

CNN PHOTOS

## Syria's 'lost generation' of girls

By **Thom Patterson**, CNN

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**13 photos:**

Amal, 14, left Syria with her family three years ago. Her future husband is 28-year-old Ahmad, right

decision, said photographer Laura Aggio Caldon. Many Syrian refugees are marrying off their child

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## Story highlights

Many Syrian families are marrying off their teenage daughters to much older men

The practice is aimed at protecting the girls from poverty and civil war

Marwa is one of countless girls under 18 who have been married off by their parents in hopes of protecting them from the horrors of Syria's civil war. These marriages, Caldon said, are creating a "lost generation."

The practice is another dark consequence from the nearly five-year war as civilians struggle to survive the fighting between government troops, rebel forces and ISIS terrorists. Many Syrian families try to protect their young daughters from poverty and war by marrying off their girls to men sometimes twice their age.



Photographer Laura Aggio Caldon

Marwa while her husband stood nearby. Marwa acknowledged in front of her own husband that she wouldn't have married him if there had been no war. Marwa said she married for economic security -- to have money for medicine to treat her blood deficiency.

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**(CNN)**—When photographer [Laura Aggio Caldon](#) spent several months with Syrian war refugees last year in Lebanon, she met a pregnant mother whose life was consumed with three things: cleaning house, reading the Quran and raising a 1-year-old boy.

Her name was Marwa. She was only 15.

It didn't take long for Caldon to realize she wasn't talking to a little girl. "Marwa was a woman who had lost her childhood," she said.

These child marriages are a growing problem worldwide, [according to the United Nations](#), which considers it a form of gender-based violence. The U.N. says children who marry are statistically more vulnerable to possible sexual abuse from their husbands, and they're also at higher risk for deadly complications from childbirth.

The war [has forced more than 4 million Syrians](#) to leave the country. Some have traveled to Lebanon, where Caldon met Marwa.

Marwa's village of makeshift houses and tents -- tucked away in the heart of the Bekaa Valley -- is called Hawsh el Harim, which translates as "place of women."

The women make no pretenses about their situations, Caldon said. She recalled a conversation she had with

If things had been different, Marwa said, she might have studied to be a pharmacist instead of getting married.

Caldon's dramatic photographs show teens who've been forced to live lives of women beyond their years.

We see Amina, 14, a mother of two sons. About two years ago, "her family forced her to marry for a better family economic situation," Caldon said.

sharing their wedding photos. Near recently entered a mosque.

Caldon, who's based in Italy, intends to return to Lebanon to learn more about child marriages among Syrian refugees.

She hopes to get an even closer look at this lost generation, to see for herself how they'll make it through life without the childhood so many of us take for granted.

*Laura Aggio Caldon is an Italian photographer based in Rome. You can follow her on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).*



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