



Syrian Women’s Perceptions of Women’s Rights, Work, Education, and Vocational Skills

May 2017



Copyright © 2017 Bareeq Education Company (non-profit), LLC. All Rights Reserved.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without the express written consent of Bareeq Education. Please contact compliance@bareeqeducation.org.



Table of Contents

Syrian Women’s Perceptions of Women’s Rights, Education, and Vocational Skills.....	1
Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction	3
About Bareeq	3
The Current Study	4
Methods.....	4
Findings	6
Summary and Recommendations.....	25



Introduction

About Bareeq

Bareeq Education and Development is an educational non-profit organization headquartered in Amman, Jordan, with the mission of providing refugee and other marginalized youths and their parents with the opportunities, knowledge, skill set, guidance, and experiences that promote positive mental health, to help them be effective members of their communities.

Bareeq established a remedial education center in Amman in 2016, where all programs are completely free. Bareeq welcomes all nationalities, religions, and ethnicities into its programs. Bareeq has served as a lifeline and a beacon of hope for those whom hope seemed too distant.

For further reading and center highlights:

Bareeq Center has 350+ students, with a staff of 9. Current programs at the center include:

1. 3rd to 12th grade remedial education (girls and boys) covering main subjects such as Arabic, Math, English (all levels), Art (Elementary) and Science (Intermediary and High School)
2. Literacy classes (Arabic) for children left behind scholastically, ages 8-13 years old
3. Literacy classes (Arabic) for adults—mainly mothers of children enrolled in Bareeq's center
4. Math programs for children: Icon Math (using tablets)
5. English as second language for Adults (in collaboration with the British Council in Amman)
6. Activities such as reading events, art, sewing, lectures (for adults on social or psychological issues), fun events for children (including field trips)
7. Many partners including the British Council, the UN, Danish Refugee Council, and more
8. University scholarships with the support of our partners
9. An education program for children and young adults with physical disabilities which includes specially fitted transportation.



The Current Study

As 2016, half of Syria's entire population has been displaced internally or have undergone forced migration to other countries^{1,2}. Women face unique challenges, as they are at higher risk of experiencing sexual and physical violence, trafficking, early marriages, and unequal access to healthcare, education, security, and other basic needs^{3,4,5}. Furthermore, women make up two thirds of the world's non-literate population. Investing in women's education and vocational skills has shown to increase women's sense of self-esteem, confidence, resilience, and can improve financial security⁵. It is also essential to understand the needs and perspectives of Syrian women in order to deliver sustainable, effective, and impactful services.

Bareeq Education & Development Organization set out to understand the status of Syrian women as they perceive themselves attaining their rights, since they are the backbone of any reconciliatory effort towards building for the future. Many of these women find themselves in an evolving social context brought on by internal and external migration due to the ongoing civil war.

Methods

The survey was written in the Arabic language to gain a maximum response rate, and contained both qualitative and quantitative data. Inclusion criteria for this study included: identifying as a woman, being of Syrian origin, and being above the age of 18. Participants could live inside or outside of Syria.

¹ Pew Research Center. (2016). *About six-in-ten Syrians are now displaced from their homes*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/13/about-six-in-ten-syrians-are-now-displaced-from-their-homes>

² United Nations. (2017). *The UN humanitarian response*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/apps/news/infocusRel.asp?infocusID=146>

³ NRC/HRC. (2016). *Securing Status: Syrian refugees and the documentation of legal status, identity, and family relationships in Jordan*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/securing-status.pdf>

⁴ Jabbar, S. A., & Zaza, H. I. (2016). Evaluating a vocational training programme for women refugees at the Zaatari camp in Jordan: women empowerment: a journey and not an output. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 21(3), 304–319

⁵ Sami, S., Williams, H. A., Krause, S., Onyango, M. A., Burton, A., & Tomczyk, B. (2014). Responding to the Syrian crisis: The needs of women and girls. *The Lancet*, 383, 1179-1181

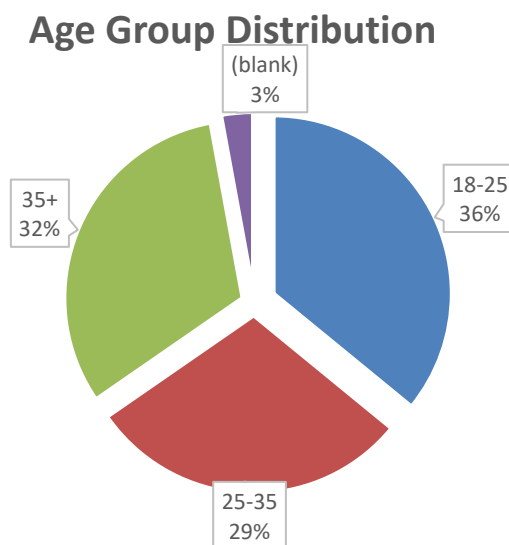


The study was published on 5th of May, 2017 and remained open for five days. The distribution of the request to fill in the survey was sent using social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. A total of 1,006 women filled out the survey.

Findings

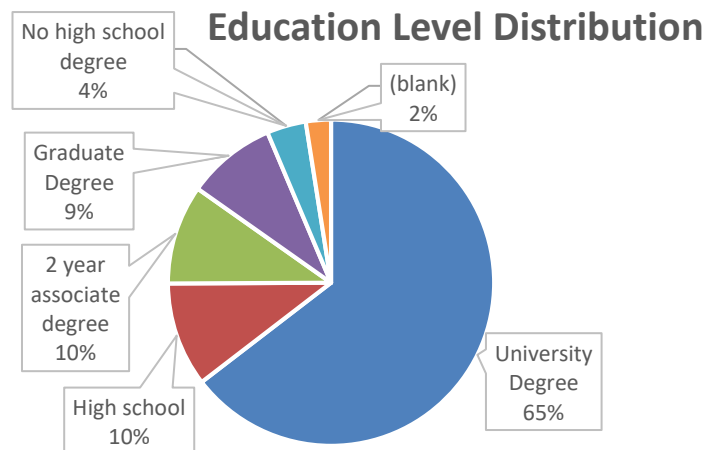
Age Groups

Participants are almost evenly distributed between the three age groups; 36% of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25, 29% were between the ages of 25 and 35, and 32% were above age 35. A very small group of participants (3%) did not respond to this question.



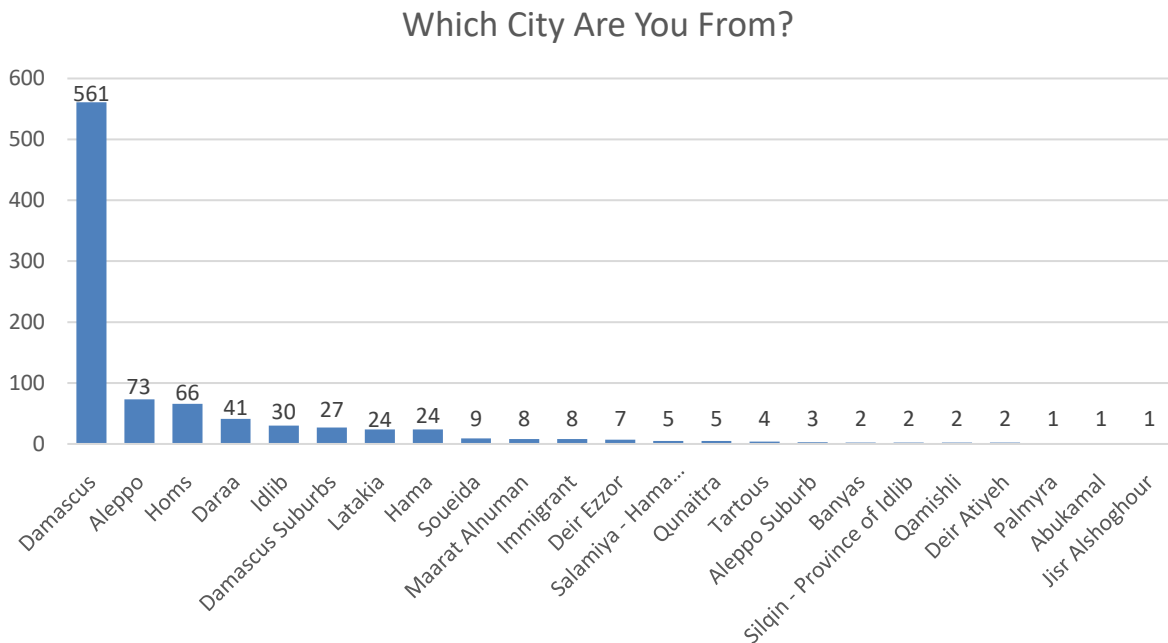
Education Levels

74% of the respondents hold a university degree or higher, with only 4% of the respondents holding a high school degree. This suggests that the results of this study reflect the views of the most educated sections of society.



Location and Origin

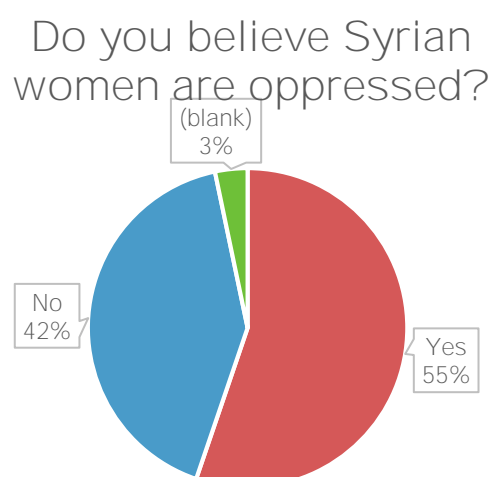
The vast majority of the respondents where from the capital city Damascus, followed by other urban areas, such as Aleppo and Homs.



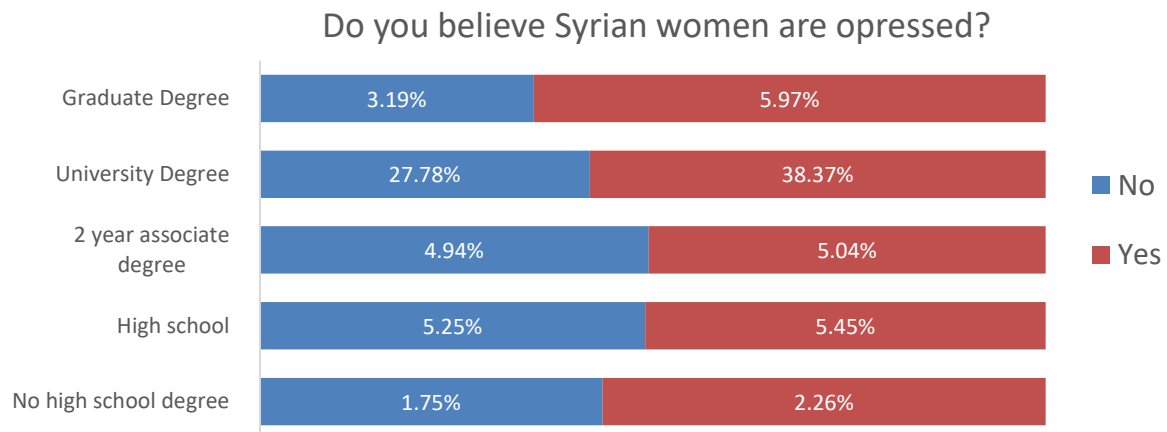
1. Do you believe Syrian women are oppressed?

In order to have an overarching understanding of women's opinions about inequality and oppression, we asked a general question about whether women felt that Syrian women were oppressed. Results show that a majority (55%) of women believe that Syrian women are oppressed, compared to 42%, who believe that they are not oppressed.

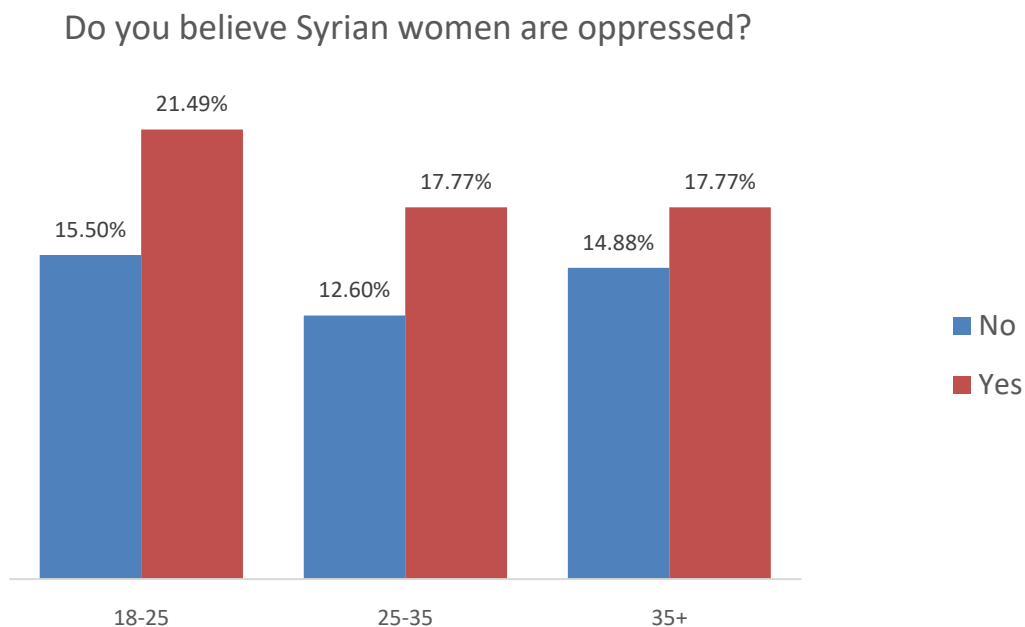
In order to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the women who reported whether they did or did not believe that Syrian women are oppressed, we analyzed the data based on education level, age groups, and geographic location. We found that, in general, the higher the education level, the higher the chance that the respondents would report



that they believe Syrian women were oppressed. This was not uniform across the sample, but this information is still powerful, as it suggests that that education is one of the ways to empower women and raise awareness about oppression.

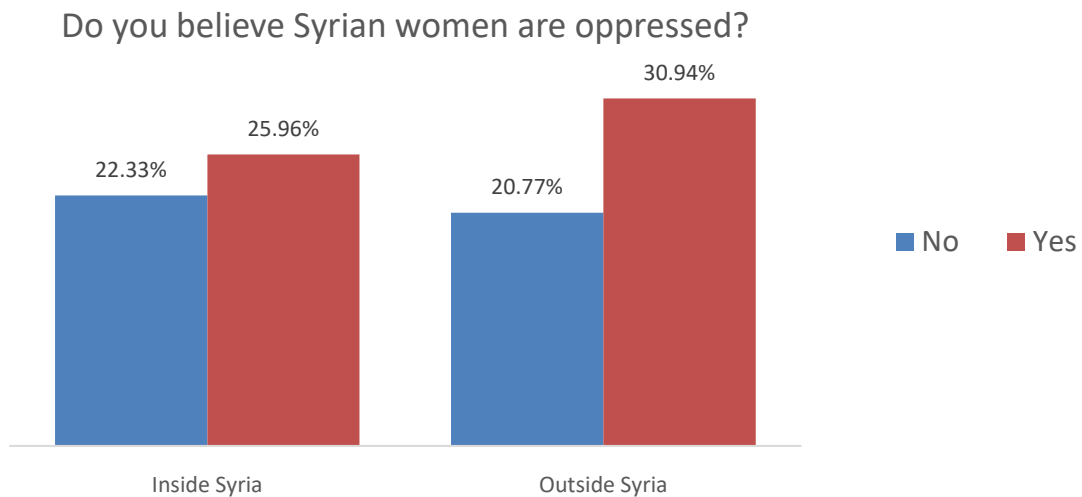


The graph below represents the breakdown among age groups. Results show that the younger generation reported believing that Syrian women are oppressed at the highest rates.

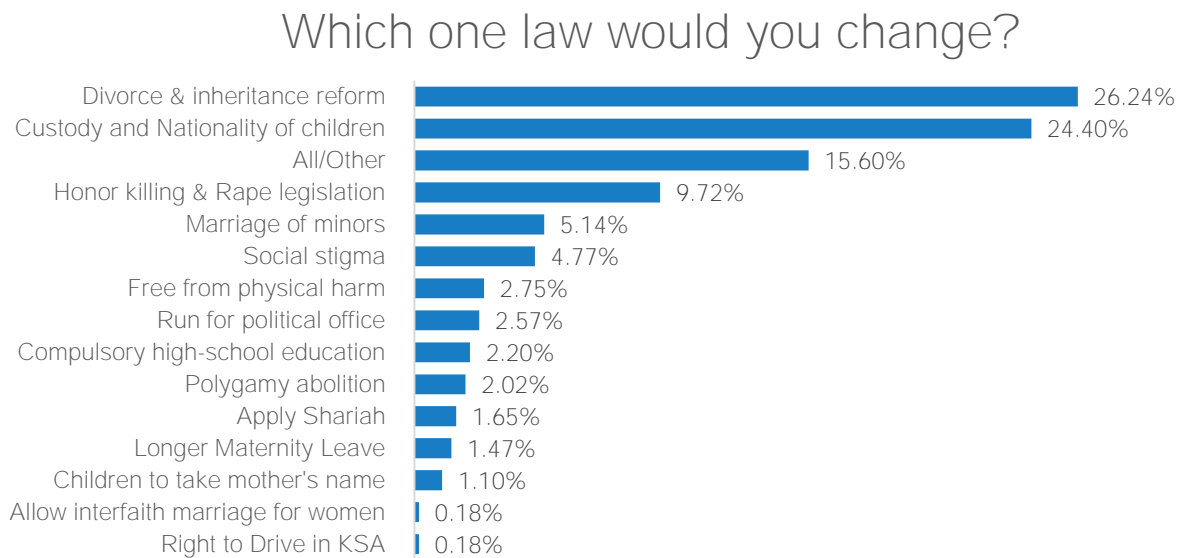


The geographic location (living inside or outside of Syria) appeared to be a predictor for how women responded. The graph below demonstrates that the women outside of Syria

reported slightly higher rates of believing that Syrian women are oppressed. It is possible that women outside of Syria also have the advantage of freedom to speak their minds and therefore speak the loudest about the oppression within Syria. This does not take away from the 26% of women inside Syria who share the sentiments about the current situation within the country.



2. Which one law would you change?



This question was left open-ended in the survey; therefore, we coded the responses by creating general themes and categories that represented the respondents' answers.

To analyze the responses, we will break down each answer and give examples of the women's responses:

- Divorce and Inheritance laws (26.2%)
 - Our findings show that the biggest section of women surveyed would change divorce and inheritance laws since in the Arab culture, men receive twice as much inheritance as women, and women cannot initiate divorce.
 - Curbing the male's ability to divorce on a whim
 - Ability to keep her home when her husband dies – at least for a while. Or have the wife equal share of owning the home as her husband
 - Allowing the wife to leave the husband's house in case of a dispute between them. Currently he can call her back with no explanation
 - Ability to punish husbands for extramarital affairs
 - Ability for a woman to marry without any male guardianship
 - Dowry reform
 - Stopping the practice of registering the marriage at engagement, which makes the woman a divorcee if the actual marriage doesn't go through

- Custody and Nationality of children (24.4%)
 - This appears to be a very emotional subject for respondents, as many of the responses from women were filled with emotionally laden language.
 - Allowing women to keep custody of children after a divorce as a priority over men, as it is currently it is the other way around
 - Ability to travel with their children without specific approval from their father
 - Ability to convey the mother's Syrian nationality to their children if they are married to a non-Syrian
 - Financial support for divorced women who have custody of children

- All/Other (15.6%)
 - This category includes women who wanted more than just one law to be changed (many cited the above requests and also honor crimes below)
 - Many respondents report that they wanted equality with men
 - Being free from male dominance
 - Financial independence and freedom to choose their own destiny
 - Equal pay for equal work among both men and women

- Honor killing and rape legislations (9.7%)
 - Responses suggest that this was another extremely important issue for women, as many of the women's responses were lengthy and many discussed their personal experiences with this issue.
 - Complete repeal the law that a rapist can escape sentencing if he marries the victim

- Ability to complain about sexual attacks and abuse
- Harsh penalties for perpetrators of sexual abuse and crimes of honor
- Marriage of minors (5.1%)
 - Some advocate 18 years as the minimum age to marry, and others report wanting to take it further to 19 and 20 years old
- Social stigma (4.8%)
 - This category covers all social and cultural barriers for women
 - Society making women feel inferior, or unimportant
 - Ability to freely choose her husband or interact with male acquaintances and friends
 - Ability to choose to work without social pressure against leaving her home
 - Some report being frustrated about gossip, lack of privacy, and social pressure to conform
 - To be free from male domination, and not to be treated as property only relevant to her home and children
- Being free from physical harm (2.8%)
 - Domestic abuse laws to be issued and enforced, with tough penalties for abusers
 - Ability to escape domestic abuse situations
- Run for political office (2.6%)
 - These respondents want the laws changed to allow for higher participation for women in public office, especially presidency or prime-ministership positions. So far, these positions have never been given to women
- Compulsory high-school degree (2.2%)
 - These respondents were clear about enforcing high school degree attainment for women, and some suggested women not to be allowed to marry before then
- Abolition of Polygamy (Polygyny) (2%)
 - These respondents want to abolish the ability of husbands to marry more than one wife at the same time. Currently the limit is a maximum of four.
- Apply Shariah (1.7%)
 - These respondents wanted all laws to be Shariah compliant

- Complete separation of men and women in society
- Enforce Shariah clothing for women
- Educate and enforce Shariah laws
- Enforce the physiological difference between men and women in the tasks they are assigned and their roles in society
- Not to criminalize the perpetrator of honor killing

- Longer Maternity leave (1.5%)
 - Some working women wanted the maternity leave laws in Syria to be extended. For public sector employees, it is supposed to be 75 days fully paid. For private sector, there could be sharp variations and may not be equally enforced. Some report only getting 30 days or less of maternity leave

- Children to take mother's name (1.1%)
 - A few women want their children to take their name instead of, or in addition to their father's. In Syrian society, women keep their maiden family names, and children take their fathers' family name

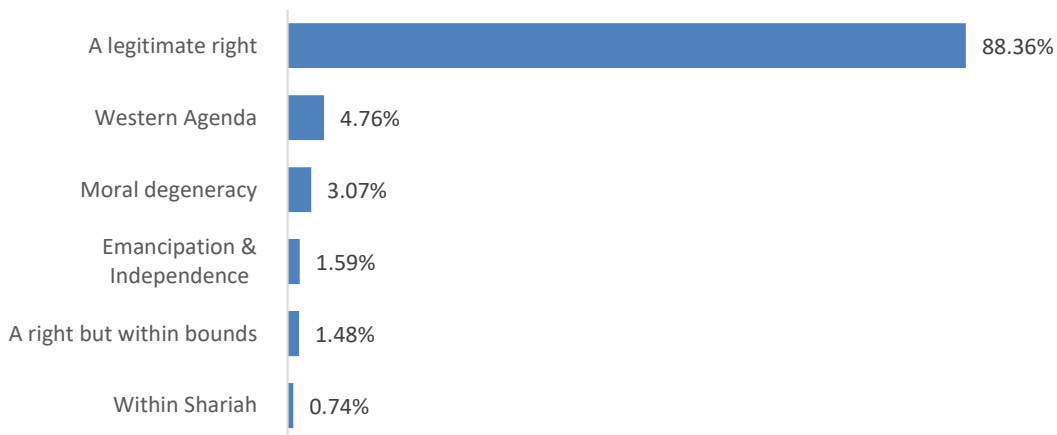
- Allow interfaith marriage for women
 - A few women report that they want the restriction of interfaith marriages completely removed. Currently, Muslim women cannot marry outside their faith, whereas Muslim men don't have that restriction

- Right to drive in KSA
 - One woman asked to have the Saudi laws changed to allow for women drivers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

3. What do you think of when you hear about the fight for women’s freedom or women’s rights?

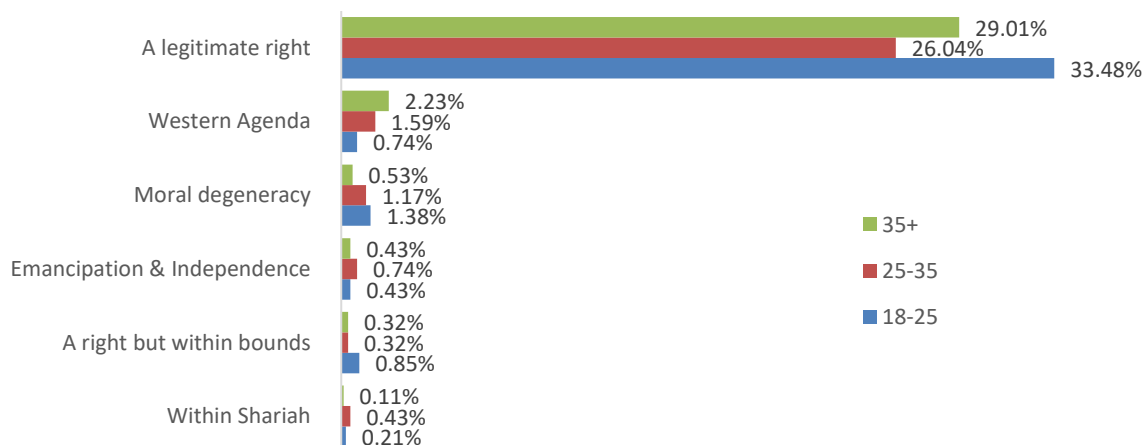
The vast majority (88.36%) report that when they hear about fighting for women’s rights, they think of it as “A legitimate right”. A sizable minority (close to 8%) report that it is a Western agenda or moral degeneracy. A small percentage (about 2%) thought of it as useful, but wanted to impose certain limits.

What do you think about the fight for womens rights?



Below, we broke the responses to this question down by age group. The youngest age group has the most positive view of women’s rights, as they make up the biggest proportion (33.48%) of all respondents who reported that it is a legitimate right.

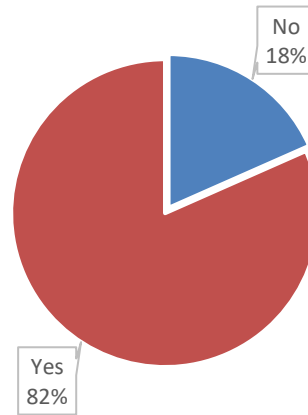
What do you think about the fight for womens rights?



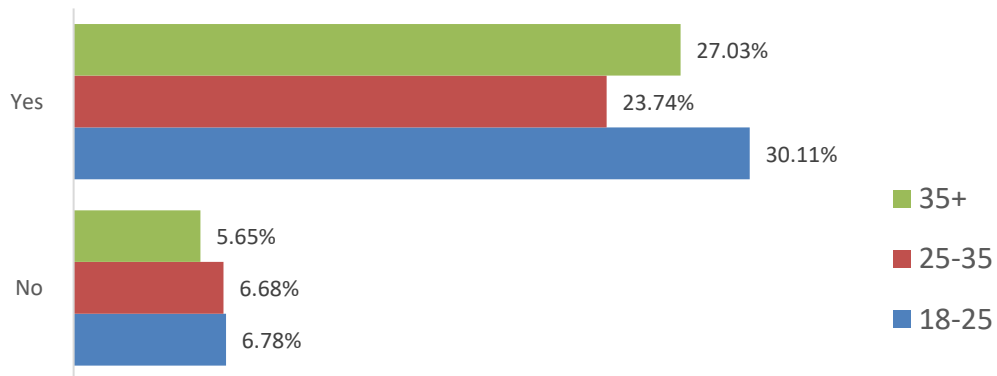
4. Should women be in leadership roles or positions of political power?

With only 18% disagreeing, results from this question suggest that there would be a significant amount of support for women in leadership roles or in politics, as 82% of the respondents agreed with this question. Additionally, the youngest age group (ages 18-25) had the highest rate of approval for women in leadership positions; this could show the potential the future holds for Arab women.

Do you support women for leadership and political positions?



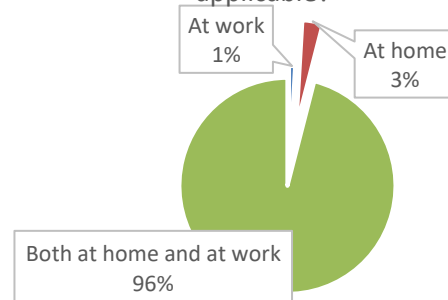
Do you support women for leadership and political positions?



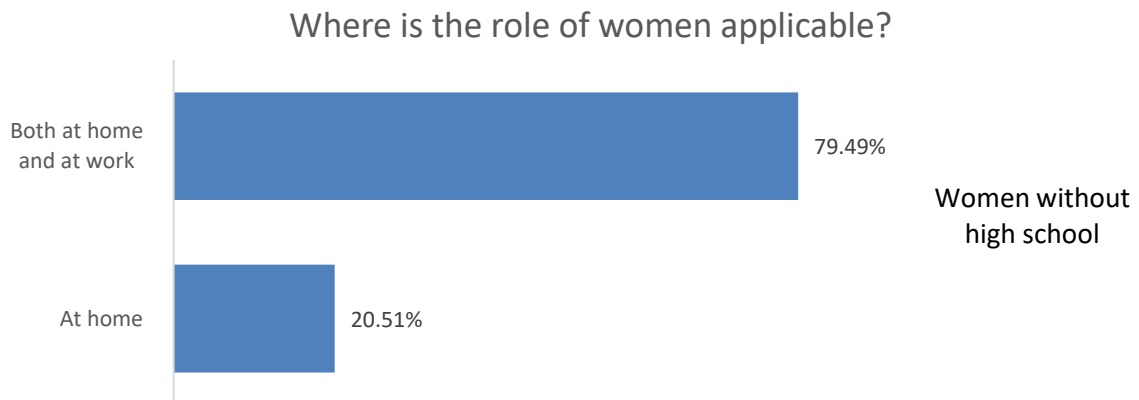
5. Is the woman's role at home or at work?

With 96% of women reporting that they believe that a woman's role is not solely at work or at home, it is clear that participants feel that women's roles should not be limited to one place, and would prefer to enjoy their responsibilities at work and at home.

Where is the role of women applicable?



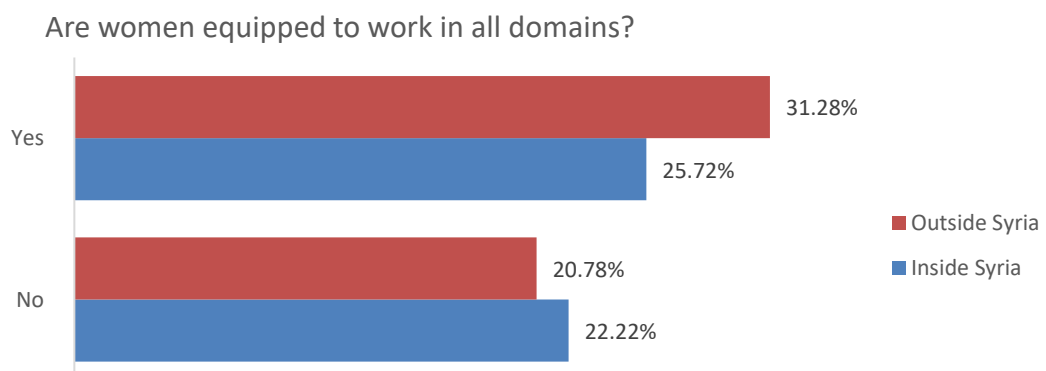
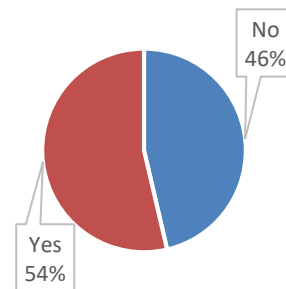
We were curious as to who believed their roles were at home, and found that the women who most chose “at home” were from the least educated segment, with more than 20% of these respondents. With the graph below, we can see that despite the near 80% of low educated women opting for both work and home responsibilities, 20.5% feel that work is no place for a woman.



6. Are women equipped to work in all domains?

The responses to the question “are women equipped to work in all domains,” to understand how confident women are of their abilities, the majority 54% said yes, and 46% said no. It is interesting to see that the women currently outside Syria are more positive about women’s capability that women inside Syria, as can be seen in the graph.

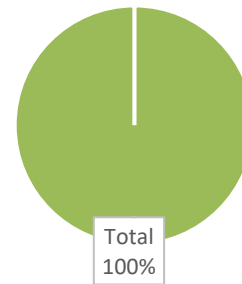
Are women equipped to work in all domains?



7. Should educating women be stipulated and enforced?

Our results suggest that education is important to the women who participated in this survey. A resounding 100% of respondents unanimously reported that education for women should be encouraged and enforced. This may be related to a question posed later in the survey (question number 17), where all women agreed that their daughters should get an education. It is possible that they want their daughters to lead a life that is independent and take control of their own futures. This may be related back to question 5 that asks about whether a woman's role in society is at work, home, or both; responses to both questions suggest that the majority of women believe that women should be free to work as professionals and take care of the home in any way they see fit.

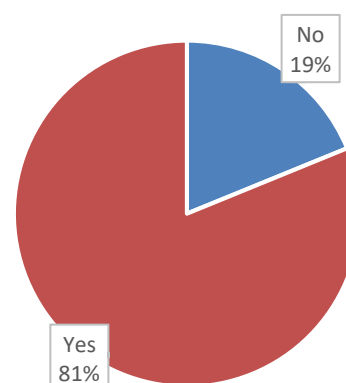
Should educating women be stipulated and enforced?



8. Do current social and cultural norms in Syria impede women's success?

We wanted to gain an insight into the mind-set of women who have experienced the social norms in Syria and to see if those norms are impeding women's success. Based on the responses, the vast majority of women (81%) believe that the social norms in Syria truly impede women's success. 19% of women disagreed, which implies that this subset of respondents believes the social norms in Syria do not stop a woman from succeeding. Further surveys could explore whether their belief about social norms and women's success is due to their own success despite the norms (that they have or have not had to battle through), or if they feel that the social norms in Syria are just fine and can bring about success for women.

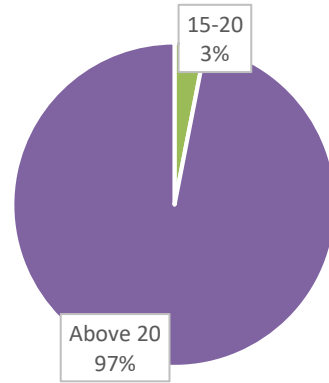
Do social norms in Syria impede women's success?



9. What should be the minimum age of marriage for women?

In the past, there has been a call for changing the age at which women in Syria should be allowed to get married. Some perceive that allowing women to marry at a young age is a social injustice, while others believe it to be acceptable. Our results showed that an overwhelming majority (97%) believe that women should be allowed to marry at age 20 or above. The remaining 3% report that they agree with women being able to marry between the ages between 15-20. It is possible that respondents who chose age 20 and above believe that this is a suitable age because it is around the time when one graduates from University or College, and therefore one's education is solidified.

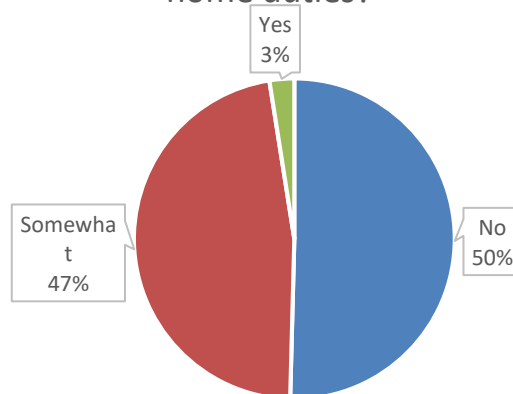
What should be the minimum age of marriage for women?



10. Does work affect women's home duties?

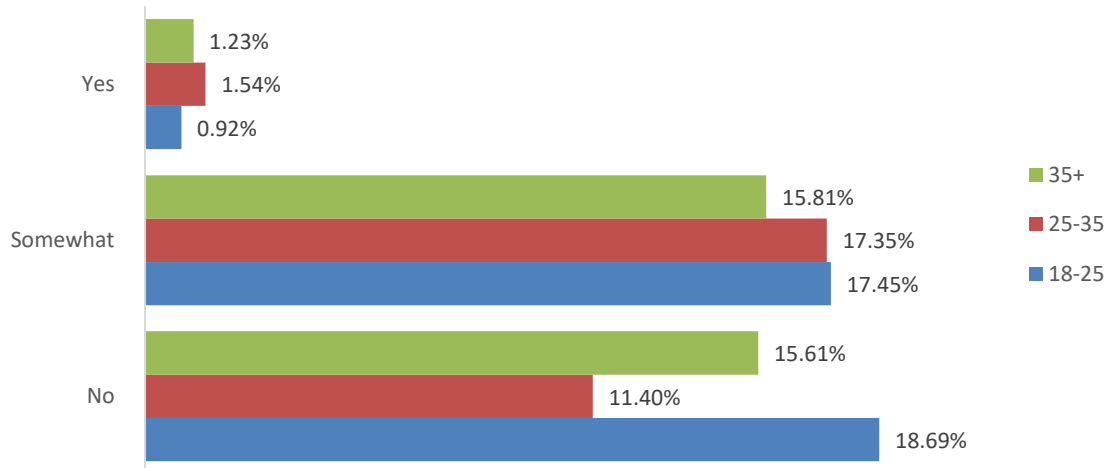
Results show that there is an almost even division between women who feel that work does not affect women's home duties, and those who believe that it "somewhat" has an effect. Finally, 3% of respondents say that it does affect their duties at home.

Does work affect women's home duties?



The graph below shows that the youngest group feels most strongly about their ability to balance work and home. It could just be the younger generation mentality or it could be that the skills the younger generation have developed have surpassed the skills of their parents and therefore can actually do both work and their home duties.

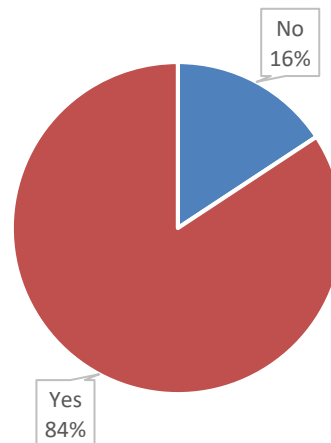
Does work affect women's home duties?



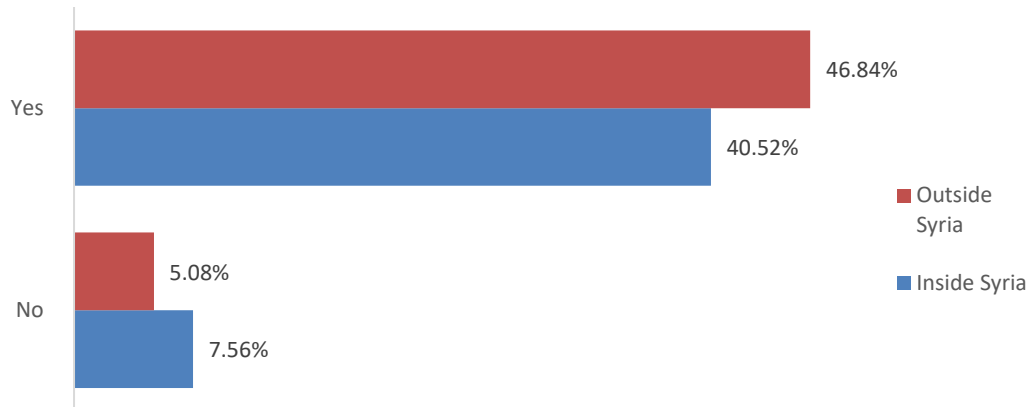
11. Do you support creating women's rights organizations?

Based on the information gathered, it is clear that most women (84%) do support the idea of creating organizations with the specific goal of increasing women's rights. However, it is interesting to see that women inside Syria are less agreeable to forming women's rights organizations than those outside Syria (graph below). It is possible that the reason for this difference could be because of the turmoil occurring in Syria currently and the feeling that any women's rights organization created could increase tension and further disarray. Future studies should examine possible reasons for this difference in order to gain a better understanding of women's needs and concerns.

Do you support creating women's rights organizations?



Do you support creating women's rights organizations?

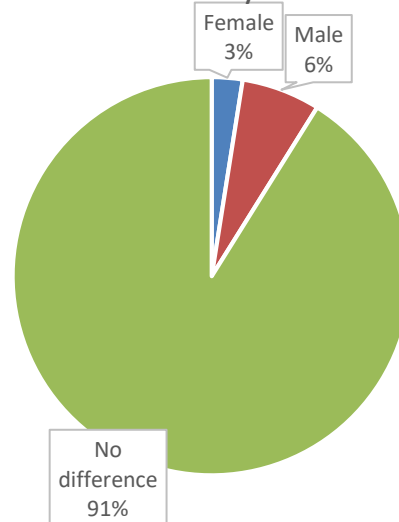


12. Do you prefer a male of female teacher?

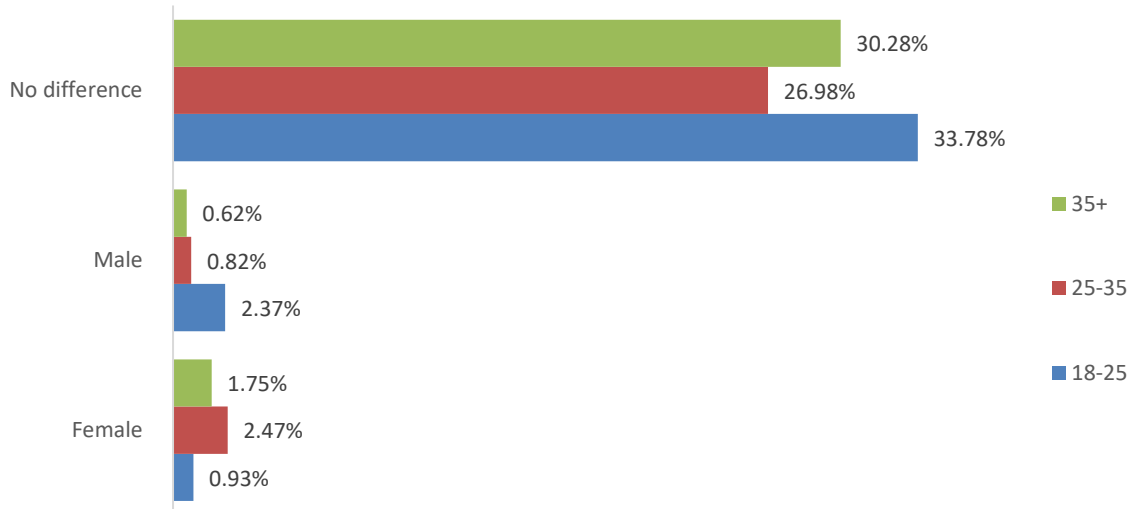
Results show that the largest percent (91%) of respondents feel that there is no preference for having a teacher of a specific gender. Having said that, 6% of these women would prefer a male teacher, and the remaining 3% would prefer a female teacher.

When analyzing responses based on age group, it is interesting to see that the respondents who chose to have a male teacher were from the youngest age group (ages 18-25).

Do you prefer a specific gender to teach you?



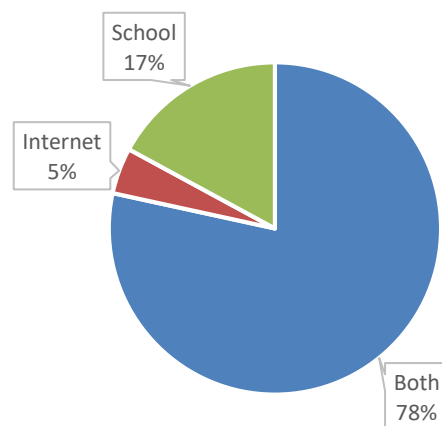
Do you prefer a specific gender to teach you?



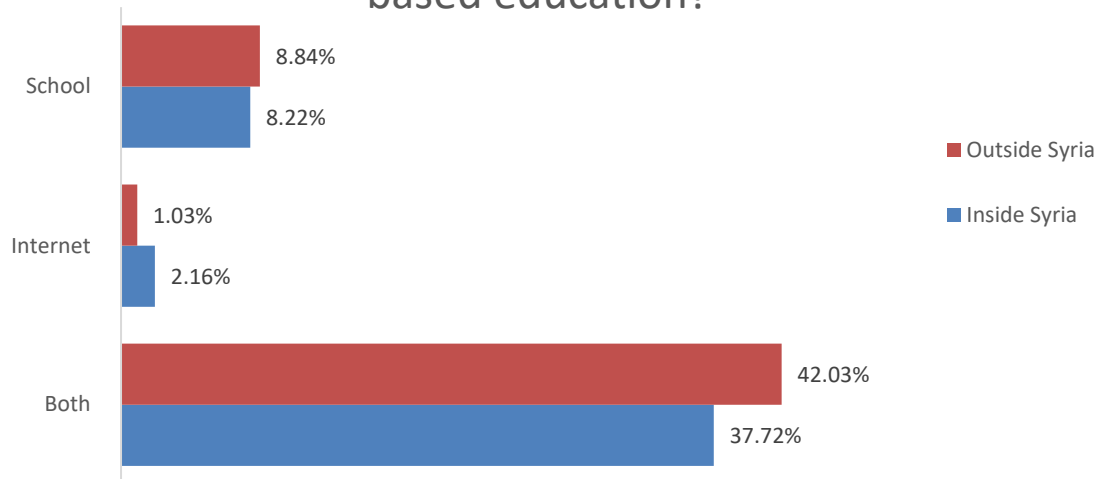
13. Do you prefer traditional schooling or internet-based education?

We felt that it was important to understand the types of schooling that women prefer (i.e., traditional in-class schooling, internet-based schooling, or both). This is to see if women who no longer have access to schooling are willing to leverage remote or Internet-based education. We found that the majority of respondents would prefer a hybrid of internet schooling and traditional schooling. We looked a bit further into this and found that women inside Syria are more inclined to prefer internet schooling; it is possible that this is due to the current turmoil in the country and lack of access to quality education. Increasing access to education within Syria can provide women with a significant opportunity, as those who are unable to leave the country could potentially apply and be admitted to a large school and receive their education from within Syria.

Do you prefer traditional schooling or Internet based education?



Do you prefer traditional schooling or Internet based education?

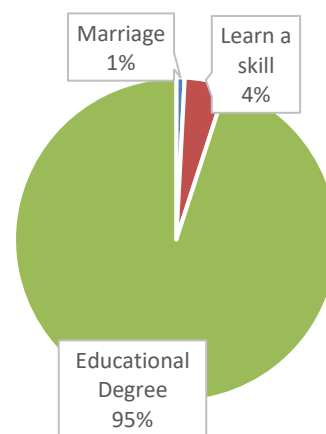


14. What is the best route for women to get their rights?

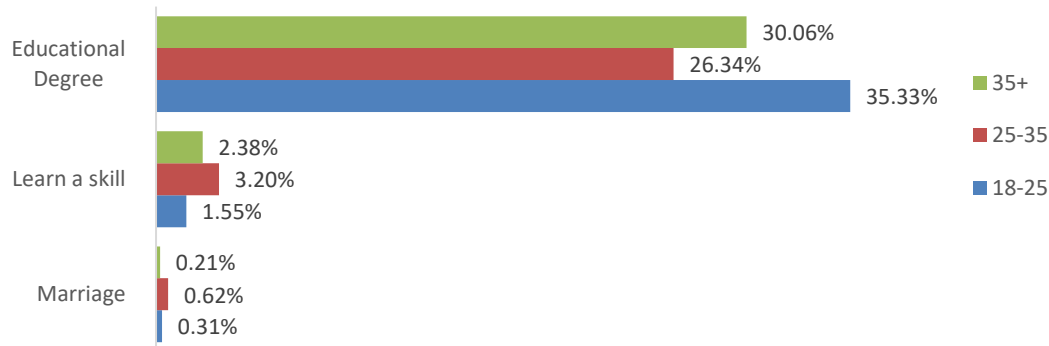
Education can provide women with the opportunity to attain a leadership position in business, politics, or in their social lives; therefore, by educating women, we can empower them to give a voice to other women and push for equal rights.

Our results show that 95% of the respondents believe that education is the best way for women to obtain equal, or at least more, rights. 4% believe that learning a skill is the path to better women’s rights, while 1% feel that marriage will give them the rights they deserve. We delved a bit deeper to see the age groups of each category and found that the youngest age bracket makes up the largest portion of respondents stated that education was the best route for women to get their rights.

What is the best route for women to get their rights?



What is the best route for women to get their rights?

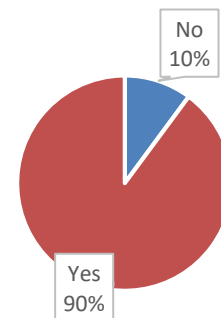


15. Are you open to vocational training to gain a salary?

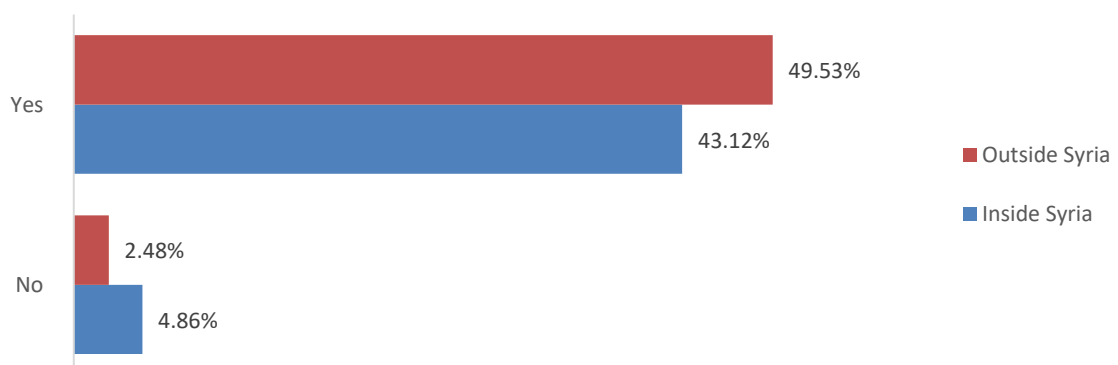
Vocational training is learning a trade through manual or practical activities and are traditionally non-academic. 90% of respondents reported being open to vocational training. We were curious to see what women inside and outside of Syria feel about vocational training and if they would be open to receive such training to gain a salary. This is important for launching initiatives in this respect.

Geographically speaking, women outside Syria are a bit more enthusiastic about vocational training to obtain a monthly salary than women inside Syria. However, as seen in the graph below, those who said no have a larger population of women inside Syria than outside.

Are you open to vocational training to gain a salary?



Are you open to vocational training to gain a salary?



Understandably, the majority of women who said they would not be interested in vocational training already have obtained some level of education (see graph below). As mentioned at the start of this report, the majority of women who took part in this survey are university degree holders; therefore, they will usually command the majority when looking at the correlation between education level and certain responses. Despite this, the information still stands strong and proves to be an interesting talking point.

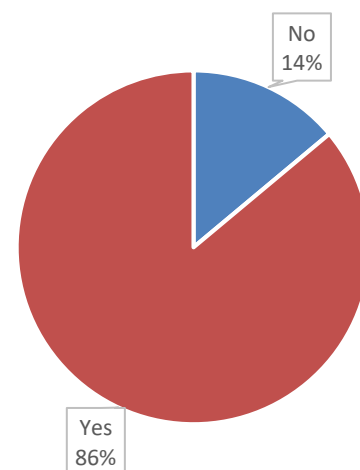
Composition of the respondents who are not open to vocational training



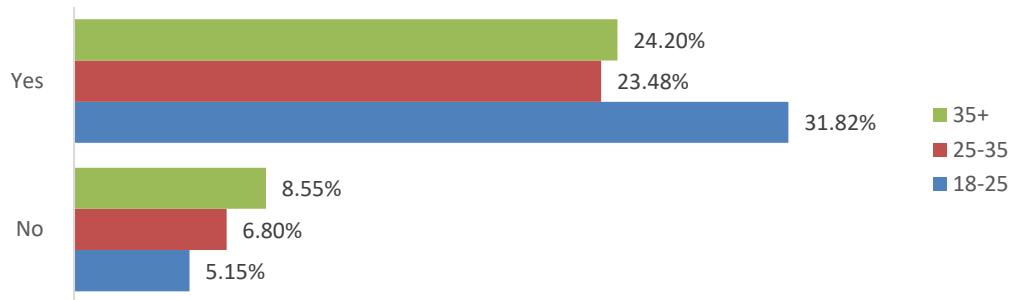
16. Should women work far from home?

We as individuals are always hoping to find work close to home in order to minimize our commute and distance between work and home is generally important regardless of age, gender, and geographic location. However, when we posed this question, we were surprised to see that 86% of women feel that, women should be able work far from home. This can be explained by the need for women to gain an income regardless of the hardships. As with other questions, the youngest segment is most amenable to taking initiative, and they were the biggest component of the respondents who said yes, as well as the smallest of those who said no.

Should women work far from home?

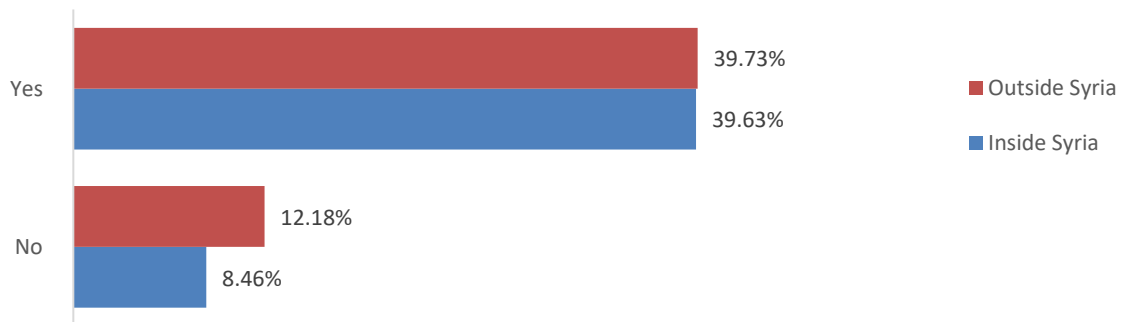


Should women work far from home?



As seen in the graph below, women inside Syria were more open to women working far from home. It is possible that more women inside Syria are open to this because of the turmoil inside Syria, which has led to high rates of unemployment.

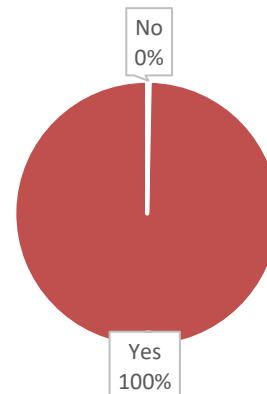
Should women work far from home?



17. Should your daughter go to school?

Results from this question show that 1,003 women believe that their daughter should go to school. Only 3 women disagreed with this statement. It is safe to say that education is a powerful tool and everyone should be equipped with the appropriate tools to be able to shape their futures into what they believe they deserve.

Should your daughter go to school?



Summary and Recommendations

Women are disproportionately affected by conflict and the need to understand Syrian women's perspectives and needs has become critical due to the current civil war in Syria. This study aimed to gain a better understanding of Syrian women's beliefs regarding women's rights, work, education, and vocational skills. The main findings in this study include:

- All 1,006 respondents believe that educating women should be required by law and nearly all of them believe that their daughter should go to school. It is clear that education for women is a strongly held belief regardless of age, geographic location, and education level
- The vast majority of respondents believe that women's rights are important issues, that education is an essential form of empowerment, that women should be able work and attain leadership positions
- Women between the ages of 18 and 25 endorse the highest rate of progressive beliefs that align with women's empowerment and equal rights
- Laws related to marriage and family, including minimum age that a woman can marry, divorce, get fair share of inheritance, and have priority in child custody, are important to a large proportion of Syrian women
- Women are willing to work far from home and women who have attained degrees below the university level are open to vocational training opportunities

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations aim to improve the lives of Syrian women.

- Women need to be provided access to both formal education, as well as vocational training, in order for them to gain employment and financial stability
- Entities that are thinking of creating projects inside Syria or outside Syria with a focus on Syrian refugees will be able to employ Syrian women, as they are motivated to learn in order to get an income
- Human rights organizations and entities that focus on laws and policies should consider working towards changing some of the laws that adversely impact women
- Organizations should develop programs that provide distance learning and internet-based education to allow women who want to learn to do so regardless of their security situation



Published by Bareeq Education and Development in May 2017

www.bareeqeducation.org

Suite 101, Amman Center Building
Queen Misbah Street, Jabal Amman
P.O. Box 2529
Amman 11181, Jordan

Tel: +962-79-226-5906

info@bareeqeducation.org