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The Influence of Gender in Refugee Camp Safety

A Case Study of Moria and Kara Tepe in Lesvos, Greece

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Abstract

This article focuses on the safety of women in the overcrowded and underfunded Moria refugee camp, on the island of Lesvos, Greece. The current refugee crisis in Europe has shown unprecedented numbers of forcibly displaced people, and many women and young girls are forced to flee alone or without male accompaniment. Despite their best efforts, camp managers struggle to improve female refugees' safety in the Moria camp due to lack of adequate resources. Female refugees fear violence and sexual assault there and have virtually no mechanisms through which to report assault or receive assistance. Another camp on Lesvos, Kara Tepe, has a safer environment for women and young girls. A comparative analysis of the two camps alongside relevant scholarship suggests that women's safety in refugee camps can be improved through involvement from local grassroots organizations and refugee women in decision-making processes regarding programming focused on reducing sexual and gender-based violence.

Keywords

gender-based violence, refugee camps, grassroots, Greece, asylum, refugees

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Introduction

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis of displacement, with a record 70.4 million people forcibly displaced across the globe. Of these, 20.2 million are classified as refugees by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR (“Mid-Year Trends” 2019, 3).¹ The term “refugee” was created by the 1951 Geneva Convention, defined as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (“Convention and Protocol” n.d.). Recent global occurrences of increased conflict and violence suggest that in reality the number of refugees is likely much higher than the estimates made by UNHCR.

Women refugees face specific problems related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during their journeys from their home country and while living in camps, often after fleeing this same type of violence in their country of origin (Freedman 2016, 21). Once women reach camps, they are thrust into a structure that is predominantly occupied and controlled by men, with many camps lacking separate sleeping spaces or locked toilet facilities for women (Freedman 2016, 22). SGBV is massively underreported because of the stigma attached to survivors, impeding the ability of women to access resources (Freedman 2016, 23).

This article explores the history of the refugee crisis on the Greek island Lesbos, gender in the refugee crisis, specifically, issues that women face in the Moria camp, and personal recommendations for improving women’s safety in refugee camps. By focusing on the example of refugee camps on the Greek island of Lesbos, this article explores refugee camp policies and their impact on creating safe spaces for women experiencing displacement. This article argues that SGBV is a significant threat to female refugees, and that the UNHCR is not adequately combating this issue with its current policies because impacted women are not involved in the decision-making process. Further, this article establishes the claim that the best way to counter SGBV in Moria, and in refugee camps in general, is for the UNHCR to work with grassroots organizations and people experiencing displacement to develop effective and desirable solutions, as exemplified by the Kara Tepe camp and the Starfish Foundation.

Evidence From Personal Observation

In June 2018, I spent two weeks working as a volunteer in two refugee camps on the island of Lesbos, one operated by UNHCR and the Greek government and the other by the Municipality of Lesbos. Thus, the framework of this article is a review of literature in conversation with my volunteer experiences, mirroring the style of an autoethnography. The initial intention of this article was not to serve as an autoethnography, but I have found that this categorization is the best way to reflect on the literature with supplementary material from my own experiences.² These experiences and observations refer to conversations with managers and other volunteers in both camps, presentations by local nonprofits providing services to camp residents, and patterns I

witnessed for the duration of my volunteer position. The insertion of my own observations into this essay is indicated by use of the first person or lack of a citation from a scholarly source.

Background: Lesbos and the Refugee Crisis

Lesbos is a small Greek island situated in the Aegean Sea, positioned closer to Turkey than to mainland Greece. Turkey is merely 5 nautical miles away from Lesbos at the closest point, and therefore the island has become a popular destination for many refugees fleeing through Turkey, as it offers access to the European Union. Europe, as a whole, has been heavily impacted by the crisis that started in the second half of 2015, as the number of refugees globally has increased by 65 percent over the past 5 years and continues to rise (“Global Trends” 2016). A camp established by the UNHCR in Moria, Lesbos, was created as a hotspot for refugee arrivals in an attempt to accommodate massive numbers of people seeking refuge, and several other camps have developed to meet the needs of refugees on the island.

Lesbos has been especially influenced by the refugee crisis because of its geographical location and proximity to the Middle East and Northern Africa. In the last few months of 2015, 3300 refugees were arriving daily at the island, which started with a population of around 88,000. By the end of 2015, the island’s population had more than quadrupled, with 379,000 refugees residing in camps on Lesbos (“Lesbos Island” 2015, 1). Since the height of the crisis, numbers of refugees on Lesbos have fluctuated, falling to roughly 8000 as of April 2018 and rising again to about 20,000 by February 2020 (Gallagher et al. 2018, 4; Smith 2020). A recent increase in the presence of refugees on the island has heightened to dangerous levels the tensions between locals and those seeking protection. The governor of the north Aegean, Kostas Moutzouris, described the island as a “powder keg ready to explode” because of violent riots and protests by Lesbos locals (Smith 2020). The demographics of the refugee population in Lesbos fluctuate, but many people fleeing the Middle East and Central Africa find their way to Lesbos.³

The Camp in Moria

The camp in Moria is unique from other camps on the island, particularly because it was the “hotspot” initial reception point for refugees in 2015 and has therefore always been over capacity (Malafeka 2018). As it is a reception and identification center (RIC), all displaced people arriving on the island are placed in Moria for registration and identification; after this process is completed, people are released to find accommodation (Malafeka 2018). What makes the camp in Moria unique is the additional burden of identifying and registering all arrivals on the island, as all other camps on the island exist only for accommodation (Malafeka 2018). Most of the people currently residing in the Moria camp are from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, with fewer coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Cameroon (Gallagher 2018, 8). Housing is separated by ethnicity and language when possible in an attempt to decrease conflict between residents, with groupings of tents for Arabic speakers along

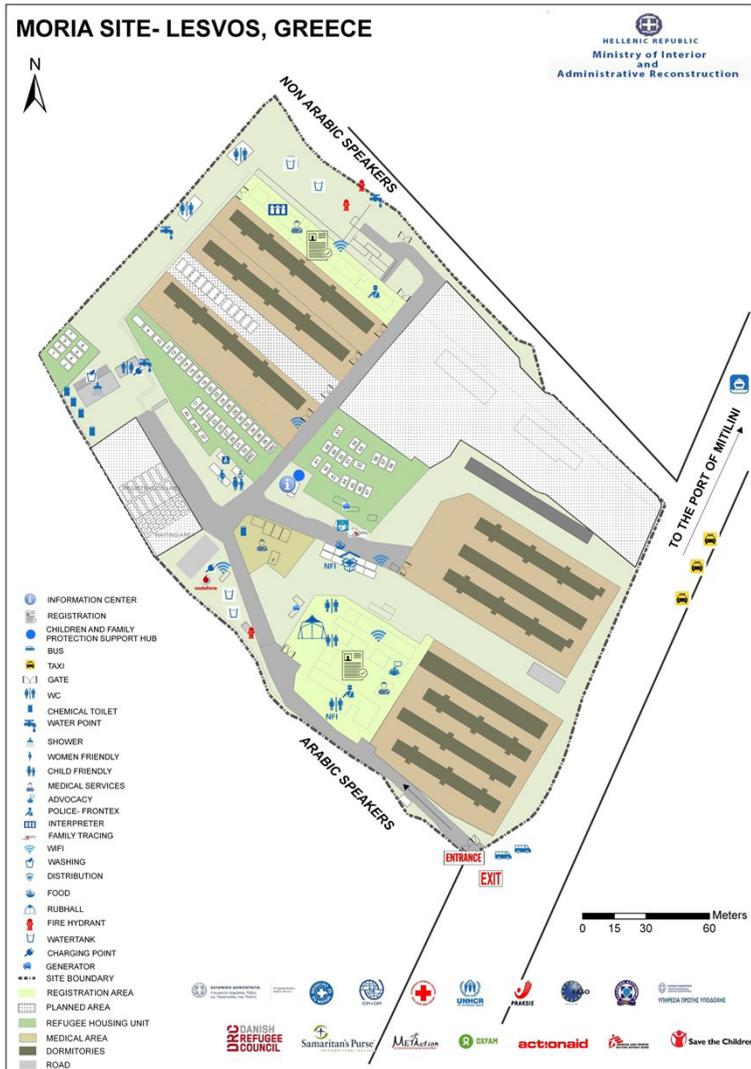


Figure 1. Map of the camp in Moria. (Source: UNHCR, 2016.)

the southern border and non-Arabic speakers on the northern camp border (further details regarding camp layout can be found in Figure 1).

Additionally, next to its northern border the camp has the Olive Grove, which is a second residential site for refugees adjacent to the Moria camp and houses mainly single refugee men, with increasingly more women and families moving in as the main camp is already overwhelmed. The Olive Grove is separate from the UNHCR-run portion of the camp and benefits from the presence of a variety of nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs), but the residents of both areas are in constant contact with each other (“What Is the Olive Grove?” 2018). Physical altercations are commonplace in the Olive Grove as men fight for limited resources, especially electricity and energy, and are often divided along ethnic and racial lines. Inside the Moria camp, residents usually separate themselves by country of origin and similar cultures to create a sense of community and avoid conflict, but this is not always possible in the Olive Grove because of the close quarters. Thus, Arab and African men tend to have conflict with each other, leading to unsafe conditions for others living there and for aid workers.

Facing constant variations in population size, the Moria camp continues to be overwhelmed. According to the director of the camp, Moria is the most overcrowded place in the world if the number of people living there is divided by the square meters of the camp (Magra 2018). The camp, which is built in an old Greek military base, is only meant to safely and adequately house around 2000 people, but roughly 19,000 currently reside there as refugees (Bell 2020). This is almost ten times the intended amount of residents, according to official numbers (Bell 2020).⁴ Additionally, in 2018 the camp in Moria was almost shut down after the regional governor, Chrisinana Kalogirou, issued a notice that gave the Greek government, in partnership with the UNHCR, 30 days to improve camp conditions described as “dangerous for public health and the environment” (Stubley 2018). An inspection of the camp by public health officials found broken sewage pipes, an “uncontrollable amount of waste,” and high risk for disease transmission (Stubley 2018). These conditions have been met with great frustration by camp residents, some of whom wrote “Welcome to Prison Moria” along one of the outer walls. The possibility of unrest and incidents of violence, some of which have led to deaths of asylum seekers, have resulted in regular presence of Greek police inside and around the camp in Moria (Jauhiainen 2017).

Kara Tepe

The camp in Moria is not the only operational refugee camp on the island of Lesbos. Only miles away from the Moria camp, another camp by the name of Kara Tepe delivers aid to vulnerable families through directed resources and local leadership. Kara Tepe is an overflow site for the Moria camp, created by the municipality of Lesbos in April 2015, and never exceeds its maximum occupancy of 1,200 people (Mavrikos-Adamou 2019). The camp is managed by a site manager appointed by local government, in conjunction with Movement on the Ground, a nonprofit started in November 2015 by Dutch volunteers who were present for the beginning of the refugee crisis on Lesbos and wanted to take organized action (Mavrikos-Adamou 2019). While the foundation is Dutch in origin, it is part of a collective of Greek nonprofits based in Lesbos, working together to address the continuing humanitarian crisis by maintaining a consistent grassroots-inspired presence on the island. Each project created by Movement on the Ground has its own project manager and team members who are often residents of the camp, employees of the nonprofit, or local/international volunteers (“Annual Report 2018” 2018). The individual groups are created by people working on the ground in the crisis; the nonprofit gains direct insight into the issues both refugees and volunteers are facing in Lesbos. Movement on the Ground relies on funding purely from

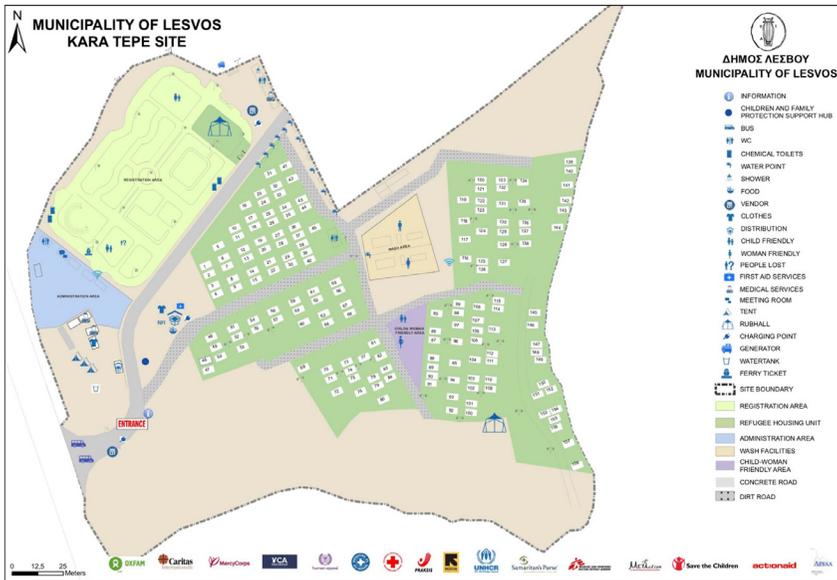


Figure 2. Map of Kara Tepe. (Source: UNHCR, 2016.)

donations through fundraising efforts and grants and utilizes around 300 long-term volunteers per year to assist in programming at no cost to the nonprofit (“Annual Report 2018” 2018). All new arrivals to the island are registered at the Moria camp, as it is the official reception center for Lesvos, and those who are considered the most vulnerable by camp officials overseeing the registration process, such as families with young children or the elderly, are chosen for transfer to Kara Tepe (“Annual Report 2018” 2018). The general structure of Kara Tepe is far more spacious than that of Moria, given that camp officials are able to control the number of residents; Figure 2, a map of Kara Tepe, shows approximately 5 meters between housing units. Contrastingly, the housing units shown in Figure 1 in the camp in Moria are separated by perhaps 1 or 2 meters.

The founders of the organization approached building the camp with a novel framework: to treat the campus as a music festival. Workers built a space with housing, food, wash facilities, and entertainment, all of which are needs of concert-goers and human beings in general. Kara Tepe has Isobox storage units that are used as houses for individual families, separate and secure wash facilities for men and women, and safe spaces for women to sew and talk about the struggles they face as female refugees. The camp is called a CampUs, emphasizing community and solidarity, and the people living there are called “residents,” instead of refugees. This specific language used by camp staff is meant to bring a sense of humanity back to people who are generally considered refugees before being considered human.

Gender in the Refugee Crisis

SGBV During Female Refugees' Journeys

Female refugees face unique challenges during their journeys to seek asylum and once they reside within camps, specifically, SGBV. This can take place in the form of sexual assault, rape, or violent abuse by uniformed officers, other refugees, and/or family members. The stigma attached to this type of violence discourages women from reporting what has happened to them and thus detracts from their access to resources (Freedman 2016, 22). The conflicts that women are fleeing usually have some elements of SGBV in addition to armed conflict, such as the civil war in Sierra Leone, when 94 percent of displaced households reported at least one family member having experienced sexual assault (Parish 2017).

Even if women are fortunate enough to escape the situations in their country of origin, they still face similar issues during their travels. Women are targeted by smugglers who force them to pay for transportation across land or water through sexual favors, and often are threatened by men traveling in the same group, even by male family members (Parish 2017; Freedman 2016, 22). A UNICEF study from 2017 that surveyed migrant women and children in Libya found that almost half of the people interviewed had experienced SGBV before arriving in a camp, often at several different locations and times. This same study found that if they have access, increasingly more female refugees take birth-control shots before and during their journey to avoid pregnancy from rape, and that one-third of the rapes reported by women were carried out by a uniformed official (Parish 2017).⁵

The European Union has done nothing to deter, and has even exacerbated, instances of SGBV during female refugees' journeys. More countries, like Hungary, have closed their borders and therefore increased the use of smugglers, which in turn leaves women more vulnerable to what has been deemed "survival sex," in reference to women being forced to use sex as a form of payment (Freedman 2016, 23; Cotterill et al. 2016, 17). Additionally, police and security forces working for governments have no repercussions for the abuse they inflict because survivors have nowhere to report to about the violence they have experienced. Further exacerbating this problem is the lack of clear policies detailing how countries or individual agencies should act if they are told about a case of SGBV (Freedman 2016, 23).

SGBV in Refugee Camps

Once women arrive in the country through which they will claim asylum, they reside in camps that lack proper security measures for female residents, which is often due to inadequate resources. For example, hygiene facilities are often not separated by gender, nor are they well lit, leading women to avoid showering or using the toilet after the sun sets and even sometimes during the day (Parish 2017). Additionally, most people reside in tents that spread for miles alongside camps without specified areas for males and females and without locks, creating an insecure situation for women living in structures built from tarps. A survey of nearly 300 women residing in nine different

Greek camps found that 64 percent of women felt they could not shower or use the restroom whenever they wanted, mainly citing security concerns as their reason why (Cotterill et al. 2016, 21). Sixty-nine percent of the same women interviewed stated that they did not have a secure lock on their shelter, 46 percent responded negatively when asked whether they felt safe in the camp, and almost 40 percent revealed that they did not feel safe going to the toilet⁶ (Cotterill et al. 2016, 33, 34). These staggering numbers demonstrate the unsafe reality women face while living in refugee camps, and conditions that often result in SGBV.

When women experience sexual violence in refugee camps, they will not always report it: A 2016 survey of female camp residents on mainland Greece asked women about experiences with violence inside camps, and not a single woman reported surviving sexual violence in this context (Cotterill et al. 2016, 46). Cotterill and colleagues determined that of the 60 service providers in camps, only 74 percent had heard of and were aware of SGBV taking place in the camp where they worked (Cotterill et al. 2016, 47). Further, while 65.5 percent of women privately interviewed in this same study reported hearing about SGBV inside the camp from their female peers, only 17 percent of the same women reported ever experiencing it themselves (Cotterill et al. 2016, 46). This could suggest that women are hesitant to discuss SGBV even in secure environments, such as a private interview, which would contribute to an explanation for the underreporting of SGBV incidents in refugee camps (Freedman 2016, 23). Additional barriers for reporting SGBV in camps include stigma, shame, fear of retribution from the abuser, language, not knowing to whom or where to report, and fear of officials or police (Freedman 2016, 23). SGBV can also take the form of domestic violence, which complicates women's choice to report because of the possibility of having to continue their journey alone or as the only guardian of children (Freedman 2016, 23). The issue of domestic violence cannot be addressed through the creation of better hygiene facilities and is difficult to obtain data on because of the privacy of family life and women's decisions not to report domestic violence. Women have many factors to consider when choosing whether or not to report SGBV to camp staff.

There are several factors that influence variances in reporting of SGBV in camps and deter women from seeking aid and resources. The 2016 study of camps on mainland Greece reported that in one camp, women who are subjected to and report SGBV are sent to a shelter away from the camp for a few weeks, and upon their return are stigmatized for having been abused and reporting it (Cotterill et al. 2016, 51). The same study also indicated that women were unlikely to report domestic violence to camp officials out of fear that it would negatively impact their relocation process, which further complicates the ability of camp managers to address SGBV (Cotterill et al. 2016, 47). A group of Somali women reported being told by Greek authorities that "they themselves presented a risk" because they were females traveling without male family, instead of receiving the protection they deserved and required (Cotterill et al. 2016, 51). These examples demonstrate the deterrents women can potentially face if they speak up in an attempt to receive aid, and therefore why women may not always report violence when it occurs.

When women do report occurrences of SGBV, there are challenges to receiving

basic post-assault medical assistance. A fundamental aspect of post-sexual-assault care for women includes testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs); across nine refugee settlements on mainland Greece, only one organization operating within the various settlements could provide swab tests for STIs and just two organizations had the capacity to offer blood tests to detect STIs (Cotterill et al. 2016, 11, 57). Contraception access in refugee camps in Greece is startlingly low, with only 12 percent of interviewed women aware of how to find condoms in camps, and emergency contraception in the case of reported rapes is not given to survivors of marital rape (Cotterill et al. 2016, 55, 57). Additionally, information about resources for survivors is often distributed in pamphlets with virtually no translation services for those who speak an underrepresented language or who are illiterate (Cotterill et al. 2016, 57). Pregnancy and STIs are highly possible results of rape, but the necessary resources to combat these potential issues are not made available in most Greek refugee camps (Cotterill et al. 2016, 57).

Issues Related to Gender in the Moria Camp

The camp in Moria notoriously struggles with high rates of SGBV; the Greek Coordinator of Médecins Sans Frontières reported that they have seen an increase in the number of sexual assaults reported in the Moria camp to about one case per week, many of them involving young girls (Da Silva 2018). The UNHCR issued a report that found at least 28% of women interviewed experienced SGBV after arriving in Greece, highlighting the Moria camp as the most prominent location for SGBV concerns in all of the Greek refugee camps (“Refugee Women” 2018). Commonly referred to as “the jungle” by camp residents, the Olive Grove is feared by many as a site where abuse commonly occurs (Da Silva 2018). The women’s section of the Moria camp, detailed in the following, is situated right beside the Olive Grove and does not allow men inside.

Women who are traveling alone, are pregnant, or are minors are housed in a distinct portion of the old military complex, in a wing titled Section C, right next to Section B housing male minors without family. These sections resemble cages because they are gated enclosures made of chain-link fence with volunteer guards stationed outside to let people in or out. In the two weeks I spent in the camp, a majority of the time a male was guarding Section C. Some of the women who are older, pregnant, or have newborn babies have an actual house-like shelter with a raised foundation and hard flooring, but these rooms are not air conditioned and are overcrowded. The remainder of the women live in tents on ground covered in loose rocks, and all of them spend most of their day inside this gated enclosure unless they ride a bus or walk to buy food from the main city, Mytilene, roughly 8 kilometers from the camp. A limited number of women are protected in Section C, leaving many women to live alone or with family in tents along the exterior of the camp and in the Olive Grove alongside the single men. Even with this extra protection, women in Section C still must leave their gated area to use the portable toilets and hygiene facilities, which are described by UNHCR officials as “no-go zones after dark” (“Refugee Women” 2018).

Instances of SGBV are heightened by hygiene facilities that are not separated by

gender, equipped with adequate locks, or monitored by security (“Refugee Women” 2018). One woman from Iran residing in the Moria camp detailed in an interview her experience of a man attempting to force the door open while she was in a female changing room, which was situated right next to the men’s changing rooms (Cotterill et al. 2016, 18). Another woman told UNHCR officials that she had not showered in two months from fear of being assaulted, and many women wear adult diapers to save them from having to leave their shelter during the night (“Refugee Women” 2018; Squires 2019). During my work in the Moria camp, there was not a secured area that was only for *all* women living in the camp because Section C is restricted to women deemed vulnerable, which leaves the rest of the women residing nearby in conditions described by the UNHCR as “unsuitable” with “inadequate security” (“Refugee Women” 2018).

Recommendations for Decreasing Occurrences of SGBV in Refugee Camps

The first, and perhaps most crucial, step of countering SGBV in refugee camps is acknowledging the problem at hand, something the previous director of the camp in Moria, Ionnis Balbakakis, was unwilling to do (Da Silva 2018). Speaking with a Greek news outlet, Balbakakis explicitly rejected data and narrative evidence from nonprofit aid workers working in the Moria camp that proved SGBV to be an increasingly large issue for residents, falsely stating that only a “very small” number of “rape” cases had happened in the camp (Da Silva 2018). Balbakakis’s denial of the issue of SGBV in the Moria camp set the tone for efforts to address SGBV, in that resources were not allocated to preventing this type of abuse. Hygiene facilities, most importantly restrooms, remain unsafe for women even during the day (“Refugee Women” 2018). The 30 medical and psychological staff members at the camp in Moria operate in three rooms that lack privacy and security for women to share the abuse they face, and people wait in lines all day in the hopes of seeing medical staff for health issues (“Refugee Women” 2018). A large problem faced by refugee camp coordinators and directors is a lack of resources, especially humane living spaces, food, educational activities, translators, and other camp operations staff (Cotterill et al. 2016, 51). The results of inadequate resources are directly tied to occurrences of SGBV and must be addressed to decrease instances of SGBV. The following subsections explore other possible avenues for reducing SGBV in refugee camps, specifically, the increased use of local grassroots organizations and more input from women experiencing SGBV, in creating effective policies and programs.

Local Grassroots Movements

Kara Tepe has a much higher standard of living and fewer instances of SGBV than the camp in Moria, and this is primarily because the group running the camp is locally based and organizes the campus around the idea of treating refugees like humans first. Residents of the camp are directly involved in programming efforts and distributions, with one example being the chai hut that is run by residents and open

throughout the day. Clothing distribution is also done in an innovative way: Instead of having people wait in line for packets of clothing, residents are allotted coupons to redeem clothing, the number of which depends on the size of their family unit. After receiving these coupons, residents can go to the clothing distribution center, which is organized similarly to a clothing store, and shop for properly fitting clothing that appeals to them, using the coupons to “buy” the clothing. This system restores autonomy to residents, as they have a choice in their physical appearance and can choose outfits they like. In spaces similar to the chai hut and clothing distribution center, residents are given the opportunity to make their own choices and create a sense of community with fellow residents. The atmosphere of community fostered by programs in Kara Tepe is not found in the camp in Moria and is an important contributor to the smaller number of SGBV cases in Kara Tepe.

According to Romy Listo, “Gender-based violence in refugee and displaced person camps is ... complex and contextual, and irreducible to a single problem with a single solution” (2018, 176). In comparing the two camps, one can see that this statement is in fact true; the contexts of Kara Tepe versus Moria could not be more opposite, and unsurprisingly, Movement on the Ground has been far more successful than UNHCR in providing safe living situations because it is a local grassroots organization. In a space like Kara Tepe, the situations from which SGBV would arise, such as unlit facilities and pathways, lack of separation between facilities, and lack of security, do not exist in the way they do in the Moria camp. Families have their own housing units with doors and solid walls, as opposed to a flimsy tent or tarp, and the camp is adequately staffed to provide a higher level of security around hygiene facilities. According to a UNHCR report, behavioral norms that typically prevent people from channeling anger into violent action break down in situations of crisis, like in the Moria camp, and the frustration of camp life leads to violence against other refugees and family members (Obradovic 2015). A 2017 survey of more than 500 asylum seekers on Lesbos found that 25 percent of camp residents in Moria felt they were “well treated” at the camp, while nearly double that amount, 46 percent, of those interviewed in Kara Tepe felt the same way (Jauhiainen 2017). In the same study, the camp in Moria was found to have “especially poor” living conditions compared to Kara Tepe, with the report citing unrest and violence occurring on days when rare provisions, such as chicken, were distributed in the Moria camp (Jauhiainen 2017). These findings suggest that the instability and insecurity asylum seekers face in the Moria camp due to lack of resources have the possibility of resulting in increased occurrences of violence. This same instability does not seem to exist in Kara Tepe because of how resources are managed and how people are treated within the camp, and this also contributes to the far lower proportion of cases of SGBV in comparison. Data on levels of violence in both the Moria camp and Kara Tepe have not been established in scholarly literature, but reviews of news sources reporting on the situation on Lesbos, as well as reports from UNHCR, consistently depict the camp in Moria more negatively than Kara Tepe (Jauhiainen 2017).

Further, in 2003 the UNHCR outlined causes and risk factors for SGBV, citing the root of this type of violence as, most often, men trying to regain a sense of control and

security over their own situation by inflicting violence upon women, who are afflicted by gender discrimination and societal norms that deem women subordinate to men (“Sexual and Gender Based Violence” 2003). Specific risk factors, stemming from the lack of security men feel while they are displaced, are divided into the following categories: individual risks, social norms and culture, legal frameworks and host country practices, war and armed conflict, and situations faced by refugees and asylum seekers (“Sexual and Gender Based Violence” 2003). Examples of risk factors for SGBV relating to refugee camps include overcrowding and communal shelters, unavailability of food and other resources, individual loss of security, the design of camp facilities, and lack of alternatives to help individuals cope with changes in their socioeconomic status (“Sexual and Gender Based Violence” 2003). These risk factors and resulting occurrences of SGBV are reflected in the camp in Moria and Kara Tepe, and are outlined in detail in Table 1. The evidence in Table 1 suggests that the camp in Moria is more likely to have higher instances of SGBV than Kara Tepe based on the UNHCR’s risk factors for SGBV.

This is not to suggest that general violence and SGBV specifically do not ever occur in Kara Tepe, as the privacy of family life obscures the ability to obtain data on domestic violence, but the causes or risk factors for SGBV outlined by the UNHCR are far less present in Kara Tepe than in the Moria camp. Some of these risk factors include the collapse of social structures, overcrowding and multihousehold dwellings, and unavailability of food and other basic resources for survival (“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” 2003). Kara Tepe has a well-established social structure, a limit on the number of residents, individual family housing, and adequate resources to feed and shelter its residents, unlike the Moria camp. According to a UNHCR report, this combination of positive factors reduces the chances for SGBV to occur (“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” 2003). Prevention of SGBV in the form of domestic violence can occur through employment and funding opportunities for men and women to help reestablish a sense of social order and stability, based on information gathered by UNHCR, but more research is needed in this area to reach a verifiable conclusion (“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence” 2003).

In addition to the differences in facilities and resources between the Moria camp and Kara Tepe, there exists an intangible factor that distinguishes the two camps: the atmosphere. Walking into the Moria camp, I was first assaulted by an overwhelming smell of sewage and garbage as I stepped over the flooding sewage drain. As I continued further into the camp and adjusted to the smell, I noticed the mass crowds of people waiting in lines or just standing with nothing to do. Residents I spoke with described boredom as a big issue in the camp, as well as a general sense of hopelessness. The streets of the camp were lined with garbage and overcrowded with deteriorating makeshift tents, and someone was always stationed at the entrance to regulate the movement of residents outside of the camp. In sharp contrast, entering the Kara Tepe camp was similar to entering any typical residential area: There were clean paved sidewalks, plentiful green space, and fresh air. Additionally, residents of Kara Tepe could come and go as they pleased, with volunteers stationed at the entrance to make sure the only people entering the camp were residents or volunteers, but not to prevent

Table 1. Presence of UNHCR SGBV Risk Factors in the Camp in Moria and Kara Tepe.

UNHCR SGBV risk factor	The camp in Moria	Kara Tepe
Lack of alternatives to cope with changes in socioeconomic status	Limited psychosocial support services are available to male residents to practice coping with stress and improve emotional well-being; overcrowding complicates access to programming for all residents (van der Woerd 2018). Access to mental health professionals is extremely limited, with 30 total medical staff for nearly 20,000 residents ("Refugee Women" 2018).	This camp remains at or under capacity with single-family household units.
Design and social structure of camp (overcrowded, multi-household dwellings, communal shelter)	This camp is overcrowded, nearly five times over capacity; dormitories are multi-household dwellings.	This camp remains at or under capacity with single-family household units.
Design of services and facilities	Overcrowding affects the adequacy of housing in this camp. The Olive Grove housing does not benefit from security patrols, and crowded conditions in the camp restrict possible outreach and prevention programs to reduce SGBV ("Refugee Women" 2018).	This camp has award-winning housing (Jauhiainen 2017). As shown in Figure 2, housing is spaced out with roughly 6 meters of space between family units, with plentiful lighting for the area.
Unavailability of food	Residents have to wait in line for food distribution, often totaling 8 hours of waiting per day (Harlan 2020).	Food is delivered to families at their housing units weekly (Pazianou 2016).
Dependence	Residents are dependent on UNHCR and NGO officials working in the camp to provide basic necessities.	Residents are dependent on the Municipality of Lesvos and NGO officials working in the camp to provide basic necessities.

residents from leaving. While Kara Tepe is still a refugee camp and is thus not a desirable destination for any person, it provides a clean and safe place to stay while families attempt to rebuild their lives by applying for asylum and hopefully being resettled. The campus has murals and other artwork throughout, as well as a colorfully painted school with a soccer field and chai stand operated by residents, reflecting Movement on the Ground's effective aid work and mission to help displaced people feel human again after being designated refugees. Of course, the caveat to this approach lies in Movement on the Ground acting as a private organization that has the capability to choose who it assists, unlike UNHCR, which has the responsibility to provide housing for everyone classified under refugee status seeking aid. The flexibility that allows Movement on the Ground to restrict how many residents it has is a large part of its success, and this cannot be used critically against UNHCR since it has a much larger population to accommodate and insufficient resources to do so adequately. The situation in the Moria camp is made even worse because nonprofits and the UNHCR have to maneuver within a capitalist system that encourages governments to step back from their obligation to provide aid, and to put more pressure on nonprofits and international organizations to do so instead (Franck 2018, 199).

Creating Effective Policies Through Increased Input from Local Women

The research suggests that perhaps the most effective way to create programs to prevent SGBV and provide resources to refugee women is by gaining more input from the women the programs are targeted toward (Robbers and Morgan 2017, 69). International norms and policies related to women's rights as refugees have not been implemented adequately or equally, as they typically do not address the issues that female refugees face detailed by this analysis (Freedman 2010, 175). Part of the issue lies in the fact that programs are often meant to target women through particular harmful gender norms as vulnerable victims, thus leading to women not having a voice in the decision-making process (Freedman 2010, 193). A massive literature review of nearly 1500 articles relating to sexual violence against refugee women found overwhelming evidence for the notion that successful SGBV interventions will "engage community members in their design and delivery, address harmful gender norms through education and advocacy, and facilitate strong cooperation between stakeholders" in order to counter SGBV and maximize limited resources (Robbers and Morgan 2017, 69).

Further, the previously mentioned study examining refugee camps throughout Greece found that some men were conscious of their violence and wanted assistance, but could not find adequate resources (Cotterill et al. 2016, 47). Consumption of alcohol exacerbates violence inflicted by men on their female family members, and men residing in refugee camps drink as a coping mechanism because of minimal access to mental health care ("Empowerment Program" 2019). Part of an effective solution would require helping men find psychological support to stop targeting toward women their frustration and anger at their general situations. Resolving this issue would only be possible by taking input from the men who are behaving violently as to what kinds of resources and programs could help counter their actions, which studies show

is best done through discussions about anxiety that manifest into conversations about violence and aggression (Cotterill et al. 2016, 47). The effectiveness of this type of intervention could be tested through a study with several groups receiving different resources, such as men who request resources and receive them, men who receive resources requested for them by women, and men who receive resources based on secondary literature. Mental health resources in refugee camps are highly restricted and in some cases nonexistent, and improving the presence of mental health care is an integral step in reducing violence against refugee women.

An example of a grassroots organization following a model of input from local women is the Starfish Foundation. The organization began in Lesvos in 2015 with a local restaurant owner providing food for arriving refugees and a transit camp built in a parking lot, in direct response to the flood of people landing (“The Story” 2017). Once the flow of people slowed in 2016, the foundation evolved to focus on several key programs, such as providing mobile phones to unaccompanied minors to allow them to contact their families, strollers to families with babies and toddlers, and an empowerment program for women living in the Moria Camp (“Mobile Phone” 2017; “300 Strollers” 2018; “Empowerment Program” 2019). The foundation was created and is operated by local residents of Lesvos, and has sustained a high level of involvement with the refugee population on the island.

The women’s self-defense and empowerment program created by the Starfish Foundation was piloted in 2018 and officially began in February 2019 as a weekend event with 3½-hour courses offered to 44 refugee women by a female Greek instructor. Translators in Arabic, Farsi, and French were present, and the content taught women basic self-defense techniques and, most importantly, how to say “no” assertively in exploitative or possibly dangerous situations. In response to positive feedback by the participants, the Starfish Foundation will be offering more regularly scheduled classes and training local women to lead these classes in the future (“Empowerment Program” 2019).

Another aspect of the women’s self-defense and empowerment program will be empowerment through sharing. Women had the opportunity to share their experiences with their peers and create a bond of shared trauma during breaks in the self-defense portion of the classes, and the organizers of the program saw this happening and decided to add another branch to the self-defense courses (“Empowerment Program” 2019). The foundation is in discussion with representatives of varying nationalities to organize themed sessions in an effort to provide a space for group sharing, and will extend this idea to all of its future programming (“Empowerment Program” 2019). The Starfish Foundation is a prime example of a grassroots organization that recognizes beneficiaries’ needs, formulates programs around these needs, engages beneficiaries in discussions about programs, and improves programming based on the feedback received. This model should be utilized by other grassroots movements, if they are not already doing so, and should be implemented in the Moria camp to empower women and improve their safety.

Conclusion

The conditions in the Moria camp for women, and all people residing there, are inadequate and contribute to heightening cases of SGBV. Cases of SGBV are steadily increasing, and the camp struggles to remain open despite the environmental and health risks to the refugees residing there, in addition to the surrounding community (Da Silva 2018). Women travel hundreds of miles and encounter dangerous situations to reach what they hope is a safe environment in which they can heal and receive aid to begin to rebuild their lives (“Refugee Women” 2018). Once they reach Lesbos and are placed in the Moria camp, women are thrust into an insecure living situation that leaves them exposed to the same threats of SGBV they faced during their journey to the island.

Studies have shown that there are effective ways to counter SGBV through local grassroots organization involvement and increased presence of women’s voices in decision-making processes related to programs. Additionally, an increased presence of mental health care is necessary to help men cope with the trauma they have experienced and in turn to reduce violence against women that is a result of misdirected anger. The Kara Tepe camp shows the possibility of providing humane housing conditions for refugees during their asylum application and resettlement process with the proper utilization of resources and comprehensive planning. The Starfish Foundation exemplifies another important aspect of providing aid to refugees: taking into consideration the spoken needs and feedback from beneficiaries to improve programming. The UNHCR needs to follow suit from Movement on the Ground, the Starfish Foundation, and other successful nonprofit groups in order to provide female refugees, and all refugees, with the safety, dignity, and empowerment that they deserve.

Biography

Allison Pail holds a bachelor’s degree in history and comparative cultures and politics from Michigan State University, and she has a wide variety of academic interests, including American history, refugee and displacement studies, and Asian studies. In June 2021, Pail earned her Masters of Science from the University of Oxford in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies. Address correspondence to Allison Pail, Michigan State University, Berkey Hall, 509 E. Circle Dr., Rm. 307, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA. alliebipail@gmail.com.

Notes

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1. Numbers presented in this article are reflective of data available at the time it was written and edited for publication (Summer 2020). In the time since this article was accepted for publication, the refugee camp in Moria was destroyed by fires. All information presented in this article pertains to the situation on Lesbos before the camp in Moria was destroyed in September 2020.

2. This article was initially written for a class capstone at Michigan State University as a student paper, and was not intended for publication. All personal observations are subject to my own personal biases and no formal surveying of camp residents or staff occurred. Any reference to volunteer experiences in the first person are reflections on my own observations.
3. I refer to this camp as “the camp in Moria” or “the Moria camp” instead of as “Moria” alone, because local people in the village of Moria have expressed frustration in having their home only known as a refugee camp, and I do not wish to contribute to this misconception.
4. Estimates of the Moria camp’s housing capabilities vary depending on the source, some as low as 400 people. The 2000-person cap is one of the more generous estimates and one of the most commonly cited, and therefore the number used for this article.
5. The World Health Organization estimates that 35 percent of women worldwide have experienced SGBV at some point during their lives (“Facts and Figures” 2019). Female refugees are an especially vulnerable population for SGBV because of lack of reporting mechanisms, power dynamics between male officials and police forces, and the potential situation of traveling with abusers. This does not equate to people from certain regions of the world being inherently more vulnerable or more violent; rather, the lack of agency for refugee populations, especially women, exacerbates concerns related to SGBV.
6. Those who did feel safe going to the toilet often had toilets annexed to or inside their shelters, instead of separate facilities away from their place of residence (Cotterill et al. 2016, 33).

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