

بسمه و زيتونه

**BASMEH & ZEITONEH**  
RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT



**Exploring Resilience, Violent Extremist Thinking,  
and the Impact of Peace Education  
on Syrian Youth in Shatila**

August 2018





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## WHO WE ARE

### **Basmeh & Zeitooneh:**

B&Z is a registered non-governmental organization dedicated to serving Syrian refugees and vulnerable populations living in Lebanon and Turkey. It began in 2012 as a small group of volunteers responding to the needs of refugees in Lebanon. Since then, we have worked to provide relief, livelihoods and, protective services, in addition, we have expanded our reach to include vulnerable host communities, while working in areas with the highest concentration of refugees. Despite the rapid development of the organization, we maintain a grassroots approach, and continue to use beneficiary input and feedback throughout project design and implementation. Our aim is to provide accessible, holistic solutions that empower and build the capacity of marginalized communities, by utilizing our community centers to serve as focal points for the local neighborhood. Our range of programs utilize an approach that upholds human dignity, and reduces the need to navigate through a complex international humanitarian system to meet basic needs. Thus the programs are aimed at building and developing skills, enhancing psychological wellbeing, and increasing individual and communal capacity in order to increase the agency and independence of those who have been marginalized.

[www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org](http://www.basmeh-zeitooneh.org)

### **International Alert:**

IA works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. Together, we believe peace is within our power. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict, bringing together people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we come together to build everyday peace. Peace is just as much about communities living together, side by side, and resolving their differences without resorting to violence as it is about people signing a treaty or laying down their arms. That is why we believe that we all have a role to play in building a more peaceful future.

[www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org)

### **The United States Institute of Peace:**

USIP is an independent national institute, founded by Congress and dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical, and essential for U.S. and global security. USIP pursues this vision on the ground in conflict zones, working with local partners to prevent conflicts from turning to bloodshed and to end it when they do. The Institute provides training, analysis, and other resources to people, organizations, and governments working to build peace.

[www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

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## 1. KEY TERMS

**Violent extremism (VE):** There is no agreed upon definition of violent extremism (VE). Terms within VE are often politicized and used interchangeably, resulting in confusion and difficulty in monitoring the impact of programming related to preventing or countering violent extremism. In their 2018 toolkit on preventing violent extremism programming, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Alert (IA) highlight the importance of developing a “contextually relevant definition of preventing violent extremism (PVE), which is shared by stakeholders, [as] a key starting point for developing national PVE strategies or action plans.”<sup>(1)</sup> The following description of VE, which is the definition that will be used in this report, was developed based on a working definition cited by the UNDP and IA in their 2018 toolkit: the activity of individuals and groups which advocate or justify violence for economic, social, or political reasons and reject the universal values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights by disseminating a message of religious, cultural, and social intolerance.<sup>(2)</sup> It is important to note that VE is not exclusive to any region, nationality, or system of belief.

**Peace Education (PE):** A program operated by Basmeh & Zeitooneh that offers a safe space for children and youths to: express themselves freely; better understand themselves, their relationships with others, and their surroundings; deal with traumatic events in their lives and acquire positive coping mechanisms; learn to defend themselves against potential harm; learn their rights; learn how to resolve conflict in peace ways; and learn about tolerance and how to accept people from different backgrounds. One aspect of the PE program is psychosocial support (PSS), which seeks to assist children and youths in dealing with trauma they have experienced, and support them at a personal, psychological, and social level. PSS is an integral component of PE. The term PE will be used exclusively throughout this report to describe the support offered to children and youths by Basmeh & Zeitooneh’s programming.

**Resilience:** The ability to recover from and cope with stressful, negative, or undesirable situations. Locally, Basmeh & Zeitooneh views the level of resilience among youths as directly related to their ability to cope with trauma. The more symptoms of traumatic stress are observed or expressed, the less resilient a person is considered to be. Individuals with low resilience are more prone to utilizing negative coping mechanisms and expressing emotion through violence. If a child or youth is seen to employ positive coping mechanisms to deal with stressful and unfavorable situations, they will be considered to be more resilient. In PE programming, Basmeh & Zeitooneh trains facilitators to assist youths in better coping with their circumstances, and to increase youths’ resilience to traumatic situations they have experienced in the past, are currently facing, or might encounter in the future. By providing participants with a space for unconditional positivity, active listening, and free expression, in addition to art and theater activities, youths can learn how to express their feelings, needs, and fears in a constructive and positive way. This seeks to contribute to their healing and increase their resilience toward negative coping mechanisms.

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(1) International Alert and UNDP, “Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism programming: a toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation”, Oslo: UNDP, 2018. P.

(2) UN Office of Counter-Terrorism in Tunisia, “Tunisia: Between security challenges and gender justice”, March 2017, p.7

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The ongoing conflict in Syria tore apart the fabric of its society and forced more than 11 million people to flee their homes.<sup>(3)</sup> Taken out of their familiar communal surroundings, many refugees have found themselves living in unfamiliar and often unwelcoming communities. Over one million Syrian refugees are estimated to be currently residing in Lebanon, and many suffer from feelings of social and economic marginalization, along with a general sense of hopelessness about their future. Moreover, as a result of the policies of the Government of Lebanon, 76% of Syrian households in Lebanon live beneath the Lebanese poverty line.<sup>(4)</sup>

The UN views violent extremism as the byproduct of historical, political, economic and social circumstances, including the impact of regional and global power politics. The circumstances that lead people to join VE groups, known as pull factors, refer to extremist ideologies and the effects they can have on impressionable young minds, in addition to tactics used by violent extremist groups to recruit disaffected individuals to their cause.<sup>(5)</sup> On the other end of the spectrum, the circumstances that drive violent extremism, or push factors, include growing horizontal inequalities, such as unemployment and poverty, as well as perceptions of injustice, socio-political exclusion, and human rights violations against certain communities or segments of the population. Other structural drivers include the rejection of a state's socio-economic-political system, corruption, and intolerance toward growing diversity in society.<sup>(6)</sup> It is important to note that these factors can be seen as *sine qua non* for VE but that they do not in and of themselves explain or predict the existence of either VE thoughts or VE actions. In other words, there might be a correlation between push factors and susceptibility to VE thoughts but this correlation has not been studied enough to identify factors that lead individuals to resort to VE action, especially in the context of refugees in the Middle East. These push factors do not inherently necessitate a counterterrorism perspective on policy and programming, and should not be used as a prism through which to look at people living under the above-mentioned push factor conditions. The latter is especially true for people that are living under these conditions because they fled violence.

The circumstances that Syrian refugees have been forced into are dire and fit the very broad UN definition of factors that could make people susceptible to VE. This has prompted organizations working in humanitarian response to take them into consideration in their programming, including in programming focused on building the resilience of youth.

This exploratory study seeks to find out whether there are indicators of susceptibility to VE thoughts among the Syrian youths that participated in Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Peace Education program and whether the program enhanced their overall resilience, which could include resilience to the very broad push factors mentioned above. The PE program under study takes place in Shatila, Beirut, and targets refugee youths that are living in difficult conditions, have little access to treatment for the

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(3) Mercy Corps <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-syria-turkey/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>

(4) UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", 2017, p. 60

(5) Donaldson, Alasdair, "Building resilience to violent extremism", British Council, 2017 <https://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/policy-insight-research/building-resilience-extremism>

(6) UNDP, "Preventing violent extremism through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity", New York: UNDP, 2016



trauma they experienced during war and displacement, and that are often suffering from social and educational exclusion. PE sessions seek to enhance the dignity of participants and aim to increase resilience by promoting self-confidence, expressions of creativity, communication, and dialogue.

The PE program held 16 two-hour sessions in total, for 250 male and female youths and children, over the course of four months. The program does not have any selection criteria for participation, aside from age. Various forms of art, including crafts, music, dance, drawing, painting and theater, as well as games and sports, provided the basis for interacting with and understanding the topic of each session. Topics covered in PE sessions included: me and myself, me and the other, me and my community, self-protection, self-expression, personal space, me and my body, emotions, peacefully resolving conflict, children's rights, early marriage, and child labor.

By conducting pre- and post-KAP surveys at the beginning and end of the PE program, semi-structured interviews with the youth, and semi-structured interviews with their mothers, Basmeh & Zeitooneh sought to assess the impact of the PE programming on youth's resilience, and gain a deeper insight into their lives, particularly whether indicators of susceptibility to VE or factors that might strengthen their resilience exist. This data complements an International Alert study that aims to test the hypothesis of whether youths who participated in resilience building and civic engagement projects demonstrated higher personal resilience than youths who did not.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The data collection for this project occurred between May 2018 and July 2018. The focus of the data gathering was Syrian youths living in Shatila, Beirut, that were between the ages of 14 and 17, and participated in Basmeh & Zeitooneh's PE programming during this time period. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the resilience and risk factors to violent extremism experienced by these youths, Basmeh & Zeitooneh employed both quantitative and qualitative data-collection methods.

Several caveats must be noted regarding the representativeness of the data cited in the report. Only eight out of the 250 participants in the program were aged 14 to 17. The program has difficulty attracting youth. Most teenage boys work to financially support their families and cannot attend during working hours, and we could not have sessions on weekends or later in the evening for security reasons. A lot of girls are not allowed to leave home and participate in activities, especially ones that include boys, and many take care of their siblings or sick relatives. Many teenage girls are also married and even have children to take care of at home. Many youth are also not interested in projects that are artistic or expressive, but would rather gain a certain skill that would help them work or gain income.

Knowing that we could only gather data from eight participants (six female youths, two male youths) in the PE program, that most of them are female, while males are more likely to act on VE thoughts, and that some come from the same family, we did not set out to produce representative study. Rather, the research aims to complement the broader study conducted by International Alert, and highlight points for further research.

Due to the fact that participants' data is self-reported, the study may also suffer from response bias. Response bias refers to the tendency of individuals to answer survey questions in an untruthful or misleading way, often in an attempt to provide the answer that they consider the most socially acceptable.

#### **Quantitative data**

The quantitative data was gathered via two rounds of KAPs surveys with the eight Syrian youth participants in Basmeh & Zeitooneh's PE program based in Shatila. The first KAP surveys were conducted shortly after the onset of the intervention in May 2018, and the second KAP surveys were carried out upon the completion of the peace education intervention in July 2018.

The KAP questionnaires included questions identical to the survey questions used in International Alert field research. This was done in order to ensure that Basmeh & Zeitooneh data on youths living in Shatila, aged 14 to 17, would be comparable with data from the International Alert research.

The KAP questionnaire is reproduced in Appendix I. The following factors were identified as part of a workshop collaboration between Basmeh & Zeitooneh and IA, and sought to examine respondents' ability to:

1. Take decisions
2. Set goals
3. Problem solve
4. Have dreams
5. Trust oneself
6. Trust others
7. Work in a team
8. Communicate in a positive way
9. Have a positive sense of belonging
10. Have a sense of purpose and productivity

Some questions have also been noted for providing insights into respondents' history of trauma, role models, sense of tolerance, and attitudes toward violence. Basmeh & Zeitooneh considers youths' ability to cope positively or negatively with trauma, a deeply stressful or disturbing experience that negatively affects normal or previous functioning, to be a key indicator of their level of resilience. This goes hand in hand with vulnerability, defined as the potentiality of being exposed to various forms of harm. When a person goes through a traumatic event, their coping and defense mechanisms are greatly hindered hence making them more susceptible to harm; making them more vulnerable. Vulnerable individuals, however, do not necessarily have to have gone through a traumatic experience. Moreover, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) identified promoting tolerance and a respect for diversity as a main pillar in its response toward VE<sup>(7)</sup>, while International Alert has identified role models as key factors that can trigger negative or positive outcomes for PVE programming.<sup>(8)</sup>

### **Qualitative Data**

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were carried out with the youths who participated in the KAP surveys, in addition to an interview with their mothers. These interviews sought to extract deeper insights into the youths' personal lives and susceptibility to VE, as well as probe for factors that might strengthen resilience to VE.

Separate interviews were conducted with the youths and their mothers in Shatila by a social worker, and in the presence of the youths' PE facilitator. Youths were told that the interviews would talk about their daily lives and what has changed since they came to Shatila from Syria, along with their aspirations for the future and what they feel and experience on a daily basis living in Shatila. Mothers were told that the interviews would cover their child's life today and what has changed since they came to Shatila from Syria, in addition to what they have observed about their child's interests, activities, friends, behaviors, and attitudes.

Written consent for the interview was obtained from both the parent and the youths, and the confidentiality regarding the information they would provide was asserted. As a result, in order to ensure the anonymity of the youth and their parents, pseudonyms will be employed in this study.

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(7) UNDP, Preventing violent extremism through inclusive development and the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity: A development response to addressing radicalization and violent extremism, New York: UNDP, 2016

(8) International Alert and UNDP, Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism programming: a toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation, Oslo: UNDP, 2018

## 4. FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

### 4.1 Personal indicators for respondents

Respondent name	Familial relations in study	Age	Date of arrival to Shatila	Number of household members	Currently enrolled in school
Layla	Sisters: Nour Tamara	14	2012	7	Yes
Fadi	No	16	2016	Youth: 6 Parent: 8	No
Rania	No	14	2015	5	Yes
Zeina	No	14	2015	5	Yes
Khadija	No	14	2014	9	Yes
Nadeem	No	16	2010	7	No
Nour	Sisters: Layla Tamara	14	2012	7	Yes
Tamara	Sisters: Layla Nour	15	2012	7	Yes

Table 4.1 (note: names of respondents have been changed to ensure anonymity)

The study sought to identify key variables such as age, number of household members, and whether the respondent was enrolled in school in order to examine their correlation with resilience. Among the eight respondents, it is notable that all six female youths are enrolled in schooling while the two males are not. Instead, the male respondents report working in order to contribute financially to their families, with Fadi working in the aluminum trade and Nadeem employed at a narghile café. Among the six female youths participants, three are sisters (Layla, Nour and Tamara).

During the interviews, nearly all respondents mentioned some discontent related to their current household situation. Most criticisms were related to how much smaller their current dwellings in Shatila were compared to their homes in Syria, which were described as “huge”, “comfortable”, and having “good furniture”. The comparatively smaller homes in Shatila also led some youths to complain about the lack of privacy. “We’re living in a one room house so [Rania] doesn’t have her own space and that bothers her a lot, and it reflects on her psyche,” Rania’s mother said. This lack of privacy and comfort may be magnified at the community level for some respondents, such as with Rania, Tamara, and Nour, who all said that they don’t like the environment in the neighborhood or walking the street, and therefore prefer to stay at home.

However, this was not the case with all respondents. Zeina’s mother stated that her daughter enjoys the freedom of going out and playing with her friends from PE. Zeina was also one of two respondents to express a preference for her current life in Lebanon, saying she felt more limited in Syria, particularly regarding opportunities for education. Nadeem also reported feeling totally comfortable with the environment in Lebanon. “I’m living a great life here because I was raised here. I have my friends and I have my work,” he said. It should be noted that Nadeem, having arrived to Shatila in 2010, is the longest-standing resident of the group and the only one to arrive before the start of the war.

The lack of privacy at home and negative views of the neighborhood reported within the sample group could be an indicator of susceptibility to VE. Discontentment with their current living situations was expressed most strongly by three of the female respondents (Rania, Tamara, and Nour). The fact that both Tamara and Nour exhibit a potential push factor and have lived in Shatila for over five years, the second longest period among all polled respondents, is a point that could be explored further in future programming.

Meanwhile, the fact that Zeina and Nadeem reported a preference for living in Lebanon over Syria is a possible indicator of contentment with their current living situation and positive resilience.

**Several respondents expressed a preference for their former lives in Syria compared to Shatila, where they suffer from a lack privacy at home and an intimidating neighborhood environment.**

#### 4.2 Respondents' history of trauma and coping ability

When the KAP surveys asked youths about a negative situation they had experienced in their lives, six out of eight respondents spoke about a trauma related to the conflict in Syria. Both Rania and Khadija told stories of bombs falling in their neighborhood and their resulting fear. Meanwhile, Layla and Tamara experienced trauma from the loss of their brother. Their sister Nour refused to discuss a traumatic event, which could indicate that she has not yet developed coping mechanisms to discuss the death of her sibling.

In addition to their own trauma, the youths may also experience stresses related to the negative effects that trauma has had on their family members. During her interview, Layla related how trauma stemming from the Syrian Crisis has affected her father. "The situation has changed [since leaving Syria]. Now my family has concerns about me, and after the death of my brother, my father had a heart attack and became physically ill because he took all the responsibilities. He also became more aggressive and violent," Layla said. The fact that youths may suffer from both personal and familial trauma is a possible risk factor that could weaken their resilience and should be studied further.

Meanwhile, the KAP data gives some indication that Basmeh & Zeitooneh PE sessions may have helped teach the youths positive coping mechanisms for trauma and improved their resilience. When polled at the beginning of the program, six out eight respondents expressed agreement with the statement: "I feel like I'm in pain or upset because of an accident or a trauma that happened not long ago." However, when surveyed again at the end of the session, only three out of eight respondents agreed with the same statement. This could reflect the fact that youths have managed to adopt more positive coping mechanisms. Or on the other end of the spectrum, it could also imply that some have become desensitized as a result of their trauma. That accurately describes Layla's situation, who recounts: "when my brother died, it was my first traumatic experience. After that, a lot of family members have died but I only cry about my brother... since his death, I don't care about anyone's death anymore."

The survey data also implies that several youths may have learned positive coping mechanisms to deal with stress. When asked whether they feel "like there's an incomprehensible pressure, which I

cannot express, so I'd rather sit alone, laugh a lot or cry a lot," six out of eight respondents expressed agreement with the statement. Following the end of the PE programming, two respondents changed their answer to disagreement, while another two respondents chose to give no answer. This could imply that PE interventions may have helped the youths learn better ways to process stress and communicate about their emotions, and therefore no longer feel the need to retreat to isolation. Tamara, who changed from agreement to disagreement with the statement after attending the PE program, reports feeling free to express herself during the sessions and particularly enjoys the meditation and relaxation exercises.

Before PE programming, over half of respondents reported experiencing a trauma related to the Syria Crisis and a preference for with dealing incomprehensible pressure alone, indicating a low level of initial resilience. The inability of parents to cope with trauma may also have a negative knock-on effect for their children. After the PE intervention, less youths said they felt incomprehensible pressure or the need to deal with it alone, implying that PE programming may help increase participants' resilience toward stressful and unfavorable situations.

#### 4.3 Respondents' sense of belonging and views toward tolerance

Survey data showed positive growth indicators for the youth participants in terms of their number of friends and their ability to trust and confide in those friends as the result of PE programming. Before the PE programming, two out of eight respondents, sisters Layla and Tamara, said that they did not have any friends in their community. This contrasted with memories of Syria before the war, where most respondents reported having many friends to play with. According to Rania's mother, "[Rania] had a lot of friends and she was sociable [in Syria]. She had good connections with her friends and they miss each other a lot." However, in the post-PE survey, all respondents reported having at least one or two friends in Lebanon. Meanwhile, in the first survey three out eight respondents stated that they did not feel as though they had any trustworthy friends, while by the end of the session, all respondents reported having at least one friend that they could trust. These results speak to the potential importance of PE programming in helping youths form friendships and learn to gain and give trust.

The KAP survey results also indicate that PE programming may be having a positive effect on youths' tolerance. Before PE sessions, three out of eight respondents answered that they could not be friends with someone from a different culture. By the end of the PE intervention, this figure dropped to a single disagreement, from Fadi, and no answer from Layla. Layla's regression in this answer may be linked to the discrimination she reported from Lebanese she encounters. On the subject of whether men and women should be treated equally, one respondent stated at the beginning of the sessions that it was okay for the sexes to be treated differently. By the end of the intervention, all respondents expressed agreement about the importance of equal treatment for all.

Meanwhile, risk factors related to intolerance are also present in the data. In interviews, several youths reported experiencing stresses stemming from anti-Syrian prejudice. Layla stated in her interview that: "Lebanese people don't accept being friends with us (the Syrians)." This sentiment is backed up by her sister Nour, who said the Lebanese "used to talk a lot about Syrians, and I was bothered a lot by that." It would benefit the integration of Syrian youth in Shatila if the participants would be

more mixed, in the last cycle they were not exposed to youth or children from other nationalities. The inclusiveness of different nationalities in a group helps expose all members to the fact that almost everyone has the same concerns and fears and that they share many of their hopes and dreams.

UNDP has identified marginalization and discrimination as potential push factors toward VE, while tolerance for other people's cultures and ideas contrasts directly with VE ideology, which objects to diversity in society. Following the positive indicators from surveyed youth, PE programming should continue promoting tolerance and mitigating feelings of judgement experienced by Syrian youth in order to strengthen their resilience to intolerant ideologies and counter potential feelings of marginalization.

Survey results pre- and post-PE programming indicate that sessions helped increase feelings of belonging among youths by assisting them in making friends in general, and friends they can trust in particular. In addition, the results imply that PE programming on tolerance had a positive effect on some youths' views of social diversity and gender equality. However, the impact of stresses related to discrimination should be examined more closely.

#### 4.4 Respondents' attitudes toward violence

The results of the KAP surveys and interviews reveal that the youth possess conflicting views about violence. When asked to express agreement or disagreement with the statement "The only way to defend my family and my society is through power and violence," all respondents surveyed before the PE program commenced either disagreed or gave no answer. However, in the survey conducted following the conclusion of the intervention, four respondents changed from disagreement or no answer to agreement with the statement. These respondents include sisters Tamara and Nour, and male youths Fadi and Nadeem. These results back up the findings of the IA survey, which found that the treatment group (youths undergoing PVE programming) expressed higher support for the use of violence than the control group (youths not involved in PVE interventions). These results could be attributed to the fact that youths began to feel comfortable discussing subjects like violence openly as they were exposed to the free expression encouraged in PE sessions. As a result, PE programming should examine potential avenues for imparting the message that violence is not the only way defend yourself, your community, and solve problems.

In a positive indicator of resilience, youths generally expressed disdain for violence and armed men in Shatila when questioned in interviews. Only one respondent said that she did not have any opinion regarding armed men in their community. Another respondent, Khadija, justified the presence of armed individuals in order to protect the neighborhood. This sentiment may stem from the conflict in Syria, where armed groups were formed as a means of neighborhood defense, which is a factor that should be studied further.

Others were more derisive in their view of armed men and those who employ violence. Zeina described armed men as "egocentric" and "narcissistic," while Layla said that those who carried guns were wrong and just doing it in order to "pretend to be men." The most strident rejection of armed individuals came from Nadeem, who claimed that men who carried weapons do this because "they think it's in the Sharia'a, but they don't know God nor Islam." Another respondent, Fadi, experienced

trauma as the direct result of violence in Lebanon. His mother recounts the story: “[Fadi] was going to work with his boss and his boss had a lot of money in his hand. A gang approached them and wanted to hit them and steal the money, but his boss told the gang to take the money because the kid doesn’t deserve to be beaten. So they beat his boss and Fadi took him to the hospital. When he came home, he was very shocked and scared.”

It is encouraging that most respondents have a negative view of weapons, violence within their communities, and the men who carry arms when asked about it directly. While that may be considered a positive indicator on resilience, the fact that several youth after PE programming reported the view that violence and power are necessary to defend one’s family and community is something that should be studied further.

**Following PE programming, youths actually expressed more agreement with the idea that violence is necessary to defend one’s family and community than before the sessions commenced. However, in interviews with respondents, there is more negativity expressed toward armed men in the context of Shatila. These seemingly contradictory findings indicate that more in-depth research is necessary.**

#### 4.5 Respondents’ trust in self, trust in others, and support system

Overall, results indicate that PE programming does have a slightly positive effect on the youths’ ability to trust in their own judgment and identify the right people to trust in life. When asked to respond to the statement “I believe that my body, my personality, or my way of thinking is incorrect or fiend,” three respondents, Nour, Khadija, and Nadeem, initially expressed agreement with the statement. After the completion of the PE intervention, Nour’s answer changed to disagreement while there was no change for Khadija and Nadeem.

More encouraging is the youths’ evolving ability to identify the correct people to trust and who to go to if they have a problem. Before enrolling in PE programming, three out of eight respondents, Zeina, Nadeem, and Fadi, stated that they would do whatever they were told, even by a stranger. However, following the intervention, only Nadeem said he would still take orders from someone he didn’t know. These results imply that PE helps youths become more discerning on whom to trust and instills in them the importance of not following orders blindly. This is a possible component of resilience to VE, as the ability to determine whether advice or orders from other people is constructive could mitigate the efforts of individuals who seek to indoctrinate youths.

Regarding support systems in their lives, most youths report turning to a member of their family when they have a problem. In the survey following the completion of PE programming, all but one respondent said they would go to a family member if they felt endangered. The only outlier, Nadeem, said that he would not go to anyone and would rather keep the problem to himself. When asked whether their parents listen to them and support them, six out eight youths answered in the affirmative during the post-PE programming survey (the other two gave no answer).

**PE programming resulted in a slight reduction in the number of respondents who were discontented with their body or way of thinking. This is a potential indicator of respondents’ increased self-**



perception and trust in their own thinking, and by extension, their capacity to deal with stress and negative situations. Educational sessions also helped shape the youths' views on who to trust in their lives. Post PE-programming respondents reported that they were less likely to take orders from a stranger, while there was also a general agreement among youths that the best person to confide in when they have a problem is a family member.

#### 4.6 Respondents' ability to set goals, belief in reaching them, sense of purpose, and role models

In general, respondents articulated defined goals for the future and backed their ability to achieve those dreams, although several said they were unable to find a positive sense of purpose in their day-to-day lives. These results are significant, and warrant further research as feelings of listlessness and a lack of meaning in life are a major susceptibility factor for VE. VE ideologies seek to take advantage of those who feel like their lives lack purpose and seek to entice those individuals to adopt their ideology and join their groups by offering meaning or a sense of adventure within a new community.

When asked about their day-to-day lives before and after PE programming, survey results were mixed. Khadija and the two male youths, Fadi and Nadeem, who are out of school and working, indicated that they felt their lives were "boring" and "almost as the day before". However, this was not the case across the board, as Nour, Rania, Zeina, and Tamara all reported that they find their daily lives more entertaining and dynamic after PE programming. These results imply that PE interventions may be particularly effective in providing stimulus, a break from monotony, and entertainment for female participants, though might have less of an impact on male youths.

It is also unclear whether the interventions affected the youths' belief that they could contribute to society in a positive way. Before attending PE-programming five respondents agreed that it was possible for them to be helpful in their society, while one respondent, Zeina, disagreed, and two, Rania and Layla, provided no answer. Post-PE intervention results varied only slightly, with Zeina switching from disagreement to no answer, while Rania changed her initial response from no answer to strong agreement with the sentiment. While it is not possible to conclude from these results that the PE-programming influences participants' view on their ability to contribute to society, it can be argued that the interventions at least help sustain the positivity and resilience of those who originally harbored positive notions about this.

In discussing the feasibility of them achieving their dream occupation, respondents were generally positive, though with some reticence to discuss the subject. In the pre-KAP survey, seven out of eight youths agreed that it was possible for them to become what they wanted to be when they grow up. However, after this PE intervention, this figure dropped to five, with several respondents refusing to provide an answer. This was the case with Nadeem and sisters Nour and Tamara. Although it's unclear, this increased pessimism could potentially be attributed to respondents' having more realistic expectations about their future prospects.

It is notable that both male respondents, Nadeem and Fadi, who are not enrolled in school and instead work to help support their families, originally expressed faith in their ability to achieve their dream of becoming a doctor and aluminum master respectively. Fadi maintained this faith in the post-PE programming survey while Nadeem switched to no answer. Since lack of future prospects or hope is

a factor that VE groups have exploited in the past, with promises of a better life or financial reward going forward, this potential susceptibility regarding the perceived lack of future prospects among PE participants is a point for further examination in the Shatila context.

Role models have the ability to influence negative or positive outcomes related to resilience to VE programming, and results indicate that PE programming is having a positive effect on resilience in that regard. In interviews, Nour, Tamara, and Layla all cited their PE facilitator as someone they would like to be like when they grow up. This is perhaps one of the best indicators of how PE interventions can play a positive role in promoting resilience to VE. By providing youths with tolerant, sympathetic facilitators, they set an example for the youth on how they should act and treat others in their daily lives.

The data indicates that female youths were more likely to view their daily lives as less dull following PE programming. Meanwhile, results were mixed regarding the youths' perception of their ability to achieve goals and be helpful in society. Several respondents refused to answer questions directly related to their future prospects while others actually expressed less confidence in their ability to achieve future goals following PE programming. On the subject of role models, several participants indicated they would like to be like their PE facilitators when they grow up. This is a positive indicator of the integral role facilitators can play in contributing to resilience to VE.

#### 4.7 Potential exposure of PE participant to VE recruiting

Following the completion of PE programming, Basmeh & Zeitooneh was informed that one of the participants in this study, Nadeem, was potentially being subjected to recruitment by a VE group.

Nadeem stood out in the sample as the only respondent that came to Lebanon before the war in Syria and as the sole youth who did report experiencing trauma directly related to the conflict.

In his survey responses and interview, Nadeem demonstrated several potential factors that have been identified as potential susceptibilities to VE. This can be seen in his agreement with the statements “the only way to defend my family and my society is through power and violence”, and “I believe that my body, my personality or my way of thinking is incorrect or fiend”. Nadeem was also the only respondent post-PE programming to say that he would still take orders from a stranger, and that he would keep problems to himself, rather than share them with a family member or friend. As a 16 year-old male youth who is not enrolled in school and working in a narghile cafe, the results also indicated that Nadeem thought that his day-to-day life was without excitement, and became more pessimistic about his ability to achieve goals in life.

However, Nadeem also gave some responses that were positive indicators for resilience, particularly his strident criticism of armed men in Shatila and stated happiness at living in Lebanon over Syria, which could imply a healthy sense of belonging. It could also indicate his awareness of tensions between Palestinians that have been residing in Shatila for generations, and newly displaced Syrians. In addition, feeling happy to be living in Shatila could indicate a preference for a lawless environment where violence is prominent and partially normalized.

The PE program focuses a lot on self-expression, and that in and of itself paves the way for children and youths to express their emotions or thoughts no matter how violent or socially unacceptable. The safe space that is offered to them, allows the stereotypes, the hidden frustrations and the aggressive feeling they have to be expressed in order to be challenged by the facilitators with more accepting, tolerating and peaceful counter-arguments. Moreover, this expression allows the program to identify youths and children experiencing abuse, exploitation or even attempts of recruitment which would then be addressed individually. So, even if the program itself does not drastically change youths' and childrens' thoughts or behaviors, it can identify individuals at risk and those who might harm themselves or others.

Nadeem's situation is being followed up on by the Basmeh & Zeitooneh protection office.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Basmeh & Zeitooneh's Peace Education (PE) programming demonstrated several positive effects on the resilience of youths who participated. Data indicates that the youths showed increased resilience in dealing with stressful situations following PE programming and more tolerant views on social diversity and gender equality. In addition, programming helped several participants, who initially reported not having any friends, form new friendships. The fact that all participants reported having trustworthy friends after the sessions is also a positive indicator of the program's ability to promote feelings of belonging and trust.

Research data indicates that female youths exhibited the largest positive affect on their resilience after participating in the program. Sisters Layla and Tamara suffer from discontent with the lack of privacy at home and with their neighborhood surroundings, feelings of discrimination against them, in addition to experiencing personal and familial trauma related to the death of their brother. After attending programming, both youths reported making friends. Layla also gave indications that she was learning to use positive coping mechanisms for dealing with stress while Tamara mentioned the PE's meditation exercises as particularly valuable. Meanwhile, Zeina demonstrated increased resilience related to her ability to trust herself and increased tolerance in her views. With two of these female youths aged 14, and one age 15, these results imply that the program may have a particularly strong impact on girls' resilience and thinking during these formative years. This is supported by the fact that several girls, following their participation in the program, cited their female PE facilitators as someone they would like to be like when they grow up.

However, results also imply that the PE program had an unclear or potentially negative impact on participants' resilience toward violence, and was less successful in encouraging resilience related to coping with trauma, self-image, and trust for male youths. When asked if "the only way to defend my family and society is through power and violence", two female participants, Tamara and Nour, and two the male participants, Nadeem and Fadi, changed from disagreement to agreement over the course of PE programming. These results mirror insights from International Alert's survey, which found that the treatment group expressed higher support for the use of violence than the control group. Meanwhile, both Nadeem and Fadi, both 16-year-old male youths who are not enrolled in school and work during the day, were unable to answer whether they thought their body or way of thinking was incorrect. Fadi also claimed to still be in pain or upset as the result of trauma, while Nadeem was the only post-PE programming respondent who reported that he would keep a problem to himself and follow the orders of a complete stranger.

Several potential susceptibilities and risk factors to VE for youths living Shatila can also be gleaned from the data. Several youths reported feeling stress related to anti-Syrian bigotry in Lebanon and discontent with their neighborhood surroundings. Another susceptibility that was present relates to the youths' seemingly increasingly negative view of their future prospects. Three participants, Nadeem, Nour, and Tamara, became more negative regarding their potential to contribute to society following the PE program, while the two girls also felt more pessimistic about the possibility of achieving their goals in life. These susceptibilities related to the youths' uncertainty about the future and their places in society have the potential to evolve into more negative and destruction feelings of hopelessness and marginalization if left unaddressed.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for future research

A number of factors identified in this study should be subject to closer examination to determine their impact, all of them should use sex and displacement as important variables:

- Past personal and familial trauma and present-day impact of stresses related to discrimination should be examined more closely to identify how they influence youth's perspective on their current situation and the likelihood that they see a way out. For Syrian youth in Lebanon, the discrimination faced in their day-to-day life could be a factor in their longing to go back to Syria, and might exacerbate the effects of the trauma they experienced there. Conversely it could also make them feel more stuck and powerless in their current situation.
- Respondents' generally expressed disdain for weapons, violence and armed men in Shatila in combination with the fact that several youth view violence and power as necessities to defend one's family and community requires closer inspection before any conclusions can be drawn.
- Respondents' lack of purpose in their day-to-day lives in combination with well-defined goals for their future require further research, especially because the refugee context often in and of itself leads to a lack of future perspective.

### Recommendations for the Peace Education Program

A number of things were highlighted by this research as being important for Peace Education programming for youth:

- The PE program could be fine-tuned to better focus on the importance of peacefully resolving conflict specifically with youths and making sure that such thoughts are challenged by the facilitators. It would also be beneficial if the PE program could include more positive and peaceful leadership examples and characteristics for youths to be influenced by.
- It is important to include parents in the sessions, which could not only make parents more aware of their children's concerns and needs but also help them become more supportive of the youth and of their future goals, hopes and dreams.
- The program would be more effective if it included participants of different nationalities or children and youths from different backgrounds in general.
- It could benefit the youth to integrate PE programming in other projects, such as the livelihood projects in which youth are more likely to enroll.

## APPENDIX 1 KAP SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. I feel like there's an incomprehensible pressure, which I cannot express, so I'd rather sit alone, laugh a lot or cry a lot.

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

2. I feel like it is hard for me to express my feelings clearly.

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

3. What do you do when you get angry at someone? (We read the possibilities for the child)

- a. I hit him/her
- b. I yell at him/her
- c. I express to him/her how I feel
- d. I tell a grown up
- e. I cry
- f. I do nothing
- g. Other answer .....

4. I feel like I'm in pain or upset because of an accident or a trauma that happened not long ago

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

5. I believe that my body, my personality or my way of thinking is incorrect or fiend.

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

6. To whom you go when you feel endangered? (We don't read the possibilities to the child)

- a. Family members (mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, sisters, brothers)
- b. Relatives (Aunt, Uncle,)
- c. A leader in the society (Cheikh, Boss)
- d. A friend or someone with the same age as me
- e. Social support giver (Teacher, Facilitator)
- f. More than one person without a leader
- g. More than one person with a leader
- h. I don't need anyone's help
- i. No one
- j. I don't know
- k. Another answer.....

7. I do whatever I'm told, even from a stranger?

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

8. Do you have friends in the society you live in?

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

9. I have trustworthy friends

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

10. What do you want to be when you grow up... do you think you'll be able to achieve that?

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

11. Every day is: (We read the possibilities to the child)

a. Boring and exactly as the day before

b. Almost as the day before

c. Sometimes fun and different from the day before

d. Very entertaining, different and new from the day before

e. I don't know

12. Like whom you want to be when you grow up?.. Are they/he/she aggressive sometimes?

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

13. My parents listen to me and support me

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

14. I can be friends with someone from a different environment or culture

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

15. If somebody touched me in an inappropriate way or was aggressive with me, I go and tell someone I trust

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

16. Food deprivation is an acceptable form of punishment

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

17. I believe that girls and boys must be treated in an equal way

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

18. The responsible parties take care of and help the people and the environment

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

19. I feel like I can be helpful in my society

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

20. The only way to defend my family and my society is through power and violence

Strongly agree-Agree-Disagree-Strongly disagree-No Answer

## **APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PE PARTICIPANTS**

1. Can you describe how it was like in Syria before coming to Lebanon?
  - School, friends, neighborhood, activities/hobbies, relationship with friends and family, hopes and dreams, house...
  - How did you feel back then?
  
2. Can you describe how it was like right after coming to Lebanon (from Syria)?
  - School, friends, neighborhood, activities/hobbies, relationship with friends and family, hopes and dreams, house...
  - How did you feel back then about the changes?
  
3. How do you describe your life in Lebanon now (today)?
  - School, friends, neighborhood, activities/hobbies, relationship with friends and family, hopes and dreams, house...
  - How do you feel now regarding all of this?
  
4. Do you feel that you have settled down or have gotten used to your new community/ environment? If yes, how? If not, why?
  - What do you think are the factors that made you (not) adapt?
  
5. Can you recall and describe major life events you have experienced? (Both positive and negative)
  - Why do you think these negative events happened to you?
  
6. Are there things that you look forward to everyday?
  - If yes, what are they and why?
  - If not, why?
  
7. In your opinion, why did the war take place?
  - Why were you displaced?
  - Why did you and your family decide to come to Shatila?
  
8. Who is a role model for you today? And why?
  - Would you want to become like them on day?
  - Is this person violent/aggressive with you or with others in general?
  
9. What do you hope to become when you are an adult?
  - Do you think you can achieve that?
  - Do people around you usually achieve their dreams?
  - Do they (family, friends, community...) encourage you to pursue your own dreams?
  
10. Where do you think you will be in 5 years? And why?
  - What makes you want that?
  
11. Do you feel that you belong to a certain group? (Friends, family, others)



- If yes, who are they? What do they do in general? What do they believe in?
- If not, what makes you say that? If you had the chance to be a member of a (another) group, what group would that be and why?

12. How would you describe the environment around you?

- How often do you notice armed men in Shatila?
- What is your opinion about them?
- Why do you think they hold these guns?

13. Do you feel that Shatila's environment is suitable and comfortable for you?

- Do you prefer to be living somewhere else? If yes, where? And why? If no, what makes you want to stay in Shatila?

14. Do you think that the peace education session you have been attending had an impact on you?

- What in particular? How?
- What is it that most affected you or grabbed your attention from the session?
- What other sessions do you think might interest you? Why?
- What encourages you to attend sessions in general? (Are there any specific time, space, activities or conditions?)

15. Would you like to add anything to what we have talked about?

16. How did you feel about this interview?

### **APPENDIX 3 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PE PARTICIPANTS' CAREGIVERS**

1. Can you describe how it was like for your child in Syria before coming to Lebanon?
  - School, friends, neighborhood, activities/hobbies, relationship with friends and family, hopes and dreams, house...
2. How do you describe your child's life in Lebanon now?
  - School, friends, neighborhood, activities/hobbies, relationship with friends and family, hopes and dreams, house...
3. Can you recall and describe major life events that your son/daughter have experienced that have drastically affected them and/or changed their behavior? (Both positive and negative)
4. Do you think that s/he is still emotionally affected by the war/displacement from Syria to Lebanon (Shatila)?
5. Do you think the environment in Shatila has had or still has an effect on your child's behavior or emotions?
  - If yes, how?
  - If not, why?
6. How would you describe his/her attitude? (Calm? Aggressive? Angry? Happy? Keeps to him/herself?)
7. Have you had problems with certain attitudes, behaviors, habits s/he had in the past few years?
8. Does s/he have a particular circle of friends that he hangs out with?
  - Who are they?
  - How do they spend their time together?
  - Do you approve of his/her friends and their activities?
9. Do you notice when his behavior changes or s/he feels unwell?
  - If yes, what do you do about that?
  - (Do they leave him be? Do they intervene and/or try to ask him about it?)
10. Would you like to add anything to what we have talked about?
11. How did you feel about this interview?





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