



A Sudanese woman applies a henna design on a Syrian child's hand during the UN Day celebration in Cairo, Egypt. © UNHCR / Tarik Argaz / 2015

6

ART THERAPY TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO SGBV – EGYPT

Population Group:

Asylum-seeker and refugee women, men, girls and boys from all countries of origin.

Project Objective:

Strengthen sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) prevention and response by assisting survivors to process violent situations, break the taboos surrounding discussion of SGBV and be in a space that encourages gender equality.

Implementing Partners:

CARE International in Egypt.

1. Project overview

In partnership with UNHCR Egypt, CARE International in Egypt (CARE) initiated its *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* project in November 2013. The project, which has now been extended until December 2017, aims to tackle sensitive topics and delve into the root causes of issues often considered taboo. To do so, CARE adopts rights-based, survivor-centred and community development approaches, employing innovative methods that target survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). The project also encourages collaborative and equal interaction among women and girls, and men and boys in order to build an understanding and appreciation of each other's experiences.

To this end, CARE conducts awareness-raising activities that highlight the different types of SGBV and their harmful consequences. It also implements a case management system that assists SGBV survivors and facilitates their recovery. Case management is provided to all asylum-seeker and refugee SGBV survivors – whether they are women, men, girls or boys. Case managers provide the survivors with emotional support while focusing on the four pillars of response: health care; safety, including safe housing; psychosocial support; and legal assistance.

Art therapy, one of the project's utilized methods, is a creative means of expression that helps survivors to come to terms with having endured violence, change their perspectives on SGBV and improve their self-esteem. CARE's experience with projects targeting Egyptians has indicated that art therapy is highly effective not only in raising awareness of violence against women but also in changing project participants' attitudes towards that violence. CARE began using art therapy as a tool to help prevent and respond to SGBV among African, Iraqi and Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees, the majority of them Syrians, in the cities of 6th of October and Obour in the greater Cairo area.

2. Context and needs

In mid-2016, Egypt was host to 256,400 refugees and asylum-seekers, 46 per cent of whom are Syrians who were forced to flee the armed conflict in their country.¹ SGBV is a significant concern for both the host and refugee communities in Egypt. In 2015, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that in Egypt 1.7 million women suffered from sexual harassment on public transportation, 3.7 per cent faced violence in the workplace, and 16,000 girls were harassed at educational institutions.² Refugee women, on account of their vulnerable situations, may face higher risks of SGBV.

According to various reports, the types of SGBV faced by refugees in Egypt include domestic violence, sexual harassment in public spaces,³ exploitation and harmful traditional practices.⁴ Through direct interaction with both refugees and medical partners, it was found that female genital mutilation is prevalent in African refugee communities and child marriage⁵ is especially widespread among Syrians.

3. Process and activities

Under the *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* project, CARE conducts SGBV awareness-raising activities for all asylum-seeker and refugee populations and provides case management services for refugee and asylum-seeker SGBV survivors. SGBV survivors access the project by calling its helpline, participating in CARE activities or visiting the Women Friendly Space in 6th of October City. CARE also works closely with refugee community-based organizations, such as Bokra Ahla and the Al Manara Centre, in joint outreach activities among asylum-seeker and refugee women, men, girls and boys. SGBV survivors also reach the project through referrals from UNHCR and other international and national organizations.

The art therapy workshops are one of the activities that CARE provides to asylum-seeker and refugee populations in Greater Cairo. The target group includes SGBV survivors who are already participating in the project as well as other asylum-seekers and refugees who are interested in joining. The project serves both

¹ UNHCR, [Population Statistics – Midyear 2016 Stats](#). Available at:

² UNFPA, [The Egypt Economic Cost of Gender-Based Violence Survey](#) (2015).

³ UNFPA, UNHCR and WFP, [Joint Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Egypt](#) (2013), pp. 18.

⁴ Plan International, [Refugee Rights Assessment in Egypt: Final Report](#) (2015), p. 9-11.

⁵ UNHCR, [Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Refugee Situations in the Middle East and North Africa](#) (2015); UNHCR, [Woman Alone](#) (2014)

to prevent SGBV and to respond to it, the first by raising awareness and changing attitudes and the second by helping survivors to process the violence they have endured and build their self-confidence.

Invited by CARE and refugee community-based organizations, each workshop has between 15 and 25 participants who attend for five consecutive days. To foster open discussion, participants are separated into different groups: adult women; adult men; girls and boys aged five to nine; female and male adolescents aged 10 to 14; and female and male youth aged 15 to 17.

The workshop sessions are designed to take participants through three phases:

1. **Self-expression**, which supports participants to open up and discuss issues that they may not be accustomed to talk about.
2. **Reflection**, which guides participants through their thoughts, helping them reflect on their perspectives and concepts related directly or indirectly to violence.
3. **Healing**, which reduces the repercussions of being either the survivors or the perpetrators of violence.

This methodology seeks to create a safe and confidential space where trust can be built among participants. Confidentiality mechanisms are always in place for all participants, as well as referrals to the CARE SGBV Case Management Unit in case a participant discloses violence. Participants are also given the option to speak individually with the facilitator or CARE's SGBV field supervisors. The art therapy workshops use different methods, including performing puppet shows, clay sculpting, writing, acting, drawing, colouring and discussions about films in order to accomplish three objectives: help survivors begin to process their violent experiences; break through taboos on dealing with the subject; and offer a gender-equal space that encourages them to discuss their concerns freely.

Help survivors start to process violent situations

To help survivors start to process violent situations that they have personally experienced, a psychodrama activity is used. By recreating life situations, acting them out and assessing them within a safe environment, participants are able to understand more clearly the circumstances in which they have found themselves and determine how they might respond differently in hopes of altering the outcome of such situations. This process unfolds as follows:

- The activity begins with ice-breaking exercises intended to enhance the creativity of participants and allow them to get to know each other in a relaxed manner.
- Participants are asked to recreate, through acting, a single scene that reflects an aspect of their lives. They then listen to music and are asked to describe in writing the situations that they associate with the music. Finally, they are asked to write their life stories and present them to the group.
- The facilitator subsequently guides the participants through their stories, drawing out additional details and helping attendees identify violence to which they may have been subjected or which they may have inflicted upon someone else.
- Two participants then engage in interactive theatre, wherein they act out the roles of the victim and the perpetrator. This has proven to be an effective way to generate discussion and assist participants to find alternatives to violence – in particular related to topics such as early marriage and domestic violence.

Break through taboos

The facilitator refrains from taking on the role of an authority figure and takes measures to establish a non-judgemental and encouraging environment. To help overcome taboos that discourage participants from speaking out about SGBV, various activities (e.g. the staging of puppet shows, clay sculpting, writing, acting, drawing, colouring and discussions about films) are employed to allow participants to build trust, open up, and share their stories as survivors, witnesses or perpetrators. Art therapy workshops have proven effective for men, as they provide them with an outlet to express themselves, pushing back against societal pressure that often forces them to suppress their emotions. This is of great importance as it offers an alternative to violence with which men may not have been previously familiar and which challenges the belief that masculinity and violence are interlinked.

“*At first when I started mobilizing women to attend art therapy sessions, they made jokes about it and its irrelevancy to their needs, which are mostly material. The first day was quiet. However, women gradually started speaking up and defining their experiences. The last session was loud, as women openly spoke about their personal experience of violence within and outside their households. It was the first time I heard these women talk about domestic violence, as it had always been a secret and, in their culture, they are not supposed to ... speak in public about family secrets.*”

Bedour ElEryan, Director of *Bokra Ahla*, a refugee community-based organization

Offer a space that encourages equality – empowering women and enlightening men

Art therapy workshops provide a platform for both sexes to voice their concerns in separate groups. Sessions are segregated by sex for adults in order for members of each sex to communicate freely and discuss their experiences and perceptions in the absence of any restrictions or judgement imposed by members of another sex. The workshops raise awareness among women of their rights while also empowering them, while men are made more knowledgeable about SGBV and their beliefs about a link between masculinity and violence challenged.

In age-specific groups, girls and boys, female and male adolescents and youths, are also invited to express their emotions and thoughts through art. The facilitator creates a safe space for them to share SGBV incidents they face at school, on the streets or at home and proclaim their right to oppose such violence. They also engage in activities to enable them to reconsider resorting to violence when problem solving and to safely oppose all forms of violence perpetrated against them.

“*Prevention of violence, whether at home or outside the household, requires listening, understanding, and creating a dialogue.*”

Male art therapy participant

4. Partners and resources

While UNHCR provides financial support, outreach activities are implemented in CARE's Women Friendly Space and in partnership with refugee community-based organizations, such as *Bokra Ahla* and *Al Manara Centre*. CARE's two field supervisors under the *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* project build partnerships with community-based organizations and liaise with the art therapy facilitators. The art therapy workshops take place in the facilities of *Bokra Ahla* and the *Al Manara Centre*.

CARE has partnered with two professional facilitators for this project: Mayer Magdi Wadih, a psychodrama expert, and John Milad, who specializes in art therapy.

5. Participation and accountability

Asylum-seekers and refugees have been included in the design, development and implementation of the *Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence* project, including the art therapy workshops, since the outset of the project. Their needs, priorities and capacities have had a direct influence on the project, and numerous activities implemented in the Women Friendly Space are a result of initiatives by refugee and asylum-seeker women.

The art therapy workshops are open to all asylum-seekers and refugees, including survivors of SGBV and other forms of violence. Confidentiality, case management and referral mechanisms are always in place for all participants. If a participant, who is not already accessing CARE SGBV services, discloses violence during the workshop, the facilitator has a discussion with him/her and if s/he is in agreement, they are referred to a case manager and then provided with services in accordance with their identified needs and priorities. The case management system assists SGBV survivors and facilitates their recovery, ensuring that their rights and needs are first and foremost. All information that is part of SGBV case management, such as screening and closure forms, are handled with confidentiality including encrypting with passwords.

Many innovative techniques are used during the workshops to promote the active participation of women, men, girls and boys in age and gender-segregated settings. In addition, asylum-seekers and refugees have been trained to act as co-facilitators of the art therapy workshop. Feedback by participants is collected after each workshop in order to address any concerns raised and make changes to the workshop methodology.

Age, Gender and Diversity Approach

Participants are separated by age and gender in order to enable women, men, girls and boys to discuss matters safely and openly. With respect to diversity, the workshops are open to all asylum-seekers and refugees without discrimination. The facilitators have experience working with diverse groups of participants and encouraging their full and active participation.

6. Results

“ Before the training I was mentally disturbed by how my kids [had] become violent. I didn't know what to do about it until I attended these sessions. I then tried to take my children through the same process I went through during the training. I can now see changes [since] I [have] started listening to them while reflecting on violence and their experience at school and on the streets.”

Female art therapy participant

Between November 2013 and December 2016, 1,277 asylum-seekers and refugees had participated in the project: 1,083 women, 91 girls, 90 boys and 13 men. Though there has not been an independent evaluation, feedback from interviews with participants, facilitators and CARE staff as well as workshop evaluations and participant observation have confirmed that the art therapy workshops have enhanced participants' well-being and built their resilience while helping to positively change attitudes about SGBV.

Feedback from participants indicated that:

- The approach is empowering and participants felt comfortable sharing their struggles with SGBV – whether as survivors, witnesses or perpetrators.
- Many of the men reported that their partners observed a positive change in their attitudes following the workshop. A Syrian man proudly described his wife's new view of him as “a new man who recognizes the right of all women to live safely and without fear”.
- Many participants improved their sense of well-being after attending the sessions as a result of being able to relieve their stress and openly discuss taboo topics.
- After the workshops, participants were able to discuss gender equality and SGBV openly with their partners, children and other family members and influence their thinking on these subjects.

I Have Retrieved My Dream: KL*, a 17-year-old male Syrian refugee in Cairo, is the breadwinner for his family and a participant in the art therapy workshop. In the first stage of the workshop, the facilitator asked the participants to share their feelings and memories. KL began to uncover memories of a sexual harassment incident he faced when he was only eight years old. In addition to that trauma, KL also remembered seeing two of his close friends killed in front of his eyes in Syria. Since becoming involved in interactive theatre and acting on stage, however, KL has become more optimistic about the future and found new friends. His true talents have surfaced. Moreover, he has become a crusader against SGBV.

KL credits the interactive theatre training with helping him overcome his inner pain from the awful incidents in his early life. As a bonus, he has discovered he is a talented actor. The young man has become a co-trainer for a new theatre group for women in the same project. Moreover, he was recruited as a theatre trainer by a local Syrian non-governmental organization (NGO) working in Egypt.⁶

Sustainability

CARE International in Egypt conducted a 12-day art therapy Training of Trainers (ToT) for 20 Syrian refugees (15 women and 5 men). The ToT built the capacities of these participants, if approved and permitted by the facilitator, to continue offering art therapy workshops after the CARE project ends. This helps sustain the work done by refugees with refugees so that it has a lasting impact on the wider refugee community. It is important to note that the art therapy facilitator assesses whether the trainees are able to conduct workshops; if so, he continues to monitor their work to ensure its quality.

7. Lessons learned

- **Facilitation:** Having an Egyptian male facilitator constituted a challenge, especially at the outset of the sessions, because it is not customary for Syrian women to discuss SGBV issues openly, especially in the presence of men. Men too initially felt antagonized during the art therapy workshop. The facilitator overcame these challenges by repeatedly stressing the non-judgmental nature of the activity, helping the participants feel more at ease in opening up and discussing sensitive issues.
- **Group composition:** Having the children and youth groups include female and male participants together raises concerns regarding disclosure, confidentiality, and safety. In particular if participants are being encouraged to disclose SGBV-related incidents, it is recommended that participants are separated by sex.

⁶ Ethar Soliman, CARE Egypt, “[I Have Retrieved My Dream](#)” (2016).

- **Methodology:** Many Syrian refugees initially found it challenging to use art therapy to tackle SGBV. Initially, men were not convinced of the importance of art therapy, which they viewed as a mere diversion, though adolescent boys and male youths were more receptive. Some women were initially reluctant to discuss domestic violence due to their fear that they would be stigmatized. For these reasons, the facilitator introduced the subject in a safe and enabling environment that gave participants the space to recognize the seriousness of the topic and the critical importance of discussing it openly.
- **Focus on SGBV:** Some participants in the workshops emphasized other forms of violence they suffered as a result of the political crises in their home countries, rather than SGBV. In response, the facilitator carefully stressed the significance of other forms of violence and the need not to dismiss it but to focus, nonetheless, on SGBV.
- **Terminology:** The term “sexual and gender-based violence” can confuse participants, due to the different interpretations of it. For instance, many participants believe that SGBV refers strictly to physical violence. To overcome this confusion, the facilitator avoided the term “SGBV” and referred instead to different forms of violence, such as verbal, emotional, physical and sexual.
- **Women’s participation:** Among Syrian refugees from conservative communities, men often do not allow their wives to participate in activities such as training and workshops. To overcome this challenge, CARE adopted a strategy whereby women were encouraged to join activities such as legal awareness sessions, as it provides important information needed by refugees, or Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups. This was generally well received by their husbands, as it served the material needs of their families. During VSLA meetings, women were also encouraged to make handicrafts and to sell them in public spaces. As a result, men gradually became accustomed to allowing the women in their families to leave the home, and the project successfully broke through a socio-cultural taboo that otherwise limited the lives of women. Women also convinced the men in their families to participate in art therapy workshops; this helped the men gain the perspective to help influence positive change.
- **Involving host community women:** Participants in the art therapy workshops reported that it could have been more beneficial had women from the host community also been part of the sessions. This would allow for cultural discussion and strengthen relationships and solidarity between refugee and Egyptian women. Additionally, it would help in their efforts to address common issues in relation to SGBV prevention and response.

Potential Risks and Mitigation Strategies

Risk	Mitigation
Increased violence or discrimination against SGBV survivors in retaliation for disclosing abuse.	Sessions are disaggregated by sex in order for each sex to freely communicate and discuss their experiences and perceptions. In addition, among groups of the same sex, the principle of confidentiality was explained and emphasized and the facilitator took measures to establish a non-judgemental and encouraging environment.
Divided political allegiances of Syrian refugees could lead to disruption, conflict or even violence during the workshop.	Ground rules were established at the beginning of the workshop, including that no reference or discussion by the facilitator or participants should involve political opinion. The facilitator reminded participants to respect and adhere to this ground rule throughout the workshop.

8. Recommendations

The art therapy workshops have the potential to be scaled up and replicated in other contexts of forced displacement. However, they should only commence after consultations with asylum-seeker and refugee women, men, girls and boys as well as other organizations providing SGBV prevention and response services, including local women's organizations. This would help identify needs, priorities and existing capacities, and identify and manage possible risks. It is also important that the topics discussed around SGBV be relevant to the everyday experiences of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Art therapy should only be provided in contexts where comprehensive SGBV response services already exist. If a person discloses that they have experienced SGBV during the workshops, there should always be case management services and a referral network to help them in place. This would permit the survivors to be provided with health care, legal assistance, safe housing and psychosocial support according to their needs and decisions as survivors.

The facilitator is key to the success of this initiative and should be carefully selected. Facilitators should have social work experience and training, a clear understanding of gender equality and SGBV issues, and be skilled in negotiation and advocacy. For safety and comfort, facilitators should be the same sex of the participants, i.e. groups of women should have a female facilitator and vice versa. In addition, for the children and youth groups it is recommended that they are also separated by sex for safety and to encourage participation.

9. More information

UNHCR Egypt: areca@unhcr.org

CARE International in Egypt: <http://www.care.org.eg/>

Ethar Soliman, CARE Egypt, "[I Have Retrieved My Dream](#)" (01/04/2016).

Other Resources

[IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action](#) (2015).

[Gender-Based Violence Information Management System \(GBVIMS\)](#).

[UNHCR SGBV Prevention and Response Training Package](#) (October 2016).

[UNHCR Action against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Response: An Updated Strategy](#) (June 2011).

[UNHCR Sexual and Gender-Based Violence against Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons – Guidelines for Prevention and Response](#) (May 2003).

Faysal El Kak, Male Survivors of Sexual Assault: A Manual on Evaluation and Management for General Practitioners (MOSAIC), in [Arabic](#), in [English](#).

[Amani Campaign Implementation Guide – Jordan](#) (2014)