

Research explores the parenting needs of Syrian refugee families

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A University of Manchester student is carrying out research to explore the parenting needs of families raising their children in refugee camps after fleeing the violence in Syria.

Aala El-Khani, a graduate from the University's School of [Psychological Sciences](#), whose [parents](#) are from Syria, is investigating the impact of war and displacement on parents.

The mother-of-two hopes her study will help lead to developing parenting resources to provide better guidance for mums and dads faced with new challenges brought about by the experience of fleeing their homes and becoming refugees while suffering stress and exhaustion and trying to care for their [children](#).

Over a million people, including young children and families, have been forced into refugee camps since fighting broke out two years ago and at least 93,000 people have been killed in Syria the UN's latest figures show. Many have seen relatives murdered or been raped before fleeing to refugee camps.

Aala, from Didsbury, Manchester, has visited three refugee camps to carry out her research with her children Shatha, aged 8, and Mohammad, aged 7. Through the support of WATAN, an institute involved in supporting all aspects of Syrian aid and relief, she recently visited Qah a refugee area on the eastern border of Syria and Bab Al-Salam refugee camp on the northern border as well as Bakhsheem refugee camp in

Turkey last October. While there she conducted five focus groups with parents of children aged five to 10, as well as eight one-to-one interviews, collected over 100 parenting [questionnaires](#) and also interviewed professionals involved in humanitarian support.

The 31-year-old, who is originally from Purley in Surrey, said: "Mental health needs in refugee camps are getting some attention from aid agencies but parenting needs have not really been looked at in detail before - even though it's known how distressed families are - so it's really important to be able to explore this further.

"One focus group was carried out in a building where many had not bathed in a month and families didn't know how they were going to get their next meal, but still they were so welcoming.

"The parents I spoke to are trying to do the best they can for their children in dreadful circumstances where they have lost everything. Children are at risk of being harmed so parents are afraid to let them go out. Some mothers described how, because of safety worries, they no longer know how to control their children's behaviour because they can't stop them going out of their cramped and crowded tent.

"Others said they worried about pollution and cleanliness, letting their children outside as well as the risk of catching illness. There's no flowing water so children are constantly getting dirty with no change of clothes."

Aala hopes after writing up her findings she can secure funding for the development of a training programme specifically aimed at refugees similar to the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme – used across the world to help parents develop practical coping strategies in different situations.

"The power has been taken away from these mums and this leads to

many psychological changes," she said. "A lot of parents said they wanted to stay strong for their children and see it as their responsibility to do their best but there is also a lot of guilt and we need to give parents more support."

Provided by University of Manchester

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