Women seen linked to militants badly treated in Iraqi camps, report says

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-women-amnesty/women-seen-linked-to-militants-badly-treated-in-iraqi-camps-report-says-idUSKBN1HO00B>

Women believed to have links to the Islamic State militant group suffer “harrowing” sexual exploitation and discrimination in Iraq’s refugee camps, a leading rights group said on Tuesday.

Female-led households are abused, mistreated and deprived of food and health care but those seen as having ties to the militants are particularly targeted, Amnesty International said in a report.

Islamic State swept through Iraq in 2014, enforcing a strict form of Islam and displacing more than 2 million people from their homes.

The Amnesty report focused on camps in the Nineveh and Salahuddin provinces in Iraq’s north, regions that had been under militant control until taken back by U.S.-led forces.

Sexual mistreatment was occurring in each of the eight camps visited, Amnesty said.

“Women who are perceived to have ties to I.S. are facing such a high degree of discrimination and very serious human rights violations,” Nicolette Waldman, Iraq researcher for Amnesty, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“What was shocking to me was the sexual violence. We found it to be widespread. The way that these women were being exploited ... was just harrowing,” she said.

One woman was quoted in the report saying: “We cannot be alone outside the camp, it’s not safe for us. But really it’s the same inside the camp. Nowhere is safe.”

Reports of abuse inside and outside such camps were confirmed to the Foundation by several rights organizations working in Iraq.

Waldman said those targeting women included security forces protecting the camps and members of militia groups.

“They’re abusing their power,” she said.

Representatives for the Iraqi government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Women whose husbands or fathers have been killed or gone missing are vulnerable to forced marriages, destitution and violence, aid workers say.

Many are at added risk if they are illiterate and do not know how to obtain identity documents for access to government help or food aid.

“After what they’ve gone through, their vulnerability makes them victims of human exploitation once again,” Karl Schembri, Middle East regional media adviser for the Norwegian Refugee Council, told the Foundation.

Amnesty warned the situation was likely to get worse due to funding shortfalls for the country’s humanitarian crisis.

Iraqi officials say $88 billion is needed for reconstruction alone, significantly more than what has been pledged or given by international donors.