



THE LOTUS FLOWER

POST COVID-19 ASSESSMENT

ASSESSMENT & NEEDS REPORT MAY 2024

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We thank you for your ongoing support for our programme

01. Acknowledgements

The Lotus Flower extends its heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated local team in Kurdistan. Your exceptional response to the impacts of global coronavirus pandemic, characterized by grace, dignity, and unwavering perseverance, has been exemplary. Your commitment, strong work ethic, and collaborative spirit have been instrumental in enabling us to continue supporting displaced women and girls. Thank you for your invaluable contributions and steadfast dedication.

Vian Ahmed, Regional Director

Assessment Conducted by: The Lotus Flower's
Community Mobilizers & Enumerators

Participants: 1,000 women, girls, men, and boys residing in out-of-camp locations in Duhok and Zakho.

Duration: June 1 2021 to May 31 2024.



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02. About Us

The Lotus Flower is a non-governmental organization that has successfully founded and operated multiple women's centers for women and girls in displacement, beginning with The Lotus Flower Women's Center in Rwanga Community camp. The center opened its doors to the community in 2016 with the aim to provide a safe, supportive, and healing environment to women and girls who have survived the atrocities of war and the invasion of ISIS in 2014. The Lotus Flower now operates 7 centers that serve the IDP, refugee and host communities.

The Lotus Flower Women's Centers work to fill resource gaps by providing community-responsive programming that revolves around four pillars from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: Education & Livelihoods, Health & Safety, Peacebuilding & Human Rights and Climate Change. We aim to provide the foundation for women to rebuild themselves, their families, and their futures.

We strive for a world where they are safe, free to access education, and are empowered to participate in their communities to drive social and economic change from within. We are investing in the future of women and girls because they play a vital role in resurrecting and strengthening communities. As local implementers, we work at the grassroots level to get right into the heart of communities. To ensure we meet their needs, we listen to the local community and employ local women to implement the programs.

Our fundamental belief is that women and girls are powerful drivers of change. We provide women and girls affected by conflict the strength and support they need to rise out of darkness; moving from past suffering and economic hardship to reach their full potential to rebuild their future.



03. Introduction

In the face of the unprecedented Covid-19 pandemic, millions of lives have been claimed and societies profoundly impacted. Among the most vulnerable are those displaced by conflict, persecution, or other uncontrollable circumstances. These individuals now face additional burdens such as gender-based violence (GBV), mental health struggles, and livelihood uncertainties.

As the virus spread across borders, disrupting economies and aid systems, displaced communities found themselves in perilous situations. Limited healthcare access made them more susceptible to the pandemic's tolls. Reports of GBV surged by 50% in some camps due to the disruption of support networks and lockdown measures. Women and girls, in particular, were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

- Mental health challenges also worsened. A World Health Organization (WHO) survey indicated a 30% increase in anxiety and depression among displaced populations. The added stress from the pandemic exacerbated existing trauma, separation from loved ones, and disconnection from support systems.
- Livelihoods were severely impacted as well. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 80% of displaced individuals in informal or low-wage work experienced significant income loss due to lockdowns and economic downturns, deepening poverty and deprivation.

Iraq, with a population of around 40 million, has faced prolonged conflict and geopolitical instability, leading to widespread displacement. The Covid-19 pandemic further strained its socio-economic landscape. The protracted displacement crisis in Iraq necessitates understanding the pandemic's specific impacts on well-being and livelihoods.

In early 2020, the coronavirus forced a global quarantine, closing schools, businesses, and restricting travel. Iraq implemented lockdowns in late February, and the Kurdistan Region imposed a curfew on March 14. NGOs and service providers were initially required to leave camps, resuming limited activities by early May under WHO guidelines. This two-month gap in services significantly exacerbated vulnerabilities.

Reports
of GBV
surged
by

50%

04. Methodology

1

Online Kobo-based structured questionnaire

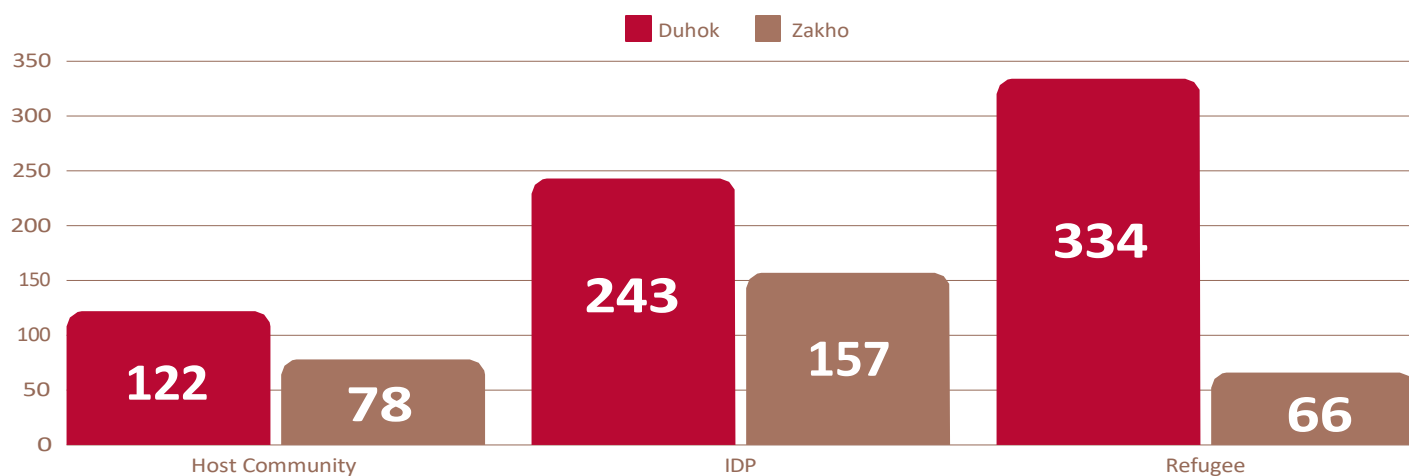
An online Kobo-based structured questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data from three years from 2021 to 2024, focusing on the non-camp areas in Duhok and Zakho cities in Iraq. The primary objective was to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent quarantine measures on the residents of these areas. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was used to gather comprehensive data through over 1,000 structured questionnaires and one-on-one interviews. The questionnaires included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture a wide range of responses.

2

Sampling and data collection

Sampling and data collection were carried out systematically to ensure a representative sample. The sample comprised 1,000 respondents, distributed between Duhok (699 respondents) and Zakho (301 respondents). Ethical considerations were a key component of the research process, ensuring confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The age distribution of the participants included 6% under the age of 18 and 94% adults.

Gender distribution among household heads showed that 14% were female and 86% were male. The respondents were categorized into three distinct population groups: 200 from the host community, 400 internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 400 refugees.



05. Key Findings

The assessment revealed several critical impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the surveyed populations. Notably, there was a sharp rise in the incidents of various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), which accounted for 44% of the total reported cases. This increase included verbal, physical, and financial violence, indicating a broad spectrum of abuse that affected many individuals within their communities.

In terms of mental health, the assessment uncovered that 82% of respondents suffered from significant psychological issues, with anxiety disorders being particularly prevalent. This high percentage underscores the severe mental health toll the pandemic has taken on displaced populations, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and trauma.

Additionally, the financial impact of the pandemic was profound. A striking 97% of respondents reported being financially affected, with many losing their primary sources of income. The economic strain was further highlighted by a substantial increase in debt among the affected individuals. This financial instability has deepened poverty levels and compounded the challenges faced by already vulnerable groups.

These findings underscore the multifaceted and severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on displaced and host communities, particularly in terms of GBV, mental health, and economic stability.

44%

of the total reported types of violence

82%

of respondents suffered from significant psychological issues

97%

of respondents reported being financially affected

Economic Hardship

The assessment of financial problems among the surveyed populations revealed significant economic distress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. A major finding was the substantial increase in debt, with 793 respondents reporting a rise in their financial obligations. This increase in debt highlights the severe economic strain faced by many individuals, exacerbating their financial vulnerability.

Moreover, 398 respondents reported losing their primary source of income. This loss of income has had a profound impact on their financial stability, making it difficult for them to meet basic needs and maintain their livelihoods. The economic downturn has forced some individuals to sell personal assets, with 151 respondents indicating that they had to sell their car or furniture to cope with financial pressures.

Additionally, 150 respondents reported moving to a different house because of the financial strain, which may indicate the necessity to downsize or relocate to more affordable housing. This displacement adds another layer of stress and instability to their already precarious situations.

Furthermore, 48 respondents reported losing a small business or project, highlighting the detrimental impact of the pandemic on small-scale entrepreneurs and their ventures. The loss of these small projects has not only affected the individuals directly involved but has also had broader implications for the local economy and community resilience.

These findings paint a stark picture of the financial hardships endured by the affected populations, illustrating the widespread and multifaceted nature of their economic challenges.

79%
of respondents
reported increased
financial hardship



Financial Impact of the Pandemic

The data reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the financial status of the surveyed population. Out of the total respondents, 740 claimed that the pandemic had a negative impact on their financial situation. This represents a substantial proportion of the population, indicating that the economic repercussions of the pandemic were widespread and deeply felt among the respondent.

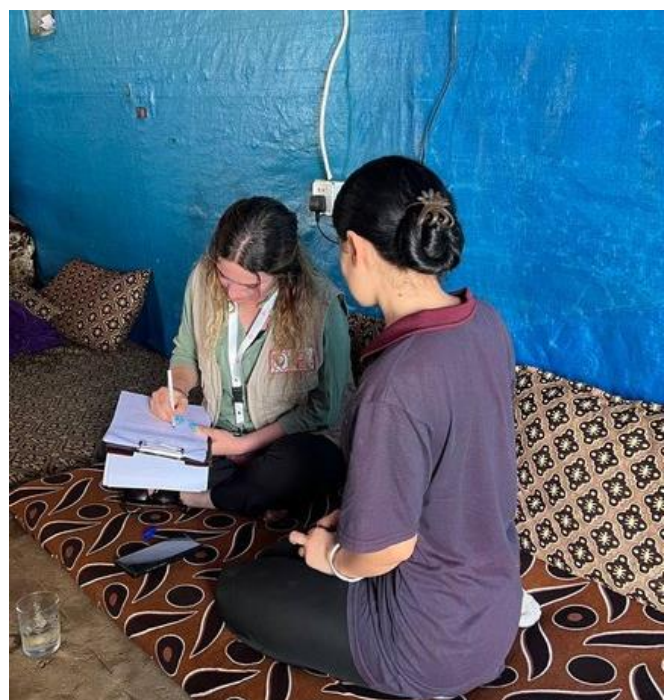
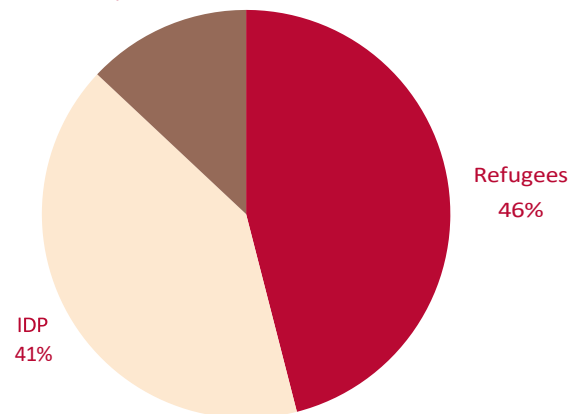
The data also shows that the Covid-19 pandemic had a greater financial impact on refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) compared to the host community. Out of those affected, 336 were refugees, 305 were IDPs, and 99 were from the host community. This indicates that refugees and IDPs are significantly more vulnerable to financial hardships due to their lack of stable income sources and secure employment.

The high numbers of refugees and IDPs facing financial difficulties highlight the urgent need for targeted support, such as emergency financial assistance and employment opportunities.

In summary, refugees and IDPs were more severely affected by the pandemic's financial repercussions, necessitating focused policy measures to support these vulnerable groups.

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

Host Community 13%



Mental Health

Mental health issues represent a significant global challenge, with refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) experiencing a higher prevalence compared to host communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation, particularly among refugees and displaced individuals, with assessments indicating that 82% of them have suffered from mental health difficulties. According to a recent thesis report, the prevalence is even more pronounced among refugees (41%) and IDPs (40%), while host communities report a lower rate of 19%. This shows the urgent need for targeted interventions and support services to address the heightened mental health burden among displaced populations, exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic.

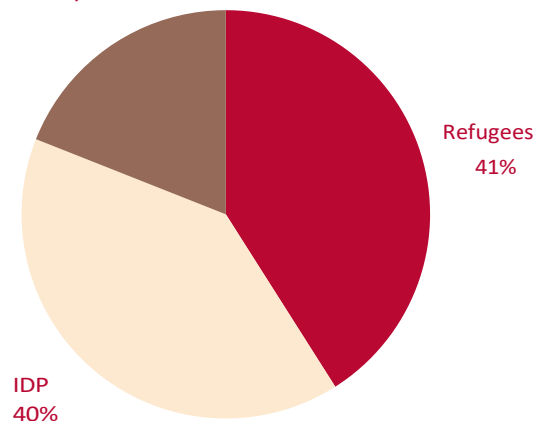
The data indicates a significant demand for therapeutic support within the population under consideration, with 52% expressing a desire to speak with a therapist.

However, the concerning aspect is that none of them have received the support they seek. This highlights a critical gap between the needs of the population and the availability of mental health services. The lack of access to support services suggests potential barriers such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, or insufficient awareness of available resources.

Addressing this gap is imperative to ensure the mental well-being of the population and underscores the need for immediate intervention and the establishment of accessible mental health services.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS

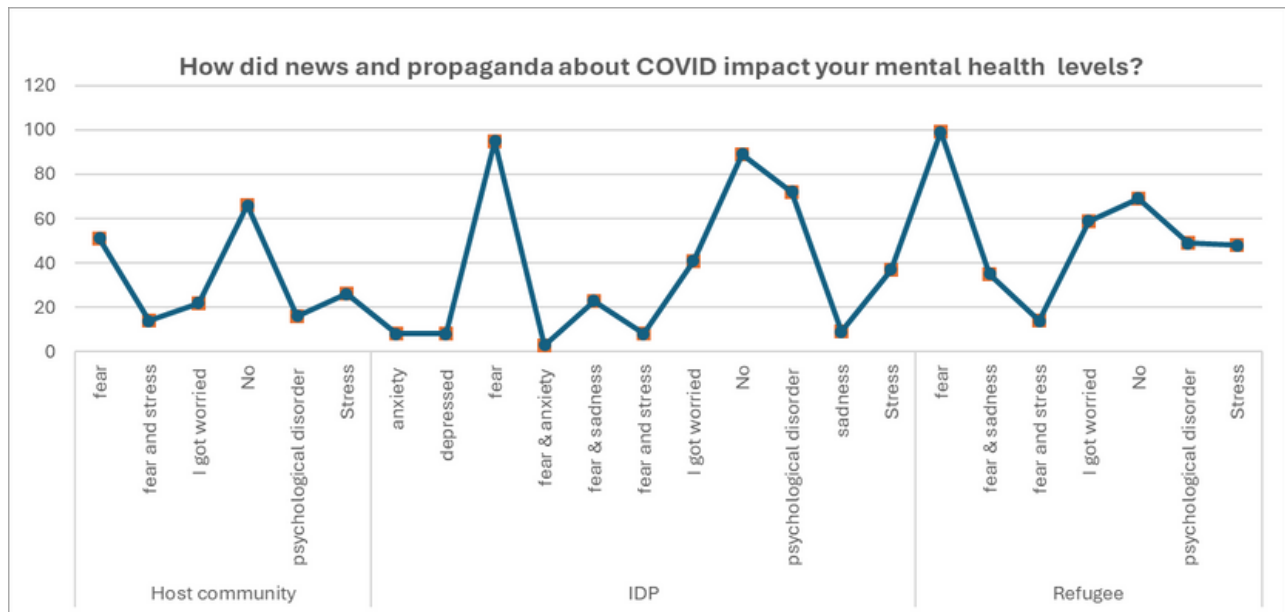
Host Community 19%



82%

have suffered
from mental
health
difficulties

According to the data, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are more prone to psychological disorders due to exposure to traumatic events such as war and violence, loss of homes and loved ones, and the instability and insecurity of their situations. Poor living conditions, lack of access to meet basic needs and mental health services, legal and economic challenges, and social and cultural disruption further exacerbate their mental health issues.



The uncertainty of their future and pre-existing vulnerabilities added to their distress, with children and adolescents being particularly affected. Addressing these needs requires comprehensive mental health support and stable, secure environments.



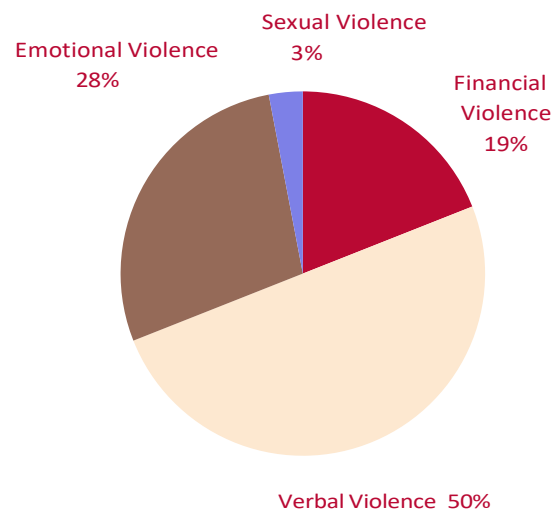
Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses harmful acts based on gender, disproportionately affecting women and girls. Among refugees and internally displaced persons, vulnerabilities are heightened due to disrupted social structures and limited resources, increasing the risk of GBV.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, GBV became even more prevalent due to increased isolation, economic stress, and disruptions in support services. Lockdowns and restrictions trapped many victims with their abusers, exacerbating the risk and severity of violence.

According to a breakdown of reported violence, verbal violence is most prevalent (at 50%), then emotional violence (at 28%), financial violence (at 19%), and sexual violence (at 3%). Despite variations, all forms indicate the urgent need for comprehensive interventions to address GBV, especially among vulnerable populations.

GBV IMPACTS



44%

of all respondents reported increased types of violence

06. Conclusion

The assessment of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on non-camp areas in Duhok and Zakho cities in Iraq reveals severe and multifaceted repercussions on several dimensions of residents' lives.

Economic Hardship

Financial instability is a critical consequence of the pandemic. A staggering 97% of respondents reported financial distress, with 793 individuals noting increased debt and 398 losing their primary sources of income. Economic hardships have forced many to sell personal assets (151 respondents) or relocate to more affordable housing (150 respondents). Additionally, small businesses have suffered, with 48 respondents reporting the loss of their ventures. The financial impact has been particularly harsh on refugees and IDPs, who lack stable income and secure employment, necessitating targeted economic support and employment opportunities for these groups.

Mental Health

Mental health issues have escalated sharply, with 82% of respondents experiencing significant psychological difficulties, predominantly anxiety disorders. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are disproportionately affected, with 41% of refugees and 40% of IDPs reporting mental health problems compared to 19% from the host community. This information emphasizes the urgent need for mental health support services tailored to the requirements of displaced populations, whose pre-existing vulnerabilities have worsened as a result of the pandemic.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

The pandemic has led to a significant increase in gender-based violence, affecting nearly half of the surveyed population (44%). The rise in GBV incidents includes various forms such as verbal (50%), emotional (28%), financial (19%), and

sexual violence (3%). The heightened isolation and economic stress during quarantine measures exacerbated these issues, underlining the need for targeted interventions to protect vulnerable individuals, particularly women and girls.

Overall Impact

The Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupted the lives of residents in Duhok and Zakho, with pervasive effects on gender-based violence, mental health and economic stability.

The findings highlight the critical need for comprehensive support mechanisms, including financial aid, mental health services and protective measures against GBV. Addressing these intertwined challenges is essential to mitigating the long-term adverse effects on these vulnerable communities and enhancing their resilience against future crises.

Financial instability is a critical consequence of the pandemic, with 97% of respondents reporting financial distress

07. Lessons Learned

Recommendations for Future Crisis Response

Lessons Learned:

- **Comprehensive Data Collection**

A mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data, is essential to understanding the full impact of crises. This helps capture a wide range of experiences and needs.

- **Vulnerability of Displaced Populations**

Crisis situations have a disproportionately negative impact on refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), who also experience increased economic instability, mental health issues and GBV.

- **Critical Need for Mental Health Services**

Mental health issues escalate during crises, particularly among displaced populations, underscoring the need for accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services.

- **Severe Economic Impacts**

Crises lead to significant economic hardships, with increased debt and loss of income sources. Financial support and job creation programs are crucial in mitigating these effects.

- **Escalation of Gender-Based Violence**

GBV incidents increase during crises, highlighting the need for robust support systems, safe spaces, and effective reporting mechanisms.

- **Importance of Community Engagement**

Engaging community leaders and members in planning and implementation ensures interventions are relevant and effective, addressing specific community needs.



Recommendations for Future Crisis Response

- **Strengthen Data Collection and Monitoring**

Establish continuous and comprehensive data collection systems to monitor crisis impacts in real-time. Utilize technology for timely data gathering and analysis.

- **Prioritize Vulnerable Groups**

Design interventions focused on the most vulnerable populations, such as refugees, IDPs, and women. Tailor support services to address their specific challenges.

- **Integrate Mental Health Services**

Ensure mental health services are integral to crisis response plans. Train healthcare providers to handle mental health crises and provide community-based support systems.

- **Enhance Economic Support Mechanisms**

Implement emergency financial assistance programs and develop long-term job creation initiatives. Support small businesses with grants, loans, and training programs.

- **Improve GBV Response**

Establish safe spaces, strengthen reporting mechanisms, and launch community awareness campaigns to prevent and address GBV. Involve men and boys in promoting gender equality.

- **Engage Communities**

Actively involve community leaders and stakeholders in developing and executing crisis response strategies. Ensure their voices and concerns are incorporated into planning and implementation.

- **Policy Advocacy and Infrastructure Strengthening**

Advocate for policies supporting economic stability, mental health services and GBV prevention. Invest in strengthening healthcare and social support infrastructure to enhance resilience against future crises.

By applying these lessons learned and recommendations, future crisis responses can be more effective, equitable and resilient, ensuring better outcomes for all affected populations.





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