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A demographic documentation of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho

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A DEMOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION OF ISIS'S ATTACK ON THE YAZIDI VILLAGE OF KOCHO

Valeria Cetorelli
Sareta Ashraph

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Cover Image

Images of victims in Kocho's village school.

Credit: Sareta Ashraph

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A Demographic Documentation of ISIS's Attack on the Yazidi Village of Kocho

Valeria Cetorelli and Sareta Ashraph

About the Authors

Valeria Cetorelli holds a PhD in Demography from the LSE and has extensive experience in population data collection, management and analysis. Her work revolves around the use of demographic methods to inform humanitarian and development policies and advance human rights and international justice. She has recently been appointed as Head of Refugee Registration and Eligibility Services at UNRWA. Prior to joining UNRWA, she worked as Demographer and Statistician at UNESCWA. Before that, she was Research Officer at the LSE Middle East Centre and at the Johns Hopkins Center for Humanitarian Health, and served as Research Consultant for UNICEF and UNFPA. In 2015, she led a survey which provided the first population-based estimates of Yazidis killed and kidnapped by ISIS.

Sareta Ashraph is a barrister specialising in international criminal law and is called to the Bars of England and Wales, and the Republic of Trinidad & Tobago. She is currently the Senior Analyst with the UN Investigative Team to promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (UNITAD). In 2018, she authored the Global Justice Center's report 'Gender, Genocide, and Obligations under International Law', which examined the gendered dimensions of genocide, including that of ISIS's attack on the Yazidis. While serving as Chief Legal Analyst on the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria from 2012 to 2016, Sareta led the investigation for and reporting of the Commission's June 2016 report "'They Came To Destroy': ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis", which determined that ISIS was committing the crime of genocide, among other international crimes.

Abstract

This study is the first publication of the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project, the objective of which is to identify every victim of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi community of Sinjar. Kocho was selected to be the subject of this first demographic analysis due to the large numbers of Yazidi men, women and children killed and kidnapped from this village, and because of the distinct timeline of the ISIS attack on Kocho as compared to other locations in Sinjar. As the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project progresses, similar analyses will be conducted for all Yazidi villages and the town of Sinjar. It is envisaged that the consolidated database resulting from this project will have multiple short, medium and long-term uses. These include, for example, a data pool that can assist in identification of remains in mass graves, and which provides reliable information for use in planning for and prioritisation of members of the Yazidi community, including provision of counselling, increased medical interventions, and gender- and youth-specific needs. It is also envisaged, and is an integral aspect of the methodological planning, that the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project will play a significant role in achieving accountability for the crimes ISIS has committed against the Yazidis. The consolidated database of victims provides reliable information of high probative value for use in criminal prosecutions before national, regional and international courts and tribunals. The documentation project's data is also capable of informing broader understandings of transitional justice, including material and symbolic reparations.

The first phase of the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project was funded by a private donation from Prof. Gerald Gray, whose generosity is greatly appreciated. The authors would like to thank Bahaa Ilyas and Orsola Torrisi for their excellent research assistance. The authors would also like to express their deepest admiration to the Yazidi enumerators and Kocho community leaders, whose compiled lists of victims served as the foundation for this study. The views expressed in this study are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

Introduction

On 3 August 2014, fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS, also known as Da'esh), attacked the Yazidi community of Sinjar, in northwest Iraq. Within days, reports emerged of men and boys being executed; of women and girls, some as young as nine, being kidnapped, sold, sexually enslaved, beaten and forced to work; and of boys ripped from their families and forced into ISIS training camps. In 2015 and 2016, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria released separate reports determining that ISIS was committing genocide, as well as crimes against humanity and war crimes, in its coordinated assault on the Yazidis of Sinjar.¹

While crimes committed by ISIS against the Yazidis are now known, the identity of all victims is yet to be established. According to extrapolations from a retrospective household survey, roughly 10,000 Yazidis were either killed or kidnapped during the assault.² This paper is the first publication of the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project, the objective of which is to identify every victim of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi community of Sinjar.³ The project follows a similar approach to that previously used by the Demographic Unit of the Office of the Prosecutor in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.⁴

It is envisaged that the consolidated database resulting from this project will have multiple short, medium and long-term uses. These include, for example, a data pool that can assist in identification of remains in mass graves, and which provides reliable information for use in planning for and prioritisation of surviving members of the Yazidi community, including provision of counselling, increased medical interventions, and gender- and youth-specific needs. It is also envisaged, and was an integral aspect of the methodological planning, that the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project will play a significant role in achieving accountability for the crimes ISIS has committed against the Yazidis. The con-

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Our Generation is Gone": The Islamic State's Targeting of Iraqi Minorities in Ninewa', p. 20. Available at <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/Iraq-Bearing-Witness-Report-111215.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2019); International Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 'They Came to Destroy: ISIS Crimes Against the Yazidis', A/HRC/32/CRP.2, 16 June 2016 ('CoI Syria – They Came to Destroy'). Available in English and Arabic at https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A_HRC_32_CRP.2_en.pdf (accessed 1 May 2019).

² Valeria Cetorelli, Isaac Sasson, Nazar Shabila, Gilbert Burnham, 'Mortality and Kidnapping Estimates for the Yazidi Population in the Area of Mount Sinjar, Iraq in August 2014: A retrospective household survey', PLOS Medicine, 14(4):e1002297, 2017. Available at <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002297> (accessed 1 May 2019).

³ The term 'victim' in this paper refers to members of the Yazidi community who were killed or kidnapped by ISIS during the August 2014 attack on Sinjar.

⁴ The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was the first international court to make extensive use of demographic expert reports as evidence in high-profile trials, including in the case of Srebrenica. See Ewa Tabeau (ed.), 'Conflict in Numbers: Casualties of the 1990s Wars in the Former Yugoslavia (1991–1999). Major Reports by Demographic Experts of the Prosecution in the Trials Before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia', Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Testimonies vol. 33, 2009. Available at <http://www.helsinki.org.rs/doc/testimonies33.pdf> (accessed 1 May 2019).

solidated database of victims provides reliable information of high probative value for use in criminal prosecutions before national, regional and international courts and tribunals. The documentation project's data is also capable of informing broader understandings of transitional justice, including material and symbolic reparations.

This paper presents a rigorous analysis of demographic evidence of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho and seeks to answer the following questions:

- How many victims can be identified by name, and what is the likely number of victims who remain uncounted?
- What gender and age are the identified victims, and what types of violations have they suffered?
- Do the results of the demographic documentation confirm the findings of testimony-based documentation?

Kocho was selected to be the subject of this first demographic analysis because of the large numbers of Yazidi men, women and children killed and kidnapped from this village, and because of the distinct timeline of the ISIS attack as compared to other locations in Sinjar. As the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project progresses, similar analyses will be conducted for all Yazidi villages and the town of Sinjar.

The August 2014 ISIS attack on Sinjar

In the early hours of 3 August 2014, ISIS fighters left their bases in Iraq and Syria and converged on the Sinjar region in northwest Iraq, close to the Iraqi-Syrian border. There, Sinjar town and 81 villages are spread out around the base of Mount Sinjar, an arid 100-kilometre-long mountain range. Kocho, a Yazidi village which was home to approximately 1,200 people at the time of the ISIS attack,⁵ lies on the southern side of the mountain (Figure 1, overleaf).

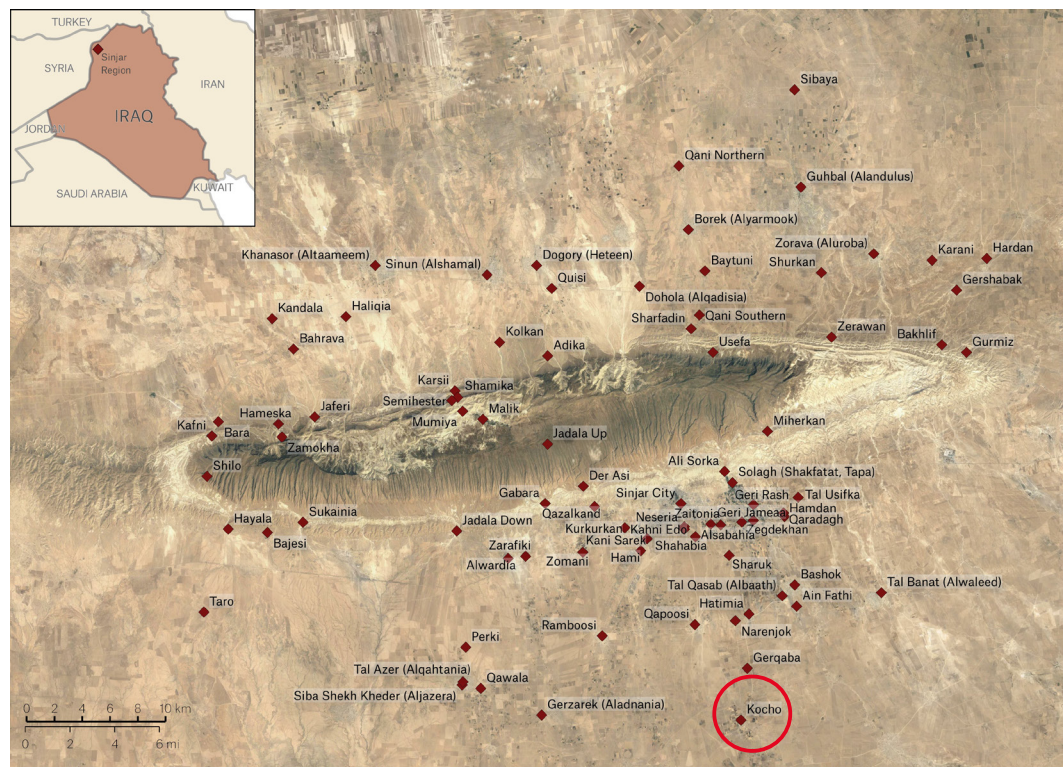
ISIS had taken control of Mosul only two months earlier, and, between June and August 2014, had made multiple small-scale attacks on Sinjar, which lay between Mosul, their de facto capital in Iraq, and Raqqa, their Syrian 'capital'. As thousands of fighters moved into Sinjar, intent on making it part of their so-called caliphate, their particular target became clear.

Sinjar was home to a number of different ethnic and religious groups including Sunni and Shia Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Christians, all of whom suffered in varying ways under ISIS. It was also home to the majority of the world's Yazidis. Said to be one of the world's

⁵ In one of the first field investigation reports, Amnesty International estimated that Kocho's population was about 1,200 at the time of the ISIS attack; see 'Ethnic Cleansing on a Historic Scale: The Islamic State's Systematic Targeting of Minorities in Northern Iraq', Amnesty International, 2 September 2014, p. 7. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/8000/mde140112014en.pdf> (accessed 2 May 2019). According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum report, Kocho was home to approximately 1,700 people but between 400 and 500 of them fled to Mount Sinjar on 3 August 2014 before ISIS seized the village; see United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "'Our Generation is Gone'", p. 16. Susan Shand reported that there were 1,172 people in Kocho; see Susan Shand, *Sinjar: 14 Days that Saved the Yazidis from Islamic State* (Guilford, CN: Lyons Press, 2018), p. 111.

oldest religious groups, the Yazidis are not accepted as being ‘People of the Book’⁶ and are often referred to, wrongly, as ‘devil-worshippers’. Consequently, they have suffered centuries of discrimination, marginalisation, and, at various points in history, persecution and genocide.⁷ ISIS, building on deep pre-existing prejudices, regards the Yazidis as not only infidels, but also pagans⁸ whose existence could not be tolerated in their ‘caliphate’.⁹ There was not the first attempt to wipe out the Yazidis, but it has been the most successful to date.

Figure 1: Map of Yazidi Villages in the Sinjar Region



Credit: Nathan Reece

⁶ ‘People of the Book’ – ‘*Ahl Al-Kitab*’ in Arabic – is used in the Quran to refer to Jews, Christians and Sabaeans and emphasises the community of faith between those who possess monotheistic scriptures.

⁷ See, Birgül Acikyildiz, *The Yazidis: The History of a Community, Culture, and Religion* (London: IB Tauris, 2014), pp. 37–63, for a discussion of earlier assaults on the Yazidi population in Iraq.

⁸ ISIS refers to Yazidis as *mushrikin* (polytheists and idol worshippers). This differs, for example, from their view of Shi’a Muslims who they define as *murtaddin* or *rafidah* (apostates or rejectors of the faith), or Christians who are *Ahl Al-Kitab* (People of the Book). ISIS’s treatment of these groups is theoretically defined by these classifications. The Yazidis, who ISIS define as polytheists (but who explicitly define themselves as monotheists) are seen to practice *shirk* (idolatry) and are held as a direct threat and insult to the central principle of ISIS-interpreted Islam, an adherence to strict monotheism, or *tawheed*.

⁹ ISIS, in an article entitled ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’, published in the fourth edition of its English language magazine *Dabiq*, stated that it had sought to determine how the Yazidis should be treated under ISIS’s ideology, prior to the attack being launched. In the same article, ISIS declared, ‘Upon conquering the region of Sinjar... the Islamic State faced a population of Yazidis, a pagan minority existent for ages in the regions of Iraq and Sham [Syria]. Their continual existence to this day is a matter that Muslims should question as they will be asked about it on Judgment Day...’ See, ‘The Revival of Slavery Before the Hour’, *Dabiq* 4, 2014, pp. 14–16.

Groups of ISIS fighters acted in concert as they seized towns and villages on all sides of Mount Sinjar. They faced little resistance as the Peshmerga, the Iraqi Kurdish fighting forces, withdrew as ISIS advanced, leaving much of the Sinjar region defenceless. As news spread of the attack, lightly armed Yazidi men mounted a very limited defence of some villages in an attempt to give their families time to flee. Yazidis who were fortunate enough to live relatively nearby fled into the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Those closest to Mount Sinjar fled to its upper slopes, where they were besieged by ISIS.¹⁰ Without shade or access to water and under a pounding sun, hundreds – mainly infants and young children – died of dehydration. By 10 August 2014, the YPG – the Syrian Kurdish forces, operating under the cover of American and Iraqi airstrikes – opened a humanitarian corridor to rescue the survivors.¹¹

Thousands of other Yazidis were trapped on lower ground. After controlling the main roads and all strategic junctions, ISIS set up checkpoints and sent mobile patrols to search for fleeing Yazidi families. Within hours, Yazidis who fled too late or who had remained in their villages found themselves encircled by armed, black-clad ISIS fighters. Almost all villages were emptied within 72 hours of the attack, with the exception of Kocho village, which was not emptied until 15 August 2014.

Kocho

At approximately 2am on 3 August 2014, Kocho's residents woke to the sound of gun and mortar fire as surrounding Yazidi villages came under ISIS attack. They alerted a contingent of Peshmerga soldiers who were stationed at the village school. Some of Kocho's men kept watch on any unusual movements around the perimeter of the village, feeding information back to the Peshmerga. As ISIS advanced into neighbouring villages, the Peshmerga left Kocho, ostensibly to reinforce other Peshmerga units fighting ISIS in other villages. They did not return. After the Peshmerga left, several hundred residents, those who had access to vehicles, fled to seek refuge on Mount Sinjar.¹² Some made it safely to the upper slopes of Mount Sinjar where they were later rescued by Syrian Kurdish forces; others, it is reported, were captured by ISIS on the roads.

When ISIS entered Kocho, the senior commander, who operated under the kunya (or nom de guerre) of 'Abu Hamza', met with the village *mukhtar* (or headman) Sheikh Ahmed Jasso and demanded that the villagers hand over any weapons in their possession. Through his fighters, he instructed the villagers to stay in their houses. Peering through curtains, survivors would later describe seeing heavily armed men driving cars and trucks adorned with black flags around the village. Faced with an initial demand to either convert to Islam or face execution, the Yazidi community leaders entered into frantic negotiations to find a

¹⁰ For an account of the violations suffered by those besieged on Mount Sinjar, and the details of their rescue, see CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', paras. 27–8.

¹¹ Helene Cooper and Michael D. Shear, 'Militants' Siege on Mountain in Iraq Is Over, Pentagon Says', *The New York Times*, 13 August 2014.

¹² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "'Our Generation is Gone'", p. 16. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's reported that while approximately 1,700 people lived in Kocho, between 400 and 500 of them fled to Mount Sinjar on 3 August 2014 shortly before ISIS seized the village.

solution that would allow Kocho's Yazidis to leave safely. Over the next 12 days, ISIS fighters, led by Abu Hamza, held multiple meetings with Ahmed Jasso and other prominent men in Kocho. The other men and all of the women and children remained inside their houses. Some of the village leaders told their families that the men were trying to reach a resolution with ISIS, possibly by having the Yazidis give up their possessions as the price for safe passage out of ISIS-controlled territory.

Kocho is, as far as is currently known, the only village in which such intensive negotiations occurred. Why remains unclear. Some have posited that the commander was from the area and so was willing to enter into these negotiations. Some, emphasising the friendships and economic partnerships that connected the various communities in Sinjar, suggested that Arabs from neighbouring villages intervened in an attempt to save the Yazidis. Some of the Sinjari Yazidis had Arab *kreefs*. The *kreef* relationship, considered to be a blood bond between families, is created when a male member of one family is invited to hold the male child of the other family on his lap during the circumcision ritual. The *kreefs*, some believe, played a role in the unsuccessful attempt to save Kocho's Yazidis.

On 15 August 2014, the attempts to resolve the situation failed. Abu Hamza ordered all of Kocho's remaining Yazidis, approximately 1,200 people, to gather in the village school. On arrival, the women and younger children were forced upstairs, while the men and adolescent boys were kept on the ground floor.¹³ Fighters were stationed on the stairs to keep families apart. One survivor recalled the last glimpse of her husband and son as she looked over her shoulder while an ISIS fighter forced her upstairs. The separation of the families marked the first step in the destruction of the last intact Yazidi community in Sinjar.

On the ground floor, the ISIS commander reportedly berated the Yazidi men and older boys for their reluctance to convert to Islam, charging that they were intent on continuing to live in the pre-Islamic period or *jahiliyyah*.¹⁴ ISIS fighters ordered them to surrender their gold, money, mobile telephones, and other valuables. Some of the male survivors have reported that the fighters stated the Yazidis' possessions were the price they were paying to leave Kocho safely. The fighters then began to force the men and older boys out of the school at gunpoint. One woman, looking out of a window on the second floor, saw the men being led away. She was told by the fighters guarding the second floor that the men were being taken to Mount Sinjar and that they would see them 'later'.

Yazidi men and boys were taken out of the Kocho village school in groups. Three of the few male survivors later described to Amnesty International being shoved into vehicles that were driven short distances (though not all to the same location).¹⁵ ISIS fighters pulled the

¹³ Whether a boy had reached puberty was assessed in various ways by ISIS fighters across Sinjar. The fighters in Kocho village, for example, inspected Yazidi boys to see if they had any underarm hair. Fighters in other locations made snap judgments based on height and weight. In general, boys aged 12 years and above were grouped with Yazidi adult men, though this was not uniformly the case.

¹⁴ *Jahiliyyah* is an Islamic concept referring to the period of time and state of affairs in Arabia before the advent of Islam. It is often translated as the 'Age of Ignorance'.

¹⁵ Donatella Rovera, 'Testimonies from Kocho: The village ISIS tried to wipe off the map', Amnesty

men and older boys from the vehicles and forced them to kneel or crouch on the ground before shooting them.¹⁶ At least one of the massacre sites was close enough to the school for the women and children to hear the sound of gunfire. ISIS fighters reportedly used bulldozers to pile earth over the bodies. A few weeks later, ISIS held another group of Yazidis in a then-empty Kocho village. Female survivors of this group described a strong stench of corpses pervading the village.¹⁷

Since ISIS was ousted from Kocho in May 2017, at least eleven mass graves holding the remains of men and adolescent boys have been discovered inside the village's perimeter.¹⁸ In mid-March 2019, the Government of Iraq, together with the International Commission for Missing Persons and the UN Investigative Team for the Promotion of Accountability for the Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL began the process of excavating Kocho's mass graves, and of forensically analysing and identifying the remains of those buried within. While several hundred men and boys from Kocho are believed to have been executed, there is, as yet, no confirmed count.¹⁹

After most of the men and older boys had been taken out of the school, ISIS fighters ordered the women and younger children downstairs. Confronted with their male relatives' possessions, the women and girls were forced to add their jewellery and other valuables to the piles. Fighters threatened that anyone caught hiding anything of value would be killed. ISIS fighters began to select unmarried girls, mostly those between the ages of 13 and 16, and took them away. Their mothers, screaming and desperately trying to hold on to their daughters, were beaten back by the fighters.

Within hours of entering the school, ISIS fighters ordered the remaining women and children, who numbered in their hundreds, into vehicles and drove them out of Kocho to a village closer to the base of Mount Sinjar. There, they were housed in a school commonly referred to by survivors as the Solagh Technical Institute. Fighters separated the group into two. Married women, surviving boys, and girls younger than nine years of age were placed on the second floor. Unmarried women and older girls remained on the ground floor. Fighters continued to arrive at the holding site, selecting and taking away women and girls from the ground floor. They also took boys who were over the age of seven. Later testimonies would suggest that the boys were taken to ISIS training camps, where they were given Muslim names, indoctrinated, and trained to fight.²⁰ Anyone who attempted to prevent fighters from taking away Yazidi boys and girls was brutally beaten.

International, 18 August 2014. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2014/08/testimonies-from-kocho-the-village-isis-tried-to-wipe-off-the-map/> (accessed 2 May 2019).

¹⁶ Ibid. See also United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "Our Generation is Gone", pp. 18–19; CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', para. 34; 'Iraq crisis: Yazidi villagers "massacred" by IS', BBC News, 16 August 2014. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-28814633> (accessed 2 May 2019).

¹⁷ CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', para 36.

¹⁸ Güley Bor et al, 'Working Against the Clock: Documenting Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State', Yazda, 2018. Available at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/92fo16_b2c5d9bdf3994c1e8994e72c571d107d.pdf (accessed 2 May 2019).

¹⁹ CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', para 34.

²⁰ Ibid, paras. 90–7.

In the early hours of 16 August 2014, the fighters ordered the terrified, exhausted women and girls into the yard of the school. There they separated the women who were deemed to be past childbearing age from the others, before leading them away. Survivors of the group left in the yard said they heard a volley of gunfire,²¹ before collapsing into panic and screaming. When the area was retaken from ISIS in 2017, a mass grave containing the remains of women was uncovered in the yard of the school.²²

After sunrise, fighters loaded the surviving residents of Kocho – all women and children – into trucks and buses and transported them to holding sites deeper inside ISIS-controlled territory. These holding sites included, but are likely not to have been limited to, multiple schools in Tel Afar; Badoush prison outside of Mosul city; a wedding hall in Mosul; and houses in the Al-Arabi neighbourhood of Mosul city.²³ There, those forcibly transferred from Kocho joined other Yazidi women and children abducted from across Sinjar. Every Yazidi woman or child captured by ISIS was held in one, and usually two or three, of these sites.

In August 2014, ISIS killed and captured thousands of Yazidi men, women and children. Kocho's fate, though delayed, was the same of that of Yazidis from villages all across Sinjar. Regardless of where the Yazidi families were captured, ISIS fighters swiftly ordered the separation of males and females, with the exception of boys who had not reached puberty who were allowed to remain with their mothers. ISIS fighters carried out executions of male Yazidis in the streets, at makeshift checkpoints, and on roadsides, as well as on the lower sections of the roads ascending Mount Sinjar. Other captives, including family members, were often forced to witness the killings. Most killings were of groups of between two and twenty men and boys. Kocho, where it is estimated that ISIS killed hundreds, appears to be an exception, based on current information. In some, but not all instances, older women from other villages were also executed.

Those who survived the initial capture – predominantly women and children – were moved to various temporary holding sites inside Sinjar, such as Solagh, and then transferred to central holding sites in Mosul and Tel Afar. From there, women and girls, some as young as nine, were registered, sold and re-sold to ISIS fighters. They were forced into sexual slavery, and were often also beaten, starved and forced to labour in fighters' houses. Yazidi boys were ripped from their families, forced into ISIS training camps, and later made to fight on the battlefield.

In the weeks immediately following ISIS's seizing Sinjar, some Yazidis – notably a small number of men who had survived executions and any injuries they sustained – made their way to safety by moving at night across Sinjar to the KRI. Some Yazidis who had either been taken in or sought refuge with Muslim families were smuggled out of ISIS-controlled territory into the KRI, at great personal risk to all involved. After this short period, any

²¹ Ibid, para. 46.

²² Matthew Barber et al, 'Mass Graves of Yazidis Killed by the Islamic State Organization or Local Affiliates On or After August 3, 2014', Yazda, 28 January 2016, p. 10. Available at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/92fo16_7ce9af13e1c64a768fc320aae544d323.pdf (accessed 2 May 2019).

²³ CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', para. 47.

Yazidis rescued were usually as a result of the intervention of smugglers, who, while often paid substantial amounts, also operated under great threat. In some cases, ISIS fighters sold Yazidi women, and any children who remained with their mothers, back to their relatives in contravention of ISIS policy. Yazidi families often sold or borrowed all they could to pay tens of thousands of dollars to fighters who were perpetrating horrific abuses on those they were holding captive. While the exact number remains unknown, Yazidi community sources estimate that thousands of those who survived the initial ISIS attack on Sinjar remain missing.

Data Sources and Methods

Civil society organisations and local authorities have attempted to compile lists of Yazidi victims of ISIS's August 2014 attack. This paper analyses data from two independent sources. The first source is a list of victims gathered by trained Yazidi enumerators,²⁴ primarily from close family members and occasionally from more distant relatives, friends and neighbours, in camps for internally displaced persons in the KRI – hereinafter referred to as 'List from Camps in the KRI'. The second source is a list of victims compiled by one of the few Kocho village leaders who survived the genocide – hereinafter referred to as 'List from Village Leader'.

Both sources recorded the victim's first name, father's name, grandfather's name,²⁵ gender, age and village of residence at the time of the ISIS attack. Information on victim's status – dead, missing, or rescued – is updated to August 2018. Neither of these sources is likely to be complete, but together they corroborate each other and provide more reliable information than either used separately.

The first phase of the analysis involved a detailed screening to assess data quality within each source. Victims' names were sorted alphabetically, checking for possible spelling variants and ensuring a uniform transliteration from Arabic to the Latin alphabet. The reported gender was examined alongside victims' names to verify consistency. Digit preferences²⁶ and rough approximations in age reporting were identified. Such inaccuracies are common in data collection through questionnaires in surveys and censuses, especially for populations with low literacy rates, but do not constitute a serious problem for the purpose of this analysis.

The second phase of the analysis involved merging the screened data from the two sources using victims' names to match the overlapping records. The merging process resulted in three sets of records: (i) a set of matched records of victims found in both the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leader; (ii) a set of unmatched records of

²⁴ The Yazidi enumerators received training from Dr. Valeria Cetorelli concerning questionnaire design, interview techniques and core principles of human subjects' protection.

²⁵ According to Iraq's patronymic system, persons are generally referred to by their given name followed by their father's and grandfather's names.

²⁶ Inaccuracies in age reporting in surveys and censuses often result from a tendency of rounding the age to the nearest number ending in the digits 0 or 5.

victims found only in the List from Camps in the KRI; and (iii) a set of unmatched records of victims found only in the List from Village Leader.

The matching process served to validate the identity of victims whose names were found in both lists. The subsequent phase of the analysis involved validating the unmatched records of victims whose names were only found in one list. Those records were inspected one by one to exclude the possibility that some victims were reported in both lists but their records were not matched because of minor errors in their first, father's or grandfather's names. Detailed screenings of existing lists of victims from other Yazidi villages and the town of Sinjar were also undertaken to rule out the possibility that some victims were erroneously reported as residing in Kocho at the time of the ISIS attack when they were in fact residing somewhere else. The validation process produced a consolidated database of all identified victims.

The final phase of the analysis involved applying a dual system estimation to determine the likely number of victims who remain uncounted. This methodology can be used when two independently collected incomplete lists of victims are available. More specifically, the total number of victims can be estimated by comparing the size of overlap between the two lists to the size of the lists themselves. If the overlap is small, this implies that the total number of victims is much higher than the number of identified victims in the lists. If, on the contrary, most records in the two lists overlap, this implies that the total number of victims is not much higher than the number of identified victims in the lists.

Let V_T be the unknown total number of Yazidi victims from Kocho, V_C be the number of identified victims in the List from Camps in the KRI and V_L be the number of identified victims in the List from Village Leader. There are V_B identified victims who are matched across both lists.

If all victims have an equal probability of appearing in the List from Camps in the KRI, then the probability of a specific victim being reported is:

$$\Pr(\text{reported in the List from Camps in the KRI}) = V_C / V_T \quad (1)$$

Similarly, if all victims have an equal probability of appearing in the List from Village Leader, then the probability of a specific victim being reported is:

$$\Pr(\text{reported in the List from Village Leader}) = V_L / V_T \quad (2)$$

The probability of a specific victim being reported in both lists is:

$$\Pr(\text{reported in both lists}) = V_B / V_T \quad (3)$$

By definition, the probability of an event composed of two independent events is the product of the independent probabilities. Therefore:

$$V_B / V_T = V_C / V_T * V_L / V_T \quad (4)$$

Solving equation (4) for V_T , the total number of victims can be estimated using the number of identified victims from the two lists and the matches between them:

$$V_T = V_C * V_L / V_B \quad (5)$$

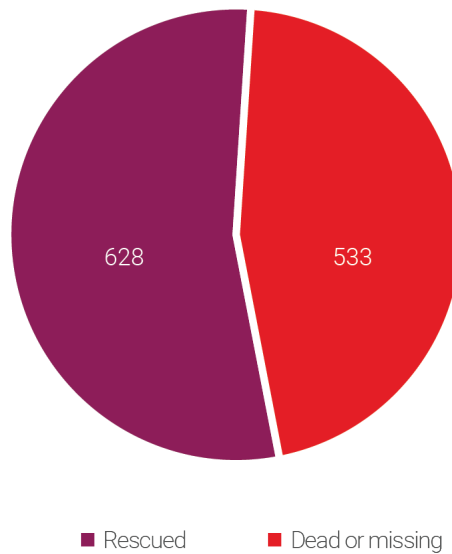
The likely number of victims who remain uncounted is then obtained by subtracting the number of identified victims to the estimated total number of victims.

Results

Total Number of Victims from Kocho

Screening and merging the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leader led to a consolidated database of 1,161 Yazidi victims from Kocho who can be identified by name. Of the 1,161 identified victims, 628 (54 percent) have been rescued from ISIS captivity, while 533 (46 percent) are reported as dead or missing (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Status of Identified Victims from Kocho



There were 848 matched records between the two sources; that is to say, 848 victims were recorded in both the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leader. In addition, the List from Camps in the KRI contained 28 records that were not included in the List from Village Leader, and the List from Village Leader contained 285 records that were not included in the List from Camps in the KRI (Table 1, overleaf). The actual number of victims is likely to be somewhat higher than the number of identified victims in the consolidated database. Nevertheless, the broad overlap between the List from Camps in the KRI and the List from Village Leader, with 848 (73 percent) matched records, is an indication of their high degree of completeness. Under the dual system estimation assumptions,

the actual number of victims, including those not recorded in either list, can be estimated using equation (5):

$$(848 + 28) * (848 + 285) / 848 = 1,170$$

This number is only marginally higher than the number of identified victims in the consolidated database, suggesting that the likely number of victims who remain uncounted is 9 (1 percent).

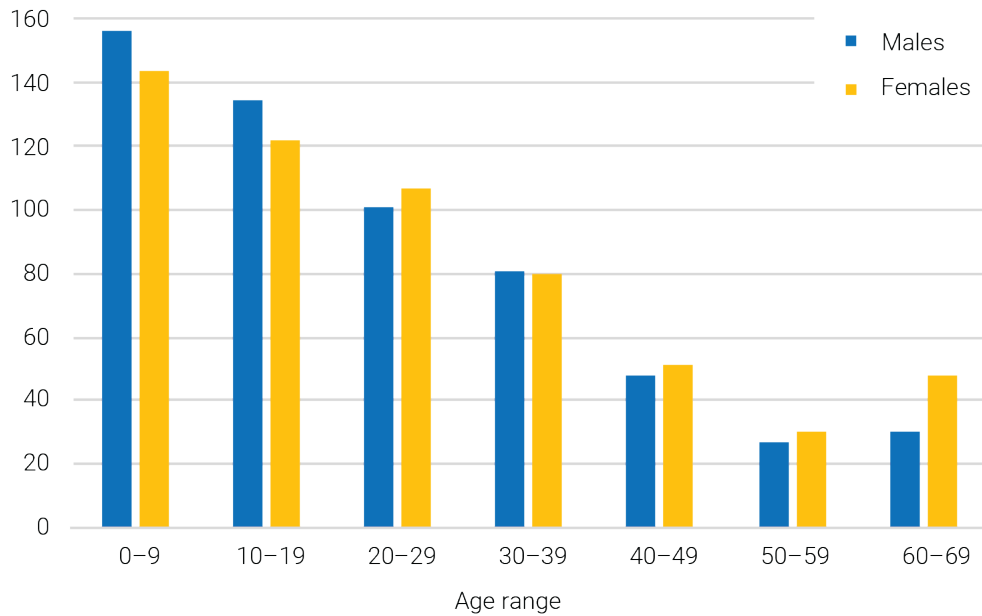
Table 1: Number of Identified Victims from Kocho

Source	Number
Identified victims in both lists	848
Identified victims only in the List from Camps in the KRI	28
Identified victims only in the List from Village Leader	285
Total identified victims in either list	1,161

The results of the demographic documentation depict a narrative that strongly corroborates the findings of testimony-based documentation, such as those of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Since there were roughly 1,200 people in Kocho at time of the ISIS attack, the number of identified victims in the consolidated database confirms, with a significant degree of certainty, that nearly the entire population was either killed or kidnapped. The nature of the attack is also substantiated by the gender and age characteristics of the identified victims. Fully, 579 (50 percent) of the identified victims are males and 582 (50 percent) are females. The age of the identified victims reflects Kocho's young population age structure, with 301 (26 percent) of them being under 10 years and 558 (48 percent) under 20 years (Figure 3, overleaf).²⁷

²⁷ The population age structure is similarly young in the rest of Iraq, owing to sustained high birth rates across the country. Overall, about 29 percent of the Iraqi population is under 10 years and 51 percent under 20 years; see 'World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision', United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2017. Available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/> (accessed 2 May 2019).

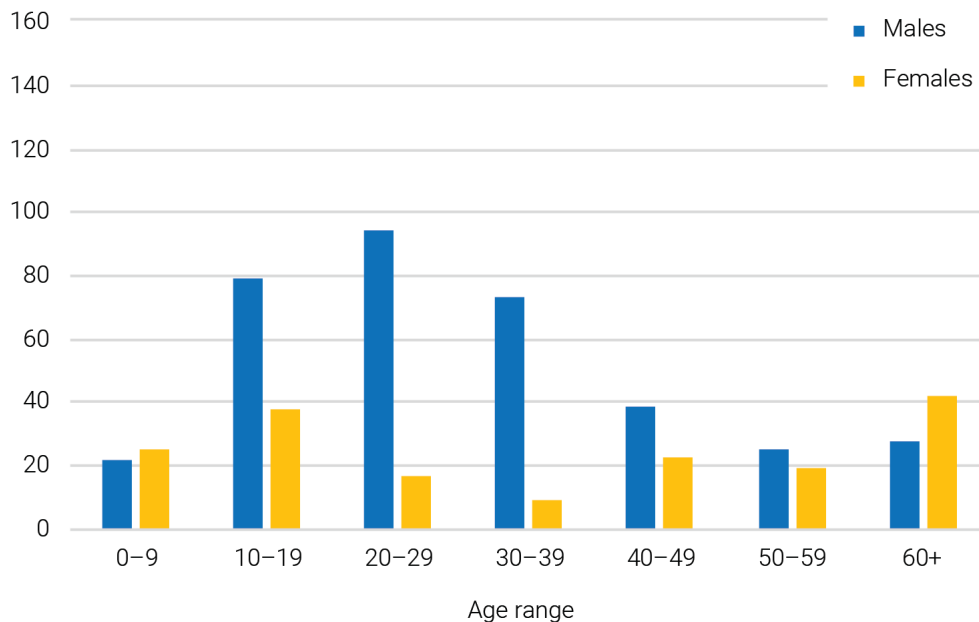
Figure 3: Gender and Age Characteristics of All Identified Victims



Dead or Missing

While ISIS targeted Kocho's entire population, the violations suffered varied depending on the gender and age of the victims. Of the 533 victims who are reported as dead or missing, 360 (68 percent) are males and 173 (32 percent) are females. Among the 157 boys and 144 girls under 10 years of age who were captured by ISIS, there are respectively 22 (14 percent) and 25 (17 percent) who are reported as dead or missing. Among the 135 boys and 122 girls between 10 and 19 years at the time of the attack, 79 (59 percent) and 38 (31 percent) are reported as dead or missing. Of the 287 men aged 20 years and above, 259 (90 percent) are reported as dead or missing. The number of those reported as dead or missing is 26 (14 percent) among the 187 women in the age range 20-39; 42 (52 percent) among the 81 women aged 40-59; and 42 (88 percent) among the 48 women aged 60 years and above (Figure 4, overleaf).

Figure 4: Gender and Age Characteristics of Identified Victims Reported as Dead or Missing



Distinguishing between dead and missing victims has been complicated by the fact that some victims' relatives were unwilling to list them as having died in the absence of witnesses to their murder or confirmation of the presence of their remains in the mass graves found in and around Kocho village and in the Solagh Technical Institute. However, the evidence collected in other documentation efforts, including those by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, strongly indicates that the vast majority of men and boys over the age of 12 who were taken out of the Kocho village school were executed in a number of different locations nearby very shortly afterwards. We would expect, therefore, that the documentation of men and boys over the age of 12 will be of assistance to the identification of remains found in Kocho's mass graves. Similarly, in the case of older women, the documentation collected is likely to be of use in identifying remains found in the mass grave in the Solagh Technical Institute.

It is impossible to exclude the possibility that some Yazidi men and boys over 12 at the time of capture who were reported as missing may have survived, living – or perhaps hiding, with the assistance of others – within ISIS-controlled territory in the years which followed the August 2014 attack. Nevertheless, as the analysis below shows, very few men and older boys have been rescued in the intervening years, creating slender hopes for their survival.

For women and girls captured by ISIS and who remain missing, both testimonial and demographic documentation suggests that they are far more likely to have survived, albeit having suffered violations almost beyond human comprehension. Following ISIS's loss of territorial control in Iraq and Syria, the fate and whereabouts of the still-missing women

and girls (as well as boys under the age of 7 who are more likely to have been allowed to remain with their mothers) remains a painful and largely unanswered question. As the women and girls were likely to have been held in close proximity to the fighters, whether in their houses or in their bases, they were particularly at risk of being casualties of the airstrikes directed at the armed group. In early 2019, as ISIS made its last stand in Baghuz in eastern Syria, close to the Iraqi border, civilians – often family members of the fighters – moved into camps run by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Some of these families brought Yazidi captives who have now been rescued and reunited with their surviving families.²⁸ As ISIS began to lose its grip on the last sliver of territory in eastern Syria, fighters who had been holding Yazidi women and children captive, and who were the perpetrators of crimes against them, decided to pose as their guardians as they fled the frontline and surrendered to the SDF.²⁹ Reports that Yazidi women and girls continued to be held captive in private houses in areas now liberated from ISIS remain unconfirmed.

For boys who were above the age of 7 but below 12 at the time of capture, or who turned 7 while held in captivity, their fate also remains unclear. Testimonial evidence, such as that gathered by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, suggests they are likely to have been forcibly recruited into ISIS ranks, trained and made to fight.³⁰ A few boys escaped after they were deployed, usually with the assistance of a smuggler or other intermediary.³¹ Recently, as ISIS's 'caliphate' has collapsed, several boys forced to fight with ISIS have been rescued.³² Precisely how many survived the training and/or the battlefield remains unknown.

Rescued from Captivity

A demographic analysis of the 628 victims who have been rescued from captivity – a catch-all term governing a diverse range of situations through which abductees have been returned to their families – also reveals important insights into the diverse ways

²⁸ For example, Louisa Lovelock encountered 'Yazidi women and their families, who had been enslaved by the militants' in Al-Hol displacement camp, near Baghuz in Syria. Louisa Lovelock, 'A Desperate Struggle for Survival Inside the Last Corner of the Islamic State', *Washington Post*, 18 February 2019. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-desperate-struggle-for-survival-inside-the-last-corner-of-the-islamic-state/2019/02/18/1c693d4c-3161-11e9-8781-763619f12cb4_story.html (accessed 2 May 2019).

²⁹ Louisa Lovelock, 'After five failed attempts to escape ISIS slavery, she tried one last time', *Washington Post*, 23 February 2019. Available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/after-five-failed-attempts-to-escape-isis-slavery-she-tried-one-last-time/2019/02/23/2137450c-3469-11e9-8375-e3dcf6b68558_story.html (accessed 2 May 2019).

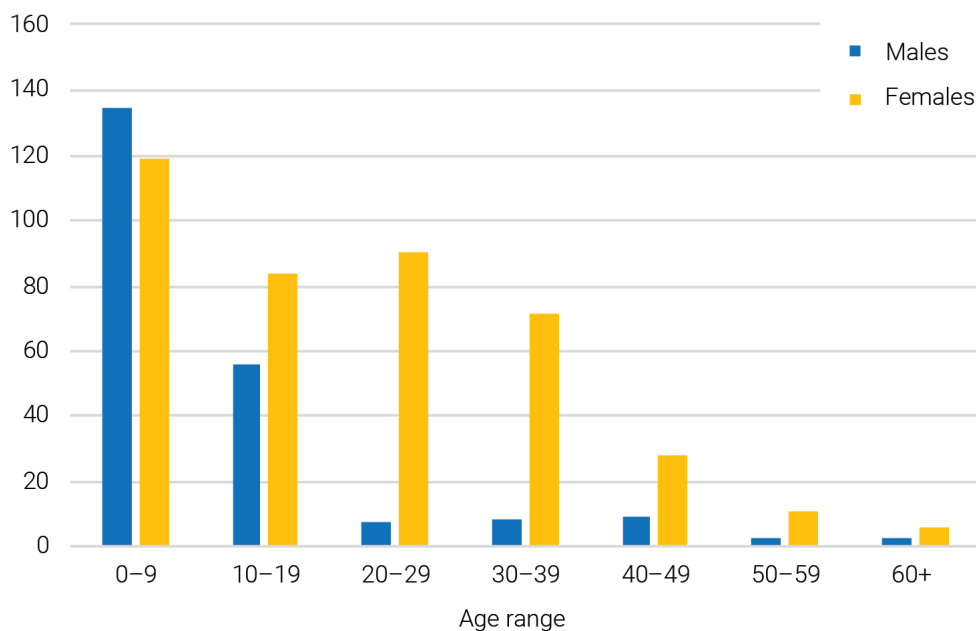
³⁰ CoI Syria, 'They Came to Destroy', paras. 90–7.

³¹ Ruaidhrí Giblin & Hiwa Dartas, 'I was an Islamic State boy soldier', *The Irish Times*, 28 April 2018. Available at <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/middle-east/i-was-an-islamic-state-boy-soldier-1.3475092> (accessed 2 May 2019).

³² Laura Kelly, 'Yazidi boy's rescue, reunion with family a bright spot amid humanitarian crisis in Mosul', *Washington Times*, 19 July 2017. Available at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jul/19/emad-mshko-tamo-yazidi-boy-survives-isis-captivity/> (accessed 2 May 2019); Sirwan Kajjo, 'Yazidi Children in Syria Await Family Reunions', *Voice of America*, 27 February 2019. Available at <https://www.voanews.com/a/freed-yazidi-children-in-syria-await-reunion-with-families/4807226.html> (accessed 30 May 2019).

in which ISIS targeted Kocho's Yazidis. Overall, 219 (35 percent) of those who have been rescued are males and 409 (65 percent) are females. The number of boys and girls under 10 years who have been rescued is 135 (86 percent) and 119 (83 percent) respectively. Among those aged between 10 and 19 years, 56 (41 percent) and 84 (69 percent) have been rescued. Only 28 (10 percent) of the men aged 20 years and above have been rescued. The number of those rescued is 161 (86 percent) among women in the age group 20–39; 39 (48 percent) among those aged 40–59; and 6 (12 percent) among those aged 60 years and above (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Gender and Age Characteristics of Identified Victims Rescued from Captivity



The demographic documentation cannot directly corroborate female survivors' accounts of being forcibly transferred from the Kocho village school to various holding sites before being sold into sexual slavery by and to ISIS fighters. Similarly, the demographic documentation does not tell a story of the violations suffered by Yazidi women and girls held by ISIS. What the demographic documentation clearly demonstrates, however, is that girls and women of childbearing age were much more likely to have been kept alive in ISIS captivity and, consequently, to have the possibility of rescue. From documentation collected and findings published by the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, it is also known that boys under the age of 7 and girls under the age of 9 were kept with their mothers by ISIS and sold as a package within the armed group's system of enslavement. It is therefore likely that children in this age group were rescued with their mothers.

After the age of 40 years, and to a greater degree after the age of 50, there is a precipitous drop in the number of Yazidi women from Kocho who have been rescued. This accords with the results set out in Figure 3, showing a greater number of women in these

age groups being reported dead or missing. The demographic analysis confirms the testimony-based findings that women who ISIS considered to be past childbearing age were separated and executed in the early hours of 16 August 2014, in the grounds of the Solagh Technical Institute.

One issue which may give rise to further examination is the number of boys aged between 10 and 19 years who have been rescued. As boys in this age group would have almost certainly been moved into ISIS training camps, before being forced to join the group's armed forces, the data collected suggests more boys have been rescued from this context than would be expected. As ISIS policy is not to allow Yazidis to return to their communities (a policy regularly breached by individual members selling Yazidi women and children back to their families), it is highly unlikely that Yazidi boys who had been trained or were members of ISIS' fighting forces would have been released with the consent of the armed group. One viable explanation may be that boys forced to fight with ISIS either escaped, or surrendered to (or were captured by) opposing forces during fighting, and upon being identified as Yazidis were returned to their families. As discussed, isolated incidents of forcibly recruited Yazidi boys being rescued, prior to ISIS's 'caliphate' collapsing, have been reported in the media. The data gathered by the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project indicates that more boys who were trained and made to fight as part of ISIS have survived than testimonial evidence has previously suggested.

Conclusion

This demographic documentation of ISIS's attack on the Yazidi village of Kocho in the Sinjar region of northwest Iraq corroborates previous findings that the armed group's attack was directed against the entirety of the village's population, with the types of violations suffered depending on the gender and age of the victims.

The consolidated database of victims generated by the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project will be of substantial assistance to identifying the remains of Kocho's residents during mass grave excavations/exhumations and forensic analyses. It is likely that only at that point will there be clarity over the distinction between those listed as dead and missing, providing if not solace then at least closure to their surviving family members.

That Yazidis who have been rescued from ISIS are more likely to be female has long been apparent and is reflected in the foci of documentation groups and humanitarian agencies. This is particularly so in the psychosocial support and medical services available to female survivors, albeit arguably weighted more towards women than younger girls. Specialised and adequately resourced counselling should be put in place and maintained at an appropriate level, including with counsellors experienced in treating victims of sexual violence. This necessarily includes those with expertise in treating child victims of sexual violence. It is essential that continued and adequate funding of these programmes be secured, particularly as international focus risks moving away from the Yazidis and northern Iraq as a whole following ISIS's loss of territorial control.

Yazidi women and girls face additional challenges to their recovery. Many have limited education, having married and had children early. Their interactions with the world beyond their extended families was often through their husbands or other male relatives. With such a substantial number of Yazidi men from Kocho reported dead or missing, it remains unclear how Yazidi women and girls from this community will survive and thrive in environments with such limited social and economic independence. Investments should be made in tracking the phenomenon of early marriages and attention should also be paid to any indications of a rise in polygamous relationships, particularly as this has not been a feature of the Yazidi community in recent years. Equally, longer-term strategies to promote female education, skills training, and employment should be implemented to ensure women's greater political, social and economic independence. A good in itself, this is also the most effective way to ensure that any marriages, or relationships entered into, spring from choice and not the vagaries of financial hardship.

The consolidated database of victims indicates that, at the time of the ISIS attack, about one quarter of Kocho's population were children under 10 years. Additional resources should be placed into ensuring there is expertise available to document crimes committed against children, and to undertake the interviewing of child survivors, where appropriate to do so. Moreover, it may indicate a stronger than expected need for trauma therapy, and other forms of psychosocial support that are specifically tailored to children, and particularly those directly affected by conflict. There may need to be further specialisations in the services offered to boys and girls held by ISIS, where it is determined that children were exposed to different violations and traumas as a result of their gender. Families of child survivors, as well as schools, may also need additional information and support in recognising and dealing with children living with trauma. Moreover, both demographic and testimony-based documentation suggests that Kocho's children are more likely to grow up with fewer male role models within their own community. This is an issue that may need to be addressed in child education and mentoring programmes.

The demographic documentation of violations suffered by the inhabitants of one village is unlikely to be sufficient to establish contextual elements of various international crimes. However, this documentation constitutes the first step to providing data that may be used before existing and future accountability mechanisms to establish, for example, that ISIS committed specific violations as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, as is required for a finding of crimes against humanity. Similarly the demographic documentation, once it progresses further, may yield data concerning conduct relevant to the determination of genocide, including, as set out in the ICTR's *Akayesu* Trial Judgment, 'the scale of atrocities committed, their general nature, and the fact of deliberately and systematically targeting victims on account of their membership in a particular group.'³³ Finally, the data collected and analysed by the Yazidi Victims Demographic Documentation Project underscores the absolute necessity of using a gendered analysis as a means of understanding the full scope of ISIS' crimes.

³³ *Akayesu* Trial Judgment, para. 523.



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