

Finding Peace in Iraq Vol. 2

Joint Field Research on New Approaches to Peacebuilding in the Kurdistan Region

A collaboration of the Center for Global Affairs
at New York University's School of Professional Studies
and the University of Duhok

Alexander Munoz
Thomas Hill
Editors

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Center for Global Affairs
School of Professional Studies
New York University
15 Barclay Street
New York, NY 10007

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Lastly, we wish to thank Marcela Gonzalez, MSGA student extraordinaire, who joined the team late in the game, and ensured that the project proceeded to completion.

Preface

When 2014 began, no one could have foreseen that the city of Duhok, and surrounding areas in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, were about to become some of the most important places in the struggle against the rise of the Islamic State (IS). Indeed, on January 3, when a group of six students and one professor from the Master of Science in Global Affairs program at New York University's School of Professional Studies arrived in Duhok to carry out the field research portion of the Joint Research Seminar in Peacebuilding, the NYU students' overwhelming first impression of the city was of a quiet, unhurried place remarkable mainly for its crisp winter air and the beautiful panorama offered by the mountains that surrounded it.

By September, however, the calm had given way to overcrowding and concern. Duhok's population had doubled as a consequence of 543,000 displaced persons having taken refuge in the city after fleeing the IS' advance into Mosul and other smaller cities.¹ Only a campaign of United States-led airstrikes that began against IS positions in August had relieved widespread concerns that Duhok, in particular, and the Kurdistan Region, in general, were at risk of falling into IS hands.

The fragile security environment as well as the difficult situation that emerged for the displaced population and its host community was not something our group of researchers anticipated, although some of their explorations into the social, political and economic dynamics of Duhok and the region in general now seem somewhat prophetic. Three of the studies carried out have obvious connections to events that occurred

¹http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=2764:who-visits-camps-for-internally-displaced-persons-in-duhok-29-30-sept-2014&Itemid=605&lang=en

later in 2014: perceptions of social service provision in the territories disputed between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Iraqi central government; the effect of Syrian refugee youth on the labor market in Duhok, and; the relationship between unemployment among University of Duhok graduates and dissatisfaction with the KRG. Still, it would be an exaggeration to say that anyone in our group saw or understood what was coming in terms of exposed rifts between communities that had been living quietly side-by-side if not completely at peace.

To the contrary, the three weeks of research in Duhok not only provided the NYU students and their counterparts from the University of Duhok (UoD) with a chance to deepen their understandings of the region, its institutions and its people, but also to develop close and constructive professional relationships that transcended differences between the two groups. The six NYU students – five women and one man – and the six UoD students and recent graduates – five men and one woman -- learned a great deal about each other and the societies in which they lived. Long days of conducting interviews and focus groups, distributing surveys and seeking official statistics from government offices led to long nights spent poring over their data – punctuated by several evenings devoted mostly to sharing delicious meals prepared by some of the UoD partners' families.

When our NYU group left Duhok for a brief trip to the eastern part of the Kurdistan Region, on the way back to New York, everyone said goodbye with a mixture of satisfaction and sadness. Researchers from both universities knew they had accomplished something special simply by carrying out their ambitious projects, but they also knew they were leaving friends with whom they now shared more than similar academic interests.

Five months earlier, we all had spent three intense summer weeks working together in New York, exploring the

concept of peace research, learning about one another, developing research teams and figuring out which projects would be both important for the Kurdistan Region and possible to carry out by graduate students with limited time and limited budgets. The most obvious obstacles to success – differences in language, academic disciplinary background, ethnicity, religion, political leanings and gender – became a natural part of our daily scenery and over time mattered less and less.

Once research teams were established and project proposals were written, the UoD group returned to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Researchers from both universities stayed in touch via email, Facebook, and Skype to make sure that necessary arrangements were made for the NYU group's research visit to Duhok in January 2014. All of the proposals were vetted and cleared by the University Committee for Activities Involving Human Subjects at NYU.

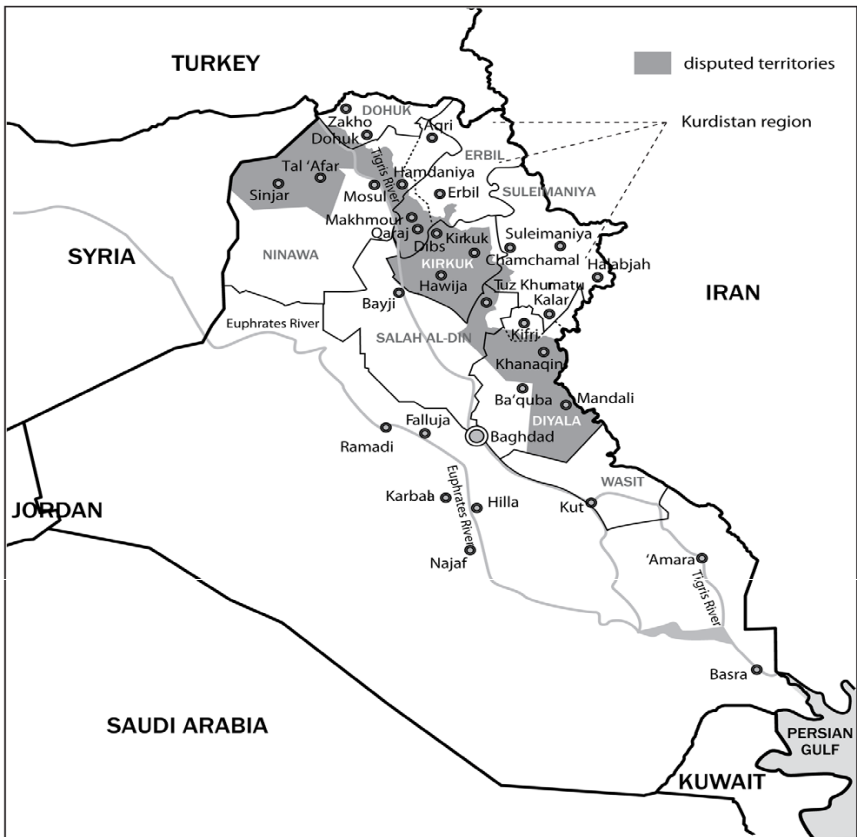
This research initiative was the second Joint Research Seminar in Peacebuilding, following the first one in 2013 – and the latest in a series of peacebuilding initiatives carried out cooperatively since 2010 by the Center for Global Affairs, home to a Master of Science in Global Affairs program and a concentration in peacebuilding, and the University of Duhok, whose Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies program is the only such program in Iraq. Everything proceeded more smoothly the second time around. The researchers from both universities had an easier time forming teams, deciding on which projects to undertake and figuring out which methods to employ. Some of the increased ease seemed to be a consequence of our having an extra week together in New York at the start of the program while some of it surely was the residue of experience. Dr. Jotyar Sedeeq, my co-instructor from the University of Duhok, and I anticipated problems earlier and were more likely to recognize opportunities.

The publication of this volume was delayed significantly by the events that occurred in and around Duhok during the summer of 2014. My co-editor, Alex Munoz, who was a student in the first Joint Research Seminar in Peacebuilding before he became field director of another shared NYU-UoD peacebuilding project, was advised to leave Duhok in June, shortly after the IS captured Mosul, 40 miles due south of Duhok. He did not return until the fall. In the meantime, the NYU researchers followed developments in and around Duhok with concern, staying in touch with their colleagues by Facebook and email. Everyone was affected in some way by the huge influx of people to Duhok; one member of the UoD group, a Yezidi man, volunteered to become emergency coordinator of a makeshift camp of displaced persons who fled the IS onslaught in Sinjar, a mostly Yezidi town to the southwest of Duhok. Members of the NYU group sent frequent supportive messages to him and others at UoD.

As the end of the year approached, the situation in Duhok eased a bit, but many thousands of people from Mosul and elsewhere remained in Duhok, not knowing when they might return to their homes. Some of the displaced and their hosts began to contemplate a future in which many of the displaced would remain permanently in Duhok, adding to the city's complexity and necessitating new thinking about services and integration. Improving the practice of peace research, and raising its profile to contribute meaningfully to public policy, would be an essential part of such efforts. The Joint Research Seminar in Peacebuilding never seemed more important.

*Thomas Hill
New York, NY
December 2014*

Map of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq



This map has been produced by the International Crisis Group. It is a modified version of a similar map appearing in Crisis Group Middle East Report N°80, *Oil for Soul: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds* (28 October 2008). Only the northern boundary of the disputed territories has been adjusted to add more detail.

Source: "Iraq and the Kurds: Trouble Along the Trigger Line." *International Crisis Group*. Middle East Report No. 88. 2009.

A note on place names: Translations from the Arabic and Kurdish languages to English often result in inconsistent spellings for place names in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region. As such, the spellings used in the map above do not all correspond directly with the Center for Global Affairs' preferred usage throughout the rest of this text. Dohuk, above, and Duhok, used throughout, refer to the same city, as do Aqri and Akre. Suleimaniya is the name of the same city and province referred to in the text as Sulaimani.

Introduction

Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), claims a history going back to at least 6000 BC. Yet upon arriving via its international airport, most Western visitors are struck by the rapid pace of development, eyes immediately drawn to the growing number of new towering construction projects that lead some locals to boast of a future as “the next Dubai.” This tension, between history and modernity is one of many contradictions inherent to the region. Finding a balance between these and other differences lies at the heart of peacebuilding, which works to “achiev[e] sustainable levels of human development and healthy processes of change” (Ricigliano 17), minimizing direct violence when possible while working to address issues of structural violence than can lead to bloodshed.

The KRI itself embodies a historical tension between Kurds who seek their own state and the Republic of Iraq that wishes to maintain its territorial integrity. The incompatibility of these aspirations has led to more than 90 years of conflict since the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne left the former Ottoman Empire *wilayet* (provinces) of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul – which contained most of the majority Kurdish areas – under British Mandate as the state of Iraq and the Kurdish population divided mainly between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq (Bengio 10-11).

It is beyond the scope of this work to recount the tragic history of conflict between Iraq and its Kurdish population. Marr (2012), Tripp (2007) and Davis (2005) all cover the subject in great depth and with sensitivity for the complexity of the all-too-often oversimplified relationship between Arabs, Kurds and others in Iraq. Even that characterization itself misses an important point about the KRI, which is home to as many as five million Kurds, but also to much smaller numbers of Assyrians, Turkmen, Arabs, and other minorities.

The diversity of the KRI, and Duhok in particular, stands as both an opportunity and a challenge. There are significant concentrations of ethnic and religious minorities: Christians – representing the Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholic, Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic churches – as well as Yezidis, whose most holy site, the Lalish temple, lies just outside Duhok. Turkmen, Armenians, Arabs, and Assyrians also have significant minority populations in the region. Each of these minority groups has, at times, enjoyed warm relations with the majority Kurdish and Sunni Muslim population of the KRI and, at other times, has found itself struggling against Kurdish dominance much as the Kurds themselves have struggled against the Arab-controlled Iraqi state.

The modern-day KRI can trace its roots back for centuries, but for the purposes of this volume, it is important to note one key point in recent history that largely defined the current state of affairs in the KRI. Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait – and his subsequent loss to a United States-led coalition in the Persian Gulf War – produced one in a long series of Kurdish uprisings throughout the north of Iraq. The central government quickly reasserted its control, sending hundreds of thousands of fearful Kurds fleeing toward Iraq's borders with Turkey and Iran. The United Nations Security Council responded by passing Resolution 688, which called on Iraq to end repression of its own people and served as the rationale for establishment of a no-fly zone north of the 36th parallel (just south of Erbil) patrolled by coalition forces, which forbade entrance by Iraqi aircraft (Bengio 197-204; Tripp 248-250).

The establishment of a northern safe haven enabled the mostly Kurdish population of the governorates of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaimani to create the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992. On October 31, the KRG established the University of Duhok, which opened that year with two colleges

and 149 students. The KRG gradually gained greater autonomy from Baghdad, a process accelerated by the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq that overthrew Saddam's regime and the adoption of the 2005 Iraqi Constitution that formally recognized the right of autonomous regions to form and control many of their own affairs.

... [T]he Iraqi Kurds not only possess their most powerful regional government since the creation of Iraq ... but also play a very prominent role in the Iraqi government in Baghdad ... The actual division of power between the Iraqi government and the KRG, however, remains in potential dispute (Gunter & Romano 39-40).

Territorial disputes have been the most obvious points of contention between Baghdad and Erbil since 2003, with both the KRG and the Iraqi central government claiming the oil-rich city of Kirkuk and many other areas along a 300-mile boundary between the KRI and central government-controlled territories that stretches from Syria in the west to Iran in the east (Kane, 2011). The advance of the Islamic State (IS) in mid-2014 further complicated the territorial issue, as Kurdish forces rushed to fill the vacuum left by Iraqi Army forces that fled Kirkuk as IS forces approached. The sudden shift led many Kurds to assert that they had taken permanent control of Kirkuk, although it remained unclear how the central government ultimately would respond (Parkinson).

One truth became clear as the end of 2014 approached: that the threat posed by the IS had motivated leaders of the Kurdistan Region and those in Baghdad to reconcile their differences in ways never before seen. As December began, the central government and the KRG announced that they had reached a deal to resolve a long-simmering dispute over oil revenues that included a guarantee by the KRG to provide 550,000 barrels per day for sale by the central government with

proceeds to be split. In exchange, the central government would resume payment of 17 percent of the Iraqi national budget to the KRG and would provide \$1 billion for support of its *peshmerga* militia to confront IS forces (Arango). Hoshiyar Zebari, Iraq's finance minister and a Kurd, told the Associated Press that the deal was a "win-win for both sides" and went on to praise Iraqi prime minister Haider al-Abadi's team as "a cooperative team, a positive team" (Arango).

Optimism ran high for building more constructive relations between the central government and the KRG in the immediate aftermath of the deal. But as the rest of 2014 – and, indeed, most of the modern history of Iraq and the KRI – demonstrates, it can be difficult to distinguish crisis from opportunity. This idea resonates with the message of contemporary peacebuilding theorists who encourage thinking about peace not as an end state, but as a dynamic process in the mold of what Ricigliano calls a progression toward "sustainable levels of human development and healthy processes of change" (17).

In that same vein, the papers in this edition explore various ongoing tensions within the KRI, especially those pertaining to the population of Duhok and nearby areas, as issues that might now undermine peacefulness but that could also offer peacebuilding opportunities in the future. Both structural and direct violence are explored, especially in the context of social and political change. Each team of researchers attempted to ground their work in wider peacebuilding theory, offering recommendations to improve peacefulness and social cohesion, while opening avenues of inquiry for further research.

The first paper in this volume, "Obligations Falling by the Wayside: Economic and Social Rights and Associated Service Provision in Iraq's Disputed Territories," focuses on the political competition in the area of the Ninewa Plains, part of the

disputed territories that are contested between Erbil and Baghdad. The essay examines how the provision of services and human rights awareness has impacted local communities, including their ties to different governments, which have left some groups feeling marginalized and neglected. The authors, Julia Kessler and Khidher Domle, make a compelling case for how improving social service provision and awareness of rights promised by the Iraqi Constitution could be incorporated into future peacebuilding efforts.

The next two papers in this collection survey the changing role of women in the KRI and perceptions of their rights, highlighting tensions between development and tradition. In “Peaceful Means of Communication in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,” Zoe Papalaskaris and Rojhat Waisi Khalid Orey investigate how the increasing use of mobile phones has impacted communal peace, particular women’s rights. Expanded cell phone usage was found to have increased women’s autonomy and independence. While this communications platform has facilitated a greater level of interaction between men and women, this contact, in light of traditional gender norms, has also led to gender-based violence and harassment, increasing tensions within families and communities. The authors also highlight the positive role government could play by better regulating cell phone harassment and abuse of multiple SIM cards.

Erika Bak Schulten and Shilan Shawkat Almahmada continue this focus on changing gender dynamics in their paper, “No Peace without Peace for Women: Women’s Perceptions of Combating Violence Against Women in Kurdistan.” They find that while there have been some successes in terms of combating violence against women, particularly within the city of Duhok, traditional mindsets continue to limit options for women, especially in rural areas. They advocate for a combined bottom-up and top-down approach that will increase educational opportunities for women while raising awareness of women’s

rights and existing mechanisms to combat violence against women, arguing for the need to promote peacefulness within families and communities in order to deepen societal peacefulness.

The KRI has also recently experienced a changing and increasingly contested political environment. Kandice Arwood and Zeravan Ameen Almaee's "The Role of Media in 2013 Parliamentary Elections in Duhok City: Methods of Accessing Information and Perceptions of Quality by Young People" examines how local youth perceive media coverage and the quality of information available. Arwood and Almaee find that despite widespread partisan influence of media outlets, Duhok youth have expressed increasing interest in high quality and more independent journalism. The authors provide several recommendations to increase media quality and independence, including the establishment of an ombudsman's office, in order to ensure that local media can play a positive role in promoting societal change and supporting good governance.

The KRI is also facing formidable economic challenges. Limited resources, particularly in regards to livelihoods, have threatened peacebuilding efforts elsewhere in the world and the KRI is not unique in this respect. Syed Maifz Kamal and Zeravan Sadeeq's "Syrian Youth Refugees and the Labor Market in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Case Study of Duhok City," focuses on how Syrian refugees are affecting competition over employment and how this impacts peacefulness between the refugee and host communities. They find that the communities have widely divergent perceptions of each other that may impact future peacefulness, but that at this time has not resulted in direct violence. The authors also provide several policy recommendations in hopes of reducing tensions between the communities and increasing economic integration.

Finally, Sara Montebaro and Sami Atroshi's "Laborers in Limbo: A Qualitative Study on the Relationship between

Unemployed University Graduates and the Kurdistan Regional Government and its Effect on Peace and Stability,” continues the exploration of economic factors related to local peacebuilding in Duhok. While they find no evidence of increased direct violence, there is growing youth dissatisfaction with employment prospects, which could lead to civil unrest. Frustration with the poor job market has also negatively affected young people’s relationships with their families, undermined psychological well-being, while also stoking resentment against the government. The authors find that, while the government is aware of the issue, little action has been taken and that there is insufficient direct communication between the unemployed and the government.

All of these papers illuminate new and under-studied peace research topics in Duhok and nearby areas. Ideally, these papers will provide the basis for future research projects and policy discussion and formulation. Each of the papers not only offers a new examination of issues, but also highlights a fundamental strength of peacebuilding research and activities – differences need not lead to destructive conflict and can, in fact, form the basis for positive collaboration. In this case, each of the international research teams combined insider and outsider perspectives, resulting in more than the sum of the individual parts. All those involved in creating this volume hope that this type of collaboration can continue, deepening understanding of how to build peace in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, while providing insights that will be applicable elsewhere.

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Obligations Falling by the Wayside: Economic and Social Rights and Associated Service Provision in Iraq's Disputed Territories

By Julia Kessler and Khidher Domle

Abstract

Through a qualitative case study of an area in Ninewa Province's disputed territories populated mostly by members of Iraqi minority groups, this paper attempts to offer a foundation for research of economic and social rights and associated service provision in the region. Utilizing 14 in-depth interviews and a large-scale survey with 443 participants, this study explores four particular themes: awareness of rights guaranteed under the Iraqi Constitution; dissatisfaction with services and priority needs; perceptions of government entities and service provision; and feelings of discrimination as a whole and within distinct groups. Findings related to these themes convey a clear argument for increased protection of economic and social rights in the disputed territories and the incorporation of service provision into peacebuilding efforts on micro and macro levels.

Introduction

The Preamble of the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 grandly concludes, “We, the people of Iraq, of all components and across the spectrum, have taken upon ourselves to decide freely and by choice to unite our future” (*Constitution of Iraq*). Following its unifying statements, the rest of the Constitution guarantees a broad range of specific human rights for all Iraqis. Nevertheless, in practice, these rights are not only often overlooked, but remain unknown to Iraqi citizens. According to Iraq’s Minister for Displacement and Migration in the 2005 transitional government, “Human Rights are not in the Iraqi consciousness. People don’t know how to demand their rights, and even if they do, they don’t say” (Taneja 29). This sentiment highlights an overt contradiction between what the Constitution calls for and what Iraqi citizens appear to be experiencing.

Though discussions of human rights often conjure debate around civil and political rights, economic and social rights can have as much, if not more, bearing on practical realities of marginalized communities. As stated in the 2007 Maastricht Guidelines on Violations of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights intended to highlight the indivisibility of all human rights, “states are as responsible for violations of economic, social and cultural rights as they are for violations of civil and political rights” (Fircchow 54). The significance of this growing global acknowledgment of all human rights cannot be overstated, as economic and social rights directly correspond to the provision of basic services required for human survival, such as healthcare, housing, and social security. In the same vein, there is an increasing recognition in the development and peacebuilding fields that “improved and equitable service provision and citizen-government relations may positively contribute to social cohesion and address some of the root causes and drivers of conflict, especially in contexts where

grievances are strongly linked to inequitable treatment or exclusion” (Järvinen 79). Not only are economic and social rights essential to quality of daily life, but their enjoyment may also affect levels of peacefulness or violent tensions in certain contexts.

This paper will discuss the results of a qualitative study designed to examine the gap between individuals’ awareness of rights and the actual protection of these rights, particularly with regard to economic and social rights and the associated provision of services. The study was conducted in Alqosh, an area located in the disputed territories of Iraq’s Ninewa Province, where communities are caught between the jurisdiction of the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). From examining related research, as well as personal experiences of the researchers, it is apparent that discrimination, neglect, and inequitable distribution of services can foster animosity between groups living together in concentrated areas. Thus, this study emanates from an overarching desire to carry out research that would, through community members interacting with the research methods, increase awareness of the community members about their economic and social rights, and ultimately contribute to enhanced quality of life and relations with one another.

Context

The disputed territories of northern Iraq, a stretch of oil-rich land claimed both by the Iraqi central government and the KRG, are home to many of Iraq’s minority communities, making the region one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse in the country. Historically, the region has experienced brutal violence and forced demographic shifts. During its rule, Iraq’s Ba’athist government initiated “Arabization” policies in the disputed territories, carrying out expulsions and genocide to

replace vast numbers of Kurds and other minorities with Arabs (Taneja 17).

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the KRG re-asserted Kurdish historical claims to the areas that now fall within the “disputed territories” category, and began partially acting as a government in the region. The Iraqi central government, in turn, began to fear a loss of control over what amounts to about 10 percent of the country’s territory and the oil that lies beneath it. Thus, the groups that remained, including Kurds, Arabs, and such minorities as Chaldean and Assyrian Christians, Yezidis, Shabaks, Turkmen, and others, found themselves caught between the two acting governments and the tension between them (“On Vulnerable Ground” 5).

According to Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, the status of the disputed territories was supposed to have been resolved in 2007, although the resolution process remained at a standstill in early 2014 (Gee). As in the rest of the disputed territories, the Ninewa Plains, which is the vast area directly south of Duhok city and north of Mosul, remained in limbo as to which entity had governmental authority over the region. Technically the area fell under the jurisdiction of the Iraqi central government and, by extension, the city of Mosul as the capital of Ninewa Province. However, in practice the KRG and other local government officials often assumed responsibilities not fulfilled by the central government (“On Vulnerable Ground” 6). This dispute over governance of the Ninewa Plains has led many of its residents to be neglected in distribution of basic services required for survival (“On Vulnerable Ground” 9).

Evidence suggests that distribution of basic services is of concern to Iraqis at large. Zara Järvinen, in “Promoting Inclusive Local Governance and Service Delivery in Post-Withdrawal Iraq,” observes, “local governments in Iraq are not properly held accountable for failed delivery. Budget allocations are not

necessarily responsive to actual identified needs” (76). Speaking to the human impact of these administrative failures, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime comments that:

This apparent dissatisfaction with public services has two principal effects. Firstly, it leads to widespread disenchantment with the public sector; secondly, the scarcity of good-quality services creates opportunities for some civil servants to extract bribes and other favors in return for preferential treatment of individuals (“Corruption and Integrity” 12).

These effects impact many citizens across Iraq and are compounded in the disputed territories.

Although the KRG has stepped in and provided some services, such as electricity and education in certain areas, other types of services under the central government’s jurisdiction, such as healthcare and housing, are left by the wayside. Though there is little formal documentation on the subject, these gaps appear to have created vacuums of basic essential services in the disputed territories, which disproportionately affect the minority communities in these areas (Gee). As synthesized by Järvinen, the “complex dual governance system in operation, including lack of clarity about roles, jurisdictions and land ownership, has resulted in inefficient administration of essential services, lagging development and imbalanced representation—discrepancies that may promote fears of sectarian or ethnic bias” (76). The fear, and perhaps reality, that the uneven distribution of services is serving to exacerbate tensions between the varying communities inhabiting the region, creates one foundation for the purpose of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Service provision and peacebuilding

This study follows an interdisciplinary framework, based upon established conceptions of the significance of social services, the role they can play in peacebuilding efforts, and upon a lesser-established rights-based approach to be used as a tool to this same end. In the present authors' opinion, utilizing a rights-based approach, and specifically, human rights awareness, to examine social service provision in this context, may create the foundation of a significant peacebuilding opportunity.

In an editorial published in 2014 entitled "Bringing Peace Closer to The People: The Role of Social Services in Peacebuilding," McCandless and Rogan write:

There is a growing recognition by policymakers and practitioners...that we must better understand the role that social services can play in fuelling instability and conflict and, conversely, the unique value they offer in fostering social cohesion and inclusive development and peaceful societies (1).

Significantly, the authors point out that the important role social services can play in peacebuilding is only beginning to be fully explored. Further, McCandless and Rogan also note that: "Inequitable social service access and delivery are particularly relevant where there is perceived discrimination towards a particular identity group or region, particularly in the immediate aftermath of conflict and even in later post-conflict settings" (1). The acknowledgement that inequitable access may underscore (or provide evidence of) pre-existing experiences of discrimination is especially pertinent in Iraq's disputed territories among its minority populations. Similarly, as outlined by McCandless in a separate report for the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, "where administrative and social

services are lacking or provided inequitably, the resulting void or imbalance is a common driver of conflict” (1). Nevertheless, social services are often not given first priority in post-conflict settings (McCandless 2).

Complex questions arise when discussing how to utilize social services to enhance peacebuilding efforts. For example, Servaes and Zupan write that “social services per se do not contribute to peacebuilding,” but can be used as a tool in the long-term processes of conflict transformation and peacebuilding (64). Järvinen expounds upon this idea, commenting, “It is increasingly felt that inclusive service provision may provide a ‘safe,’ ‘soft’ means of strengthening civic engagement and building social cohesion and state legitimacy which complements more up-front democratization and peacebuilding tools” (75). By conceptualizing service provision as a peacebuilding tool in this manner, engagement of citizens, and not just state entities, is emphasized. Indeed, multiple practitioners cite the involvement of community members and more localized governance in creating equitable service delivery mechanisms that contribute to larger peacebuilding efforts as an essential consideration. McCandless and Rogan remark that “local and even non-formal action must be prioritized as a critical dimension of peacebuilding, especially when conflict sensitive, and in particular, in equity-promoting ways, complementing the customary focus on national political levels and on the state” (3).

An emphasis on the role of individuals and communities and their relationships to governmental entities lends itself to a human rights-based approach. Specifically discussing Iraq’s case and a UN initiative currently underway, Järvinen notes:

Improving service delivery is also dependent on the active empowerment of civil society to monitor and advocate for services and support the government in

addressing needs that easily fall between the cracks in Iraq, [...] more effort is being directed to initiatives to strengthen government–civil-society cooperation and citizen oversight capacities, as well as to promote awareness of human rights (78).

Järvinen, in essence, highlights the significant role that human rights awareness can play in empowering individuals and, thus, civil society, to advocate for the services that are most needed.

Furthermore, Firchow writes, “Integration of human rights-based approaches to development cooperation and peacebuilding requires an increased effort to promote local dialogue and engage individuals affected by conflict and underdevelopment” (60). This study was specifically designed to incorporate these ideas, and to engage individuals in discussions around economic and social rights and associated service provision in order to generate a starting point for making connections to longer-term peacebuilding efforts.

Economic and social rights and human rights awareness

Within the context of human rights in the disputed territories, the majority of studies have pertained to civil and political rights, specifically related to minority civil and political rights within the broader Iraqi landscape. However, as evidenced by the aforementioned gaps in provision of basic social services and the potential for contribution of these services to peacebuilding, it is equally important to examine the enjoyment of economic and social rights in this context, as it is these rights that often determine the reality of quality of life on a daily basis.

Economic and social rights, along with cultural rights, are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* Article 22). The foundational document outlining the responsibilities of

states in respecting economic and social rights of their citizens is the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (*International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*). Among its provisions are rights related to employment, housing, and healthcare. Iraq signed the ICESCR in 1969 and ratified it in 1971. In addition, the Iraqi Constitution also makes explicit references to economic and social rights. Portions of the provisions most pertinent to this study read as follows:

Article 30:

The State shall guarantee to the individual and the family [...] social and health security, the basic requirements for living a free and decent life, and shall secure for them suitable income and appropriate housing. [...]

Article 31:

Every citizen has the right to health care. The State shall maintain public health and provide the means of prevention and treatment by building different types of hospitals and health institutions. (*Constitution of Iraq*)

According to these provisions in their entirety, citizens of all regions of Iraq, including in the disputed territories, have the right to healthcare, social security, and adequate housing, among other essential services.

One primary motive for this study was the previously observed lack of awareness by one member of the research team among the communities in the Ninewa Plains of these rights that the central government has the responsibility to protect under the Iraqi Constitution. This relative lack of awareness strikes the researchers as particularly troubling and significant, for if individuals do not know what their rights are, how can they protect themselves against human rights violations or ask for better protection when advocating for their rights based on the Constitution? Among human rights organizations and other

NGOs, this question provides the basis for “Know Your Rights” campaigns or broader human rights education and advocacy strategies (“Assessing fiscal policies from a human rights perspective”). Through such campaigns, communities can identify their own needs, and, thus, become empowered to set goals and develop strategies for the increased enjoyment of economic and social rights (OHCHR 88).

Research questions

This study’s researchers believe that any study of economic and social rights in the disputed territories will only be the foundation for further research, based upon the frameworks of the role of social services in peacebuilding and common human rights awareness practices, and coupled with the aforementioned gaps in previous empirical research specifically examining the fulfillment of economic and social rights in the disputed territories. Therefore, the researchers chose to examine the baseline awareness of the economic and social rights enshrined in the Iraqi Constitution, particularly related to their corresponding government-provided services, followed by addressing deeper questions of implementation and efficacy. This preliminary research hopefully will serve to provide initial guidance towards illuminating the types of services that warrant increased awareness and, ultimately, improved provision.

The core research questions this study examined are:

1. What level of awareness do individuals in the disputed territories of the Ninewa Plains have of their rights under Articles 30 and 31 of the Iraqi Constitution?
2. How effectively do they feel that these rights are being protected in terms of the services they are receiving?

3. What is the perception of who is protecting these rights most effectively?

Methodology

As previously mentioned, research was conducted as a case study of one area of the Ninewa Plains, called Alqosh, in order to maximize data generation within a limited three-week time frame. Located approximately 25 kilometers south of Duhok and 35 kilometers north of Mosul, Alqosh consists of a small city, also called Alqosh, 21 nearby villages, and three “collective towns,” each consisting of three to five villages within one concentrated location (Field notes, Int. 4, Int. 6). Hence, in total, there are 35 independent locales, including 25 Yezidi villages, three Sunni Arab villages, six Assyrian Christian villages, and the Chaldean Christian city of Alqosh (Int. 4). Population estimates range from 54,700-58,500 total residents in the area, (Int. 4, Int. 6, “Food List” in field notes). According to one official, Yezidis make up around 80 percent of this population, while 12 percent are Christian, and 7-8 percent are Arab (Int. 6). One main reason Alqosh was selected for this case study was because Alqosh provides an opportunity to examine attitudes of a few different groups within one concentrated area. Moreover, Alqosh has carried historical significance for many minority groups in Iraq, including those mentioned and others, such as Iraqi Jews, who lived in the area in large numbers until the late 1940s (“Ninewa: NCCI Governorate Profile”).

This qualitative study primarily consisted of in-depth interviews and a large-scale survey. Fourteen interviews were conducted with individuals representing a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, including local and regional government officials, political party representatives, village leaders or *mokhtars*, activists, and other families and community

members. Of the fourteen interviews, six were Yezidi, two were Arab Muslim, five were Christian, and one was Kurdish Muslim. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and Kurdish and consecutively translated into English. The mixed research team for this study included a researcher from the University of Duhok, an active member of the Yezidi and broader minority communities with close connections to Alqosh. While these relationships were a major asset and essential to the implementation of the study, they also may have contributed to certain biases stemming from occasionally asking inadvertently leading questions, due to the researcher's familiarity with the topics at hand. The other member of the research team is a Master's student at New York University's Center for Global Affairs, whose background is in international human rights work, particularly in the Middle East. The inclusion of one member of the research team as an external and relatively bias-free researcher without personal connections to the community allowed for additional examination into the potential for bias as a whole.

The survey was designed to explore the attitudes of young adults aged 18-35 related to the core research questions. This target population was chosen because this group is well-positioned to carry the goals of the research forward and to potentially raise the awareness of other segments of the population. Research participants were asked questions related to some or all of the rights guaranteed under Articles 30 and 31 of the Iraqi Constitution. Questions aimed to assess awareness of these rights, perspectives on how well these rights were being protected, and which actors were most effectively protecting them.

Surveys were distributed in fourteen different areas of Alqosh, and also to a group of students from Alqosh who were attending the University of Duhok. Five hundred and twenty-four surveys were distributed, with 443 valid surveys returned.

The majority of the surveys were distributed using trusted proxies in each of the villages, who were given instructions and briefed in the ethical practice of survey distribution. However, the use of proxies may have contributed to a loss of control in some cases, as the researchers were unable to confirm first-hand how each individual completed the survey. Survey participants were selected based upon a convenience sample of young adults in youth centers, cultural centers, and student centers in the areas in and around the city of Alqosh. Distribution occurred in six Yezidi villages, two Arab villages, five Christian areas, and two mixed locations. In analyzing the data, survey responses were translated from Arabic to English by members of the research team, with minimal additional support provided by designated translators, and results were aggregated to determine participants' attitudes.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Despite a limited three-week period to conduct the field research, this study's researchers were able to generate a large amount of data, providing insight into a wide range of topics. For the purposes of this paper, however, data will be presented related to four particularly salient themes. The majority of survey responses have been broken down by respondents' religion and ethnicity when appropriate, to reflect similarities or differences in perceptions among the distinct ethnoreligious groups.

Rights guaranteed under the Iraqi Constitution

In order to assess participants' awareness of rights under Articles 30 and 31 of the Iraqi Constitution, each survey participant was first asked to select which rights from a group of six were included in the Constitution. In actuality, all six are guaranteed in the Constitution, including the rights to healthcare,

social security, housing, education, electricity, and water. Out of the 420 respondents who answered this question, only 52 percent selected all six rights. Ninety-two percent of participants selected the right to education, making it the most frequently known guaranteed right. The right to water received the lowest number of selections, with 60 percent of respondents including it in their selection. When examining this question according to religious and ethnic groups, Arabs selected all listed rights at a rate of 77 percent, while 53 percent of Yezidis, 52 percent of Assyrians, and 31 percent of Chaldeans selected all.

Participants then were asked to read Articles 30 and 31 of the Constitution, and were asked to respond to a series of five written questions afterwards. While completing this portion of the survey, numerous participants were observed laughing or joking, commenting that although the Constitution may say these rights are guaranteed, they are not guaranteed in practice (Field notes). One young Yezidi man remarked, “It is just paper! Nothing in the Constitution has been applied” (Field notes). Similarly, in almost every interview conducted, when asked about these same Articles, interviewees also began to laugh. From community members to local officials, including Arabs, Yezidis, and Christians, participants noted that these rights may be included in the Constitution, but asked, “Where is that?” or “Who is caring about it?” (Int. 2; Int. 5).

Dissatisfaction with services and priority needs

Overall, participants reflected a general dissatisfaction with service provision in Alqosh. Survey questions mostly pertained to healthcare, social security, and housing assurance. When asked which of these three services, if any, they currently received, 45 percent of the 433 respondents reported that they received healthcare, 14 percent received social security, 2 percent received housing assurance, and 52 percent received none of these services. Significantly, almost the entire portion of

respondents who reported receiving housing assurance were Christian. It is important to note that these responses, as with all of the survey questions, were specifically reflecting the experiences of 18-35 year olds in the area, who may not yet have been in position to receive some of these services, and additionally, that these responses were based on their own definitions of these services.

Nevertheless, the fact that over half of respondents claimed that they received no healthcare was quite a stark figure. When asked to describe levels of satisfaction with the provision of these rights, the majority of respondents reported being unsatisfied. For healthcare, 66 percent of respondents were unsatisfied with implementation. This number was consistent across religious and ethnic lines. For social security, 75 percent of respondents were unsatisfied, which was also mostly similar across groups. Though 71 percent of respondents overall were unsatisfied with the implementation of their right to housing, Assyrian Christians reported higher rates of satisfaction, with just 44 percent selecting “unsatisfied.”

Interviews echoed similar feelings of dissatisfaction, and also served to provide further insight into the current state of these services in Alqosh, as well as additional priority needs. Of utmost concern to almost all individuals interviewed was the lack of healthcare facilities available to residents of Alqosh. For some of the larger villages, residents noted that they had access to one small healthcare center, but that it lacked adequate staffing, hours, medicine, and medical supplies (Int. 1, Int. 4, Int. 8, Int. 9, Int. 11., Int. 14). An interviewee from a large Yezidi village further commented that the healthcare center had only been established within the past six months (Int. 1). In addition, interviewees reported that these healthcare centers lacked specialized care, and most worrisome to multiple participants, lacked facilities for maternal health or births (Int. 1, Int. 4, Int. 8., Int. 9, Int. 11, Int. 14).

A doctor in a health center in one of the Yezidi villages explained that the health centers in the area were all very basic because they were not permitted to acquire accreditation higher than Level C, due to their ambiguous status under Article 140 of the Constitution (Int. 13). For urgent needs, residents needed to travel to hospitals in Sheikhan, Duhok, or Mosul, which can take between 20-45 minutes driving (Int. 4, Int. 5., Int. 7, Int. 10, Int. 14). Yezidi and Christian interviewees noted that they did not feel safe traveling to Mosul for fear of being targeted, and therefore must take longer routes elsewhere (Int. 9, Int. 11).

The *mokhtar* of a small Arab village described his village's healthcare access as consisting of a mobile health clinic that visited twice a week for two hours, distributed medication, and left (Int. 2). For the residents of his village trying to reach a hospital, he noted that sometimes they were not permitted to enter Duhok, in Kurdish-controlled territory, especially since recent violent incidents occurred nearby (Int. 2). According to the Iraq Briefing Book, "The healthcare system in Iraq has been based on a centralized, hospital-oriented and capital-intensive model which, with limited efficiency and capacity could not ensure equitable and appropriate access to health care and other health related services" (85). Though undoubtedly affecting the disputed territories in unique ways, it appears that many of the same problems endemic to Iraq's healthcare system as a whole were also at play in Alqosh.

Though this study focused mainly on healthcare, social security, and housing, participants also expressed other significant needs, including: electricity, water, better roads, increased presence of security forces, and education. The expression of these other needs varied according to ethnoreligious group membership or status of the village or city. In certain villages, including two large Yezidi villages and a small Arab village, interviewees noted that their access to electricity was very sporadic (Int. 1, Int. 2, Int. 11). An

interviewee from one of these Yezidi villages reported having government-provided electricity for just eight hours every day, necessitating the use of generators the rest of the time (Int. 11). He also commented that water is a high priority, as his village's water network has not been improved since 1979, resulting in a village water supply that is neither adequate nor clean (Int. 11). The *mokhtar* of one of the Arab villages similarly noted that there was only one water source for more than 1,000 residents of his village (Int. 2). The quality of roads was also of concern to interviewees, who noted the muddy, even flooding, pot-holed tracks that served as the only vehicular routes through the villages, and between villages (Field notes, Int. 1, Int. 2, Int. 5). By contrast, access to electricity and water, and condition of roads in the Chaldean Christian city of Alqosh, given its municipality status, were in significantly better condition (Field notes, Int. 5). The small Assyrian villages also appeared to have improved access to these types of infrastructure (Field notes, Int. 7).

Perceptions of government entities and service provision

Due to the unique situation of the disputed territories and the resulting ambiguity in governmental authority, many of this study's results are centered on perceptions of the Iraqi central government and the KRG, and the services each is providing or failing to provide. Results also reflect perceptions of other major players in service provision, including local government, and to a slightly lesser extent, political parties and NGOs. Three survey questions asked participants to reflect upon the actions of these entities. The first asked those participants who said they were currently receiving healthcare, social security, or housing to rank the service providers. Of the eligible respondents, 33 percent ranked the central government first, while 60 percent ranked the KRG first. These numbers were similarly reflected among

Christians and Yezidis, but essentially reversed for Arab respondents.

The second pertinent question asked participants to rank the entity that they felt was most effectively protecting their rights under Articles 30 and 31 of the Constitution. For this question, 8 percent ranked the central government first, 46 percent ranked the KRG first, and 38 percent ranked local government first. When examining all answers, regardless of which entity was put in first place, 58 percent of respondents ranked the KRG ahead of the central government. Interestingly, responses for this question were relatively consistent among Christians, Yezidis, and Arabs.

Lastly, when asked which entities were obligated to protect these specific economic and social rights, a similar number of respondents included the central government (62 percent), the local government (62 percent), and the KRG (57 percent) in their answers. When broken down by ethnoreligious group, Arabs included local government in their responses at a much higher rate than Christians and Yezidis, who tended to put similar weight on the central government, local government, and KRG alike.

Interviewees offered essential insight into the relationships of the central government and KRG to service provision in the area. While Alqosh and the rest of the disputed territories remain the legal responsibility of the Iraqi central government, the KRG has – particularly in recent years – stepped in to fill certain roles. For most villages, the central government has contributed in basic ways by providing services such as electricity, water, and items for the “food list,” which allocates specific provisions to families each month (Int. 2, Int. 6). Often, however, after many demands from the community, the KRG has stepped in to improve services that were lacking, or to build roads and healthcare centers, and to provide the services of trained security forces (Int. 3, Int. 4, Int. 5).

Numerous interviewees described the process through which their communities obtained needed services in painful detail, describing a sort of Catch 22 situation. Making reference to the fact that Alqosh is legally under the administration of Ninewa province and its government, one Arab interviewee frankly explained: “The problem is that when we go to the KRG, they say we are associated with Mosul. But you know the situation in Mosul: no one cares” (Int. 2). This sentiment was not by any means limited to the Arab village; a Yezidi representative of the Kurdish Communist Party made nearly the exact same statement in a separate interview, recalling that each entity tells residents to go ask the other for assistance (Int. 12). Another Arab interviewee explained that the Ninewa government consistently offered excuses for why it could not provide services because the security situation was unstable, yet this claim seemed unfounded in Alqosh, an area that has experienced very little physical violence in recent years (Int. 3).

McCandless notes that, “Despite their recognized contributions to peacebuilding, administrative and social services tend to take a back seat to interventions focused on the security sector and political processes in post-conflict settings” (2). In this case, however, it appeared that the concept was being taken even a step further, with the government in Ninewa using the weakness of security sector as a pretext for not providing services. A Yezidi representative of a Kurdish political party concurred with one of the Arab interviewees, noting that another reason offered by the Ninewa government was that the villages were already getting services from the KRG (Int. 4). However, even though the KRG occasionally has stepped in to create projects, for reasons that some interviewees speculated as having to do with gaining increased political support, its authority to act was still significantly limited by the political status of the area, preventing it from providing the full-scale services that the residents of Alqosh needed (Int. 4, Int. 5, Int. 12).

This paradoxical relationship was further evidenced by an examination of the budget for services in the area. Interviewees noted that the government in Ninewa allocated the budget from the area, but that the Ninewa government had previously chosen not to use its available budget, and that no budget technically was allocated from the KRG for the area (Int. 2, Int. 3, Int. 12). The head of the Local Council for the Alqosh area pointed out that the Ninewa government *returned* the budget allocated for the Alqosh area to the central government in Baghdad in 2008, 2009, and 2010, and claimed its inability to spend was due to a lack of physical security in the region (Int. 6). A representative of a large Kurdish political party in the area recounted that in 2011, 11 billion Iraqi dinars were returned (Int. 4). In early 2014, however, the chairman of the Ninewa Provincial Council, who is Kurdish, noted that because relations had improved within the Ninewa government between Kurds and Arabs following the Kurdish boycott from 2009-2012, he had been able to double the budget allotment to Ninewa Province's countryside for 2014. In contrast to some claims by other interviewees, he offered that the government in Ninewa not only did not care if the KRG took on service distribution in Alqosh, but that he actually encouraged it. (Int. 14)

As Baird describes in relation to other fragile and conflict-affected (FCA) states,

Unfortunately, the long route of accountability is weak in many FCA states, and public services often become the currency of political patronage and clientelism. This link can only be strengthened through better information and stronger legal, political and economic means to press demands against the government (5).

These concepts certainly appeared to apply to the state of affairs in the disputed territories in early 2014. Other themes that repeatedly arose included: accusations of corruption; the

relationship between municipality status and service distribution; a need for local government to have greater authority in determining priority needs; and how residents of the disputed territories have taken action to bring attention to their needs.

Feelings of discrimination as a whole and within distinct groups

Many research participants conveyed a feeling of being ignored by all governmental entities, and particularly by the central government. A Yezidi Kurdish political party representative commented, “If you read the mentality of people here, they feel they have been forgotten, and they think it is because they are minorities” (Int. 4). Others echoed this sentiment. A Chaldean women’s rights activist remarked, “Honestly, we do not understand in all of Iraq how the leading process goes. They just care about their own pocket, not the people. [...] Always minorities are the first victims” (Int. 5). One interviewee also conjectured that the central government was refusing to provide services to many of the groups because of these groups’ close relationships to the KRG and their Kurdish nationalist sentiment (Int. 4).

Even more layered feelings of discrimination came to light when the research team explored questions pertaining to comparisons between different villages and services being received in each one. These feelings were expressed in two main ways. First, Yezidi interviewees often compared their experiences to quality of services in Christian villages. Interviewees noted, with particular emphasis on the amount of security forces allotted to Christian villages and other nearby Christian areas outside Alqosh, that their services were not nearly as good as those in predominantly Christian areas (Int. 1, Int. 11, Int. 12). A Christian resident of the city of Alqosh also acknowledged this reality, musing, “Our little is better than what those villages have” (Int. 5).

This issue seemed to demand further exploration, as there were certain recent historical events that also could help explain an unequal allocation of resources, such as the relocation of many internally displaced Christians to the disputed territories following the outbreak of religious-based violence in Baghdad in 2005-6 (Int. 7, Int. 10). These comparisons did not appear to create feelings of animosity towards Christians in the area, with interviewees noting that their relations with Christians were quite positive, but that they simply wished they would be treated as well (Int. 1, Int. 12). Similarly, Arab interviewees recognized certain ways in which they were treated differently by the KRG, due to the tense history of Arabization in the area, but that this did not create personal tension with the other groups in the area (Int. 2).

The second theme that emerged during discussions of discrimination was the feeling expressed by residents of certain Yezidi villages that other Yezidi villages were receiving better services than they were (Int. 11, Int. 12, Int. 14). Interviewees attributed this trend to the fact that the majority of local leadership came from one of the Yezidi villages, and that that village therefore received more services than others (Int. 11, Int. 12, Int. 14). While one local official from that village denied that resources were allocated based on the communities' ties to particular leaders, the chairman of the Ninewa Provincial Council agreed that these distinctions were clear (Int. 6; Int. 14). He further suggested that more regulated emphasis be placed on determining service provision based on the two criteria already in place: population size and needs (Int. 14).

Further implications of inadequate or inequitable service provision on peacebuilding

After investigating the status of economic and social rights protection and service provision in Alqosh, it became clear that, beyond the micro-level effects inequitable service

provision may have on peaceful relations among different groups in the area, the peacebuilding effort on the macro-level, i.e., resolving the ambiguous political status of the disputed territories, also strongly needs to address the question of service provision. As noted by McCandless and Rogan, “Social service related provisions are increasingly finding their way into peace agreements” all over the world (2). The KRG seemed to be starting to take note of the important political role service provision can play, and was actively building political support through the provision of services (Int. 5).

Furthermore, evidence of weak service provision in some areas served as an urgent argument in and of itself for why a resolution to broader political questions must be reached as soon as possible. As one interviewee said, when the Iraqi central government and the KRG have problems between them, it is the *people* who suffer (Int. 12). Many participants noted the hindering effect of the ambiguous Article 140 of the Constitution, related to the legal status of the disputed territories, has had on service provision in their area (Int. 4, Int. 14, Surveys). In addition, multiple interviewees commented on the long-term effects that poor service provision was having on their communities, noting that many young people were choosing to emigrate rather than remain in Iraq (Int. 4, Int. 8, Int. 12). The survey demonstrated a very high rate of dissatisfaction with basic services among young adults. This issue, therefore, is central to the future of the region and to creating conditions that might enable new generations to thrive.

Conclusion

This pilot study, using a blended framework that incorporated a human-rights based approach into peacebuilding, established numerous possibilities to further explore the role of service provision as a vehicle for improving relationships

between residents of the disputed territories in the Ninewa Plains and governmental entities, as well as between one another. This study found a fundamental gap in service provision in Alqosh, despite the economic and social rights guaranteed under the Iraqi Constitution. Further, and perhaps due to this extreme gap, many individuals were unaware of the rights they were supposed to enjoy. As expressed by one interviewee, “People forget their rights because rights become hopes, and hope is not reality” (Int. 1).

Residents of Alqosh expressed a belief that the governmental entities that should be responsible for them, particularly the Iraqi central government, ignored their basic needs. Järvinen offers one suggestion for possible progress, noting that, “[i]n the long term, well-managed local governance reform and administrative, political and fiscal decentralization would be an effective way to improve inclusive local development and equitable service delivery” (76). This concept was echoed repeatedly by interviewees and survey respondents, who wrote that they would be most interested in talking with local government officials to develop plans for improving services in order to tackle the service-delivery gaps. Further examination into issues raised throughout this study may illuminate potential pathways to changes in policy and education while simultaneously empowering communities to strategize for implementation of improvements to their quality of life.

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Peaceful Means of Communication in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

By Zoe Papalaskaris and Rojhat Waisi Khalid Orey

Abstract

This research study aimed to ask young adults in the city of Duhok, within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), *“How are mobile phones shifting the societal role of females in Duhok?”* Our research uncovered a multitude of opinions on the topic of increased mobile phone use in the KRI. Our research team sought to explore possible advantages and disadvantages related to mobile phone communication on the part of women. Think tanks and multilateral organizations have been looking towards technological advancements in order to foster gender equality, conflict resolution, and economic stability throughout various regions of the world. While positive achievements have been recorded, negative social complications such as violence, harassment, and domestic conflicts, have also developed as a side effect of mobile phone use in different countries. The research team’s interest increased upon identifying a gap within the existing literature regarding the use of mobile phones within the KRI. Parallel to the literature gap was a growing speculation that males have used mobile phones to harass women in the KRI, or that women have been victims of verbal or physical abuse from jealous husbands over instances related to mobile phones. Intrigued by the lack of knowledge and the possible negative implications of mobile use by women inside and outside of the KRI, we designed a research plan designed to clarify the relationship between mobile phones use and gender roles and relationships within Duhok city. We sought to understand how contemporary attitudes towards mobile phone communications

are related to communal peace and one subcomponent of it, the realization of women's rights, throughout the region.

Introduction

Some people claim that “technology shapes society” while others believe the opposite, that “society shapes technology” (Ling 21). Since its creation, the mobile phone has continued to reinvent itself and influence the world. Angry citizens of Egypt and Tunisia seized the power of a hashtag in 2011 and illustrated a previously unknown power of the mobile phone when combined with social media. During and after the Egyptian and Tunisian revolutions, overwhelming excitement over the “Twitter Revolution” was heralded by headlines in media outlets (Lotan 5). Experts have grappled with understanding the role of social media during subsequent time-sensitive world events, trying to decide who the real actors are and what tools they use to transmit information and represent themselves to the world (Lotan).

The 2011 revolutions were not the first time that mobile phones played an important function during a major international crisis or political event. Within the first 48 hours after the 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti, a first-ever Emergency Information Service was created to send free SMS messages to help Haitians during a period of uncertainty (Reuters 2010). Cell phones emerged as “as a lifeline for many survivors” and helped to find people trapped under rubble (Reuters).

In a speech during his visit to Tallinn University in Estonia, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon praised Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as “having a profound impact on the pace and scale of development.” (United Nations 2013). According to a 2014 report by the International Telecommunications Union, “Measuring ICT access and use by households and individuals is

key to monitoring the progress of countries towards becoming information societies.” ICTs are communication devices that transmit information (IGI Global), and include devices that connect to the Internet, such as mobile phones and computers, as well as radios, satellites and televisions. For the purposes of this research paper, the only ICTs being examined are mobile phones.

It is undeniable that mobile phones have become indispensable tools in times of political uproar or a resource in periods of despair. Yet, at the micro-level, mobile phones have also been a source of controversy for women. Suderbari, a small Indian village within the disadvantaged Bihar state, has banned mobile phone use by women entirely (Burke 2012). The village council believed that mobile phones allowed women to elope with lovers. Manuwar Alam, a village leader, was worried about girls using phones and said, “Unrestricted use of mobile phones is promoting premarital and extramarital affairs and destroying the great institution of marriage” (Burke).

Surely the role of mobile phones is both evolving and controversial. The research team sought to better understand just how this particular ICT device is playing a social role within the information society of Duhok, located in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

Context

The city of Duhok is situated within the northern tip of Iraq, with proximity to borders shared with Turkey, Syria, and Iran. The city appears immersed, like the concave surface of tea in a cup, with a rim of mountains that surround thousands of streets and homes. After traveling through twisting mountain roads and reaching the city limits, visitors to Duhok might feel a sense of isolation even from neighboring towns and cities. Males dominate the city streets, at morning, noon, and at night. In some

ways, Duhok is a microcosm of the broader KRI, nervously eyeing borders with sometimes hostile neighbors (while trying to manage its own internal conflicts), presenting itself as a society dominated by men, at least publicly, and enjoying a fondness toward and a fascination with ICTs.

The research team anticipated the scarcity of literature related to females' use of mobile phones in the KRI. Most of the research our team located that was related to women in the KRI tended to focus on subjects such as female genital mutilation, women's roles in political discussion, and violence against women in the KRI. In "Between Nationalism and Women's Rights: the Kurdish Women's Movement in Iraq", co-authors Nadjé al-Ali and Nicola Pratt outline the realities of women's rights in the KRI as a combination of nationalism, modernization, and identity that is sometimes attacked for having a western agenda (Al-Ali, Pratt 339). The status of women – and their ability to exercise their rights within Kurdish society – is largely dictated from the top-down. Many women's rights activists oppose the main political parties that are, according to Al-Ali and Pratt, "increasingly perceived to be corrupt and out of touch with people's aspirations and needs" (341).

There is friction between the practices of feminism, modernism, and Islam within the KRI. When discussing feminism and gender equality in the Middle East, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, a scholar of Islamic Feminism writes that "Women do not start from the same starting point in life as men, and they are not on a level playing field, so we need a new concept of equality that takes difference into account" (Qantara 2010). Gender equality is a sensitive topic not often found in public discourse within the KRI and the surrounding Middle Eastern region. Houzan Mahmoud, a prominent Kurdish women's rights activist in the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) described the state of women in Iraq as "dire" and has

said that the OWFI is in a struggle against gender-based violence, sexism, racism, tribalism, and other traditions that contribute to subjugation of women (Mahmoud).

Innovations in technology appear to be pushing against the so-called closed society in which many Kurds claim they live. A few articles published about this subject in Kurdish-based news sources suggest that mobile phone use has become a source of tension between men and women. Kurdnet, an independent, online news service produced in Vienna, Austria, published an article in August 2011 describing some of the daily harassment women face in the KRI through mobile phones. For example, a 25 year-old man in Sulaimani admitted to using over 60 different cell phone numbers to call and text women, during late-night hours (Burhan 2011).

Asiacell, Iraq's first mobile operator has adopted some methods aimed at curtailing the problems women experience as mobile phone users. In February 2013, Asiacell's "Almas Line" won a Global Mobile award for Best Mobile Product or Service for Women in Emerging Markets (Invest In Group 2013).

According to Invest In Group's reporting:

The Almas Line was designed and launched by Asiacell ... exclusively for use by its female customers.

Almas...is intended to target the primary obstacles for female mobile usage in the developing world: pricing, cultural sensitivities, technological illiteracy, and the potential for harassment. ... Judges at the Global Media Awards praised the Almas Line's ability to cater to traditional values while at the same time have a large-scale impact on its intended clientele (Invest In Group, 2013).

The word 'almas' means 'diamond' in Kurdish and Asiacell advertises the line to women by saying, "You deserve to shine like a diamond" (Asiacell 2014). The Almas line provides

female users with many benefits, such as discounted phone calls, services that provide access to religion, beauty, and health, and a free subscription to the “Bye-Bye” service, which allows users to block up to twenty phone numbers from unwanted callers and/or SMSs (Asiacell 2014).

Conceptual Framework

ICT presents unique and timely opportunities for women and girls. It promised better economic prospects, fuller political participation, communication with the outside world, and an enhanced ability to acquire education and skills to transcend social restrictions. However, use of ICT continues to be governed by power relations whereby women frequently experience relative disadvantage... In addition, women have a lower degree of economic security than men and face gender-related constraints on their time and mobility. They are therefore less likely than men to access, use and participate in shaping the course of ICT. – (Ngolobe, SMS Uprising, 2010)

Journal articles and briefings on the role of ICTs and gender inequalities have documented the difficulties that new ICTs have posed for women in various countries. In “SMS Uprising,” development policy analyst Christiana Charles-Iyoha writes that mobile phones can empower women in restrictive cultures “by aiding their interaction with men without ... face-to-face contact,” (Charles-Iyoha 117). This idea supports the notion that women are seeking new paths to empowerment without having to side-step traditional mores in restrictive societies.

According to Dr. Kutoma J. Wakunuma, a Lecturer at De Montfort University, who researched extensively in Zambia where mobile phones reinforce gender inequalities:

[For] some women, possession of a mobile phone meant being answerable to their spouses, it meant being at the mercy of their husbands who decided whether they could continue to have a mobile phone or not, it meant physical and verbal abuse and mobile phone inspections to see who had called their numbers, why and what relation there was between the caller and the spouse (Wakunuma 2012).

In the KRI, Islamic traditions highly influence societal practices that include distinct roles for women, men, and children. When expectations are resisted, the outcomes can be dangerous for women. Mobile phones have been available since approximately 2003 in the KRI and have offered a new venue for men and women to communicate in ways that were seen by many as unthinkable in other public settings. New relationships forged by way of mobile phones have sometimes led to the deterioration of previously existing relationships due to jealousy, at times even undermining marriages.

Methodology

Our research team consisted of Rojhat Waisi Khalid Orey, a graduate of the Master of Arts in Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies at the University of Duhok, and Zoe Papalaskaris, a student in the Master of Science in Global Affairs program at New York University. This team offered our project a bi-cultural lens thanks to having one member from the United States and another from the KRI. This pilot project hopefully will serve as preliminary research for other organizations, think tanks, institutions, and groups interested in

expanding upon the topic of development and peace with the aid of mobile phones in the KRI.

The methodology for this research project consisted of:

1. Desk research conducted in New York
2. Surveys distributed at Duhok Polytechnic University (DPU)
3. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with female and male students at DPU
4. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews with local government officials

The project involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. During the initial stages of the project's formation, the research team had hoped to also facilitate gender-specific focus groups. Due to the sensitivity of our research, NYU's University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects asked us to refrain from facilitating focus groups in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Population of Youth, aged 18-28, in Duhok Governorate¹

Year	Female	Male	Total
2011	115,275	120,685	235,960
2012	120,808	126,478	247,286
2013	126,607	132,549	259,156

The Chief Statistician of the Census Bureau of Duhok Governorate, Chiyavan Abdul Razaq, provided this data chart. Based on these population figures, we determined that we would need a sample size of 383 females and 384 males in order for our survey to have a 95 percent confidence level. However, it was impossible to distribute so many surveys during the three-week period we had available to us. Our final sample size

consisted of 86 females and 70 males, all of them in Duhok City Center, which is just one of six areas included in the Duhok Governorate.

Surveys

Surveys consisted of 15 multiple-choice questions and three written-answer questions. The research team received a total of 236 surveys. Because we decided to consider the first batch of surveys administered as a pre-test, we ended up with 156 valid surveys (86 female; 70 male) to be analyzed. Eighty surveys conducted on the first day were voided because we were not confident that the environment in the classrooms where we conducted the survey was comfortable for all female participants, and believed that they might not have felt free to answer the survey honestly. On subsequent days, we agreed to separate research participants by gender in order to facilitate comfort and confidentiality. We were concerned after the first day of surveying that some students might have been trying to see each other's responses, and that some research participants might face criticism or harassment for answering particular questions in certain ways. Control in the survey environment to eliminate – or at least minimize – these undesired possibilities was recognized as a huge strength for the project.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with eight female and six male students from Duhok University, a mobile phone retailer in Duhok, as well as with the Chief Officer of Combatting Violence of Criminals and the Chief Statistician of the Census Bureau of Duhok. Interviews lasted 20-40 minutes.

The female researcher interviewed female students who spoke English. The male researcher conducted the other interviews in Kurdish; he later translated them to English. Both

male and female research participants were asked four open-ended questions that led to further discussion.

Open-ended interview questions:

1. Do cell phones give women in the KRI access to information that concerns regional issues, awareness of women's rights, or new spaces to communicate?
2. What kinds of issues do female youth in the city of Duhok, ages 18-28, face as result of using cell phones?
3. In which ways do cell phones alter the rights of women in the KRI?
4. What are the types of social conflicts that can arise from young women using cell phones?

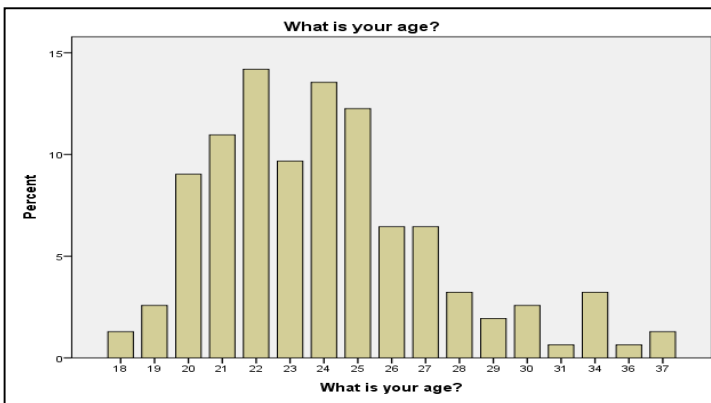
Data Presentation

Survey Demographics and Multiple-Choice Questions

Of the 156 surveys collected, 55.1 percent came from females and 44.9 percent from males. Among males and females, the most common age was 22, constituting 14.2 percent of survey respondents. While most of our participants fell within the target age range of 18-28 years, we received 16 survey outliers from participants between 29 and 37 years of age. Muslim (93.6 percent) was the dominant religion among participants. A large majority of students (72.4 percent) reported that they were single. Most participants reported having used cell phones for a total of five to eight years or more².

² According to experts that we had interviewed, and common understanding among citizens in the area, mobile phones had first been released in the KRI in the early 2000s. Due to the age range of participants and the knowledge of mobile phone existence from 2000 onward, we wanted to measure phone ownership within a short time period (i.e. Less than one year; More than one

The calling feature was the favorite function among both male and female participants, and the most used (Table 1). Eighty-seven percent of participants spent between 10 – 30 minutes per day calling family, and seventy-five percent spent between 10 – 30 minutes calling friends. While sixty-seven percent did not use phone calls for romantic purposes, the second largest percentage for phone calls for romantic purposes was ten percent of participants who spent between 60 minutes and 3 hours per day calling significant others (Table 2). In addition, ten percent of these participants also spent the same



amount of time per day (1-3 hours) texting “significant others.”

year but less than five years; More than five years but less than eight; More than eight years).

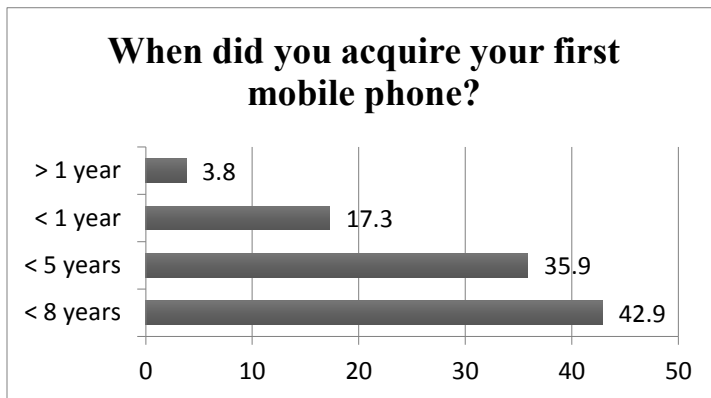


Table 1. What is your favorite function on your phone?

Gender	No answer	Phone Calling	SMS	Internet	Apps	Games	Music	Total
Female	1	67	5	8	1	0	4	86
Male	1	63	1	2	0	1	2	70
Total	2	130	6	10	1	1	6	156

Table 2. What is the average amount of time you spend per day on phone calls for romantic purposes?

Time	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
0 minutes	105	67.3	67.3	67.3
0-10 minutes	9	5.8	5.8	73.1
10-29 minutes	9	5.8	5.8	78.8
30-59 minutes	12	7.7	7.7	86.5
1-3 hours	16	10.3	10.3	96.8
3-5 hours	2	1.3	1.3	98.1
More than 5 hours	3	1.9	1.9	100.0

Total	174	100.0	100.0	
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For questions on viewpoints of cell phone use within the KRI, female and male participants answered similarly on most questions. The majority (82 percent) of participants reported that they had either created new relationships with friends or with both friends and romantic partners with the aid of a mobile phone (Table 4). Responses to this question indicated that it is possible that a high percentage of males and females in Duhok use cell phones for romantic purposes.

Table 4. Has your mobile phone helped you to create new social relationships with friends or romantic relations?

Gender	No answer	Yes, with friends only	Yes, with romantic relations only	Yes, with both friends and romantic partners	None	Total
Female	0	37	0	32	17	86
Male	1	23	1	36	9	70
Total	1	60	1	68	26	156

Less than half of survey respondents (39.7 percent) expressed a belief that mobile phones are contributing to positive changes in women's lives. However, 13 percent felt that mostly negative changes had occurred while 27 percent felt that both positive and negative changes had taken place in women's lives as a result of cell phone use. Whereas opinions were spread between the three answer choices and 31 men and women choose not to answer this question (Table 5). Contrary to the belief that mobile phones are a positive change, 129 out of the 156 participants believe that mobile phones had been related to domestic violence, harassment, or abuse towards women (Table 6).

Table 6. Are mobile phones related to domestic violence, harassment, or abuse towards women?

	No answer	Yes	No	Total
Female	3	74	9	86
Male	2	55	13	70
Total	5	129	22	156

Table 5. Are changes in women's lives occurring as a result of increased mobile phone use positive or negative?

	No answer	Positive	Negative	Both	Total
Female	19	34	9	24	86
Male	12	28	12	18	70
Total	31	62	21	42	156

The relationship between infidelity and ICTs was a subject that surfaced during our preliminary desk research, which is why we felt it was imperative to ask if the use of aliases within the contacts of mobile phones was a common practice among men and women. Most male and female respondents reported that they knew someone who has hidden the true identity of contacts within their phone.

Table 7. Do you know anyone that uses aliases within the contacts of their mobile phone?

	Yes	No	Total
Female	68	18	86
Male	62	8	70
Total	130	26	156

Survey Written-Answer Comments

1. Within your community what are the changes you can identify as a result of women using mobile phones?

Male and female participants answered that while mobile phones have strengthened women's social relationships, mobile phones also have created many problems. Male participants identified problems that ranged from an increase in divorce rates to killings caused by mobile phones. A male participant responded by saying that phones are positive for women because they "opened new doors," became a means to increased communication among women, and also a positive for males as mobiles "make it easy to talk to women." One male participant mentioned the 2008 "misuse of mobile phone" law³ passed by parliament, and its implementation has made people more cautious about their mobile phone use.

Female respondents highlighted the ways that mobile phones have empowered women and brought both negative and positive changes to their lives. One female participant answered that mobile phones have "contributed to the [increased] control over women, violence and divorce towards her."

2. Why do you think violence against women happens as a result of using mobile phones?

This open-ended question followed a multiple-choice question about whether participants found gender-based violence (GBV) as a result of mobile phone use to occur

³ The KRI Parliament unanimously adopted the misuse of phone law in May 2008, in efforts to criminalize persons who use mobile phones to harm others (Library of Congress).

more frequently in urban or rural places. Male and females offered responses to this question, focusing on the following responses:

- a. Mobile phone use and GBV in rural places is found because of tribal customs that prevail in these communities;
 - b. Mobile phones are used more in urban places, therefore there will be more cases of GBV in urban areas; or
 - c. Members of rural communities have a lower level of education, thus they are uneducated in the proper uses of mobile phones.
3. How have mobile phones affected the traditional role that women have in Duhok society? Why?

Male participants wrote that mobile phones have helped women “get out of the four walls of the home,” to be empowered and to have an active role in society. Women are described as domestic caretakers and orchestrators of home-life in the KRI, and male participants thus described mobile phones as a means for them to have a sense of mobility without actually moving. Overall, most male participants identify mobile phones as being a real game-changer for women in the KRI.

Female participants agreed with males that mobile phones have empowered women to do big things such as attend university, find jobs, or to become members of parliament. Males and females also recognized that while mobile phones have brought significant changes to women’s lives, social traditions and customs have limited the amount of change that technology has had on women’s lives in the KRI.

Interviews – Female and Male Youth (18-28)

Participants often mentioned Facebook throughout our research in the field. Whereas Facebook emerged in the United States during a time before smartphones were broadly available, and was initially used mainly on desktop and laptop computers, many participants in our project said they first gained access to Facebook through their phones. Although our research questions concerned cell phones, we believe that Facebook's popularity in the KRI was largely due to its use on cell phones; thus it was important for us to explore how Facebook altered the cell phone experience for youth in Duhok.

Rojan,⁴ a 21 year-old female student from Duhok expressed her strong concerns about the use of cell phones throughout Duhok and shared personal stories about receiving harassment through her mobile phone:

I know a girl who killed herself when she was 17 years old. She ended a relationship with her boyfriend; shortly after the break-up, she married a different man and was pregnant. Her ex said that he had recorded old conversations and messages on his phone of her, although it was all lies, and would use it against her... blackmail. He was extremely jealous. Because the girl had no one to talk to and was so afraid, she killed herself (Personal Interview, January 2014).

Rojan also shared accounts of her own problems with mobile phones and Facebook. In the last year, an unknown person took her photos off Facebook and created a fake profile of Rojan, which included images of Rojan's face on pornographic images. Rojan said such actions were common and

⁴ All names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of research participants.

that, as a result, most women in the KRI do not have any real photos on their Facebook profiles.

Aveen is a married 24 year-old university graduate from Duhok. She said that her husband is often jealous of her mobile phone use. He knows her phone's password and often looks through it without her consent. We asked Aveen if she used aliases within her phone, but she said that doing so would create even more problems for her relationship. Aveen's last comment was that "the positive outcomes of cell phone use for women are greatly improving our lives; however the negative aspects always spoil the perception, greater than the positives" (Personal communication, 8 Jan. 2014)

Kajeen, a 25-year-old female program associate at a local NGO in Duhok, said that at times she had received up to 20 calls per day, especially at night, from unknown callers. Kajeen described a common act by men that other female interviewees also mentioned to us. Some men will start calling one phone number, and then make subsequent calls to other unknown people by changing the last digit of the number (i.e. 5671234, 5671235, 5671236... and so on) until they reach a female. Once they receive a female on the line, they will do their best to keep her on the phone.

Bilind, a 24-year-old male student from the nearby city of Zahko who attends Nowruz University in Duhok, said fathers and brothers are less involved in monitoring the phone use of female family members than they were in previous times. Bilind mentioned that most people in Duhok use more than one SIM card. One card, he said, is for "serious relations and normal functions" and the other card is for "non-serious relations," or what other participants described as "fun." Bilind also mentioned that his father has broken his phone three times for what he described as being too "busy" with the mobile (Private Interview, January 9, 2014).

Sheer, a 26-year-old male from Semel, a city that neighbors Duhok, who was studying at Duhok University, said that he prefers not to use his mobile phone to talk with women from the KRI. He said that communicating with a Kurdish girl via mobile will lead to problems with her family – which is why he prefers to talk to women outside of the KRI. Another male student from Duhok University, Amed, 23, spoke about the conception of women’s honor during his interview with us. Amed said that misuse of mobile phones would affect women more than men “because there is no punishment for males” and that women face punishment “because women are the family’s honor, in the customs and traditions of the Middle East” (Private Interview, January 10, 2014).

Interviews with Officials

Ismat Mziriy, Chief Officer at the Office for Combatting Violence and Criminals, spoke with the research team about his work at the office and the trends he has seen with crime, including the misuse of mobile phones. The majority of mobile phone misuse cases Mziriy sees in Duhok city are by 15-18 year olds. Mziriy said he has seen an increase among fathers who come into the office requesting action against offenders who harass their daughters and that the police have created a unique way to find the perpetrators. Male officers use computer software to transform their voices into female voices in order to continue a dialogue with an offender that they hope will lead to a meeting. Once the offender is identified in a public setting, he is arrested and sent to jail with a fine. Mziriy said that the KRI gained too much new technology, too quickly:

We came from a very, very rural society; huge developments in technology have reached the KRI. With the Saddam regime, nothing was permitted. We had one TV station, more than half the time the programs were

about Saddam. When the Kurds were free, we automatically had more than 1000 stations, and then there were freedoms everywhere for Kurds. When this shift [in technological additions] happened, a lot of negatives increased as well (Mziriy, Ismat. Personal interview. March 2014).

Mziriy added that the best thing that can happen is for mobile phone companies to start adhering to local laws, and registering SIM cards to owners, as they are supposed to do. Unregistered SIM cards, widely available in the KRI's markets, are referred to as "orphans" (Kurdnet 2011).

Data Analysis

Both female and male participants expressed their belief that mobile technology has offered youth a new venue to increase communication with the opposite sex. Many participants described Duhok as a "closed" society (past and present), meaning that traditional norms and religious customs have a large impact on everyday life. Two dominant opinions were found among both male and female participants:

1. Life will be more advanced with each passing year as a result of new technologies; or that
2. The youth do not fully understand that their actions with cell phones can negatively harm others.

The youth and the officials interviewed described phone usage by Kurds as having two main categories: phone calls and "fun," which was the word used to describe all activities that are unlawful and often adulterous. Our research led us to believe that there are many young females and males in the KRI who choose to hide their romantic relationships from family members

of very traditional, older generations. However, freedom to pursue relationships has come with a price. Many women receive unwanted calls from unknown men, sometimes hundreds of calls. When male relatives or spouses answer these calls, trouble can occur for the women, even if they are merely victims of harassment.

Males and females saw that mobile phones provided women with the benefit of virtual mobility, the ability to communicate with many people in different places without leaving their domestic responsibilities. This development has given women more freedom to pursue job opportunities as well as access to increased communication with distant family members. Mobile phones have provided women in the KRI with a stronger sense of self, more friendships, and greater group solidarity within society.

Recommendations and Questions for Future Study

After the data was received and analyzed, the research team found that SIM cards play a significant role. Most are unregistered, resulting in the opportunity for misconduct on the part of men. SIM cards, according to the contracts the KRG has signed with mobile phone companies, are supposed to be registered by the name of the mobile phone user. However, this is not widely practiced. Small shop owners, who are in the business of selling mobile phones, must be willing to respect and enforce the mechanisms created for SIM card registration.

In an effort to unveil how many mobile phones both men and women use, the research team contacted cell phone providers for the data that would tell us how many SIM cards are actively being used in the KRI. Representatives from Asiaccell and Korek were unable to provide information regarding our inquiry.

The research team also found that the data led itself to the question of male-to-female interaction in the KRI. Mobile phones have created a new space for young men and women to interact, but what does that mean for the old norm of non-interaction? The research team hopes to revisit this research study and further examine gender relations and how that relates to communal peace in the KRI.

Conclusion

The introduction of mobile phones to new areas of the world has removed some social obstacles while creating others. This mixed method research project sought to examine how the information society of Duhok – specifically the greater availability of mobile phones – has changed women’s lives, and what these changes have meant to society as a whole.

Our study found that:

1. Male and female youth in Duhok see positive and negative effects of mobile phone use for women;
2. Male and female youth believe that cell phones have provided women with greater freedoms than they previously possessed;
3. However, male and female youth expressed an overwhelming opinion that cell phone use is closely connected to gender-based violence against women in the KRI;
4. Male and female youth in Duhok believe that cell phones are serving as vehicles for dishonest, and at times, criminal behavior, mainly by men who use unregistered SIM cards to harass unknown women, leading to potential negative repercussions for them within their families and communities.

Mobile phone use in Duhok represents an underground space that contradicts the societal realities of the KRI. It is unclear if cell phones make Duhok a more, or less, peaceful place. Throughout interviews, several participants mentioned that the misuse of mobile phones by people is the issue, not the phone itself. It appears that cell phones are able to merge social spheres that have been left untouched due to norms and customs. Therefore, in the context of Duhok, the merging has created issues for women that can sometimes result in dangerous outcomes. The uses of mobile phones seem to be unlimited. There is potential to eliminate the negative aspects of phone use that have been cultivated, such as harassment and violence against women. However, the youth we interviewed appeared to be knowledgeable of the role of mobile phones within Duhok and optimistic that one day, mobile phones will have less negative aspects.

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No Peace without Peace for Women: Women's Perceptions of Combating Violence Against Women in Kurdistan

By Erika Bak Schulten and Shilan Shawkat Almahmada

Abstract

This paper is the result of a qualitative study on how women in the Duhok governorate of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) perceive the quality of existing services for victims of violence against women (VAW). Thirty-nine in-depth interviews were conducted with women who currently live within the scope of the government's Office for Combating Violence Against Women (OCVAW), victims of VAW who currently have cases in the court system, women who do not have personal experience with the OCVAW or court system, advocacy professionals, and government officials. Collected data shows both current successes in practices to combat violence against women as well as many shortfalls that often allow oppressive traditional practices to linger, prohibiting society at-large from becoming more peaceful. This report concludes with recommendations based on participants' responses, directed at both government and advocacy groups, to further initiatives from the top-down into society, but also toward communities and families, to foster peaceful existence up from the micro-level. In order for women to live free from physical or verbal harm in the public space, peace must first be achieved in the private space, or within the home.

Introduction

For too long, women have been beaten, raped, tortured, terrorized into submission, and murdered for the maintenance of a societal structure that fails to recognize them as humans with equal rights and value as men. This system perpetuates cycles of violence and war as successive generations fight the battles of their grandfathers. In many places, these ingrained structures, which deny life for women, thus, for all people, are slowly evolving into systems that acknowledge women as strong and capable members of society who deserve equal rights and consideration. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is one place this is happening. Still, even in the KRI, the direct suffering typically experienced by women and girls is relegated to being a women's issue, a phrase commonly used in the KRI (Field notes), and not recognized as both a cause and product of all types of violence associated with war. Without peace for women, peace for the region will not, and cannot, be achieved.

Context

According to a recent report by the International Rescue Committee (IRC):

The need to challenge traditional perceptions of honor and to protect women and girls at risk has been widely documented. At the same time, acts of violence, including female genital mutilation and domestic violence, represent significant threats to women and girls, causing severe physical and psychological harm to the victims” (IRC 2013).

In 2013, according to statistics provided by the Duhok Governorate Office for Combating Violence Against Women (OCVAW), there were 11 officially recognized murders of women in Duhok governorate with 1225 complaints of VAW.

However, violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan is underreported, primarily because it usually occurs within the home. (IRC 2013). Long-standing cultural norms and familial dynamics persist, allowing such violence to continue, but because, for many women and girls, freedom of movement outside the home is restricted and contact with the outside community is controlled, victims' suffering is easily hidden. Neighbors and community members are often reluctant to assist, considering it a private matter. And according to several participants' comments, neither OCVAW nor regular police can intervene within a home to investigate unless a victim or someone from within the home calls for help. In an effort to begin combating violence against women from the top-down, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) enacted several laws to begin addressing the problems involved with VAW. These include the 2011 Anti-Domestic Violence Law Number Eight; 2008 amendments to the personal status law, which prohibit a man from marrying a second wife, unless the first wife agrees to the union, and the 2002 amendments to the penal code that classify "honor killings" of women as murder (Aziz). Despite these changes, communities remain reluctant to fully implement these legal initiatives (Dr. Sami Hussein, Commander of the Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women).

The KRG established the Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women (DCVAW) in 2007. The Directorate, and subsequent on-the-ground offices, such as Duhok's OCVAW, includes a dedicated police force, separate from regular police units, whose sole purpose is to help women. Other activities include advocacy campaigning, legal advocacy, and services that are interconnected with the Nawa Center, a government-run safe house for women. "[The Nawa Center] serves two purposes: First, it attempts to solve the confrontations or problems that women endure, and second, it has become a temporary shelter for those who have no alternative place to go"

(Kurdish Globe). Government sponsorship is necessary for the services to be effective, but laws are not enough, particularly as funds, forces, and the motivation to adequately implement new ideas are in short supply (Stoter).

Conceptual Framework

A 2013 study conducted by the Warvin Foundation, and USAID's Access to Justice Program provided us with a baseline for understanding broader perspectives from women about violence against women in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Warvin Foundation is an online news organization dedicated to combating VAW in the KRI and in the greater Middle East. According to their study, when asked, "How familiar are you with the eliminations of violence against women law [2011 law] in Kurdistan?" 36 percent of women from Duhok said they were not aware of such a law, 28 percent said only that they knew it existed, 22 percent said they knew some of the tenets of the law, and just 14 percent of women from Duhok said they were "very much familiar" with it. Additionally, when asked, "Have you seen or witnessed a woman getting benefit from the [2011] law of eliminating violence against women?" 31 percent of participants from Duhok governorate responded that they had never seen one woman helped by it, 58 percent responded that they had seen very few women benefitting, while just 11 percent of women from Duhok governorate said they had seen many women benefitting from the passage of the 2011 law. (2013 Warvin/USAID research). Clearly, laws have not been sufficient to change practices that are deeply embedded in families and communities.

What happens to men, women, and children behind closed doors significantly impacts individuals and families, but also undermines the overall safety and peacefulness of communities and countries.

Children who are victims of or witnesses to violent crime are at an increased risk for delinquency, adult criminality, and violent behavior...it also places children at significant risk for substance abuse, mental illness, and suicide. Witnessing family violence appears to have both short- and long-term effects on children. Intervening in the lives of victimized children before negative patterns of behavior are established may be the only real opportunity to prevent future violence in our streets and in our homes (OVC Monograph).

Women compose half of society, and without their safety, the reality of peace cannot exist. The problem of violence against women is not an issue that affects only women, but one that also plays a role in broader violence of the region. Peaceful living and a rejection of violence in every form must be learned at the micro-level, within the home and in communities. Children who grow up in homes where violence is used are more likely to use violence in their own lives (Safe Horizon).

The majority of existing research and other literature concerning violence against women in the KRI comes from the perspective of NGO practitioners and centers around the violence itself, cultural perspectives on violence, and existing laws to combat VAW. There is no research prior to this study that focused on listening to women themselves, in order to increase understanding of how they believe the services they receive are functioning in practice. The anthropological concepts of legitimacy to exercise violence, and in what contexts, as well as the social function of violence help to explain the complex circumstances that allow violence against women to persist (Zuckerhut 14). This complexity tells women to accept abuse committed against them. The results of domestic violence in the KRI are similar to those seen in many other places around the world. Women often return to their abusers for lack of options

and because they have been trained to believe they have no rights of their own. For example, Patricia Zuckerhut writes:

Domestic violence... is a form of violence that is “ever-present but hidden by the multiplicity of images of normalcy” as an example of contended legitimacy. In many [places]... the beating of women and other dependents by men in the household or male relatives is still accepted as a form of discipline to retain inner-domestic relations of power (16).

Violence in society is a means to control some groups within it, to “[reinforce] social hierarchy and order;” (Zuckerhut 20). But if women continue to be terrorized into submission, can there be positive peace? The answer is no – it can only contribute to an “aspect of disharmony and destruction” (Zuckerhut 22). In its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the United Nations defined violence against women, as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” The gap between prevailing cultural norms in the KRI and elimination of VAW is often wide, varying greatly from family to family. Indeed, not all families and communities support violence against women. Many women are educated, some are free to choose whether to have a career, a family, or both; but as reported by our research participants, generally speaking, women having such choices are not yet the norm in the KRI. These advancements also do not necessarily preclude a woman from experiencing direct violence.

Methodology

This research was a joint effort by Shilan Shawkat Almahmada, of the University of Duhok, and Erika Bak Schulten of New York University. Co-researcher Almahmada is a dedicated professional who works as an investigator in the court system in Duhok and is also a graduate student of Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies at the University of Duhok. In our many discussions about the realities of being a woman in the modern-day KRI, she shared the following on why combating violence against women is important to her: “Because I am a woman and I live here. I see much violence against women happening. Women’s voices should be heard and they should be protected from violence.” (Personal interaction. 8 August 2013.) Co-researcher Schulten is a graduate student at the Center for Global Affairs at New York University, specializing in Human Rights with a focus on combating gender-based violence. She previously traveled to the Kurdistan Region in 2006 as a member of the United States Air Force and had the honor of meeting with a group of women from the KRI and was moved by their enthusiasm in her freedom and empowerment as a female and military member. That experience motivated her to return to the KRI.

When our research was initially conceived in August 2013, we designed it to include both in-depth interviews and focus groups with women in Duhok governorate. However, NYU’s institutional review board asked our team to eliminate the focus groups out of concern for the safety of our research participants.

Our research consequently relied solely on in-depth interviews with women living in Duhok governorate who, at the time of the research in January 2014, lived within the scope of the OCVAW and/or the court system in both Duhok city and its suburb Semel. Because of the location of the Nawa Center in

Duhok city, women who live there potentially come from all parts of Duhok governorate and arrive under varying circumstances. Some arrive as they are urgently fleeing violence, others as part of a legal process following a complaint they filed against someone and are placed in the Nawa Center by the courts. Yet all of them are there for safety reasons – and primarily because they have nowhere else to go. This was an important understanding that we developed during our research; even by focusing on interviews with women in the Nawa Center, we still heard from women from many villages, towns, and cities, and with differing familial circumstances.

In total, we conducted 39 in-depth interviews – 16 interviews with women living at Nawa; six with women who currently have cases in the court system but do not live at Nawa; eight with women who are not living within the scope of the OCVAW or legal system; two with advocacy professionals, and seven interviews with government and court officials. Most of our participants had partial primary school or no formal education, and not all were literate, so we chose to obtain their informed consent verbally. Interviews were conducted in either Kurdish or Arabic, depending on which language was more appropriate for each participant, then translated to English by Almahmada and documented by Schulten. One interview with a government official, Dr. Sami Hussein, was conducted in English.

Presentation of Data

All research participants had their confidentiality protected, with the exception of government officials, whose real names have been used. All interview data has been coded to further protect our participants and to facilitate data analysis. Each category heading, listed below in Table 1 corresponds to the number of an individual interview within the same category.

For example, the citation of “B6” would denote comments from interview number six within the “other women within OCVAW/legal system” category.

Table 1: Total In-depth Interview Participants

Category	Number of Interviews	Reference Code
A: Nawa Center	16	A + (1 – 16)
B: Other women within OCVAW/legal system	6	B + (1 – 6)
C: Women outside of OCVAW/legal system	8	C + (1 – 8)
D: Advocacy professionals	2	D + (1 – 2)
E: Government and Court Officials	7	E + (1 – 7)

Perspectives on VAW as an Issue:

Of the 30 participants in categories A, B, C, just three (A13, A15, B2) said they did not know any other women outside of the Center who have experienced domestic violence. According to one interviewee, she does not hear about “anything” because she is isolated in a village and does not know about issues involving other people (A15). All other participants said they know women (sometimes “many” – A4, A5, A6, A7, A11, and B4) who are victims of domestic violence. One participant stated: “There are many more victims

of violence against women that people don't know about – [violence] from fathers, brothers, and husbands.” (A11)

The spectrum of VAW is broad and often includes: verbal abuse, such as the degradation of women through disparaging name-calling (A1), beatings with fists and metal objects (A10), forced sexual activity with strangers for money (A16), and murder (A5, A16). Several participants believe that VAW affects fewer women now than in the past (A5, A9, C2, C5), but there is no data available to support this claim. Known data, included in Table 2 below, reflects only reported cases, which have trended upwards since 2008 and likely reflect positive movement to conditions that allow women to report violence against them. In 2008, there were only 394 complaints made to the police, but in 2013 there were 1225.

Table 2: Reported VAW, 2008-2013

Reported Violence Against Women - Duhok Governorate						
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Murder	13	12	10	6	9	11
Suicide	28	13	15	10	10	7
Attempted Suicide		48		9	37	
Burning	52	75	85	51	35	25
Complaints (cases)	394	480	561	656	701	1225
Sexual Violence	8	13	19	14	31	28
Self-Immolation				34	25	33
TOTAL	495	641	690	780	848	1329

Source: Compiled from statistics provided by the Duhok Directorate for Combating Violence Against Women, 2014.

Views on Government Services

The majority of participants (categories A, B, and C) expressed a belief that the KRG, law enforcement (OCVAW), and legal system (courts) are trying to do their best to help them

and all women who experience violence. As with the Warvin/USAID study, our work also showed that women know very little about the laws and services available to them. While only two participants were able to identify the 2011 law by name (A3, C3), most at least knew that laws and services exist in some form to help women. However, several expressed the belief that there are no such laws or services (A14, B3, B6, C3).

When asked if the police help women who experience violence, all but two participants (A10, C1) expressed a belief that police are committed to helping women. One interviewee said that in her town, every time she made a complaint against her abusive husband, the police told her to go back to her husband and care for her children (A10). She also stated that police in Duhok city seem to be more helpful and caring than others within the governorate (A10). Other participants asserted that women owe their lives to the police (A11, A13). One went as far as to say: “When there is a case where a woman is at risk of being killed, all the police come around to protect her. They are ready to die to protect her” (A11). In the words of another woman, “All of my life is owed to the police because they protected me and brought me to this place” (A13). Participants expressed belief in the efficacy of local police in Duhok and Semel, and the motivation of police to help them and to combat VAW, stating that “If women call, the police come to help” (A3, A7, A9, A12, B5).

One problem, however, is that some women who are in grave danger do not report their cases to the police (A16, C2). According to one interviewee, “If people hear sounds or news that VAW is happening, police still cannot enter the house because the man will say they cannot come inside. It is all because of old traditions. But, if women call for help, the police will come and help her” (C3). Another participant said “if a husband is an important man in the community, he could beat his wife until she died and no one would come if she didn’t ask

for help” (C2). When asked why women do not self-report violence committed against them, participants cited factors related to shame, fear, lack of education, and isolation within the home. These four elements of VAW resounded throughout our field research.

A question about whether police act as a deterrent to VAW received mixed responses. Fourteen participants said they believe police are a deterrent to those who would otherwise commit VAW. A12 mentioned the importance of a uniformed police presence in the community because “people respond to authority.” Another participant said that “if not for the police, my husband might kill me” (B1). B2 shared that “If it wasn’t for the police working, women would be in danger. Police help and men are afraid of the police.” Other women were not as optimistic about the power of the police, “because some think they are more powerful” (C4). Eight said police are not a deterrent, and one participant expressed a belief that police sometimes function as a deterrent to VAW.

These women expressed a belief that the court system is functioning to help women receive justice. Only one said that she does not believe that the court helps women; however several said the court could be helpful “if the woman is in the right...” (C1, C2, C7). Participant A5 stated, “Court cases for women are sometimes postponed more than one or two times. I don’t know why they do it.” Additionally, she asserted, “Because the judge is a man, he allows the men to talk first and more than women. The judge said to me, ‘Don’t talk until the man is done.’ If judges were women, it will be better” (A5). Two-thirds of interviewed women expressed a belief that the court system acts as a deterrent to VAW, because of the legal costs associated with court cases, public opinion of those who are called to court, and/or because the threat of legal action gives potential offenders pause from hurting or killing women. Only three participants (A15, B3, C1) of the remaining third (10

participants) expressed a belief that the court system does not function as a deterrent.

Three quarters of our research participants in participant categories A, B, and C said they were hopeful that “the government” would solve the causes and problems associated with VAW, and deferred to its assumed expertise. One participant voiced the opinion that: “Everything is related to the government. If they become better defenders of women’s rights, day by day, it will be better. Government has the power to change individuals” (B2). Two other participants echoed this need for government action (A7, A13), with a third adding that: “It would be better if the government encouraged families to help women inside the family” (A2). Asked whether the government offered such encouragement now, she responded, “I don’t see it” (A2).

The Nawa Center

Women are grateful for the Nawa Center and have few complaints. Without it, some said they would be dead (A8, A15, A16). Women cycle in and out, staying there for as little as a few days or for as long as a few years (A16, B5). Some of the women come once and leave when their problems are resolved; others leave and return to their abusive homes. Many have lived at the Nawa more than once (E1). Women outside of the OCVAW/legal system (participant category C) had either never heard about Nawa or had heard it was a good place for women who need it.

Overcrowding in the small center is sometimes a problem (Field notes), although the Director of the Center, Dachaz Fetah, told us that the KRG is constructing a new and larger building, but that its completion date was unknown (E1). Police escorts are needed for safety reasons when women leave Nawa for the hospital, court, or other official appointments, but because escorts are small in number, leaving Nawa is currently

restricted to official business. Many believe the services at Nawa meet their needs, including medical, emotional, religious, and physical needs, but as with every facet of VAW, each case is unique. Workshops that teach hairstyling skills are sometimes offered at the Center, but not with regular frequency. The current Director is highly regarded by the women at the Center as a dedicated, caring professional. (A9, B5, Field Notes).

A total of 178 women lived in the Nawa Center at some point in 2013, and some of them had children with them (E1). Because of the aforementioned traditional barriers, Director Fetah stated that many more women would come if they were able, although she has witnessed improvement in public opinion since 2007, when Nawa first opened (E1). At that time, she said, few people in the local communities would accept it, but now many people understand the good it provides (E1). Yet, it is a difficult, ongoing process, as restrictive and oppressive traditions are still prevalent in Duhok, and “everyone knows each other” (E1). Director Fetah also connected VAW to peacebuilding, emphasizing the importance of facilitating peace at the micro-level. According to Director Fetah:

If people do not apply peace within their families, they will not apply peace in the community. The community is made up of families – like me and you – when women become victims of violence, the community becomes a victim of violence. Also, unfortunately, women here are raised by old, bad traditions...this leads to conflict and dispute (E1).

All category B and C participants expressed hope that the KRI will improve in terms of both VAW and overall quality of life for everyone, while only five category A participants concurred (A3, A4, A5, A9, A15). In the words of one interviewee: “Yes, I am hopeful because I always see problems resolved” (A9). However, another five A participants (A2, A6,

A12, A13, A16) expressed uncertainty, and five (A1, A7, A8, A10, A14) stated they do not have hope that the status of VAW will improve. One participant shared: “VAW won’t become less, because man has rights in everything. Women are human and have the same rights under God. Women are important and should be protected” (A7). While another participant voiced the perspective that:

No, it won't be better. It will be worse. Women are [made to be] weak creatures because of traditions, community, lack of education – everything. Women need work training and chances to get a job; for instance job training in sewing that she can do inside the house. I just want to go out and live a normal life” (A1).

Theme: Families and Community

The circumstances of each woman are complex and unique, so opinions regarding family and community as helpful or detrimental varied greatly. For some women, “family is the problem,” (B1), whereas other participants felt that: “It depends; some [families] protect women from violence, others encourage violence against women” (B4). It is important to understand that VAW can occur within the family to which a woman is born and/or the family into which she marries. Many participants expressed a belief that parents generally help victims of VAW when the perpetrator is a husband or someone from his family. However, when we asked what happens when the perpetrator is her father or brother, we heard only uncertainty and doubt, with one interview replying: “I don’t know – she would probably not get help” (C7).

Snapshot of VAW: Participant A16 said she was forced into marriage as a child (age unknown) to a much older man, brutally beaten by both her husband and his family, and forced into the sex trade by her husband who was unwilling to work. ***"When I married him, I stayed two years inside the house without being allowed to leave. He would not let me visit my family. When my father and brother called on the phone, he told them that if they took me to their house, he would kill me."*** Upon learning she was a woman in prostitution, her family vowed to kill her – a mission spearheaded by an uncle who arranged her child marriage, because they believed she brought shame to their family. At the last moment and with a gun to her head, her father convinced the uncle not to kill this woman. Her family has disowned her and the uncle's vow remains. She has lived at the Nawa Center for three or four years, afraid to leave: ***"This makes me feel like I can't breathe. I need to go out, to become free, but I feel the doors are closed because of my situation. Sometimes I hope I will die. That will be better than life. I know another girl who killed herself."*** A16 also reported that she has not had a minute of schooling in her life and does not know her own age. She has no job-applicable skills, no money, no family, and no hope for her life or future. ***"I'm sad because my father and mother disowned me. They said I will stay at the Center until I die and that they never want to see me again. Now I don't have anyone but God."***

When asked what options women have after experiencing violence, all but two of the category A, B, and C participants said options depend on how the community views a particular woman, how community dynamics and familial dynamics affect one another, and that more often than not, women who claim their rights in court or call for help are judged negatively as “bad” women who bring shame to their families or communities. Some traditionalists, including some women who have internalized old ideas, itself a dimension of VAW, consider it a worse dishonor for a woman to seek help from others, than it is for someone to commit VAW in the first place (C2). Another participant expressed the view that “communities sometimes help women when she is a victim more than once, because he brings shame” (A2). Whereas another stated, “communities do not help, because when people in the community hear about cases of VAW, they will say it is a private problem. No one wants to involve themselves in other families’ business” (C1).

Data Analysis and Recommendations

1. Educated women are more easily respected and regarded with value than their uneducated peers, and were more likely to view themselves as having human rights and value. Educating women and girls is also positively correlated with greater economic development (Girl Rising). Most of our participants had a partial primary education or none at all. This lack of education greatly restricted their options, including ways to generate financial support for themselves and their children. One participant stated:

If the woman is educated, [the community] will be more likely to respect her. The women who are uneducated have a higher likelihood of being a victim twice, by being judged as bad, or being blamed from old, bad traditional ways of thinking. People say bad things about women who go to the court, OCVAW, or police; that she is bad, just for being a victim. If more women were educated, they would probably have a better chance of being respected and not blamed – and maybe not become a victim in the first place (C8).

While data about custody cases in the court system was not available, in divorces including children, social worker Haifa Ahmed, who conducts investigations to determine parental custody suitability, said the court in Duhok will rule in favor of the mother to keep her children, but only if she can demonstrate an immediate ability to support and house them (E6). The 2011 law contained a provision under which divorced women receive a small stipend from the government,⁵ but not enough to support children (E6). Several women said that this provision gave them the courage to finally leave their abusive husbands, but that it is not enough to help women escape when children are involved.

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So, in cases when women have limited income and income options, children often remain with the father. Ahmed also stated that the divorce court orders child support, but that it's potential is not considered admissible income when calculating suitability (E6).

Clearly, financial and child considerations, along with negative perceptions about women in violent situations all limit women's willingness to leave violent households or to seek help at all. Often, women who make a claim against their abusers eventually rescind it, because they feel they cannot sustain life on their own (A9, A10, B1, B4). In such cases, alleged perpetrators will soon be out of jail, back at home with their victims, and consequently, violent practices continue through successive generations.

Development of society through education is the key to changing these behaviors and promoting peace. In a 2009 interview, Nicholas Kristof connected education with peacebuilding, arguing that: "Empowering women tends to lead to faster economic growth, which in turn tends to undermine extremism and reduce civil conflict" (Seattle Times 2009). Furthermore, "there's some evidence that countries that marginalize women tend to be...more prone to violence – bringing women into the picture tends to result in more security" (Seattle Times 2009). Thus, compulsory general education through secondary school should be required for both boys and girls, and programs for adults living without education should be developed in more communities.

Snapshot of VAW: *"The best thing is to teach fathers and mothers that it is better for daughters, as well as sons to get educated and go to university.*

*I feel so sad, because I am 27 years old and am only now starting to get an education, and didn't go when I was a child. **I am now living my dream, because I never thought that I would be able to read or write – never thought I might someday go to university. But it's like a dream now, because the impossible became true.***

I heard about a workshop to learn German and I told my mother that I will be the first one! I want to continue in opening schools, teaching about the government, and learning more languages to become more educated.

After meeting you today, I will go to my house and tell my parents about you and how you are very educated and how you are still good."

- C8, a 27 year-old woman currently in the 4th grade

2. To combat VAW, family and community initiatives countering VAW should be developed and established in all communities. It was clear in our research that families and communities wield most of the influence in countering VAW. Tribal and community methods exist in many forms for peaceful resolution of problems; but as it pertains to VAW, some are willing to help, while others perpetuate violent practices. Our participants were all experiencing care within the Duhok city or Semel areas, but several came from other parts of the governorate and these women expressed a significant decrease in quality of services received. Dr. Sami Hussein defined the problem this way:

We are fighting against tradition and old minds. People don't understand human rights⁶, women's rights, and the rights of the child. We need more years to see greater change. While it is important to change laws, it is much more difficult to

⁶ Dr. Sami said children have begun learning about human rights in school, but in limited capacity and with women's rights being a very small portion of it. He stated that the Ministry of Education has promised to include more women's rights education in its curriculum, but has not yet implemented this initiative.

change communities, especially when they don't accept legal change. Start teaching children these things young and all the way through school, in order to change these minds and old traditions (E2).

DCVAW seminars and workshops⁷ for combating VAW exist in some communities, but these need to be expanded and innovated to reach a broader audience in all communities – urban and rural; because VAW exists in all of them – and because women's access varies so wildly. Our research shows positive movements towards combating VAW in Duhok in terms of legislation, police services, services by the Nawa Center, and some educational programs. However, the ways in which women learn about the services available to them must be expanded. According to UN Women:

Although progress is being made globally, many women and girls who experience physical and sexual violence still lack access to quality multi-sectorial services. These services are essential as they provide much-needed support to survivors of violence, by keeping them safe, providing health care for their injuries, responding to their sexual and reproductive health needs, including provision of post-rape care and counseling, and facilitating their access to the police and justice system. Particularly vulnerable groups...such as women living in remote areas – have even more limited options and often lack access to basic services (UN Women).

Signs, billboards, flyers, and pocket cards with OCVAW contact information currently exist and are good ways of being an everyday public face in the community (in addition to actual police forces), but for women who cannot read or whose

⁷ Dr. Sami said every month, there are more than 20 seminars conducted throughout the governorate.

movement outside the home is restricted, their utility is small. Television and radio programs and advertisements also exist, but airtime is restricted by political will and focus on other topics.

3. A constant, ongoing education curriculum and program schedule for everyday empowerment/self-esteem promotion for women living within the scope of the OCVAW and at the Nawa Center is desperately needed. Basic needs are met for women who make it there. The Center protects, feeds, and provides women with medical and other basic services, which are vitally important, but the Center also has an opportunity to further empower women, even in the face of VAW, by facilitating relationships between Nawa women and others. NGOs in Duhok could partner with Nawa to create an innovation in empowerment care; providing a space so that women could become mentors for those at Nawa. In all phases of combating VAW, it is imperative that the government works with NGOs, professionals, and communities to remove barriers to the peaceful living of women, to develop more effective programs and initiatives to combat VAW, and to improve quality of life for women, which affects all people.

Snapshot of VAW: *“When there is peace in the family, it will influence peace in the community. I am now married with children. My husband and father have encouraged me to do my best and to help others. If every one of us [women] was suffering, we could not come to these places and work like we do, but I am now able to help women do their best and to live at a high level. **When a family lives in peace, society lives in peace, which leads to overall development.** Families who give women options in life live in a high degree. [The opposite] leads to war, which leads of other problems in society.”* –Captain Ropak Huseen, first woman working at OCVAW Semel, wife, and mother

4. An oversight process within the ranks of the police, both OCVAW and regular forces, and court system is needed to ensure women are treated fairly and respectfully by all officials throughout the region. Additionally, because women work at the OCVAW and rarely in regular police units – in fact, none of the regular police units on the ground include women (E3) – whenever women need help from police in these matters, OCVAW personnel should handle the case; until a time when there is male/female integration across all sectors. Captain Huseen said women feel OCVAW is “their house,” and because female officers will be dealing with cases more often at OCVAW, women feel safest there, viewing it as more private setting (E3).

In order for OCVAW to receive increased funding from the government for additional personnel, station locations, and initiative implementation, the need for this must be shown. The official need is based upon the number of women who seek help, but if women do not have access to existing methods of help, they cannot seek it. We personally witnessed the OCVAW in action when an emergency case of VAW arose. It was not just a show for us, as the process had already commenced prior to our arrival. The impressive display of victim care and protection of the young woman by a large group of armed police, while being transported to the Nawa Center was inspiring. The OCVAW Semel, with leadership from Captain Ropak Huseen and others, motivated us to know that valuable processes are integrating into society there, albeit slowly.

Conclusion

We found that women largely believe government services, including tenant agencies, function to help women who experience violence in the Duhok city and Semel areas, but that utility is almost always limited due to familial and community

barriers which can function to hide, hurt, and shame women. Each case is unique, varying from woman to woman, family-to-family, and community-to-community. Innovative government and advocacy programs are needed to combat VAW, not only top-down government programs, but also bottom-up programs that facilitate local dialogue, provide basic services, and offer opportunities for women's empowerment. Women need high-quality, multi-level care and after-care in cases involving victims of VAW that should include increased medical care, physical protection, educational programs, psychological support, emotional support (including mentorship), and financial support. Compulsory primary and secondary education for children and adults living without education, and also job skills training are imperative.

Combating VAW, and all violence, needs a strong commitment from officials responsible for primary and secondary education. Education for adults, who did not receive it as children, is also crucial – in addition to community enrichment and education programs that promote respect for human rights and the importance of developing a culture of peacefulness. Protecting the lives of women in Duhok – and supporting and uplifting those who have survived violence – may represent a shift in traditional behavior, but also will allow the society in which they live to move forward in peace, leaving oppressive practices behind.

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The Role of Media in 2013 Parliamentary Elections in Duhok City: Methods of Accessing Information and Perceptions of Quality by Young People

By: Kandice Arwood and Zeravan Ameen Almaee

Abstract

This study sought to determine which media sources were used by young people in Duhok to access information about the 2013 parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The study also attempted to determine the perceived quality of the information presented. Media plays a crucial role in any society and the public feels the influence of media, whether negatively or positively. There are many examples of media being used during wartime to incite violence or further divide a community based on existing tensions (“Between Freedom and Abuses” 6). Since media are responsible for sharing information, covering news about policies and political processes, and serving as a general watchdog for the public interest, the freedom and plurality of media in a country can be considered a solid indicator of the quality of governance. To explore the role of media, positive or negative, we used a participatory action research method. The intentionality of peace research and our participatory method enabled participants to think critically about the media and quality of information available in Duhok – the third-largest city in the KRI and home to the University of Duhok. The outcomes of this research included evidence of young people’s dissatisfaction with available media and a critical analysis of the current political environment that limits freedom of coverage by the main media outlets in the region.

Introduction

Following the United States military invasion of Iraq in 2003, new forms of media emerged throughout the country. According to the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS), as of September 2010 there were approximately 5,000 registered journalists in the KRI (“Between Freedom and Abuses” 7). In the words of Farhad Awni, President of the KJS, “The censorship which was prevailing under Saddam Hussein disappeared, paving the way for an era of freedom conducive to the emergence of unlimited media” (“Between Freedom and Abuses” 5). Despite an increase in the quantity of available media sources, the quality was questionable and the political environment remained restricted (“Between Freedom and Abuses” 21). In the KRI, in addition to the many media outlets that were controlled by major political actors, some independent media outlets also developed. These independent sources soon ceased to operate as a result of political pressure, violent attacks on investigative journalists (Hlidkova, 1), and divisiveness experienced in the politicized and polarized environment (“Between Freedom and Abuse” 18).

This study was developed in part to explore the recent history of political control of the media in the KRI. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the region’s leading political parties exercise strict control over information disseminated publicly and censorship is commonly practiced. Attacks against journalists are rising in the KRI and most reports attribute this to police and security forces connected to the leading parties of Massoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (“Between Freedom and Abuse” 8). The 2013 Kurdistan Parliament elections took place without major incidents of violence and 73 percent of eligible voters turned out in the three governorates (Duhok, Sulaimani, and Erbil) that compose the

region (“Iraq Election Watch”). Our research, however, revealed that political parties control the majority of media outlets and used intimidation techniques to manipulate coverage (Personal Interviews).

“Kurdistan might be more peaceful and stable than the rest of Iraq, but the way it deals with the media and dissenters is the same as the central government. Neither takes criticism well, and readily uses the security forces against those that question them. That shows that rule of law is weak, and the politicization of the police and armed forces. Iraq does have a large number of media outlets, something that is new to the country after decades of dictatorial rule” (Wing).

As media is broadly understood to be a powerful tool, particularly during elections, our research was designed to better define the connection between peacebuilding and media in Duhok (Howard).

The electoral process in the KRI has been the subject of controversy. The KRG consists of two main institutions: the Kurdistan Region Presidency and the Kurdistan Parliament (“Fact Sheet”). The president is the highest level of the executive authority. Massoud Barzani, the current KRG president, has held the office since its creation in 2005 (KRG website). The Kurdistan Parliament, consisting of 111 seats, is responsible for establishing new laws and government policy and debating major current issues. The Parliament is designed to guarantee representation of minority groups, such as one seat for the Turkoman Movement List and two seats for the Chaldean-Assyrian-Syriac Council (KRG website). Another quota also guarantees a minimum representation of 30 percent of female members of Parliament (MPs) (“Iraqi Kurdistan” HRW). While the system provides assurances that marginalized groups receive

representation, the KDP and PUK parties are perceived as running Parliament with a heavy hand (“Between Freedom and Abuses“ 6). The density of regional control of the KDP in Duhok has significantly affected the ability for media to critique the ruling party.

The political atmosphere in the KRI was quite intense prior to the September 21, 2013 parliamentary election (Zebari 2013). Although many Iraqi Kurds were skeptical of change, the results of the election shook up the region more than expected (“Free Speech Under Attack”). The traditional winners have been the KDP, with its power concentrated in Duhok and Erbil, and the PUK, with its power base in Sulaimani. The KDP and PUK previously ran together as a coalition, but in September 2013, they ran separately for the first time.

A relative newcomer, Goran – known as the Change Movement – founded in 2009, also challenged them (“Iraq Election Watch”). Lydia Khalil wrote one of the main works on the “political dynasties” of the KDP and the PUK in 2009 for the Brookings Institute. Khalil writes that the election occurred at a time when a feeling of dissatisfaction blanketed the KRI. According to Khalil, “genuine political participation [was being] stifled while corruption and cronyism [were] rife. Kurdish citizens [complained] about the chronic lack of essential services and unfulfilled promises of greater political freedom” (Khalil, 3). Our research was designed to provide young people in Duhok with a space to share their potential frustrations while enabling us to analyze the relationship between youth disaffection with the KRI’s political situation and the role of the media in that disaffection.

The below table includes 2013 parliamentary election results for the main parties, the KDP, PUK, Goran, as well as the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG), and other minority seats.

Table 1: 2013 KRG Parliamentary Election Results

Province	KDP	PUK	Goran	KIU	KIG	Other; Minority Seats
Erbil	340,668	91,072	130,000	46,000	46,300	52,448
Duhok	310,816	25,176	12,775	56,660	4,814	33,566
Sulaimani	92,500	234,252	333,961	84,081	67,285	6,401
Total Seats	38	18	24	10	6	15

(“Iraq Election Watch”)

Conceptual Framework

There are currently gaps in the literature relating to media in the KRI. Prior to conducting this research, we were unable to find comprehensive data or mappings of the current media situation or citizens’ perspectives on the quality of coverage. To our knowledge, there have not been any studies to date about the methods young people in Duhok use to interact with media or that deal with youth perceptions about the quality of local media sources. One of the most recent books by Jaffer Sheyholislami discusses new media and the relationship between Kurdish identity and public discourse (Sheyholislami 10). Although this book focused on Kurdish identity, we used it as background information for our research. Reports published by Human Rights Watch (“Growing Effort to Silence Media”) and Reporters Without Borders (“Between Freedom and Abuse”) were closer to the topic of our research – trying to understand the broader constraints on media.

These reports included significant studies on the background of the growing media outlets in KRI. Reporters Without Borders found that media was used as a political propaganda instrument prior to the 1991 revolution and that these divisive practices have carried over to the present day.

These reports concentrated on incidents within Sulaimani governorate. The report had limited information about Duhok, however we used these documented cases to inform our research. Our research was designed as a pilot study to begin filling the gaps in this underreported area.

The peacebuilding framework used in this study reveals the underlying connection between a critical media presence and a more peaceful society (Batic 2013). This study illustrates the effects of a controlled media on a population and uses a broad definition of peacebuilding. Media organizations such as Internews and peacebuilding organizations like Search for Common Ground define media as “a perfect space where beliefs and attitudes can begin to be reformed...peacebuilding [is] not just about the elimination of violence but also about building positive relationships, knowledge, and attitudes among the former enemies” (Batic). There are multiple connections to peacebuilding outside of direct physical violence, including mechanisms for greater government accountability, creating an informed electorate, and generally increasing the freedom of expression and diversity of opinion. The recent tensions between the political parties have sparked violent outbursts and threats aimed at journalists (CPJ 2012), which have limited the space for quality coverage.

The international community has included media as a vital portion of freedom of expression to be protected. Media is closely connected to the public’s right to receive information from a plurality of sources. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (Article 19), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) have all utilized strong language about protection of media and freedom of expression. In 2000, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression

outlined minimal requirements to uphold the ICCPR including:

- Sanctions for defamation should not be so large as to exert a chilling effect on freedom of opinion and expression and the right to seek, receive, and impart information ... and damage awards should be strictly proportionate to the actual harm caused;
- Government bodies and public authorities should not be able to bring defamation suits;
- Defamation laws should reflect the importance of open debate about matters of public interest and the principle that public figures are required to tolerate a greater degree of criticism than private citizens;
- Where publications relate to matters of public interest, it is excessive to require truth in order to avoid liability for defamation; instead, it should be sufficient if the author has made reasonable efforts to ascertain the truth;
- Where opinions are concerned, they should only qualify as defamatory if they are unreasonable, and defendants should never be required to prove the truth of opinions or value statements;
- The burden of proof of all elements should be on the person claiming to have been defamed rather than on the defendant; and,
- A range of remedies should be available in addition to damage awards, including apology

and/or correction (UN General Assembly ICCPR).

Iraq has not implemented the civil nor criminal defamation laws to fully meet these international law requirements (“Iraqi Kurdistan: Growing Effort to Silence Media”). UNESCO’s Declaration of Sana’a on Promoting Independent and Pluralistic Arab Media includes an outline of principles required to establish a free and pluralistic media. All of the Arab states endorsed the 1997 Declaration that says, “a free, pluralistic and independent press is an essential component of any democratic society” (Declaration of Sana’a). Iraq is a signatory and has ratified many of the international agreements guaranteeing freedom of expression and protection of a pluralistic media.

The Iraqi Constitution provides additional protections under Article 38, which guarantees that the state will protect “Freedom of expression, through all means; Freedom of press, printing, advertisement, media and publication; Freedom of assembly and peaceful demonstration” (“A Media Policy for Iraq”). How well these protected rights have been implemented was an underlying question in this research.

Methodology

Our study focused on the following questions: 1) How did young people (between 18-35 years old) access media to gain information on the 2013 Kurdistan Region Parliamentary elections? 2) What is the perception of media available in Duhok city by young people between 18-35 years old?

We employed a variety of methods in our research, including online and paper surveys, a focus group, and interviews. During January 2014, we spent three weeks in Duhok doing field research. We collected 176 valid paper surveys and 33 valid online surveys. This work follows the

introductory phase of a participatory action research study. The data generated consists of both qualitative (focus group and interviews) and quantitative information (online and paper surveys). We used a Kurdish-to-English translator for the survey results and focus group, and provided all of the materials in English, Arabic, or Kurdish.

The process of the field research was divided into two main stages: observations and desk research prior to the election and post-election field research. The paper surveys were conducted directly (face-to-face) to ensure the highest rate of return and also to ensure that members of our research team were available for any clarifying questions. Due to the age range of our target population, we spent most of the time with college students and in local cafes. The majority of participants came from various colleges at the University of Duhok, including the School of Arts and the Law College. Additional surveys were conducted at the Duhok Polytechnic University. The focus group consisted of six students from the Journalism Department at the Duhok Polytechnic University. The focus group allowed us to gauge the interaction between young people around the topic of media. The power of dialogue and discussion created space to highlight points of importance that were not found in the surveys. The final phase of the research included interviews with journalists and representatives of media organizations in order to gain perspective on the atmosphere and potential limitations felt by participants in the media sphere. These interviews provided contextual knowledge about the situation.

Our original hypothesis was that the majority of our participants would confirm that the commonly used media sources for information are political party seminars and political party owned media. This first section of our hypothesis was incorrect. The data showed that 76 percent of participants used local television but only nine percent used party seminars. The second half of our hypothesis was correct; the majority had a

negative perception of the quality of media coverage for the 2013 Parliamentary elections.

The main challenge to our research stemmed from the highly politicized environment in Duhok. Since many aspects of daily life in Duhok, including employment, are closely connected to political party affiliation, we were cautious of potential risks for the local researcher and research participants by political party representatives who would not wish to see our project completed. To address this concern, we developed our survey questions so as not to explore political affiliation, but instead to focus on political processes and the quality of information presented by media. The interviews with various media outlets were mostly critical, but KDP-affiliated members were less likely to criticize the KRG.

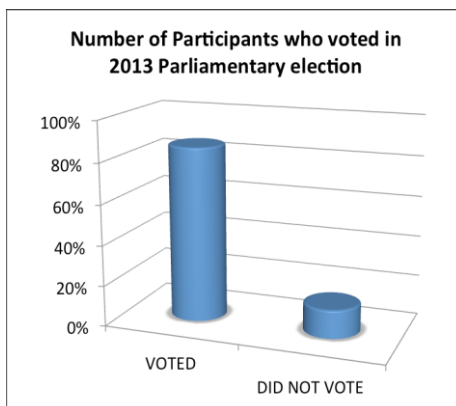
Validity

Each researcher engaged in this project brings years of experience in community-level organizations and media-related work. Zeravan Ameen Almaee is particularly well prepared for this type of research since he possesses strong community connections, language capacities in Kurdish, Arabic, and English, and has strong field research skills in the area of peacebuilding. Kandice Arwood has previously been engaged in independent media development in the Balkans and has conducted research about media and its importance in a post-war environment. Both partners have relational interviewing skills and developed a comfortable and professional space for the survey participants and interviewees. In developing this research, the goal was to reach people between the ages of 18-35 in Duhok city. In order to devise statistically viable figures, we interviewed the majority of media outlets from all major parties and surveyed a total of 176 people in our assigned age-range.

Presentation of Data

The research results revealed overall dissatisfaction with the quality of information covered by the media. Although this research focused on assessing the methods used to access information and the quality, many underlying societal factors were exposed in the process. The elections were a source of controversy because the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament imposed a two-year extension of Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani's term that came just weeks before the election. The Parliament, controlled at the time by an overwhelming majority of the Kurdish bloc, including Barzani's KDP party, rushed through two laws extending President Barzani's term following violent tensions between opposition members in the preceding days (Zebari). The lack of transparency in the executive branch and Parliament has been a topic in international media but rarely covered by local sources (Ekurd.net, 2013). This study revealed the lack of media independence from government or political party co-option that, in turn, limited the topics covered and perspectives offered. President Barzani's ruling party, the KDP, has stated, "reducing party influence in governance" as one of its top policy agenda items (Ekurd.net, 2013). This study revealed the true influence that party politics have over the media sector, the negative effects, and the desire for reform.

Our research included 176 valid paper surveys, 33 valid online surveys, one focus group, and eight interviews conducted throughout January 2014. The average age of participants in our surveys was 21.5 years

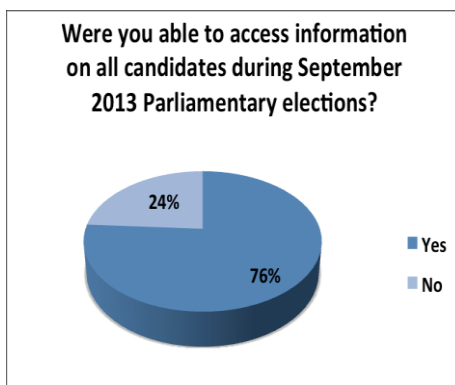


old. The participants were 53 percent male and 43 percent female, although four percent did not answer the gender question. The majority of participants surveyed were students and about 40 percent were originally from Duhok. The overwhelming majority, 84 percent, voted in the September 21, 2013 parliamentary elections. The main source of media was television and 88 percent said TV was the main method for all news. We also found that 75 percent of students used local television media as the number-one source of information during the election. Many of the research participants also mentioned using social media, including Facebook, and newspapers as supplementary sources of information.

The focus group revealed deep frustration with the current state of media. The consensus was that the quality of information during the elections was incredibly skewed according to the associated political party.

Two students in the focus group are interning at a local television station. Both shared examples of limitations within the stations and external pressure not to cover issues that were politically sensitive (one was a corruption allegation, the other a finance-related issue). All seven participants in the focus group were concerned about the professionalism and constraints of the field they were about to enter (Focus Group).

The main concerns listed in the paper survey's qualitative questions aligned with many of the comments made in the focus group. The media coverage heavily focused on candidates' tribal and personal affiliations without any



substantial analysis of their capacities. Many of the open-ended questions in the survey included comments about the media focus and coverage of only selected candidates, without any critical analysis. The focus group participants raised the same concerns and criticisms.

The second part of the research was intended to complement the surveys using interviews with journalists. Once we analyzed the results of the methods used to access information, we began to look into the most used source of media – local television outlets. During this period, we interviewed representatives of eight of the main local news stations in Duhok. The media stations included Rudaw, Speda, NRT TV, Kurdish News Network (KNN), Badinan, Pelistank (Children's TV), Kurdportal.net, and Duhok TV. In order to develop a holistic understanding of the media situation, it was necessary to recognize the work environment and allow media professionals to share their experiences. One of the questions in our paper survey sought to determine whether people were able to access information about all of the candidates for parliament. Out of 176 valid surveys, 134 participants were unable to access information about all possible candidates. After interviewing the journalists, it became clear why this was the outcome – most media outlets only cover candidates who are connected with the political party most closely affiliated with the outlet. For example, Pelistank TV, a children's television outlet, only covered KDP candidates, as the ruling party funds the station. The channel ran political ads during various shows and even integrated political propaganda into some cartoons. One colleague in Duhok shared a story of his child reminding him to vote, a message that came from a Pelistank TV show. Our interview with journalists at Pelistank TV revealed that they were also uncomfortable with political messaging in children shows and would prefer not to use such tools (Interview #7). Many of the journalists and media managers were critical of the

media situation and manipulative methods they were requested to follow.

Some of the concerns discussed throughout the interviews were similar to those revealed in the surveys and focus group. The interviews revealed harsh conditions in which the journalists work and the limitations on providing quality coverage. Threats, bribes, censoring, political fights, and permission barriers were cited in almost every interview. The interviews included questions about which political party candidates were covered, what were the limitations to coverage, and what were the main challenges for journalists during the election period. The answers to these questions were very similar – the limitations came from outside pressure and internal ownership limits since most media outlets are owned and funded by political parties (Interviews #7, #8, #9). The survey data showed that only two television stations covered all major candidates and, therefore, left a void in the quality of information throughout the election period. This perception matched with the information gathered through direct interviews with media outlets, as most sources dedicated their news coverage to promoting likeminded political candidates only.

Some of the limitations mentioned beyond direct political party affiliation were due to intimidation and blockage, both physical and indirect, to media outlets considered to be affiliated with the opposition parties, including KNN, Speda, and NRT TV. Representatives of each of these three stations shared stories of violence from local police in Duhok that included breaking video cameras, confiscating film of events, and physical beatings of local journalists. These intimidation tactics were rarely reported to the local authorities due to Duhok's politicized nature and the belief that there were no outlets for protection (Personal interview #5).

Rudaw is the main source of independent media in Duhok. The Duhok station began in 2005 and the manager we

interviewed, Sulaiman Alikhan, has worked with Rudaw from the beginning (Interview #1). Throughout the interview, Mr. Alikhan reinforced the importance of interactive and non-party affiliated coverage. According to focus group and survey participants, Rudaw was commonly mentioned as providing the best quality reporting. According to its website Rudaw describes itself as:

an integral part of Kurdistan, Iraq...Through its impartial reporting, Rudaw works to promote democracy, freedom and human rights in Kurdistan's post-conflict society. Rudaw was founded on the journalistic principles of honesty and integrity, and aims to provide objective and unbiased information about events in all the four parts of Kurdistan, which spreads over Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria (Rudaw Media Company).

Rudaw and NRT TV were the only channels in Duhok to cover all of the candidates for office, regardless of political affiliation (Focus Group). Although Rudaw was founded with funds from the government (Personal Interview #1), the station has since transitioned to a corporate model without affiliation, and journalists are now able to cover a broader range of topics.

NRT TV is another independent station in the KRI and includes a radio station, newspapers, and a television station. Our interview was with the NRT Manager of the Duhok office. He shared his view that the political parties have strongly impacted media and the challenges are related to party interference. One of the examples given was about permission to cover certain stories (Interview #1, #3, #5, #6). In order to cover a story, permission from the security institution (Kurdistan Security Agency, also known as *Asayish*) is required and it has led to many problems. Oftentimes the *Asayish* has asked NRT not to cover a story and would reject permission if NRT pursued a particular subject. NRT is a non-party affiliated channel, which

has limited access to and coverage of certain stories as a result. Preference was also given to media sources with close relations to the KDP in Duhok, and these outlets have been able to cover stories with fewer restrictions (Personal interviews #1, #2). The station covered the 2013 parliamentary elections in an interactive way and ran ads from multiple political parties including the KDP, PUK, and the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Campaign ads cost 25 cents per second and any party with funds could have its messages broadcast (Interview #9). In reality, however, the majority of television stations only presented associated political party candidate ads. For example, KTV broadcast only KDP related candidates and Badina only KIU candidates.

NRT and its journalists have been the focus of many violent attacks. On October 27, 2013, the owner of NRT TV, Shaswar Abdulwahid, was the target of a drive-by shooting in Sulaimani. NRT has also been the victim of arson of one of its offices and threats to journalists. Mr. Abdulwahid responded saying that “[my] message to those who attacked me is that, as long as I am alive, I will neither shut down NRT nor will I retreat” (“NRT TV Owner Wounded” 2013).

The journalists we spoke to at KNN and Speda TV had similar concerns about media restrictions by political parties in Duhok (Interview #5, #2). The Journalists Syndicate could play a key role in increasing quality of coverage and supporting journalists at risk. The Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) has not escaped the politicized environment and is not recognized as a resource for journalists outside of the KDP. The current leader of the KJS in fact ran in the September 2013 elections as a KDP candidate (Interview #9).

As we learned through our interviews, only journalists affiliated with the ruling KDP party felt that the KJS would protect them (Interviews #4, #7, #5). Although the main goal of this research was not to document cases of violence or

aggression against journalists, many of the interviewees shared stories of threats, violence, or intimidation by various political leaders. The “climate of fear” found in the Human Rights Watch (“Growing Effort to Silence Media” 3) report extends to journalists in Duhok as well. One of the main outcomes of the interviews was evidence that highlighted the failure to implement protections guaranteed through the Iraqi Constitution.

Recommendations

The changes needed to address the gaps found throughout our research include local and national level recommendations. In order to create an environment where the media can operate as a public service, it is necessary that the minimal requirements for upholding the ICCPR set forth by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression are implemented. The importance of the defamation regulations and prohibition of government bodies and public authorities bringing defamation suits needs to be addressed in the KRI. Additionally, the lack of remedies and protection offered to local media has shown to be a result of institutionalized coercion, thereby influencing the quality of information presented in the media (Interviews #2, #4, #5).

Although it may be challenging, one of the ideas commonly discussed in our interviews included devising a televised discussion or debate of the main candidates to be broadcast on all major TV stations as a means to reform election coverage. As long as the questions posed were of a critical nature and focused on policy-centered issues important to the public, such a forum might help ensure that quality information about the candidates would be presented to the broader public. Crucially, 76% of our survey participants used local television stations as a main source of information during elections.

Providing a unified platform for various ideas to be presented and discussed would provide more information to the public and address the dissatisfaction also expressed in the surveys.

The quality of information covered in the news media is deeply burdened by the politicized environment, which was mostly attributed to a lack of oversight (Interview #1). One of the recommendations to address this issue was based off a Swedish model of transparency for the media (Interview #9). The Swedish system is supported by a variety of stakeholders including: The Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association, The Magazine Publishers' Association, The Swedish Union of Journalists, and The National Press Club. These organizations select the Board of Press Cooperation, which oversees the Charter of the Press Council and the Standing Instructions for the Press Ombudsman. These organizations also develop and maintain codes of ethics for press. The Press Ombudsman serves as an office where complaints by any person can be lodged without cost. If violations are found to be valid, the Press Ombudsman may formally criticize the media source or warrant a decision by the Press Council (Ward 14). The council investigates cases, censures the appropriate actors and supports the journalists with representation (Swedish Union of Journalists).

Another missing piece mentioned by two of our interviewees are retractions. The Swedish model includes a periodic report about the quality of media, ranking media outlets based on the code of ethics. This process educates the public on quality of coverage according to regulations and creates an accountability mechanism for media outlets. In 2010, there was an attempt by academics in Duhok to establish a similar council, but the political parties – both ruling and opposition groups – refused the idea and it was never fully realized (Interview #9).

Party affiliation and control of media outlets hinder the transfer of important information to the public in Duhok. A

majority of research participants were dissatisfied with the quality of media and felt unable to gather important information during the 2013 parliamentary elections. The lack of critical outlets and concentration on party affiliation, tribal, and personal attributes instead of substantial discussion of candidates' plans and ideas, created a negative perception of the media. The media outlets that covered all of the candidates, Rudaw and NRT, were regarded as the best sources among our participants. In order to have a better quality of media, the environment in which they work also needs to be secured. The creation of an independent oversight mechanism, strengthening and de-politicizing the Journalists Syndicate, and implementing the current laws on record in the KRI would increase the quality of reporting.

Conclusion

Based on their rate of voter turnout, the young people in Duhok are politically engaged at a higher percentage than the average population and they are frustrated with the divisive tactics of political parties distorting the media. Our research showed that the majority of students surveyed, more than 60 percent, used the two independent stations overwhelmingly. Rudaw and NRT TV, which strived to cover all candidates and issues with a journalistic lens beyond political affiliation, succeeded in providing the fairest information.

Although the media is still divided along party lines, youth in Duhok are moving towards a more independent perspective, manifested in their media choices. The desire to move beyond divisive political parties toward a more sustainable and peaceful society is clear among young people in Duhok. The role of the media is critical in fostering this societal change and these reforms are recommended from both young people in Duhok and media outlets themselves.

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Syrian Youth Refugees and the Labor Market in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Case Study of Duhok City

By Syed Maifz Kamal and Zeravan Sadeeq

Abstract

The status of refugees around the globe is a threat to international peace at every level of analysis. Since the onset of Syrian conflict in 2011, millions of Syrians have taken refuge in neighboring states. This study focuses on Syrian refugees in Iraq, analyzing the possible friction connected to the integration process of Syrian youth refugees in Duhok in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). The study analyzes various dynamics related to the economic integration of youth refugees, particularly into the local labor market. The study concludes that tensions do currently exist, including notably different perceptions of economic grievances on the parts of the refugees and their host community counterparts. In particular, data suggests that the host population views the refugees as competitors in the labor market, classifying the refugees as an “economic group.” In contrast, the refugees see themselves as positive contributors to the labor market. Furthermore, data suggests that even with the vast differences in opinion, the refugees do not experience any direct violence from the local community. However, the notion of absence of violence should be taken with caution. The study concludes that further research must be done on the topic of economic integration of refugees in order to better understand the phenomenon and to foster effective policymaking.

Introduction

The status of refugees is a significant issue in humanitarian affairs, human rights, and peace studies. Even though the outpouring of refugees has remained constant since the signing of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* in 1951 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), refugee integration is a policy obstacle that most host nations and the international community are still learning to address (Strang and Ager). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees worldwide is currently at an all-time high. There are more than 10.5 million refugees, in addition to a larger number of internally displaced people, in the world (UNHCR Global Appeal 2014 – 2015). Regionally, the Middle East has the greatest proportion of refugees, with nearly 4 million (UNHCR Global Appeal 2014 – 2015). Approximately 80 percent of refugees are hosted by developing nations with limited resources (UNHCR). Thus, the issue of refugee hosting is a difficult economic issue, raising the question of whether refugees are a benefit or a burden to host countries (Sesay).

Since the onset of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Syrian refugees have flooded neighboring countries. Reports of integration problems and violent incidents between refugees and local host communities have come out of Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon (Roth and Eakin; Watson; and Karadsheh). In particular, Mafraq in Jordan – the second largest refugee camp in the world – has experienced friction between Syrian refugees and their host communities (Onishi). Tensions between refugee and host community youth have been principally related to employment, raising an issue that affects the peacefulness of society (Onishi).

This study seeks to determine whether the presence of Syrian youth refugees in the labor market in the Kurdistan

Region of Iraq (KRI) affects local perceptions of peacefulness, examining Duhok as a case study. In particular, this paper focuses on Syrian male youth refugees living in the Domiz refugee camp (Domiz Camp), located in the Duhok governorate of Iraq, and host community youth, while examining refugee integration mechanisms in order to determine the effect Syrian refugees have on Duhok. The purpose of this paper is to analyze whether economic grievances related to labor market competition signal any structural conflict between the host community and the refugees. The paper also evaluates the issue from a policy perspective. The research finds that there are conflicting perceptions between the host community and the refugees related to refugee integration in the labor market. However, the perceived conflict has not resulted in direct violence between hosts and refugees. The issue of economic integration reflects a complex situation that significantly affects peacefulness in Duhok. Thus, this paper concludes with a set of policy recommendations that could help reduce tensions and improve the process of economic integration for Syrian youth in the local labor market.

Context

Duhok and Domiz Camp are both located in the northwest of Iraq. The geographic proximity between two predominantly Kurdish areas – northeastern Syria and the area in Iraq overseen by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), partially accounts for the large number of refugees flowing into Iraq; as the vast majority of refugees are Syrian Kurds (Salman). The KRI hosts 97% of Syrian refugees in Iraq. Domiz Camp is the first camp in Iraq set up for the Syrians escaping the conflict and it is also the largest refugee camp in Iraq.

There were an estimated 140,000 registered residents from Syria in Domiz as of January 2014, a number that is

expected to keep increasing (UNHCR). Out of this group, more than 70,000 live in the camp, while the rest live in Duhok city, located 15 km from the camp. Syrian refugees accounted for 12-15 percent of the population in Duhok Governorate as of January 2014 (UNHCR, Central Statistical Organization – Republic of Iraq Ministry of Planning). Most people in the camp work in Duhok city. According to this research, 95 percent of the working youth work in Duhok city. Among the Syrian refugees, 50 percent of the population is male. And among the males, 40 percent of the population is between age 15 and 30 years (UNHCR, D1).

KRG policy indicates that refugees are free to work in the local economy and they are also free to move in and out of the camp as per their will, often labeling the camp policy as an “open camp” (Salman). This research indicated that most refugee workers work in private sector. However, it must be noted that the KRG policy is simply a declaratory policy, meaning that it has not been drafted within any legal framework (UNHCR Country Profile – Iraq). In addition, many participants of this research pointed to the Refugees Convention, but Iraq is not a signatory to the Refugee Convention or its protocols, which exempts Iraq and also the KRG from direct responsibilities under the Treaty (Convention and Protocol Relating to Status of Refugees).

Conceptual Framework

It is essential to understand the contextual environment of refugee studies. Refugee inflow is broadly divided into four categories (String and Ager; Collins):

Table 1: Refugee Flows and Destination of Refugees

	Refugee Inflow (Low Refugee Pouring or High Refugee Pouring)	
Proximity to destination (Neighboring Country or Remote Country)	Neighboring + Low Pouring (Ex: Syrians to Israel)	Neighboring + High Pouring (Ex: Syrians to Jordan)
	Remote + Low Pouring (Ex: Syrians to United States, Canada)	Remote + High Pouring (Ex: Burmese Rohingyas in Saudi Arabia)

This study categorizes the KRI as a “High Pouring + Neighboring Refugee country.” In other words, the KRI, and Duhok in the context of this study, is a very refugee-prone area.

There have been very limited studies related to labor markets in conflict settings, especially in situations of humanitarian emergencies (Garcia and Barlett). This study fits into the broad conceptual framework of topics related to refugee integration, and more narrowly into labor market integration, contributing to the limited research on the topic. The broadly known “refugee integration theory” comes from Alison Strang and Alastair Ager in their article “Refugee Integration: Emerging Trends and Remaining Agendas.” They argue that policymakers and researchers must take the socio-economic desires of both refugees and the host communities into consideration in order to successfully integrate refugees into host communities. They conceptualize the notion of “resource acquisition,” stating that there are limited resources within a society and the resources have to be carefully calculated and distributed in order to avoid any friction between the host community and the refugees (Strang and Ager).

A policy paper from the International Labor Organization (ILO) explores policies of labor market integration in conflict-related areas (ILO). It argues that labor market evaluation is essential because sound labor policy jumpstarts economic growth and helps to avoid friction between existing workers and new incoming workers, such as refugees. The ILO finds that young people get trapped in a “cycle of violence, poverty, and social exclusion.” Therefore, policy reforms should cater primarily to youth (ILO/CRISIS). This concept is relevant to the situation of Syrian youth refugees in Duhok and policymakers concerned with addressing it. If Syrian youth refugees find themselves trapped in a “cycle of violence, poverty, and social exclusion,” the peacefulness of Duhok’s society may be threatened.

Alix-Garcia and Anne Barlett theorize that population displacement impacts both labor competition and local demand (3). Wages decrease in the host labor market. Absorbing large inflows of refugees creates “labor shocks” in local labor markets, which may lead to socio-economic grievances within host communities, with the potential threat of conflict (24). Oded Stark explains that the refugee phenomenon creates poverty, which poses a potential for violence. However, Stark holds that labor market price is actually determined by the policies of the host countries. If the refugee camp is closed, then there will be a “shadow” labor market which disrupts the labor market dynamics beyond governmental regulation (Stark 328). Moreover, refugees expand “market size,” which creates more opportunities for all people (Stark 328).

Susan Banki emphasizes that refugee integration approaches need durable solutions grounded in conflict resolution. Refugees are either a convenient pool of labor or a threat to domestic employment. The host community’s attitude is important in creating peaceful integration and reducing the potential for conflict. If resources are drained, the host

community can become resentful. Isabel Ruiz and Carlos Vargas-Silva add to Banki's research, stating that one cannot separate the intertwining of violence and forced migration issues in the host countries of the displaced (Ruiz and Vargas-Silva 772 – 782).

In sum, when a mass of people, such as Syrian refugees, move into a host area, there is potential for conflict with the host community related to economic resources (Czaika 26). This potential for conflict is especially notable in the labor market, where the presence of refugees creates competition, giving employers an option to pay refugees less than local workers (28). The potential for conflict is particularly higher between youth because limited opportunities for youth in labor markets leads to potential crisis (DeFreitas 11 – 13). In many instances, it has been observed that youth economic grievances threaten the peacefulness of a society. Recent examples are found in the Arab Spring, where youth have been at the forefront of the uprisings, expressing their discontent and thereby destabilizing the societies in Egypt and Tunisia (Schwartz).

Methodology

Zeravan Sadeeq, of the University of Duhok and Syed Mafiz Kamal, of New York University, collaboratively undertook this research. This cooperation allowed the research to benefit from the richness of a local's input and also an outsider's perspective. The study produced complementary data using mixed-methods: 1) surveys, 2) interviews, and 3) observations and consultations. For the purpose of this research, youth was defined as someone between the ages of 15 and 30 years. The final data set of the research included 224 valid surveys and 13 interviews. The researchers conducted observations and consultations in Domiz Camp and in work sites

such as markets, including the local bazaar, and construction areas.

The research focused on the private sector labor market, because KRG policy allows Syrians only to work in the private sector. This is the case, even though 60 percent of the local population's employment is in the public sector, meaning that the public sector labor market share is significantly larger than the private sector share (Salman; Ministry of Planning Kurdistan Region)⁸.

The survey and interview questions were originally prepared in English and then translated into Arabic. Arabic remained the written form of communication for the field research, while most vocal communication was conducted in Kurdish. Interviews were tailored to specific individuals and their specific professional responsibilities in order to generate rich qualitative data. Although all interview participants gave consent to use their names, the researchers decided to maintain their confidentiality because certain information seemed sensitive while analyzing the data. Professional responsibilities of interview participants may be mentioned; otherwise they will be cited according to reference codes mentioned in Table 2 below.

⁸ The figure of 60 percent employment in the public sector is an estimate offered by KRG officials. However, from interviews with various stakeholders, including public officials, the researchers learned that public sector employment possibly could be between 70 and 80 percent.

Table 2: Participants and Reference Codes

Participant Type	Methodology		Number of Participants	Reference Code
Syrian Youth Refugees	Surveys	Observation, Consultation, Field Notes	152	SYS
Local Youth	Surveys		73	LYS
Domiz Camp Official	Interview		1	D 1
UNHCR	Interview		2	UN 1-2
Employers	Interview		4	E 1 - 4
Government Officials	Interview		2	G 1 - 2
Workers Union Representative	Interview		1	W 1
Refugee researchers	Interview		2	R 1 - 2
Economist	Interview		1	EC 1

Presentation of Data

*Survey Results:*⁹

- Of the Syrian youth workers surveyed, 25 percent were below the age of 18, as opposed to only eight percent of the surveyed working locals. About half of workers, both Syrians and locals were over 24.
- In terms of highest education levels attained, 77 percent of the Syrians surveyed had finished secondary school, 18 percent had completed an undergraduate degree, and 5 percent had a graduate or post-graduate education.
- Approximately 85 percent of locals surveyed had received some sort of job training, while less than 50 percent of Syrians had received some sort of job training.
- Just 30 percent of the Syrians surveyed expressed knowledge of their legal rights related to employment, while 55 percent of local youth surveyed expressed knowledge of these rights.
- The amount of participants who did not have any form of social security¹⁰ is extremely high both among Syrians (97 percent) and locals (78 percent).
- A plurality of Syrians surveyed worked at construction sites (39 percent), followed by restaurants (20 percent), gas stations (14 percent), and factories (5 percent).

⁹ Summary of all survey data is provided in Appendix 3

¹⁰ Social security provisions for workers in KRI are outlined in KRG laws and resolutions – Resolution No. 15 of 2012, Law No. 4 of 2012, and Law No. 39 of 1971). The provisions related to “Law of Pensions and Social Security for Workers” entitles workers to pension and security fund (Kurdistan Region – Iraq, The Presidency of the Region). With certain conditions, workers may enjoy social security benefits, unemployment benefits, paid leave, and sickness/disability benefits.

Meanwhile, just three percent of locals worked construction jobs.

- 93 percent of Syrians surveyed did not have an employment contract with their employers. 70 percent of the locals surveyed did not have employment contracts.
- When asked if the presence of Syrians create competition in the labor market, 41 percent of the Syrians acknowledged that it did, as opposed to 85 percent of locals who concurred.
- Just 4 percent of the Syrians surveyed thought Syrians had had a negative impact on the economy in Duhok. In contrast, 70 percent of locals surveyed thought Syrians had a negative impact on the economy.
- Approximately three-fourths of the Syrians (74 percent) expressed a belief that they are paid less than Iraqis performing similar jobs.
- 72 percent of Syrians surveyed expressed discontent with their wages and said that their wages do not fulfill their basic needs.
- 92 percent of the locals surveyed thought that the Syrians were reducing the average wage for workers in Duhok.
- 43 percent of the Syrians surveyed said they were in Iraq because of the conflict in Syria. 39 percent said they fled because of both the conflict and to pursue work opportunities. 16 percent acknowledged that they came to Iraq only for work.
- 84 percent of the Syrians surveyed approved of the labor policy of the government. Just 33 percent of the locals surveyed approved of the labor policy of the government towards the Syrians.
- More than one-fourth (26 percent) of Syrians used the open-ended “Comments” sections of the questionnaire. 10 percent of the locals made use of the “Comments” section. Some of the policy recommendation ideas

offered will be mentioned without attribution in a later section of this paper.

Interview Questions and Results

On the role of government in integrating refugees into the labor market:

- Government officials acknowledged that the KRG and local government have the most responsibility in integrating Syrians. They thought that reducing discrimination against Syrians and having a cordial attitude towards Syrians was their primary role. They also pointed to the free-to-work policy for the Syrians that the KRG has maintained.
- Most employers agreed that they do have a role in integrating Syrians into the labor market because they function in the private sector.
- The governmental spokesperson for Domiz Camp claimed that their role is to collaborate with NGOs to integrate youth refugees into the labor market. This is done by developing various courses and trainings.
- The government official also expressed a need for greater cooperation from the UN, in order to fulfill its role properly. He also expressed discontent with the role of the UN, stating that the UN is not playing its role, because according to the KRG, 80 percent of services at Domiz Camp, including services related to the labor market, are being provided by the government. Therefore the UN should bear a larger share of the services.
- The UN officials interviewed, meanwhile, seemed to be critical of the government's role, stating that the government has not been active in its role and could do more.

On laws and policies related to refugee integration into labor market:

- The legal provisions for Syrian workers are not clearly stipulated. This created a problem in the process of integration into the labor market. The government officials expressed that there were no legal criteria with regard to Syrians.

Available employment related services:

- Most economic opportunities were in the construction sector.
- The government has said that it conducts various special programs for Syrians in coordination with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The KRG said it was conducting vocational trainings for Syrians such in fields of information technology, carpentry and welding.
- Since 70 percent of available jobs were in the public sector, refugees are excluded from a large employment pool by default (R2).
- Moreover, there were no formal educational opportunities for Syrian youth (because they were not legally able to enroll in government-run secondary schools or universities), which will impair their skill levels and potentially will create long-term employment problems (R2).

Advantages and disadvantages of Syrian refugees in labor market:

- Employers could pay less money to the Syrians, which is beneficial for many employers.

- Syrians filled the gaps in the job market left by locals who prefer not to do certain kinds of work.
- Syrians also filled the skills gap in the labor market. Some of the Syrians were very experienced. Syrians deepened and broadened the labor pool, bringing new expertise into the community.
- Syrians had a higher level of entrepreneurship compared to locals (R2).
- The presence of Syrians had a negative effect on job opportunities for locals, leading to unemployment among locals.
- A large amount of wage money was being transferred to Syria, meaning that the money left the local economy (E1 – 2, E4).
- Syrians were also perceived as negatively affecting wages, driving down local salaries.
- Syrians did not work according to local regulations, such as the regulations for foreign workers. The Syrians did not have knowledge about local labor laws.

On the socio-economic life of Syrian youth refugees:

- One UN official said that the financial situation of the refugees is “average or good” (UN1). Basic services and needs are provided to the refugees, but they need to work in order to improve their living standards.
- Young men are often overlooked when it comes to services, because families are prioritized.
- Youth refugees do not have access to higher education. This inaccessibility to education was creating a “lost generation.”¹¹

¹¹ The Migration Policy Center finds that only 24 percent of the youth are attending school (Salman). Additionally, Syrians do not have access to higher education.

- A noteworthy response of one of the participants, who has worked extensively with the Syrians, was “according to my experience with Syrian refugees, my conclusion is that they are an ‘economic group,’ not refugees” (R1).

Interaction between local youth and Syrian youth:

- Participants stated that they have not seen any direct conflict between local youth and Syrian youth, especially in their daily dealings. However, they were cautious not to generalize their experiences and acknowledged that some friction might exist.
- One participant stated that some locals looked at Syrians as “jobs stealers” (E4).
- There seemed to be very little interaction between the local and Syrian youth, which is below the “required level” (G1).
- In general some friction did exist but the “problem is not very big” because perception really boils down to individual interaction (R1).
- One participant stated that there is a sense of “the other” which needs to be destroyed, from both Syrian and local youth sides (R2).

Confirming the number of Syrian youth in the camp:

- Around 33,000 youth refugees were registered in the Camp. Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 lived in the “youth phase.”

Unemployment:

- Unemployment was not a prominent issue. However, it did exist. 80 percent of the youth refugees worked and

the rest were searching for work (UN1). NGOs, in coordination with the UN, helped refugees find jobs.¹²

On the refugee movement policy of the camp:

Refugees had the freedom to move in and out of the camp and to go and work in the city. More negatively, this meant that tracking the refugees was impossible, especially if refugees committed crimes.

- Moreover, the policy led to an increase in unemployment among the locals.
- More positively, the policy can be viewed as a conflict resolution mechanism, as employment kept the refugees occupied and reduced the chances of them engaging in direct violence anywhere.

Observations and Consultations

- Employers generally seemed to be happy with current government policies towards Syrian workers.
- Many Syrians are very highly qualified with prominently high educational levels (graduate degrees) or advanced professional skills. Due to their refugee status, many of them faced downward occupational mobility. This is particularly because they are unfamiliar with the local labor market.
- The research frequently came across socio-economic grievances of Syrians, which may be a source of conflict. However, there was also much gratitude from the Syrian refugees towards the host community with regard to

¹² It must be noted that previous research at Domiz Camp by the Migration Policy Center has indicated that employment among Syrians is 76 percent, which is close to the UN claim (Salman).

services. One participant described the camp as a “five star camp” (SYS).

- One Syrian refuted the notion of the refugees constituting an “economic group,” claiming that life in Syria was and would be better after conflict: “[I]n Syria there were more opportunities, since there hasn’t been conflict in Syria for decades, unlike in Iraq’s Kurdistan Region, which has just recently started enjoying stability” (SYS).
- When the researchers asked another Syrian participant about whether the Syrians are an “economic group,” he simply answered, “poverty is worse than war” (SYS).
- Although most Syrian refugees in Domiz Camp were self-described ethnic Kurds, there were some self-described ethnic Arabs. The Arab refugees faced an additional barrier to employment because they did not speak Kurdish, excluding them from various jobs.¹³
- Construction and other labor-intensive sector employers stated that it was easier to find Syrians than local youth to hire.¹⁴ Availability is the prime reason for Syrian employment.
- There were many Syrian youth who volunteered for paid military training in the KRI, which provides an additional means of livelihood for the Syrians (SYS).
- In particular work places, such as the restaurant sector, where interaction between Syrians and local workers was higher, the friction between them seemed less.

¹³ The number of Arab refugees in Domiz is very low, estimated by the Camp Authority spokesperson as between 50 and 100 households.

¹⁴ Anecdotal evidence obtained during the research suggests that Syrians get paid 30 to 50 percent less than locals for performing similar work. However this evidence was not generalizable.

Data Analysis

The data showed that there was undoubtedly friction between the Syrian youth refugees and their counterparts in the host labor market. The question was: how serious was this conflict? The study concludes that the conflict between youth refugees and local youth in Duhok was not as severe as that in other host countries for Syrian refugees, such as in Jordan or Lebanon (Roth and Eakin, Watson and Karadsheh).

However, the divergent perceptions of Syrians and locals highlighted a potential for conflict. For instance, 76 percent of Syrian youth expressed an opinion that Syrians were having a positive impact on the economy, whereas 70 percent of the local youth saw Syrians as having a negative impact. These contrasting views – combined with the fact that the vast majority of locals viewed Syrians as driving down local wages – suggest a dangerous difference in how the two communities of youth understand the local economic dynamics.

Almost all of the Syrians surveyed and interviewed expressed satisfaction with the KRG's labor policies for Syrians. However, an overwhelming majority of locals disapproved of these policies. Moreover, Syrians did not enjoy any legal rights in the labor market, with 70 percent of them unaware of their legal rights, 97 percent of them lacking any social security, and 93 percent of them working without contracts.

Of the Syrians surveyed, 85 percent did not think they were competing with locals for jobs, directly contrasting a widespread view held as common knowledge by members of the local community. In addition, most locals surveyed and interviewed argued against Syrians having freedom of movement. These views expressed by locals suggest significant levels of hostility, not just towards the Syrians, but also toward the KRG's handling of the integration process. These differences in perception, combined with hostility in the local community

about labor market integration, pose a threat to peacefulness within the host society.

The majority of Syrians surveyed said that they were in Duhok because of the violence in Syria, with only 16 percent mentioning economic reasons as the motivation for their presence in Iraq. Thus, it seems reasonable to dismiss the claim by some in the local community that the Syrians in Duhok should be considered an “economic group,” rather than viewed as refugees.

The fact that almost three times as many Syrians than local youth used the additional “Comments” space in the surveys to voice their concerns suggested that the Syrian youth refugees were in need of new ways to make their voices heard.

The research strongly suggests that better policies are required to address the refugee youth in the labor market. There was a high level of unemployment in Duhok, 17 percent, among the locals in Duhok, with youth unemployment even higher (Ministry of Planning – Kurdistan Region). Moreover, the unemployment rate in Duhok was significantly higher than in other governorates and cities of the KRI, such as Erbil and Sulaimani (Ministry of Planning – Kurdistan Region). The other governorates in the KRI host significantly fewer refugees. Therefore, it is possible that Syrians were posing extra competition in the Duhok labor market, leading to higher rates of unemployment among locals. However, the Syrian youth refugees also were providing an extra pool of labor, which could benefit the economy and adversely reduce chances of violent conflict.

Most Syrians agreed that they received lower wages than Iraqis, with locals commonly expressing a view that the Syrians were responsible for driving down wages. There was definitely a difference in perspective on this issue. However, 72 percent of the Syrian youth refugees stated that their wages did not fulfill their basic needs, an alarming signal for a source of conflict.

Frustration and grievances could emerge from this situation. This phenomenon, which could be considered a form of exploitation, should be addressed through a calibrated policy intervention.

There seemed to be very low levels of interaction between host community youth and Syrian youth. More interaction would likely improve the integration process, in turn reducing the potential for conflict. The fact that there was no written or draft labor policy for refugees was a source of much confusion and possible tensions. From listening to the diverging views of government officials, UN representatives, and other research participants, it became clear that better cooperation was needed between stakeholders to help refugees integrate into the labor market.

Policy Recommendations

This study suggests the KRG – in collaboration with the UN, the Iraqi government, and NGOs working with refugees – consider the following policies:

- Draft a refugee integration law or policy.
- Allow Syrian workers to unionize (SYS).
- Consider restricting freedom of movement for Syrians younger than 15, especially in regards to work, since it was leading to a problem of child labor (G2).
- Issue employment cards for Syrian workers.
- The government can create “special towns” for Syrians, instead of putting them in camps. It will generate better economic productivity (EC1).
- Have more joint programs between locals and Syrians, so that there is more interaction between locals and Syrians. A collaborative microfinance scheme could be considered.
- Define a minimum wage for Syrian and local workers.

- Mandate employment contracts for Syrians.
- Open a job office in Camp Domiz and in Duhok city for the Syrians.
- Consider employing Syrians in the agriculture sector, which desperately needs local revival (EC1).
- Provide more vocational training. Evaluate the skills of Syrians and better connect them with the local labor market, in order to ensure that there is no skill-waste.
- Admit Syrians to local universities.
- Encourage Syrians to transfer money to Syria through legal means.
- Provide subsidies and assistance to expand the private sector labor market.

Conclusion

The study finds that there were stark differences between perceptions of Syrian youth refugees and local youth regarding the labor market. The differences in opinion present a potential source of conflict. However, the situation in Duhok as of January 2014 had not yet resulted in significant levels of direct violence against Syrian refugees.

The refugee integration process in the region has a long way to go before it can be considered successful. With limited resources and the likelihood that the number of refugees in Duhok will continue to increase, more research into this field needs to be undertaken in a continuous way. In doing so, policymakers and other influential stakeholders can take constructive steps to facilitate the integration of the Syrian youth refugees based on the most accurate information.

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Laborers in Limbo: A Qualitative Study on the Relationship between Unemployed University Graduates and the Kurdistan Regional Government and its Effect on Peace and Stability

By Sara Monteabaro and Sami Atroshi

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative study with a central question of, “What is the relationship between unemployed University of Duhok Faculty of Humanities graduates and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and its effect on peace and stability in Duhok?” Though the findings were mixed, several themes and commonalities reflecting the research participants’ perceptions came to light. Based on the data collected from 72 research participants, the relationship between unemployed university graduates and the government has not necessarily had direct effects on peace and stability in Duhok city, but the data does show that there is growing potential for civil unrest. Cited outcomes of the research include growing tensions within affected families, resentment toward the government, and psychological effects on the part of university students and graduates from the Faculty of Humanities. From the government side, data suggests awareness of the issue and a concerted effort to address it, although little direct action had been taken at the time of this study in January 2014.

Introduction

With a burgeoning economy, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has transformed from a once isolated territory of Iraq under constant internal siege from Saddam Hussein's Socialist Ba'ath Party, to a fully functioning autonomous region receiving tremendous international investment and attention (Ala'Aldeen). The KRI's newfound wealth is due in large part to \$24.5 billion worth of foreign and local investments between 2001-2013 (Stevenson 16). The year 2012 saw an approximate 12 percent economic growth rate evidenced by significant investment in the oil and gas, construction, and electricity sectors (Stevenson 16). As these industries continued to flourish in 2014, so too did the job markets within them, increasing the demand for university graduates with degrees in engineering, technology, energy, and business (Interview 1; Int. 3, Int. 5). Nevertheless, there remained an upsurge of unemployment among university graduates across the KRI, including in Duhok city. This study, focused on university graduates from academic backgrounds in the humanities – those who would seem to benefit least directly from the growth in industry – to explore how unemployment has impacted their lives and the society around them.

The research set out to evaluate the challenges in the relationship between university graduates from the University of Duhok Faculty of the Humanities and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and how that relationship could be improved to foster and maintain peace in the local and regional community. The research also aimed to provide an analysis of the current school-to-work transition for university students at the University of Duhok, and to assess their perceptions of social protection, opportunities for employment, and the challenges of unemployment in Duhok city.

Context

During the first decade following the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime, the KRI has experienced notable change with respect to its higher education system. In 2005, there existed just five public and two private universities in the KRI (Harb 4). Today, the KRI is home to 13 public universities, 6 public higher education institutes, and 10 private universities with a total of 94,700 students in higher education institutions across the region (Report Co.; KBI). Such an influx of degree-seekers has left the KRG grappling with ways to incorporate this growing population of highly educated individuals into the labor market (Int. 7; Int. 9).

It appears that the number of university graduates in the KRI has been growing faster than the job market that might absorb them. The public sector job market is increasingly competitive, especially for students and graduates with degrees in the arts and sciences (Int. 4). It is common for job descriptions within the private sector to demand that students speak a second language – other than their native Kurdish – have years of work experience, and other qualifications specific to the sector in which the job exists, resulting in either “a mismatch of skills young people possess and those that firms seek” or in job seekers unwilling to take positions available in the job market (Abdih 1). Students and graduates on the whole, have high expectations for job prospects post-graduation (Int. 5).

Historically across Iraq, university graduates transition from school to work by applying through the centralized placement system (UNODC 56). Given the country’s historically limited private sector, Iraqis’ most common form of employment has been as civil servants (UNODC 57). In fact, looking across the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) region, Iraq’s public sector has been one of the largest

employers per capita, accounting for roughly one-third of overall employment in the country (World Bank 228). More narrowly, from mid-2012 to mid-2013 the KRG employed approximately 700,000 civil servants throughout its ministries and departments, of whom 126,000 worked for the Ministry of Education (“Baghdad’s” 2014; UNODC 79). The KRG was said to have hired 25,000 workers in 2011 and an additional 40,000 in 2012, but was unable to employ all fresh graduates who applied through the centralized placement system (Tashan). The public sector in the KRI has now become too saturated to absorb the number of graduates seeking government positions (Tashan).

According to an International Labor Organization (ILO) statistical update from 2011 (Appendix 1), although the overall unemployment rate in Iraq from 2006-2010 averaged approximately 16.8 percent, estimates of youth unemployment reached 43.5 percent, giving Iraq the highest youth unemployment rate among the report’s 12 Arab states and territories and North African countries (ILO 2011). The KRG Ministry of Planning has said that, “In 2009, Duhok Governorate recorded the highest unemployment among all KRI governorates at a 16.91 percent average compared to 13.22 percent in Erbil and 11.88 percent in Sulaimani” (Ministry of Planning). This paper contends that the increased number of unemployed university graduates has contributed both directly and indirectly to these overall unemployment statistics.

Although the private sector has expanded rapidly in the KRI due to direct foreign investment from neighbors such as Turkey and from other countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and other European nations, the overall scale of private enterprises in the region is relatively limited (Int. 8). Moreover, the private sector has developed primarily as a result of foreign investments in the region, meaning higher pay on average than in the public sector, but also fewer regulations with limited safeguards in place for domestic laborers working for

foreign private sector companies (Zulal). The lack of social protections and benefits within the private sector has dissuaded university graduates and degree holders from joining the private sector; instead graduates have chosen to wait “as long as needed” to obtain a government position (Int. 2; Int.6; Foc. 2; Foc. 3).

To address this issue, in 2008 the KRG began revising the Iraqi Pension and Social Security Law 39 of the year 1971 in an effort to provide comparable employee benefits for public and private sector workers alike (Tashan). As of 2014, government employees received a host of benefits as civil servants, including pensions and land ownership upon retirement (Int. 3). The retirement eligibility age for social security in the KRI is 60 years old for both men and women (55 years old for early retirement for men with a minimum of 30 years of public service and 50 for women with 25 years of experience), at which time public servants are able to retire with a pension and a certain sized plot of land depending on how long an individual worked for the government and the rank and salary of their position upon retirement (Klein). Although salaries typically were much higher in the private sector, many students and graduates prefer the public sector as it is considered more reputable and respected within the society (Int. 4; 8). The KRG’s interest in revising labor laws has been grounded in a desire to push recent graduates to work in the private sector, leading to lower unemployment rates in the KRI (Tashan; Int. 4).

Increasingly competitive public sector jobs have also led to corrupt practices in the job application process. Prospective government job seekers frequently have been asked about their political party affiliations during the application process, and, consequently, have been hired based on political affiliation rather than merit (Bahadur). Furthermore, nepotism has been ubiquitous within the public sector, creating partiality within the hiring process for fresh graduates (Int. 3; Int. 4; Int. 7). For these

reasons, feelings of resentment and frustration have led students and graduates to feel that the government has made false promises to them. (Amjad and Havers 90).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC):

Whereas 13.7 percent of all civil servants in Iraq admit that they received help from family or friends in their [job] recruitment, the share was as much as...24.2 [percent] in the Kurdistan Region, in particular: Erbil (27.1 percent), [Sulaimani] (23.4 percent), [Duhok] (18.6 percent) (60).

The study from the UNODC also describes corruption at all levels of the government but citing “petty or administrative corruption,” which includes small bribes or favors in exchange for government employment for friends and family members, as having a “stronger impact on the everyday lives of the Iraqi population” (12). Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 contain statistics that highlight the growing importance of family connections in the hiring process across Iraq from 1983-2011.

The UNODC recommended in its 2012 evidence-based study on corruption in Iraq’s public sector that there should be greater “transparency and fairness” in the hiring process in order to ensure “integrity standards” and to avoid a mismatch in skills versus job requirements (55). Moreover, because the supply and demand for government positions was too unbalanced, the UNODC concluded that, “fair and transparent procedures are all the more necessary” (55). The challenge ahead will be to guarantee the implementation of such transparency.

Conceptual Framework

We entered this study wondering whether increased numbers of highly educated unemployed people could lead to

civil unrest in Duhok's society. In order to understand the issue fully, we focused on perceptions of the graduates' relationship with the government. As of early 2014, there existed no specific research on the effects of unemployed university graduates on peace and stability in the KRI. Though studies have been conducted on this topic in other countries and regions around the world i.e., South Africa (Price), Colombia (United Nations), Sierra Leone (Fanthorpe and Maconachie), Liberia (Maclay and Ozerdem), Sri Lanka (Amarasuriya), a gap in the literature existed pertaining to Iraq, and especially the KRI. However, mainstream peacebuilding literature does point to youth unemployment as a key source of civil unrest, or at least a potential threat to societal stability and peace (Izzi 103). For this reason, many post-conflict countries implement entrepreneurship training, skills and capacity building programs, or even microcredit loan activities to preemptively thwart civil unrest (Izzi).

A study by Ishiyama and Breuning investigated how access to education correlates with resurgences of civil conflict within post-conflict countries. The findings showed that the more years of education received, especially secondary through higher education, the less likely it was that civil conflict would recur (Ishiyama and Breuning). However, other scholars assert that this phenomenon holds true only as long as economic opportunities grow at a pace consistent with the growth in available educational opportunities (Thyne).

This study analyzed the relationship between unemployed university graduates from the University of Duhok's Faculty of the Humanities and the government through a peacebuilding lens using the "human capital theory" and "relative deprivation theory" to support its findings (Becker; Gurr).

Human capital theory asserts that people decide to invest in education by weighing the costs and benefits (economic

returns) and additionally, that individuals perceive that the more education one has, the more income one will receive in the future (Becker). Moreover, scholars argue that, “students choose whether or not to attend college based on their perception of the returns related to their investment” (Paulson). In our case study of Duhok city, we found that students and graduates had noticeably high expectations of greater returns of obtaining a university degree in comparison to joining the workforce straight from secondary school (Int. 4; Int. 8; Foc. 2; Foc. 3). Furthermore, students and university graduates who participated in our study reported feelings of regret for not joining the workforce straight from high school instead of earning their degrees, which some said, put them at a disadvantage in the labor market (Int. 3; Foc. 3).

Relative deprivation theory stresses that individuals commonly compare themselves to others and when confronted with inequality (by contrast to others), they feel anger and resentment (Davis). When applied to unemployment, Gurr argues that relative economic deprivation results when a person’s expectation of economic outcomes differs in comparison to the real economic outcomes obtained (Gurr). Gurr also suggests that when there is a significant gap between expectations and outcomes, collective dissatisfaction occurs, tensions develop, and then “disposes men to violence” (Gurr).

According to the University of Duhok’s website, Duhok city is “the most peaceful place in all of Iraq” (University of Duhok). However, our research participants suggested that that distinction might not last (Int. 2; Foc. 1). Highly educated youth across the Middle East have taken to the streets to protest low employment rates and economic opportunities (Balch). According to Balch:

Two notable features characterized the affected countries [of the Arab Spring]: each was

struggling with a stagnant economy and each was home to a population of disillusioned and often unemployed (or, more frequently, underemployed) youth. Put together, the two make for a toxic combination, as events revealed (Balch 1).

Though, this paper does not conclude that the effects of the Arab Spring have reached Duhok city in the KRI, the opinions of our research participants suggest that such events are not entirely outside the realm of possibility in the future (Int. 3; Int. 4; Foc. 2; Foc. 3).

Methodology

After completing five months of desk research and organizing a thorough research project design, we spent three weeks conducting field research in Duhok city during January 2014. Over the relatively brief period of the field research, we completed 11 in-depth interviews and facilitated three focus groups with 72 research participants in total. The interview participants included current government officials, university faculty, and university graduates (both employed and unemployed). Of the focus groups, two were conducted with current university students from various Faculty of Humanities colleges in addition to one focus group with unemployed university graduates.

Most interviews were conducted in the Badini dialect of Kurdish, with the following exceptions: one university graduate interview; one focus group with university students; one government official interview, and; one university staff member interview, which were all conducted in English. Interviews and focus groups conducted in Kurdish were audio recorded and translated by a local Kurdish translator in Duhok. Each

interview ranged from 30 minutes to one-and-a-half hours, while focus groups averaged one hour each.

Similar questions were asked to each research participant with some questions tailored to their specific backgrounds and interests in the research project. Various themes and connections were drawn from the answers and data collected within the interviews and focus groups. In addition, there were some opinions and answers that differed greatly from the majority of research participants. We considered those responses to be outliers.

As originally conceived, this study planned to incorporate a survey element into the research design. However, due to time constraints and limited access to university graduates in Duhok city, the survey portion of the study was removed to focus specifically on the qualitative element of research participants' perceptions. In the end, both research partners found that focusing on interviews and focus groups made the best use of the three-week period of field research.

Because this was a qualitative study aimed at measuring perceptions, questions were typically asked in an open-answer format and participants were permitted to answer questions however they wished. The study sample cannot be considered representative of the entire KRI, nor of Iraq as a whole, but the sample group has created a baseline on which to build future research and from which to delve deeper into questions about the effect of unemployed university graduates on societal peace and stability in Duhok.

Presentation of Data

Data collected through the focus groups and interviews were coded to protect the confidentiality of the participants as seen below in Table 1:

Table 1: Citation Coding for Data Collected in Interviews and Focus Groups

Group	Number of Interviews/Focus Groups	Citation Code
Graduates	3 interviews; 1 focus group	Int. 1-3; Foc. 1
University	3 interviews	Int. 4-6
Government	4 interviews	Int. 7-10
Students	2 focus groups	Foc. 2-3

Our coding system was based on Lawson's study of refugee camp peace programs (2012) and replicated in Munoz's study about the effects of diminishing flows of the Tigris River in the KRI (2013). This coding mechanism maintained the confidentiality of research participants and also distinguished perceptions of one group from another.

We found that both university students and graduates had high expectations of their post-graduation career prospects, prior to entering university. In sum, the vast majority of student or graduate participants noted that before joining the University of Duhok Faculty of the Humanities student body, they assumed that if they acquired a higher education degree, the government would provide them with a public sector job (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1; Foc. 2; Foc. 3). This notion was consistent with the human capital theory, whereby expectations of high returns (a government appointed job) were anticipated and contributed to

the decision to invest in higher education (attending and graduating from university).

We also found that the definition of “employment” was specific to the public sector. In Duhok, being “employed” specifically meant having a government position in the public sector (Int. 1; Int. 2, Int. 3; Int. 5; Foc. 1; Foc. 2; Foc. 3). Even individuals who were fully employed in the private sector – often with salaries three to four times of the amount paid to government employees – still considered themselves to be “unemployed” (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1; Foc. 2).

Starting in 2003, the job market in the KRI began to demand specific skillsets such as foreign language capabilities in Arabic, English, or Turkish (Int. 2). Students without such skills have found themselves at a disadvantage in comparison to their student counterparts who have such skills. This was evidenced by our two focus groups with current Faculty of Humanities students. The first focus group consisted of students in the Geography and History departments, while the second focus group included only students in the English department. Though the two groups agreed across the board on several issues, answers to questions regarding personal job prospects after graduation were strikingly different. Students from the English department reported having far greater job prospects than their Geography and History counterparts because of their language abilities.

Many students in the English department said they did not fear the job market because even without a government appointed position, they would still be able to find lucrative prospects in the private sector. One English student said the difference in opinions was directly related to the content of their educations. For example, English students had a vastly larger amount of academic resources available to them simply because they could read English as compared to students studying strictly

in Kurdish, which has a much more finite number of resources available.

With regard to the role the University of Duhok plays in the relationship between unemployed university graduates and the KRG, it became clear through the collected data that the University of Duhok has served as an intermediary between the two entities, in both positive and negative ways. Students, graduates, and government officials all concluded that the university could and should be doing more to improve the relationship by providing more opportunities for students while in school around campus. One such recommendation was to provide student-only spaces to encourage collaboration and to build their own networks and partnerships. At the time of our study, the university had limited places for students to meet and gather (Int. 4). The central campus library was still under construction, but once completed could serve this purpose (Int. 4; Int. 5).

Data Analysis

Just like we have equations in chemistry, like $H_2+O=H_2O$, we also have equations in politics. If the law is without justice and equality, then there will be no sense of belonging within the people. Those people become a source of anxiety and disorder in society. Many of them even commit suicide or cooperate with terrorists [...] because their hearts are full with the injustice against them (Int. 4).

Through our analysis of the data collected via interviews and focus groups, several themes emerged. Next we will describe and begin to explore those themes, regarding the status of unemployed university graduates and their relationship with the KRG.

Loss of Trust

Frustrated university graduates have lost trust in the KRG and to some extent have lost their sense of patriotism (Foc. 1; Foc. 2). In one case, a graduate said he/she no longer participates in elections because of a feeling of neglect on the part of the government (Foc. 1). In other cases, research participants mentioned incidents of friends, colleagues, and family members leaving the KRI for better opportunities in Europe or elsewhere in the Middle East. Tying into the theory of relative deprivation, some university graduates see greater economic opportunities abroad than within the KRI and, specifically, in Duhok. Additionally, in 2013 there were several student-led and graduate-led protests in Duhok city calling for greater services provided to university students and access to employment for graduates (Int. 2; Int. 5; Int. 8; Foc. 3).

Tensions within the Family

Students and graduates on the whole said they felt tremendous pressure to secure a government job. Family relationships have been strained, as parents must support their children for longer than expected. Though most participants said their families were supportive of them, the parents of the participants were growing more and more resentful toward the KRG (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1).

Worse still, graduates still waiting for a government appointment, continued to live with their families and received monetary allowances from their parents due to a lack of personal income (Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1). In one case, a graduate said his brother did not receive a university degree but instead accepted a low-level government position straight out of high school, moved up in ranks and was earning a monthly salary of 1 million IQD (roughly \$860 in USD), while the graduate had a

university degree but no income and had to borrow money from family members (Int. 1).

Marriage Prospects

Unemployed graduates were unable to marry without government employment for several reasons. First, male graduates without a government position could not afford the bride price requested by the brides' families (Int. 1). Brides' families at times have imposed very high bride prices, seemingly to ensure that the groom had enough income not only to pay the initial bride price but also to provide a stable and secure life for their daughters (Int. 1). Second, brides' families have sometimes rejected marriages on the grounds that the groom did not have a government job (Int. 1; Foc. 1). One research participant, a prospective groom, said he was in fact employed, but as a store manager; because he was still waiting for a government position, and that the bride's family prohibited the marriage (Int. 2).

Psychological Effects

University students and graduates who participated in the research reported having lowered self-esteem as the leading effect of unemployment after graduation (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1). Many said they felt disappointed in themselves that they had to continue to ask for money from their parents and continued to feel dependent on others (Int. 2; Int. 3). Some mentioned that friends, former classmates, and colleagues had had suicidal thoughts and had experienced depression (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1; Foc. 2).

Prospects of Civil Unrest

Every participant agreed that long-term unemployment of university graduates could lead to civil unrest if it is not effectively addressed by all parties, but particularly by the government. This consensus included the government officials

interviewed. Participants explained that most crimes in Duhok's society come from unemployed people with "too much time on their hands" and the first sign of university graduate involvement in such kinds of activities have been the recent protests that have occurred during 2013-2014 (Int. 3; Foc. 1; Int. 5; Int. 8).

"Wasta"

The term "wasta" in Kurdish or Arabic refers to a combination of nepotism, corruption, relationships, and bribery, but ultimately translates to English best as a social currency of favors (Field Notes). With regard to finding government employment, wasta has been an advantage to a few of the research participants and a detriment to many. Those who feel betrayed by the wasta system said they felt neglected by the government's recruitment and appointment process. This has led to high levels of resentment among students and graduates.

Students looking to apply for government positions said they have been told that jobs would be distributed based on merit, but in reality, they said that nepotism has played a significant role in job allocation in the public sector (Int. 1; Int. 2; Int. 3; Foc. 1; Int. 5; Foc. 3). Several graduates and students pointed to fellow classmates who obtained government positions through family members or through other connections with the KRG, even though they had performed worse at the university than some graduates who remained unemployed (Int. 1; Int. 3; Foc. 1; Foc. 2). The 2012 UNODC information detailing corruption in Iraq (Appendix 2), is consistent with such statements (UNODC).

Few alternatives to the public sector

The private sector job market requires various skills, which on average, most Faculty of the Humanities students said they did not possess (Int. 4; Int. 7). Graduates from the history,

geography, and Kurdish departments said they faced several obstacles when looking for private sector employment. The first such challenge was a lack of language skills, as most private companies in the KRI have begun to require English language skills as a prerequisite for employment (Int. 5; Int. 6; Int. 9). In addition, students with humanities backgrounds said they lacked other basic qualifications, such as computer science training, and often needed additional vocational training to work for private sector companies (Int. 10).

However, an outlier existed in our discussion with students in the Faculty of Humanities English department who reported feelings of contentment about their comparative advantage over other Faculty of Humanities students. They said their advantage in terms of obtaining employment was due in large part to the fact that English languages skills were becoming a powerful tool to open doors to economic opportunities (Foc. 3; Int. 6).

The KRG has developed a job searching website called, *Kurdistan Works*, which posts open job positions in the private sector (Int. 8; Int. 9; Int. 10; Kurdistan Works). The career site provided information about companies, job postings, training opportunities, internships, and volunteer opportunities. However, government officials in charge of the website said that just 52 university graduates had visited the site from early 2013 until early 2014 (Int. 7).

Many research participants also pointed to a lack of foresight by the Ministry of Planning, citing the disparity between university enrollments and the availability of jobs post-graduation (Int. 6; Int. 9). One research participant said the KRI had an “old school education system” that was not responding to market needs (Int. 10).

The University of Duhok has opened a Career Development Center (CDC) – which in early 2014 was in its second year of operations – to help students connect with private

sector companies (CDC). The programs that the CDC runs are geared toward students with engineering, business, and technology backgrounds because the vast majority of companies the CDC has partnered with are within those industries (Int. 6). While on campus, we attempted to locate the Career Development Center over the course of three days by asking university students, staff, and faculty members about directions on how to get to the CDC building. In total, we asked 25 students, four faculty members, and seven staff personnel in or nearby the Faculty of the Humanities building about the whereabouts of the CDC office. We were provided with many different directions and locations (Field Notes). We found that due to the relatively short lifespan of the CDC and the fairly limited scope of its programs focused on other colleges and schools at the university, few people from the Faculty of the Humanities knew even where the CDC was located, let alone that it existed.

One University of Duhok faculty member explained the system this way:

Our people as an education and a way of thinking don't accept to work in all kind of jobs, for example our graduates don't accept to work as a receptionist in an office or as driver [...] and even if our graduates agreed to work in such jobs, there are no rules to protect them and they don't have any rights (Int. 4).

Social protection rights were a major point of contention among research participants. Most participants viewed the lack of social protection rights within the private sector as the biggest obstacle preventing them from seeking private sector employment (Int. 2; Foc. 1; Foc. 2).

Validity

Finding accurate and transparent statistics in Duhok, and more broadly in the KRI, was a significant challenge to this study. The Ministry of Statistics in Duhok was helpful in providing as much data as possible regarding government jobs and university students, but the data was incomplete and therefore difficult to analyze. Most of our statistical data was drawn from desk research and from interviews with government officials whose willingness to share their knowledge of government-compiled data was the closest we could come to actually obtaining the data during our brief period of field research in Duhok.

Counterfactuals also played a role in this study because the absence of violence could not easily be measured in Duhok. We identified a great deal of literature surrounding the connection between unemployment and direct violence worldwide. However, we were unable to locate any scholarly research on the absence of violence as it related to access to employment.

Our team was well positioned to conduct this research project with one local team member and one outsider team member. The dynamic of the team allowed for a greater balance of ideas and a more well-rounded approach to the research. The diversity of the team members allowed for both a local and macro context to be applied to the project.

Conclusion

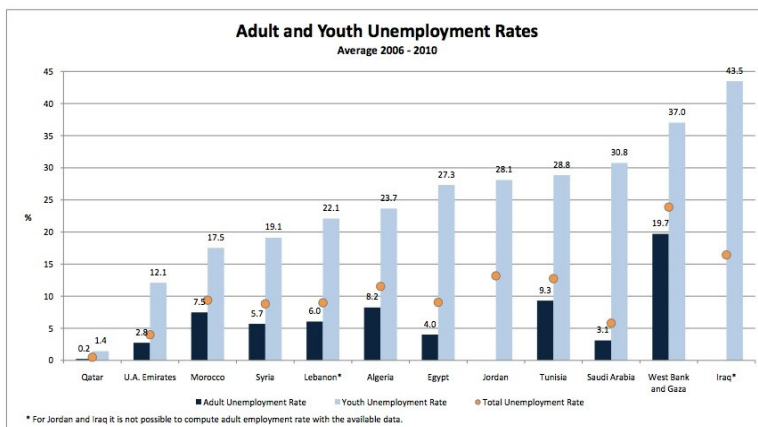
This study found that unemployed university graduates from the University of Duhok Faculty of the Humanities and the Kurdistan Regional Government together have a strained relationship. The data we generated from 72 research participants pointed to themes of resentment, tension, and loss of trust in the relationship. The research also concluded that as of

early 2014, the relationship between unemployed university graduates and the government in Duhok city had had no direct effect on peace and stability. However, the data did show a growing potential for civil unrest if existing conditions were to continue or become exacerbated in the long-term.

Outcomes of the research included government awareness and a concerted effort to address the issue of university graduate unemployment. However, it was also noted that a lack of direct communication between the government and the unemployed had resulted in a stagnant relationship. Our hope is that this study has begun to map a new direction for peace research in the KRI and more specifically, in Duhok.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Adult and Youth Unemployment Rates (2006-2010)

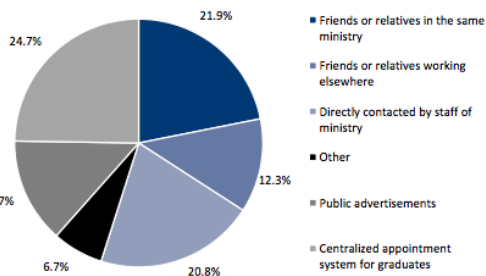


Source: ILO, Department of Statistics

This graph compares adult (i.e., people aged 25+) versus youth (i.e., people aged 15 to 24) rates of unemployment. It also displays the total rate of unemployment. In many countries, youth unemployment rates are several times higher than the rates for adult population.

Appendix 2: Percentage distribution by sources of information, Iraq (2011)

Figure 51: Percentage distribution of civil servants, by source of information about job vacancy at the time of their recruitment, Iraq (2011)

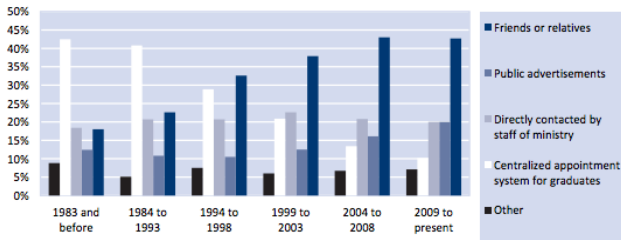


Source: ICS Survey 2011

Appendix 3: Percentage distribution by source and year, Iraq (2011)

Corruption and Integrity Challenges in the Public Sector of Iraq

Figure 52: Percentage distribution of civil servants, by source of information about job vacancy and by year of recruitment, Iraq (2011)



Source: ICS Survey 2011

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Glossary

connectors: the systems, institutions, values, interests, and cultural norms that connect people across lines of conflict

cultural violence: the legitimization of violence in cultural institutions, such as religion, language, art, media, law, and education, that makes violence acceptable in society

direct violence: the observable incidences of self-directed, interpersonal, or collective violence, including physical, verbal, or psychological acts and acts that inhibit or insult our basic needs and/or physical persons

dividers: the systems, institutions, values, interests, and cultural norms that divide people in society and have the capacity to exacerbate conflict and/or violent

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI): the autonomous region of northern Iraq, composed of the Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaimani governorates, and bordering the rest of Iraq to the south, Iran to the east, Syria to the west, and Turkey to the west

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG): the legal entity representing the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, as recognized in the 2005 Iraqi constitution

negative peace: the absence of direct violence

peacebuilding: action to identify and support structures which will strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a resort to violence and/or violent conflict

peacefulness: the degree of manifestation of peace; the term peacefulness is often used to acknowledge that the various forms of peace are dynamic concepts, often in flux, and rarely achieved as complete and constant

peace capacities: the existing and potential systems, institutions, and cultural norms that provide the building blocks of peace for societies in conflict

positive peace: freedom from all forms of violence in the context of a sustainable social system

resilience: the capacity of social systems for repair, renewal, adaptation, and the absorption of stress without resort to violence or violent conflict

structural peace: a state of positive peace embedded in and supported by society's attitudes, institutions, and structures

structural violence: the systemic ways in which a given social, cultural, or economic structure or institution harms people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs

A note on sources: The definitions included here are composites, synthesized from many sources and refined through study and practice. The types of peace and violence are significantly influenced by the work of Johan Galtung, and the concepts of connectors, dividers, and peace capacities come directly from Mary Anderson's text *Do No Harm*. Additionally, the work of Jurgen Brauer and J.P. Dunne, Peter Brorsen, the Institute for

Economics and Peace, and former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, as well as the editors, authors, and researchers of this collection have influenced the nuances of various definitions. For more information on fundamental peacebuilding concepts, please see the works generally cited below.

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