

# PREVENTING SEXUAL EXPLOITATION & VIOLENCE: AN ASSESSMENT

KURDISTAN  
NOVEMBER 2020



IMPLEMENTED BY THE LOTUS FLOWER  
[WWW.THELOTUSFLOWER.ORG](http://WWW.THELOTUSFLOWER.ORG)



## INTRODUCTION

Since the ISIS attacks in 2014, thousands of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees continue to reside in primitive living conditions in camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. With many individuals still healing from the trauma of being held as sex slaves and subjected to rape, trafficking, and torture by the terrorist group, they now live in fear of continued abuse as incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are widespread throughout displacement camps.

The Covid-19 health pandemic has negatively impacted our community in a variety of ways. Since the beginning of the crisis, we have witnessed an increase in SEA incidents as the enforced lockdown, isolation, and minimal humanitarian services exacerbated the stressor of living in protracted displacement.

In addition to the physical effects of SEA, there are many long-term social, cultural, and health ramifications including STDs, psychological trauma, depression, and suicide. The situation is amplified by the lack of effective reporting mechanisms for SEA cases and legal services to seek justice. This has been a concern since the camps first opened as trading sex for food or other forms of support has become a routine survival tactic.

### **Since the spread of COVID-19 in the region, we have seen an increase in sexual exploitation.**

Victims of SEA are often afraid to report such abuse for fear of losing material assistance. Societal stigma is another reason why women and girls are afraid to report the incident as they fear being rejected by their family and discriminated against by their wider community. The threat of retribution or retaliation is another common deterrent to reporting SEA. Additional barriers such as language, literacy, and the limited capacity of existing service providers makes the situation more critical.

## AT A GLANCE

**79.5M**

people are forcibly  
displaced globally

**52%**

of IDPs are women

**35%**

of women have  
reported that they've  
experienced sexual  
violence

**60-  
75%**

estimated percentage of  
women who experience  
sexual violence (reported  
& unreported)

As illustrated by the varying percentages, it is incredibly difficult to confirm the rates of sexual violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, among women. Displacement is particularly hard for women and girls and as such, sexual violence is even more difficult to track. Although sexual assault is common, many do not feel comfortable or safe to disclose these incidents. Without accurate data through effective reporting mechanisms, it is nearly impossible to know how many women experience all manners of sexual violence and as such, NGOs and other service providers cannot provide targeted interventions.

# METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the course of 6 days in September 2020, the Lotus Flower team conducted an in-person assessment in one refugee camp (Domiz 2) and two IDP camps (Essyan and Rwanga). The questions were a combination of quantitative and qualitative with the goal to gain an insight into the communities' level of awareness and understanding of sexual exploitation and abuse as well as existing reporting mechanisms.

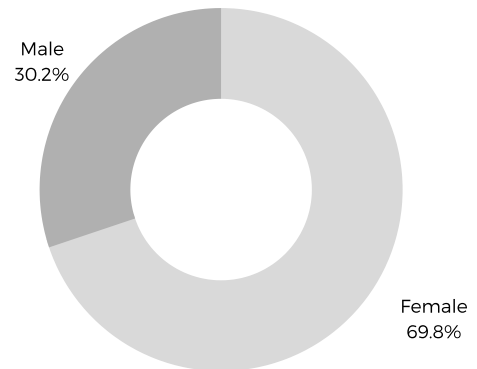
The Lotus Flower team provided information on SEA at the end of the interview.

## TOTAL RESPONDENTS PER CAMP

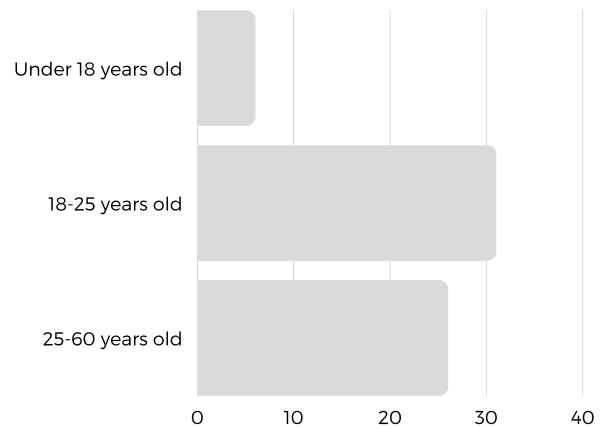
- Domiz 2 (Refugees): 23
- Essyan (IDPs): 20
- Rwanga (IDPs): 20

**TOTAL RESPONDENTS: 63**

## Gender Breakdown of Respondents



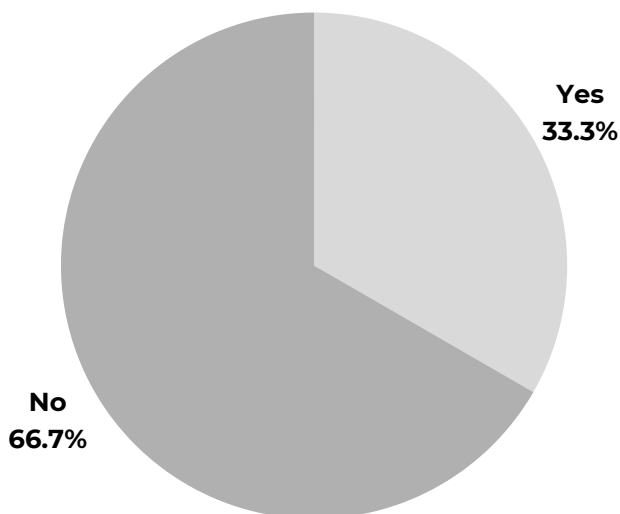
## Age Breakdown of Respondents



# KEY FINDINGS

# 76%

of respondents have no idea what sexual exploitation and abuse is.



## DO YOU KNOW WHAT SEA IS?

All respondents were asked if they knew what SEA is and if so, to please give an example.

Those who said 'yes' stated that SEA is:

- Abuse from a position of power
- Exploitation by a psychiatrist towards a psychologist
- Sexual exploitation in exchange for financial resources
- Exploitation of employees by their manager
- Exploitation of teenagers, either verbally or physically

## HAVE YOU WITNESSED SEA BY NGO WORKERS OR SERVICE PROVIDERS TOWARDS BENEFICIARIES?

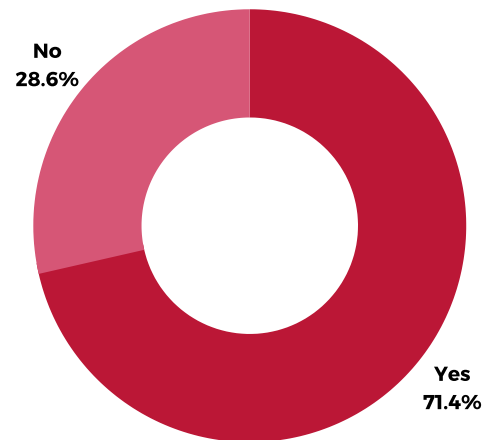
Only 33% of respondents said yes, they had seen or heard about an SEA incident perpetrated by a humanitarian worker or other service provider towards a beneficiary. They had heard about it from friends, close relatives, siblings, and/or neighbors.

Those who said no indicated that people prefer to not share this information with anyone due to the stigma around such an incident and fear of losing necessary services.

## DID YOU KNOW THAT SERVICE PROVIDERS CANNOT RECEIVE ANY FAVORS FROM BENEFICIARIES FOR PROVIDING A SPECIFIC SERVICE IN THE CAMP?

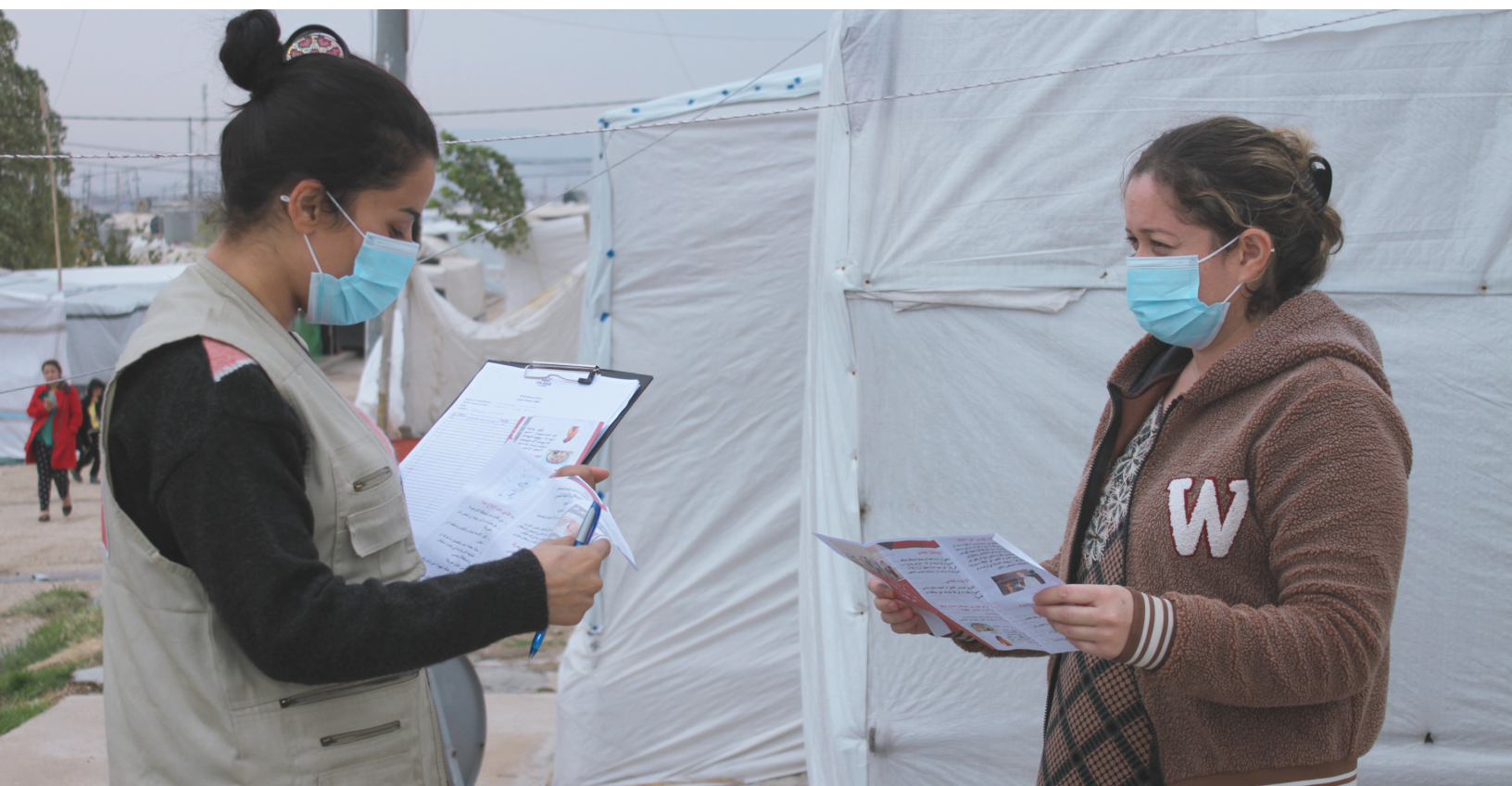
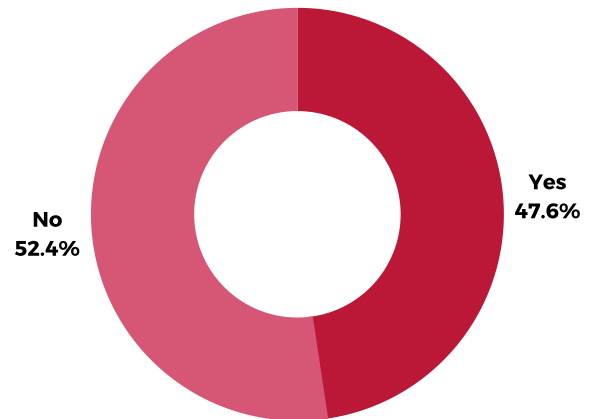
45 respondents (71%) stated that yes, they knew service providers could not receive favors from residents, while 18 respondents (29%) were not aware of this.

While we're pleased that a majority of respondents were aware of this standard, we would like to see the result be closer to 100% as it's concerning that some residents are not aware of this and may be less likely to report it.

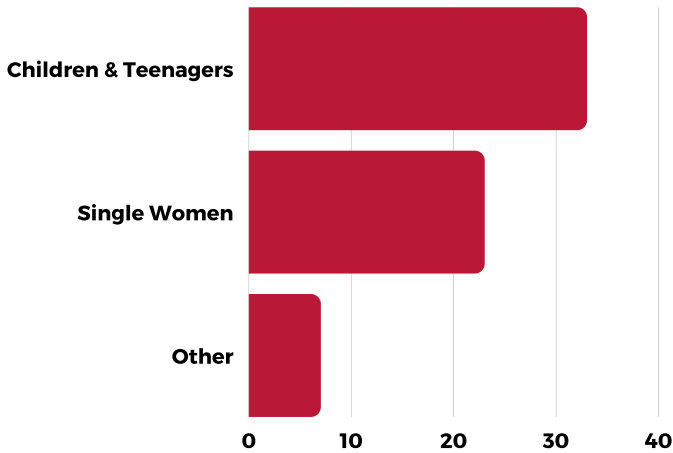


## ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY REPORTING MECHANISM FOR ABUSE OR EXPLOITATION BY A SERVICE PROVIDER IN THIS CAMP?

This response rate was split almost 50/50. To decrease incidents of SEA, more people need to know what SEA is, how to report it, and why it's important to report such cases.



## IN YOUR OPINION, WHO IS THE MOST VULNERABLE TO SEA IN THIS CAMP?

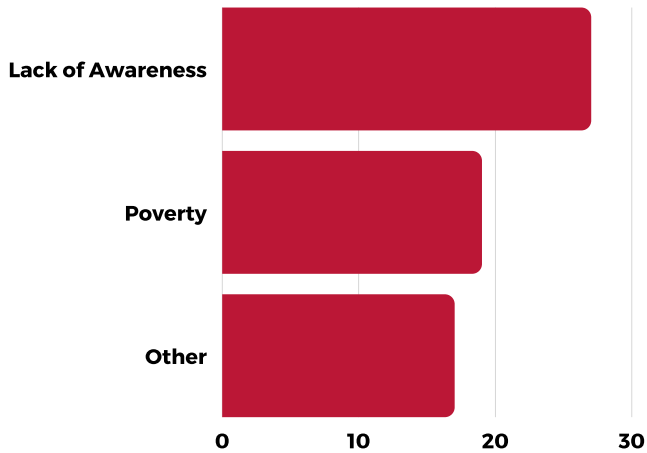


52% of respondents said that teenage girls, boys, and young children are more likely to experience SEA in the camp.

37% of respondents believe that single women - divorced women, ISIS survivors, and widows - face more incidents of SEA in the camp than any other community group.

1% of respondents indicated that other community members, like men, are exposed to SEA.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS FOR SEA IN YOUR COMMUNITY?



43% of respondents said that lack of awareness is the driving force behind SEA whereas 30% said poverty was the main reason.

27% indicated other reasons, including unemployment, dangerous use of social media, sexual desires, patriarchal society, and lack of effective consequences for abusers.



## DO YOU THINK SEA HAS INCREASED IN THE CAMP SINCE COVID-19?

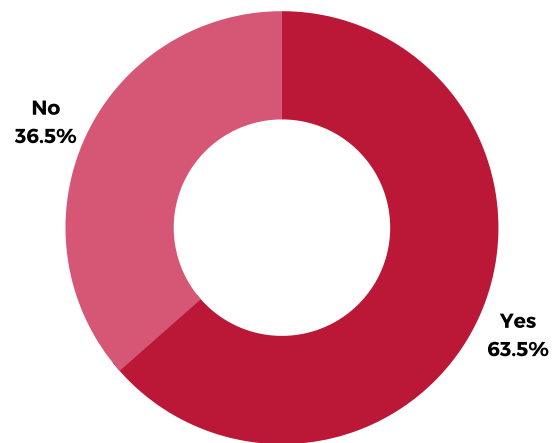
The majority of respondents stated that yes, SEA has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Reasons for the increase include:

- Reduce of available services in camps, especially protection, as NGOs halted all activities
- Poverty
- Lack of financial resources
- Unemployment

36% of respondents indicated that SEA incidents have not increased after the spread of the virus for the following reasons:

- Services from the government and NGOs were stopped
- Staff from many institutions and organizations stopped working in the camps
- Fear of being infected with the virus



While it's concerning that sexual exploitation and abuse have increased due to the difficult environment caused by COVID-19, we are alarmed that there are camp residents who stated that SEA incidents have decreased due to the lack of staff from institutions and organizations that worked in the camp.

As a local organization, we are deeply embedded within the community and we call on our partners, international NGOs, and local institutions to investigate this further.



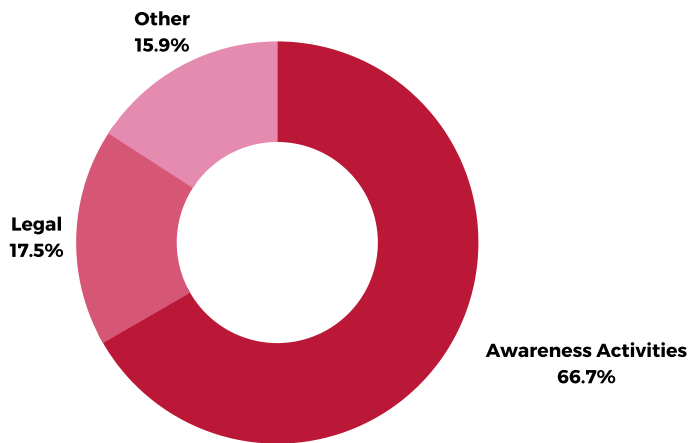


## WHAT SERVICES DO YOU THINK WILL HELP END SEA IN THIS CAMP?

The majority of respondents (67%) said that an increase in awareness and educational activities with all demographics within the camp are vital.

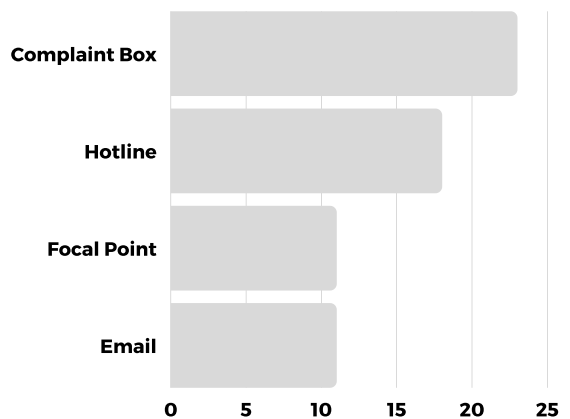
18% of respondents stated that effective case management through follow-up support and access to legal pathways to prosecute perpetrators are needed for survivors.

The remaining respondents suggested other services, including job opportunities, professional training, and a special center for reporting abuse.



## WHAT REPORTING MECHANISMS ARE MOST SUITABLE TO REPORT SEA IN THIS CAMP?

37% of respondents requested a complaint box that is protected and regular follow-up by NGOs and policy. 28% requested a hotline, 17% asked for a PSEA-specific focal point, and the remaining suggested an email address.



# SOLUTIONS

The logic behind a camp assessment is to provide a forum for the community to express their current needs, any gaps in services, and identify solutions. Sexual exploitation and abuse is a human rights violation and based on this survey, must be addressed immediately as cases have increased since the spread of COVID-19 in the region.

Women and girls living in displacement are considered particularly vulnerable to SEA due to the shelter environment, gender inequality / traditional gender roles, economic insecurity, and lack of male protection.

It is the responsibility of all stakeholders to work together to mitigate sexual violence.

The Lotus Flower proposes the following interventions:

- Increase PSEA awareness activities, ideally integrated with all programming and services
- Increase training for staff of all active NGOs, INGOs, and any other type of organization that works with IDPs & refugees
- Recruit a PSEA focal point in all camps
- Launch a formalized reporting process via a hotline, email, and complaint box for case management and timely follow-up
- Establish a legal process with consequences for those found guilty of SEA
- Collect anonymized data to determine the reach of SEA and to develop a comprehensive response strategy

“ We are receiving alarming reports of sharp increases in the risks of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and child marriages [as COVID pandemic continues].

- UNHCR's Filippo Grandi:  
November 2020 Press Release

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## ABOUT THE LOTUS FLOWER

The Lotus Flower is a non-governmental organization that has successfully founded and operated multiple women's centers for women and girls in displacement, beginning with The Lotus Flower Women's Center in Rwanga Community camp. The center opened its doors to the community in 2016 with the aim to provide a safe, supportive, and healing environment to women and girls who have survived the atrocities of war and the invasion of ISIS in 2014. The Lotus Flower now operates 3 centers that serve the IDP and refugee community.

The Lotus Flower Women's Centers work to fill resource gaps by providing community-responsive programming that revolves around 6 pillars from the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: Education, Livelihoods, Mental Health, Well-Being, Human Rights, and Peacebuilding. We aim to provide the foundation for women to rebuild themselves, their families, and their futures.

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

**Our fundamental belief is that women and girls are powerful drivers of change.**

We provide women and girls affected by conflict the strength and support they need to rise out of darkness; moving from past suffering and economic hardship to reach their full potential to rebuild their future.