

Locked down in a tent

SYRIAN CHILDREN IN TIMES OF COVID-19 QUARANTINE

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The author summarizes the results of 10 interviews with Syrian children who were asked how they adapt to the COVID-19 crisis and which role media play in this context.

Syria has been a war zone for 10 years, and this left many social and economic problems on most Syrians. Children are usually the group most affected. Those children whose homes were destroyed and who had to move to new areas inside Syria may be exposed to harassment from the rest of the community members. The situation is similarly difficult for children who took refuge in Lebanon. They live in small tents and are subjected to racism by members of the host communities. Within the framework of the IZI-study "Children, media and COVID-19," 10 Syrian children (in Syria and refugee camps in Lebanon) between the ages of 9-13 were interviewed. The qualitative interviews were conducted via WhatsApp or Telegram applications.

To fight the spread of COVID-19, the Syrian government has taken a set of preventive measures at a late stage, such as the quarantine, and a full closure of educational institutions, markets, shops, and restaurants, except those that sell essential food.

This study attempts to discover how children adapt to the COVID-19 epidemic and the role of the media in this context.

Most children express satisfaction that they spend more time with the family in addition to spending time trying to develop their specific skills, whether musical, literary or scientific. On the

other hand, they complain about the length of free time and the feeling of boredom, and they miss meeting friends and playing outside. Yet, this does not prevent them from perceiving and facing the situation with patience. "Everyone has to be patient, it is better than being infected with the virus," says Majd, 10 years.



Ill. 1: For Syrian children, parents play the major role in gathering information on COVID-19

The children are unanimous in their concern about the scarcity of financial resources and the difficulties of providing necessities such as food and cleaning material. This is enhanced by the absence of any governmental help for the most affected groups. The majority of respondents focuses on the difficult economic conditions, even more harshly in the case of children refugees in Lebanon, who reside in small tents in isolated camps with no entertainment or educational means. This accumulates with work restrictions imposed on the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as Rima, 11 years, says: "We can no longer afford everything we need since my father stopped working and the army is forcibly closing our shops." Further, we may not forget the permanent scarcity

of water resources, which impedes the implementation of measures of sterilization and virus prevention.

The Syrian government wanted to provide distance education for school students, but many reasons prevented this from being realized, e.g., power outages and a lack of permanent internet connection or appropriate electronic devices.

In refugee camps, most children do not have access to educational opportunities in terms of public schools, but some attend alternative NGO education centers. Those, however, are closed since the start of the quarantine.

The media do not play the first role in disseminating knowledge about the virus in our study. The parents (especially mothers) play the primary role in indoctrinating children with preventive information and measures. Educational advertisements via the internet (Facebook and YouTube) have a secondary role in this.

A much lesser role is played by television. According to our results, the behavior of the children is affected by what they see in these educational ads. It was noticed in the context of the interviews that the children are little interested in searching for new information about the virus and are satisfied with what they previously received. This may be due to the unavailability of devices, but even if available, they prefer to watch funny programs, not those about COVID-19. ■

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