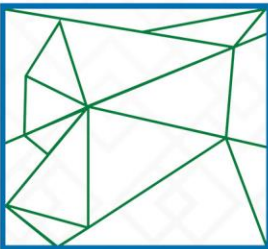


About 350 Syrians have Died by Suicide since 2021



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September 10, 2022

About 350 Syrians have Died by Suicide since 2021

Women and children top suicide figures, driven by domestic violence and child marriages

This report covers the topic of suicide. You can access a suicide hotline in northwestern Syria at 00352681133899. You can see a comprehensive list international suicide hotlines [here](#). Please take care.



Executive Summary

Cases of suicide and self-harm increased sharply across Syria throughout 2021 and over the first eight months of 2022. The individuals are from all age groups, including children, teenagers, women, and men.

Geographically, suicides occurred in all territories of control. Cases were documented in northwest Syria—particularly areas controlled by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), encompassing Idlib province and Aleppo's northern countryside, in northeastern Syria— controlled by the Autonomous Administration (AA), in areas controlled by the Syrian government (SG)—including Rif Dimashq (Damascus countryside), As-Suwayda and Daraa provinces, and in the areas controlled by the Turkey-backed Syrian National Army (SNA), which extend over northern and northwestern Aleppo, Afrin, Ras al-Ayn/Serê Kaniyê, Tal Abyad, Azaz, al-Bab and Jarabulus.

Between early 2021 and early September 2022, STJ documented no less than 330 suicides throughout Syria, and obtained the details of at least 98 cases, registering the names of the victims, dates of their suicides, and their separate contexts. Categorized by age and gender, 51 men, 9 boys, 28 women, and 10 girls died by suicide.

STJ mapped out the registered cases:

- In SG-held areas: There were at least 38 cases, across the provinces of Homs, Hama, Latakia, Rif Dimashq, Deir ez-Zor, and Daraa.

On 7 July 2022, the Director-General of the Syrian Forensic Medicine Authority, Zaher Hajjo, made a statement to *al-Watan* newspaper, which is often aligned with the SG.¹ He revealed that the authority had recorded 93 suicides since early 2022—namely, the first half of the year. The cases included 67 males and 24 females.

In a second statement to the same newspaper in late 2021,² Hajjo said that the authority recorded 197 suicides in 2021, among them 109 males and 48 females. He highlighted that these cases occurred in the provinces of Damascus, Homs, Tartous, Latakia, Aleppo, and As-Suwayda. According to the Syrian government, Sara, and STJ:

- In HTS-held areas: There were at least 20 suicides.
- In SNA-held areas: There were at least 10 suicides.
- In AA-held areas: There were at least 21 suicides in al-Hasakah, Qamishli/Qamishlo, Raqqa, and Deir ez-Zor. The number STJ documented is corroborated by figures recorded by the Sara Organization to Combat Violence against Women in northeast Syria.

In an exclusive statement, Sara Spokeswoman, Arzo Tammo, reported that the organization corroborated nearly 24 suicide cases, in addition to 33 attempts between 2021 and up to July 2022 in AA-held areas.

¹ "The Forensic Medicine Authority Registered 93 Suicides This Year" (in Arabic), *al-Watan*, 7 July 2022 (Last visited: 8 September 2022)
<https://www.facebook.com/2324163584573230/posts/pfbid033ioe9s7PQ2aanh2kVtWbnSHbXGu28Lz7YcATq5gLBMyo9gnK5EdesGhHtNbYEhA6l/?d=n>

² "Statement to al-Watan" (in Arabic), *al-Watan*, 3 September 2022 (Last visited: 8 September 2022).
<https://alwatan.sy/archives/284716>





Additionally, STJ documented at least 6 suicide attempts across Syria and no less than three suicides in countries where Syrians have sought asylum.

Location	First half of 2022 (Source: SG figures)	2021 (Source: SG figures)	2021 and first 8 months of 2022 (Source: STJ database)	Sara figures	(SG figures+ STJ figures from July and August)
SG-held areas	93	197	38	-	290 + 4
AA-held areas	-	-	21	24	21+3
HTS-held areas	-	-	20	-	20
Opposition/Turkey-held areas	-	-	10	-	10
Total	-	-	-	-	348

Examining the cases aggregated into the database, STJ's researchers noticed several patterns in the motivations behind the suicides. In some cases, individuals killed themselves because of poverty and dire living conditions – conditions directly caused by the Syrian conflict which has now lasted over a decade. In other cases, individuals were struggling with intense psychological struggles.

Notably, domestic violence and early marriages are among the most recurrent motivations for suicide, particularly among women and children.

While adult suicide cases were recorded across Syria before, recent documentation has tragically shown the proliferation of suicide within younger age groups. The victims included children and teenagers, some of whom were only 12 at the time of death.

In a 2022-report, Save the Children reported that “Almost one in five of all recorded suicide attempts and deaths in Northwest Syria are children,” citing out that the total number of suicides in the area recorded in late 2020 has “jump[ed] by 86% from the first three months of 2020.”³

Based on the interviews conducted for the purposes of this report, researchers with STJ concluded that the reported figures are only a fraction of the true number of cases, which remain underreported because families choose to cover up suicides in an effort to avoid “social stigma.”

³ "NORTH WEST SYRIA: NUMBER OF SUICIDE ATTEMPTS AND DEATHS RISE SHARPLY", Save the Children, 29 April 2021 (Last visited: 5 September 2022).

<https://syria.savethechildren.net/news/north-west-syria-number-suicide-attempts-and-deaths-rise-sharply#>





In response to the increasing rates of suicide in Syria, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced they had been supporting the prevention of 3,400 suicide cases in Syria since 2013.⁴

STJ consulted with several researchers who are currently investigating suicide in Syria. The researchers recommended that concerned organizations, both domestic and international, begin to provide and educate communities on mental health services and support the development of psychological care services. Furthermore, they advocated for the creation of a socio-psychological support network, particularly for Syrians who have experienced trauma.

Additionally, the researchers stressed the importance of investing in efforts to understanding the challenges facing Syrians of all ages, to support efforts establishing a culture of social empathy, and to support victims of violations rather than blame them, particularly women and girls who suffer sexual and physical abuse.

Addressing authorities, researchers recommended that concerned bodies work to improve living conditions and the financial status of the population and establish a culture of anti-bullying and non-discrimination, which fosters an environment and culture of care.

Methodology

For the purposes of this report, STJ conducted a total of 27 interviews. The interviewees were mostly family members or sources close to the individuals who died by suicide in Idlib, Aleppo's northern countryside, al-Hasakah, Qamishli/Qamishlo, Rif Dimashq, Daraa, and As-Suwayda.

For professional commentaries on the cases, STJ reached out to a sociologist who is specialized in social and psychological support, and a psychologist, trained and certified in the development of human resources and personality types.

The majority of the interviews were carried out in July and August 2022, both online and offline. Moreover, STJ consulted several open sources which addressed suicides in Syria to corroborate the information made available on the cases documented in the report.

Throughout this report, STJ uses pseudonyms to refer to the victims who ended their lives.

The rest of the report includes detailed information on suicide cases in Syria. Covering these cases is important to highlight where, how, and why suicides are increasing. You can access a suicide hotline in northwestern Syria at 00352681133899. You can see a comprehensive list international suicide hotlines [here](#). Please take care.

Common Suicide Triggers

To trace the reasons underlying the reported suicides, STJ reached out to family members of the individuals or persons closest to them across all territories of control in Syria.

⁴ WHO Official Twitter, 10 September 2021 (Last visited: 7 September 2022)
<https://twitter.com/WHOSyria/status/1436249035950764037?s=20&t=RyBoJyeWDGwIGALLYags5g>





In Idlib and Aleppo's Northern Countryside

In this section, STJ narrates the stories of women who killed themselves in Idlib and Aleppo's countryside in 2021 and 2022. Spending time with these stories is meant to highlight one of the leading causes of suicide for women and girls – domestic violence and early marriage.

Women and Girls

“She Set Herself on Fire”

In late 2021, Ilham N. (33), from Ma`arat al-Nu`man, died by suicide when she set herself on fire. According to a female relative, Ilham wanted to put an end to her suffering. The relative narrated:

“Ilham hails from Ma`arat al-Nu`man. She was married and a mother of two children, both younger than seven. Her husband beat and abused her constantly. He was bad-tempered and known for his mood swings, due to his alcohol addiction. One day, Ilham decided she could no longer tolerate the suffering and decided to burn herself.

The relative elaborated that Ilham's family knew she was being abused and beaten in front of her children, and always advised her to be patient and put up with her husband's actions. She added that Ilham also had massive concerns over her surroundings and how her community would perceive her in the case she filed for divorce and became a divorced woman.

“She Shot Herself with Her Husband's Rifle”

Fatima B. (25), who is a mother of two, used her husband's rifle to take her life in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Atmeh, north of Idlib. Commenting on the tragic story, a source close to the victim narrated:

“That day, we ran to Fatimah's tent after we heard a shot coming from its direction. I remember that I arrived there with over 15 other camp residents, in addition to Fatima's husband. We could not get in there. Fatimah had locked the door to her brick-made shelter (Though made of concrete camp residents call their places tents). We asked the husband to open the door, but he refused, alleging that she might not be properly dressed. However, several women entered the tent and started wailing.”

The source added that the women were shocked at the sight. Fatima was already dead. The source pointed out that Fatima's husband constantly beat her:





“Two months before Fatima committed suicide, there were always sounds of fighting coming out of the tent. Her husband would beat her every now and then, and after every dispute they had, her father would show up and try to fix the issue. However, only a few days would pass before they fought again, and her husband would beat her until she decided to kill herself in the end.”

“She Swallowed a Poisonous Substance”

In a third case, Yara E. (34), who hails from al-Ruj Plain, in Idlib’s countryside, decided to die by suicide in June 2022 by swallowing a poisonous substance. Commenting on the story, a source close to Yara recounted:

“Yara was extensively and repeatedly hit by her husband, who is a farmer. The residents of the neighborhood where they stayed always heard shouting and sounds of beating. For five months, Yara just went to her family and begged them to ask for a divorce. However, the family returned her to her husband’s house every time, saying that scandals would haunt them if she got a divorce. The situation remained the same until Yara ultimately decided to die by suicide.”

“She Took a Pill”

Like Yara, Fatima N. (19), who hails from Ma’asaran village, in Idlib’s countryside, chose to poison herself in January 2022. According to a close female relative, Fatima’s father died nearly a year before she killed herself. So, she moved in with her older brothers. They forced her to leave school to work in olive harvesting. The relative also narrated that Fatima’s sisters-in-law were cruel to her, adding:

“Fatima was an overachieving student. Before she killed herself, her brother tried to marry her to a man, who is 20 years older than her, just because he was rich. The groom was ill-reputed among the locals. This caused her trauma and thrust her into a severe state of depression. This is what made her kill herself later. She wanted an escape from her struggles and the cruelty of her brothers.”

“She Threw Herself Down a Rocky Slope”

Displaced from Homs city to the Afrin region, Ruaa B. (21) killed herself in June 2022. She threw herself down a steep slope. The locals attempted to take her to the nearest makeshift clinic, but their efforts were to no avail. Ruaa died on the way. Narrating the details of the incident, a close source said:

“Ruaa was a high-performing student. She dreamt of becoming a teacher. The young woman hails from a well-off family. However, before she killed herself, her mother was injured in a random shooting during a wedding. The shot left the mother paralyzed. The





incident had a massive negative impact on Ruaa, especially since she was intensely attached to her mother.”

Ruaa’s mental health continued to deteriorate, and she was irritable most of the time. The source said that this spiraled into acute depression, adding:

“On top of her mother’s accident, Ruaa failed her high school exams. This made her withdrawn and more inclined to seclusion. Additionally, her father’s busy business schedule and frequent absence made matters worse. So, she decided to die by suicide that day.”

“She Tried to Die by Suicide Several Times”

In late February 2022, Huda M. (22), originally from Hama’s countryside and displaced to Maabatli/Mabeta, in the Afrin region, set herself on fire. Narrating the story, a source close to the victim said:

“Huda went through extremely difficult experiences. Nearly six months before she committed suicide, a person on bad terms with her brother raped her. After the assault, she tried to kill herself multiple times. Once, she tried to jump off a very high building. On a second attempt, she poisoned herself. This last time, she did not survive.”

“She Decided to Die after a Year of Forced Early Marriage”

Displaced from Idlib’s countryside to an IDP camp in the Afrin region, Ula H. (18) decided to take her life after a year of forced marriage to a man 14 years older than her. A source close to the victim narrated:

“When Ula’s family fled their area, her father forced her to marry after they ended up in a tent in an Afrin camp. One month into her marriage, Ula returned to the tent due to disputes with her husband. Impoverished and crammed into the little space of the tent, her father immediately returned her to her husband, who lived in the same camp. This scene was repeated several times over eight months. Ultimately, Ula poisoned herself. She was immediately taken to the hospital, but she died on the way.”

“She Unexpectedly Ended Her Life”

On 13 July 2022, Ranya R. (45), who is displaced from Idlib’s countryside to Maabatli/Mabeta, in the Afrin region, died by suicide. A witness to the tragedy, Ranya’s sister recounted:

“Ranya had a happy life with her husband until he started to use violence, nearly three months before she killed herself. He started fights, hit her, and threatened her with





divorce. He even married another woman. Since then, Ranya was depressed, anxious, and isolated, even with her three sons. Without any signs, she ended her life.”

The New Phenomenon of Child Suicide in Idlib

In Idlib province, STJ documented a new pattern of suicide. Several children and under-18 minors died by suicide for a variety of reasons, including inaccessibility of education, family tight finances, and mental and financial burdens carried by children at a young age, especially those who lost their breadwinners.

While these reasons motivated the majority of child suicide cases, it was bullying that drove one of the children to take his life.

“Too Young to be a Breadwinner”

Displaced from Homs’ countryside to an IDP camp in rural Idlib, Muhammad W. (14) took his life in February 2022. The victim’s mother narrated:

“After we fled our area, we went through massive financial difficulties. Mohammad’s father was a construction worker, a job he was paid very little for. The wages barely covered the price of bread. In 2020, he had cancer and died. Consequently, the household and making a living were the responsibility of my son Muhammad, older than his three brothers.”

Despite his young age, Muhammad was forced to take rough jobs. His employers often treated him unfairly and exploited him. They either curtailed his wages or did not pay him at all. The mother added:

“My son was sad and felt crushed by these experiences. Without a warning, and as I entered the second room of our concrete shelter (tent), I witnessed a sight I could never erase from my memories. My child was hanging from the ceiling.”

“Bullied to Death”

On Sunday evening, in March 2021, Zaid N. (13), from Idlib, poisoned himself. The boy took his life, seeking an escape from the pressure and bullying he suffered from classmates. A relative of the boy narrated:

“Zaid never missed a school day. Suddenly, during the second semester, he started to show symptoms of fatigue, affected by the frequent fights he was forced into by his classmates. We did not take these fights seriously, while Zaid continued to mention that he will drop out of school. He did not go to school for a few days, but we always sent him back to school. We had no idea that the students were beating and bullying him. The





teachers later revealed that several students were insulting him with obscene language, and sometimes beat him with their legs. These children were punished. We never imagined that this would lead Zaid to commit suicide.”

“He Lost His Mother”

At dawn on Sunday, in June 2021, Ahmad M. (16), from Idlib’s countryside, committed suicide by hanging. Ahmad’s father narrated:

“Ahmad’s mother died in 2020 affected by a terminal disease. This changed Ahmad’s life, especially since his mother managed some of his needs. However, after she died, and due to poverty, displacement, and my inability to meet the family’s needs, Ahmad grew more isolated and lonelier nearly three months before he committed suicide. He was detached from his siblings and friends, would not eat, or sit with us. He ultimately killed himself.”

“Unrequited Love”

He loved a young woman, but she married another man. Heartbroken, Rami B. (18), displaced from Hama’s countryside to an IDP camp in rural Idlib, ended his life with poison in June 2021. A source close to the young man narrated:

“Rami and his family were displaced from Hama, but they were still doing fairly well financially. Rami continued to work in cellphone maintenance. He got emotionally involved with a girl almost a year ago, but she left him and got married. This caused Rami to kill himself.”

The source added that this was not the first time that Rami tried to kill himself. He previously cut his wrist with a sharp object, but his family managed to take him to hospital and saved his life. However, they failed the second time, because Rami ended his life at his workplace.

Real Figures Are Far More

Seeking a professional perspective on the rise in suicides, STJ reached out to Hala Kayali, who is one of the researchers documenting suicides in Idlib and Aleppo’s countryside. Kayali attributed the increase to a variety of factors that continue to create a difficult reality with several negative consequences, including suicides.

Kayali cited factors such as chain-displacement and inadequate housing conditions, where IDPs from various areas are forced to share spaces despite their societal differences. These factors transformed living styles of several of the affected families. Additionally, there are the tensions and disputes arising between IDPs and locals in host areas, not to mention poor education. Under these circumstances, Kayali pointed that it is necessary to:





“Talk about children struggling with bullying and hate-speech at schools and IDP camps, due to which six child suicides were recorded over the last two years of my work in camp areas. Moreover, over the past few years, teenage girls made suicide an escape from life, reacting to abuse and poverty. These girls end their lives in response to their new lifestyles after they get married to men they do not want, or men they were forced to marry by their male family members. Such marriages are conducted for various reasons, including the cases where the head of the family is an IDP and his tent is not fit to accommodate all family members. In such cases, the father sees in giving his daughter in marriage a solution to the scarcity of space and to cut expenditures. These issues stem from displacement-related conditions experienced by people in these areas.”

Elaborating on the status of women in IDP camps, Kayali added that younger women lack privacy or the chance to experiment with their femininity, especially under their dire living conditions. While they are forced to cook outdoors and under the scorching sun, families can barely secure drinking water.

These young women are deprived of their rights as women, which made many of them, including teenagers, to choose to die by suicide, often through the use of pills.

Kayali highlighted that she monitored four deaths with pills in her areas of operation, which were not documented because the families attributed death to poisoning, without referring to suicide. She added:

“The ongoing war made a large number of women breadwinners after they lost their male supporters and had to fend for children in parallel with poverty and displacement. Several women who lost husbands, who just went absent, died in combat, or disappeared, became the first people in charge of raising children and meeting needs. Several suicide cases were monitored among women of such status in Idlib province.”

Focusing on children, Kayali located rising suicides in the poor quality of education, displacement, and family-related struggles, particularly the absence of the father, in addition to early marriages, which are condoned by traditions first and encouraged by poverty second. She expanded on these factors, saying:

“The spread of drugs and common use among children enlisted into armed groups, particularly in areas controlled by Turkey-backed factions, was also a reason behind suicides. This is so because drug abuse is becoming the norm in said areas. In the cases, where children are blackmailed or exploited by the recruiting factions, drugs become an escape from reality and family poverty, especially for children who are displaced and are providing for their families.”

In relation to education in particular, Kayali said that in 2022 at least five students committed suicide in Idlib and Aleppo’s countryside after they failed elementary school. These children died by suicide as a result of family violence and a parent threatening them with punishment should they fail exams. In a final observation, Kayali stressed that:





“The documented suicide cases in Idlib and Aleppo’s countryside are far from the actual cases, especially since some suicides go unannounced, because families are inhibited by traditions, and fear stigma and the disruption of their reputation. These concerns apply specifically to suicide cases among teenage girls. Due to this, organizations do not have access to all cases and, thus, cannot document them.”

Limited Response

According to activist Mustafa al-Sayed, who works in a Suicide Monitoring Unit in Idlib and northern Aleppo, specialized efforts to combat suicide risks remain insubstantial.

The activist pointed out that there is only one suicide hotline to report cases in northwestern Syria. The hotline is operated by UOSSM, which also runs the only mental healthcare facility in Idlib province. For reference, the number is **00352681133899**. The facility covers mental disorders, reaches out to potential suicide victims, and supervises their treatment. Commenting on the organization’s efforts, activist al-Sayed narrated:

“The organization saved over 28 potential suicide victims in 2021. These individuals were offered treatment sessions, supervised directly by specialists. Several other organizations are working on expanding the scope of psychological support and awareness efforts. Some teams carry out field visits to towns and camps and listen to the issues locals are experiencing. However, the support offered is limited to guidance and tips provided during treatment sessions.”

Al-Sayed pointed to a gap in the work of these organizations. The awareness teams are built of non-specialized staffers, who have no expertise in mental healthcare or awareness methods. The organizations subject these teams to limited training programs of a few days and then send them into communities to spread awareness. This affected the results, which were negative sometimes, or inadequate relating to both awareness and mental health.

Suicides in Northeastern Syria

In the AA-held areas, STJ monitored several suicide cases in 2021 and 2021. However, field researchers with STJ faced several challenges in accessing the families of the individuals. Several of the families preferred not to discuss the matter because suicide is a highly sensitive issue.

“Unhappy Life”

On 26 February 2022, Lara M. (17) shot herself and died, using a gun at her home in Qamishli/Qamishlo city, in al-Hasakah province.





Lara left a handwritten letter behind, saying she died by suicide because she was unhappy with life. Commenting on the case, a source close to her said that Lara was experiencing some mental difficulties before she killed herself.

“Acute Depression”

In July, Qmishli city witnessed a second suicide. Fatima (70) die by suicide by hanging.. A source close to the victim narrated:

“Fatima hanged herself at her son’s house. Fatima suffered from acute depression for three years. She lived with her son and killed herself as he and his wife paid the neighbors a visit.”

“Intense Divorce”

On 2 June 2022, Raed M. (28) also killed himself by hanging in the al-Hilaliyah neighborhood, in Qamishli/Qamishlo city. A source close to the young man recounted:

“Raed and his wife parted ways following family disputes that ended with divorce. This left him in an acute psychological crisis. That day, he informed his family that he intended to die by suicide, but they did not believe him. Half an hour later, they checked his room and found him dead.”

“Unknown Reasons”

In the city of al-Malikiyah/ Derik, Hala M. (18) died by hanging herself in the room she shared with her two-year-old sister. A source close to the victim narrated:

“Hala killed herself for unknown reasons. She was not on bad terms with anyone, and we had a good relationship. We had fun. Even when they searched her cell phone, they did not find anything that would have led her to die by suicide. However, many baseless stories were circulated after the incident, such as that she was involved in an emotional relationship, or that she had lost her virginity.”

“Unrealized Dreams”

In Deir ez-Zor, Eid was a devastating experience for Ruba A. (12), who could not get new clothes due to her family’s tight finances and dire conditions. Without any sign, Ruba killed herself by hanging on 12 May in 2021, according to a source close to the victim. The source added:





“Ruba’s family was impoverished. Some of the neighborhood’s residents tried to help them with money, but Ruba’s father had kidney failure, and could not move or work. The father had promised Ruba to buy her new clothes for Eid, but, unfortunately, no one helped them at the time.”

Ruba cried for two days because she could not have new clothes on the first day of Eid like the other children. She killed herself. The family was horrified, especially since they had previously lost a son to Leukemia.

Documentation in the Region

For an accurate assessment of the situation, STJ reached out to Arzo Tammo, spokeswoman for Sara Organization to Combat Violence against Women in northeast Syria. Tammo reported that the organization recorded at least 24 suicides since 2021 and up to July 2022, in addition to 33 attempts.

Tammo noted that the majority of the cases were of under-18 girls. She recounted:

“These cases were documented in various areas, including al-Hasakah, Kobanî/Ayn al-Arab, Raqqa, Sarrin, and the Euphrates Region. The larger number of the victims were girls, who died by suicide due to psychological pressures or domestic violence, given that COVID-19 sent domestic violence cases soaring because people were forced to stay home during the reported period.”

Tammo pointed to other motivations, including the financial standing and the poor living conditions of the victims. She listed some of the documented cases, indicating the various age groups and contexts:

“A divorced woman shot herself dead after her in-laws took her children to Iraqi Kurdistan. Suicides were even committed by 40-year-old women.”

Tammo also narrated the story of a young woman in Amuda. The victim was in love with a young man, who later threatened and blackmailed her, saying he will post nude photos of her on social media. She killed herself using a Kalashnikov rifle.

Suicides in SG-Held Areas

STJ documented suicide cases in several SG-controlled areas involving women and children who experienced violence. The cases occurred in the provinces of As-Suwayda, Daraa, Rif Dimashq, and the section of Deir ez-Zor where the SG maintains a presence.





A Teenager in As-Suwayda

In As-Suwayda province, Amer M. (17) died by suicide by hanging on 13 May 2022. The teenager was pronounced dead minutes after he arrived in the city hospital. A source close to the victim recounted:

"Amer died by suicide after years of emotional abuse by his father, who did not try to connect with his son. The father would reprimand him for the most trivial reasons. He worked all day and showed no concern for the feelings of his children. His sole concern was making money, which in his opinion is more important than emotions."

Another informed source told STJ that Amer kept a journal and that a few hours before he ended his life, he wrote that he was often reprimanded by his father and that he was fearful of him. The source added that Amer also wrote that he tried to kill himself twice before, and what shocked him the most was that his father would not even hug him or attempt to communicate with him despite these attempts.

Women in Daraa

Not far from As-Suwayda province, STJ recorded several suicide cases in Daraa province; however, though obtaining an accurate number is currently beyond reach. STJ's field researcher attributed this difficulty to a variety of reasons, mainly because families keep the suicide of female members a secret.

The researcher added that suicide cases defy funeral traditions, which complicates the process of documentation further. While the custom is that deaths are announced through the mosques' loudspeakers, and people are invited to perform the funeral prayer, and then the funeral ceremony, several suicide cases are not announced. This contributes to withholding the details of the deaths and the reasons behind them.

"Separated from Her Children"

In November 2021, Raw'a M. (20) died by suicide at her family home in Mhajjah town. Raw'a's suffering started in 2015 when she returned from Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan to the town to marry her cousin. The husband had recurrent epilepsy seizures, which led to blackouts. Due to his medical condition, the husband was doing poorly financially because he could not keep a job. Commenting on the story, a source close to the victim narrated:

"Raw'a and her husband were cousins and lived in adjacent houses. They got married and had two children under dire financial and security conditions, and they constantly fought. Raw'a often sought refuge at our house, escaping her husband's beating, which





all neighbors heard. Once, in mid-2019, she escaped to her uncle's house after she was beaten. So, her uncle went to court and filed a case against the husband. He spent a few months in prison. The custody of the children was granted to her in-laws, who denied her seeing them."

The source added that when the husband was released, he tried to get back together with his wife. However, Raw'a refused, mainly fearing the violence and the beating. Her uncle refused all the efforts made by the intermediaries who intervened to resolve the conflict.

To see her children, Raw'a spent time looking at them through a hole in the wall that separated the houses of her uncle and in-laws, but the husband discovered what she was doing and cemented the hole.

When intermediaries also failed to convince the husband to return the children to their mother, Raw'a decided to kill herself using a poisonous substance. She died before they could take her to the hospital.

The field researcher said that Raw'a's family tried to cover up her suicide and, instead, said that she died due to a heart attack. However, chats she had with a relative corroborate that she died by suicide.

The field researcher added that a few months after Raw'a killed herself, her father, who is in his fifties, also died by suicide in the Zaatari Refugee Camp. His body was found in his tent on 4 April 2022. The reasons behind his suicide remain unidentified. The only detail known about the case is that the father changed his WhatsApp status just before he died, into *Inna Lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un* (Verily we belong to Allah and verily to Him do we return.)

"Physiological Struggles"

Originally from al-Shaykh Maskin, Razan M. (19) died by suicide by hanging in her room, in Daraa city. Sources told STJ that emotional struggles were behind the incident.

"They Forced Her out of Home"

In Mhajjah town, in Daraa's northern countryside, Alyaa M. (20) died by suicide in February 2022, seeking to escape the unfair treatment of her husband and mother-in-law. The husband, her maternal cousin, and his mother forced Alyaa to leave her home following a fight over having children. She left her home entirely after her husband married another woman and returned to her family house.

At her parents', Alyaa suffered again at the hands of her brothers, who wanted the golden jewelry she had. They fought over the jewelry and the brothers would hit her. A source close to the victim narrated:





"The husband asked me to talk on his behalf, try to resolve the dispute, and help him get his wife back. However, the wife refused to return home. We were aware of the violence she was being subjected to at her family house, while she was also being poorly treated at her husband's. The family ties between the spouses made solving their issue more difficult. Therefore, Alyaa killed herself in the bathroom using a poisonous substance. She was taken to the Izra' National Hospital, but she was already dead. He brothers insisted on saying that she slipped in the bathroom, hit her head, and died."

A Young Man in Rif Dimashq

In Rif Dimashq (Damascus countryside), Qusai Z. (20) died by suicide by hanging on 25 May 2022. The family woke up to this sight, a relative of the victim said. The relative added:

"Qusai was too young to deal with such heavy burdens. He had a big family to provide for, especially after the death of his father nearly two years ago and the arrest of his brother by the regime almost four years ago. He was a breadwinner for his sister-in-law, his three nephews, and two sisters. Additionally, his working conditions were quite difficult. He had to work 13 hours a day."

The relative added that, for two months, Qusai would not talk to his family or friends. He left home for work at dawn and returned late at night. The relative elaborated:

"Qusai's family was suffering from extreme financial difficulties. Some of the locals would help the mother, but without Qusai knowing. All this weighed down of the young man, who just opted for suicide."

Suicide Abroad

STJ found that suicides are not limited to Syrians at home, because some cases occurred in refugee host countries. In Early 2022, Abir A. (23), originally from Deir ez-Zor and a refugee in Turkey, died by suicide because her family did not consent to her divorce. She set herself on fire. A source close to the victim narrated:

"Abir spent nearly a month in the hospital before she died affected by the burns. She had asked her husband for divorce following lengthy disputes, but her family refused even though she insisted. Ultimately, she lost hope and just set herself on fire."





Suicide and the Social System

In his book *Suicide*, Sociologist Émile Durkheim probes into the phenomenon of suicide, tracing deep ties between the act and the existing social system, its conditions, and any sudden changes it undergoes.⁵ Adopting a similar reading into suicide, sociologist Samah Salmeh said:

“Suicides indeed increase in countries witnessing armed conflicts, because suicides are deeply related to the extent of social and financial security available. When these factors are lacking, especially in countries with armed conflicts, it is only natural for suicide rates to rise. This is because the matrix of social values in these countries—which functions as a deterrent for some individuals from committing suicide—gets affected by the conflict. At times of conflict, under which people are displaced, the matrix is destabilized, the thing which renders the social authority non-existent, along with the social restrictions it entails. This, consequently, makes it easier for some individuals to commit suicide.”

Salmeh added that, particularly in countries where there are armed conflicts, it is difficult to exactly tell which groups are more susceptible to commit suicide. However, the vulnerable groups are most likely at the risk of ending their lives, including groups subject to discrimination, extensive violence, such as rape victims, or people with chronic physical pain, traumas, or acute mental disorders, such as depression and schizophrenia. Additionally, suicide rates are also related to specific social phenomena, including domestic violence and early marriages. Individuals exposed to extensive violence are likely to die by suicide, seeking it as a means of escape. Elaborating on the reasons behind suicide, Salmeh said:

“One of the reasons for committing suicides is a neglected mental disorder. If an individual develops a disorder but does not seek a doctor, psychanalyst, or psychological support specialist, he/she would develop acute and chronic depression that might lead them to commit suicide. There is also the idea that mental disorders are still socially stigmatized, even though the rising risks of suicide had made people more open and keen on their mental health, which is a positive development.”

Salmeh noted that the suicide phenomenon has various devastating impacts. Suicides affect families who might, in some cases, struggle with long-term emotional effects, battling with grief and guilt. Moreover, suicides had society-level impacts because they decrease social efficacy.

Depression as a Culprit

Commenting on depression as a suicide trigger, trained psychologist Jwana al-Bizreh said that international statistics demonstrate that [depression](#) is the second cause of death, after natural causes, and that it could be one of the causes leading to suicide. She elaborated:

“Depression is an ancient disease. It was not treated with prescribed medication, as it is currently treated. Back in the old days, people used to consider it as demonic possession

⁵ Durkheim, É. (2005). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. Routledge.





and would treat it with torture, for instance. Depression was only properly understood after Sigmund Freud. Additionally, with modern medicine, psychiatric medications emerged which can help people return back to normal life after they totally lost hope and happiness. However, these medications must be taken under the supervision of a psychiatrist and according to a specific medical program, because depression has been no longer classified as solely a mental disorder, but rather a mental and neurological disease.”

According to al-Bizreh, people who are stuck in the past, and have no hope in the future, are mostly suffering from depression. People who fear the future are probably stressed. Nevertheless, both cases might lead to suicide, when these individuals reach the stage where they lose hope in life and struggle with massive psychological pressures. She added:

“Motives to commit suicide are either moral or material. People are morally triggered when they are subjected to violence, unfair treatment, or rape, which affects them psychologically and indulges them in depression and frustration. On the material level, people are affected by financial and social pressures, such as a lack of job opportunities, while having financial burdens and commitments. These triggers might pave the path for suicidal ideations, especially in people who have a negative way of thinking. Suicide offers an exit from bitter reality.

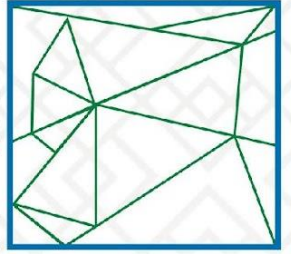
Al-Bizreh highlighted that it is never easy to decide to die by suicide. Therefore, suicide is an indication that the person, whether a child, a teenager, or an adult, has reached the stage of despair where they wish for death. She added:

“International statistics show that women are more prone to develop depression than men, but men are more prone to commit suicide, which relates to the male brain formation and psychology that is somehow involved in aggression. Additionally, recent studies have demonstrated that depression is genetic. That is, should a family member have depression, it will likely pass down to his/her children in the future.”

In regard to measures, al-Bizreh said that effective psychological therapy helps curb depression cases and, thus, suicide. She highlighted that treating depression patients is not an easy task, especially when it comes to motivating patients to perform activities that are at their best.

She emphasized that tolerance on the part of the family and surroundings, refrain from pressuring or criticizing patients, as well as encouragement play a major role in treatment, in addition to medications.





About Us:

Syrians for Truth and Justice (STJ) is a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization monitoring human rights violations in Syria. Founded in 2015, STJ has been based in France since 2019.

STJ is an impartial and independent Syrian human rights organization operating across Syria. Our network of field researchers monitor and report human rights violations occurring on the ground in Syria, while our international team of human rights experts, lawyers, and journalists gather evidence, examine emerging patterns of violations, and analyze how violations break domestic Syrian and international law.

We are committed to documenting violations of human rights committed by all parties in the Syrian conflict and elevating the voices of all Syrians victimized by human rights violations, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, class, and/or gender. Our commitment to human rights monitoring is founded on the idea that professional human rights documentation meeting international standards is the first step to uncovering the truth and achieving justice in Syria.



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