

1 *Review*

2 **Narrative Review: The (Mental) Health consequences** 3 **of the Northern Iraq offensive of ISIS in 2014 for** 4 **female Yezidis**

5 **Pia Jäger**^{1,*}, **Claudia Rammelt**², **Notburga Ott**³ and **Angela Brand**⁴6 ¹ Section for Social Policy and Social Economy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ruhr-University Bochum,
 7 Universitätsstr. 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany & Department of International Health, Faculty of Health,
 8 Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University, Universiteitssingel 60, 6229 ER Maastricht, Netherlands9 ² Section for Church and Christian History, Faculty of Protestant Theology, Ruhr-University Bochum,
 10 Universitätsstr. 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany; E-Mail: claudia.rammelt@hotmail.de11 ³ Section for Social Policy and Social Economy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Ruhr-University Bochum,
 12 Universitätsstr. 150, 44801 Bochum, Germany; E-Mail: notburga.ott@rub.de13 ⁴ Department of International Health, Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences, Maastricht University,
 14 Universiteitssingel 60, 6229 ER Maastricht, Netherlands; E-Mail: a.brand@maastrichtuniversity.nl

15 * Correspondence: pia.jaeger@rub.de; Tel.: +49 234 – 32 28971

16 **Abstract:** The Yezidis who represent a religious minority living in Northern Iraq were particularly
 17 affected of the persecution by ISIS that gained power after 2013. This paper gives an overview of
 18 the events and the mental health consequences as well as associated influences on affected female
 19 Yezidis. Based on systematic literature search the aspects “*Persecution by ISIS and actual situation of*
 20 *the Yezidi community*”, “*Gender-specific aspects of the persecution and its consequences*”, “*Mental health of*
 21 *the affected women*” and “*Cultural-historical and religious context*” are worked out. Research indicates a
 22 high burden of health strain and mental health problems in the surviving Yezidi women, especially
 23 PTSD and depression. Concerning transgenerational trauma, the recent genocide revive past
 24 experiences in the history of the community. Like the narrow cultural and religious rules of the
 25 community, this can be both a resource and a burden. The actual extent of the attacks is neither
 26 predictable for the affected individuals nor for the community, consequences could also be passed
 27 on descendants. Long-term care and support of the affected persons, their descendants and the
 28 Yezidi community seems indispensable.

29 **Keywords:** Yezidi/ Yazidi – genocide – ISIS/ IS – Northern Iraq offensive – transgenerational trauma
 30 - PTSD

31 **1. Introduction**

32 Inter alia as a result of the civil war in Syria and a political vacuum following the fall of Saddam
 33 Hussein, the Islamic terrorist militia ISIS (Islamic state of Iraq and Syria, syn: ISIL – Islamic state of
 34 Iraq and the Levant group) gained power since 2013 [1,2]. Gradually ISIS brought Iraqi and Syrian
 35 areas under its control with the goal to establish an Islamic caliphate based on the fundamental
 36 Islamic “God’s law” Shari’a [3,4]. One of ISIS’ most prominent offensives is the so-called “Northern
 37 Iraq offensive” in August 2014. Here ISIS brought a large part of the Northern Iraqi areas - including
 38 the region “Sinjar” - under its control. Due to the cruelty of the action this offensive is also known as
 39 “*Sinjar massacre*” [5].

40 Both Muslims, who did not share ISIS’ understanding of Islam, as well as Christians and
 41 members of other religious minorities experienced displacement, persecution or were forced to
 42 convert. Particularly affected, however, were the Yezidis as they are exposed to persistent rumors
 43 and prejudices such as “devil worshippers” and considered to be “infidels” by ISIS. Depending on
 44 gender, male and female Yezidis had different experiences with ISIS. [7–11]

45 The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the events and the mental health consequences
 46 as well as associated influences on affected female Yezidis in Northern Iraq.

47 2. Methods

48 The methods of this narrative review are planned according to the requirements of Cochrane
49 [12] and PRISMA-P [13,14].

50 2.1. Electronic literature search in scientific databases

51 A systematic literature research with the databases “pubmed”, “Cochrane”, “Dimdi” and
52 “google scholar” will be done. Concerning the mental health of displaced Yezidi, all research articles
53 published after 2014 will be taken into account. Regarding the cultural-historical and religious
54 context, all research articles will be considered without limitations of date. Due to the different
55 spellings and authors named “Yazidi” etc., the terms “Yezidi”, “Yazidi” and “Ezidi” in title and
56 summary will be used in the search.

57 The following table gives an overview of the results of the literature search.

58 **Table 1.** Literature Search Tracking Sheet.

<i>Date of search</i>	<i>Database</i>	<i>Years searched</i>	<i>Search terms</i>	<i>Further search settings</i>	<i>Hits</i>
07/11/2018	PUBMED	No restrictions	Yezidi OR Yazidi OR Ezidi	in title/abstract	16
07/11/2018	PUBMED	Since 2014	Yezidi OR Yazidi OR Ezidi AND mental	in title/abstract	10
08/11/2018	SCHOLAR	No restrictions	Yezidi OR Yazidi OR Ezidi	in title/abstract, excluding citations and patents	158
08/11/2018	DIMDI (DATAH & AMIS)	No restrictions	Yezidi OR Yazidi OR Ezidi	No restrictions	0
08/11/2018	Cochrane Library	No restrictions	Yezidi OR Yazidi OR Ezidi	In title/abstract/keyword	0

59 2.2. Selection and inclusion criteria

60 From the results found in this research, the studies dealing with the subjects

- 61 ▪ Persecution by ISIS and actual situation of the Yezidi community
- 62 ▪ Gender-specific aspects of the persecution and its consequences
- 63 ▪ Mental health of the affected women
- 64 ▪ Cultural-historical and religious context

65 will be worked out.

66 All studies that focus on Yezidi women or people (women and men) will be included in general.
67 Studies that only deal with men or children will be excluded.

68 Provided that a standardized scientific survey has taken place, both qualitative and
69 epidemiological surveys will be considered. If this is not the case, the studies are excluded or used in
70 the “gray literature”.

71 With respect to the cultural-historical context, publications with a systematic overview of
72 relevant aspects will be included. Publications that only focus on specific aspects, do not adequately
73 substantiate their sources and so do not contribute to classifying the current context in terms of
74 cultural or religious history will be excluded.

75 Publications with a clear conflict of interest or strong political orientation won’t be considered.
76 Especially with regard to gray literature, attempts will be made to use reports and articles as neutral
77 and trustworthy sources or press.

78 Language should not be an exclusion criterion. For the use of foreign-language articles that are
79 not available in English, translation software or, if necessary, interpreters will be used.

80 2.3. Gray literature

81 Concerning the actual situation, the gender-specific aspects and the cultural-historical context
 82 grey literature such as reports of national and international organizations and local and international
 83 press as well as literature from the personal collection of the authors will additionally be taken into
 84 account.

85 2.4. Handsearching

86 As additional sources, books and articles from the personal collection of the participating
 87 authors are supplemented.

88 3. Results

89 After consideration of the topic and selection criteria and the exclusion of duplications, the
 90 following literature selection results:

91 **Table 2.** Resulting Literature Selection.

Persecution by ISIS and actual situation of the Yezidi community	
Systematic literature search	
Research article	5
Book/Chapter	1
Working paper	1
Additional handsearch	
Book/Chapter	1
Research article	1
Graduate works	1
Gray Literature	
Reports	1
Newspaper article	5
Gender-specific aspects of the persecution and their consequences	
Systematic literature search	
Research article	9
Graduate works	1
Comment	1
Gray literature	
Report	1
Additional handsearch	

Research article	3
Book/Chapter	1
Gray literature	
Book/Chapter	4
Research article	1
Reports	2
Graduate works	1
Working paper	1
(Health and) mental health of the affected women	
Systematic literature search	
Reviews	3
Research article	12
Graduate works	1
Gray literature	
working paper	1
Additional handsearch	
Research article	2
Gray literature	
Interview	1
Newspaper article	1
Cultural-historical and religious context	
Systematic literature search	
Research article	13
Books	10
Graduate works	3
Case reports	1
Gray literature	
Congress contribution	1
Additional handsearch	

Books	5
Gray literature	
Report	1
Newspaper article	1

92 The used literature of the systematic search as well as the gray literature and additional sources
93 are listed in the appendix.

94 Based on the systematic compilation of literature, a differentiated presentation of the research
95 subject is made. The upper categories of the literature assignment form the lead structure, whereby
96 individual contents can also be used across.

97 3.1. Persecution by ISIS and actual situation of the Yezidi community

98 Even after the so-called „Sinjar massacre“, violence and persecution against Yezidis was
99 rampant. Until now, Yezidi people are kidnapped or killed [15]. Still there is a high number of Yezidi
100 women in ISIS' captivity. Estimates presume in 2017 on 2 500 Yezidis (male and female) [9] or 3 000
101 Yezidi women and children who are still in the hands of ISIS [16]. Other sources report that at least 6
102 000 Yezidi women have spent some time in ISIS- imprisonment [17].

103 The atrocities committed by ISIS can be called a systematic destruction of the Yezidi community
104 [18], that shakes the Yezidi society in a long term [19].

105 The violence was not only directed against members of the religious communities - also sacred
106 sites and temples were ruined systematically. At the same time, the local religious roots of Yezidis
107 living in exile/ diaspora were destroyed. By this "religious cleansing" of persons and physical
108 structures, ISIS seeks to create a homogenous neo-Salafi space. [20]

109 On June 16th, 2016, the "UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria of the UN Human Rights Council"
110 confirmed that the actions of ISIS against the Yezidis in Northern Iraq constitute a genocide that not
111 only took place in the days of "Sinjar massacre" but still continues. The report cites the statement of
112 the Chairman of the Inquiry Committee, Paulo Pinheiro: "Genocide has occurred and is ongoing. ISIS
113 has subjected every Yazidi woman, child or man that it has captured to the most horrific of atrocities"
114 [21]. A legal review and prosecution of the genocide crimes against the Yazidis has begun only
115 recently [22].

116 Not least because of the public relations of Yezidi associations and survivors, the fate of the
117 Yezidis certainly has international support possibilities - such as the support of the Peshmerga army
118 and PKK for the liberation of the Sinjar [23–25]. Nevertheless, the response to the genocide and the
119 protection and assistance provided by the international community are considered insufficient by
120 observers [26].

121 In 2017 large parts of the occupied areas by ISIS could be reconquered. While some of the
122 displaced Yezidis returned to their home villages [27], many others were unable to do so. Either due
123 to the extent of the destruction or to the fear of a return and renewed attacks by ISIS still a large
124 number of displaced persons live as "internally displaced persons" (IDP) in so-called IDP-camps.
125 Other Yezidi live as asylum seekers in foreign countries [28], especially in Germany [29] or Turkey
126 [30]. Further, some Yezidi people cannot (or do not want to) return to their homeland after they were
127 forced to convert to Islam [15]. In addition, the relationship with the resident Muslim population -
128 some of whom have cooperated with ISIS - is also tense; the shaken trust between former neighbors
129 [31] makes a return difficult.

130 The situation in the IDP camps in Iraq [32] as well as in the refugee camps is quite precarious,
131 especially in Turkey, both at the supply and the legal level. Also, access to the INHCR and compliance
132 with relevant guidelines is questionable [30].

133 Regarding Yezidi women in a Turkish refugee camp, it could be shown that there were
134 restrictions concerning regular and healthy food, the conditions in camps were unhygienic. The
135 educational, social, cultural and religious needs were met insufficiently. [33]

136 Educational access to Yezidi has also been limited in the past, not least because of material
137 poverty that made it necessary for children to become involved in agriculture. In 2003/2004 and
138 2013/2014, it continued to deteriorate. [34]

139 All in all, the community of the Yezidis living in Sinjar - with their strong local connections - has
140 been scattered. Its members divided into returnees, refugees, Diaspora and IDP, the future of this
141 people is uncertain.

142 3.2. Gender-specific aspects

143 “Although all women are subject in some manner to discrimination based on gender, this is
144 compounded for some women when gender discrimination ‘intersects’ with discrimination on other
145 grounds. Refugee women suffer from both the internalized and external consequences of their often
146 already marginalized identities as women and ethnic, national or racial minorities.” [35]

147 The experiences of affected Yezidis with ISIS are often gender specific. Although Cetorelli’s
148 research has shown that about the same number of male and female Yezidi have been killed or
149 abducted by ISIS [9], the experiences of survivors vary significantly.

150 Particularly women and girls are affected by sexual violence. This is systematically used as a
151 “war tool” by ISIS - on the one hand because of the physical and psychological consequences for
152 those affected, on the other hand also because of the consequences for the community. [36–41]

153 Thus, it is assumed that in the context of genocide, violence and, above all, sexual violence,
154 intend to harm the life force of a community by destroying its intimate relations on a family level as
155 well as its reproductive force on a community level. Such attacks have a strong symbolic and
156 metaphysical component with a destructive force able to conquer entire groups [42,43]. Also, some
157 ISIS fighters seem to believe that if they rape Yezidi women they will make them Muslim [44].
158 Additionally, ISIS uses sex to motivate the young people to join them [45].

159 Consistently, various sources and statements of those affected report about mass rapes during
160 the attacks of ISIS, sex slavery (also known as “Sabaya”) and forced prostitution as well as trafficking
161 especially the abducted young and female Yezidi [46–49].

162 ISIS has developed a system for the enslavement of Yezidi women: organizing the kidnapping,
163 transportation and accommodation of the prisoners. The abducted women were also increasingly
164 “registered”. This complicated an escape and expanded the “trade” and the resulting economic profit
165 for ISIS [17,50]. The “trade” took place between ISIS members as well as urban markets or online
166 auctions [51].

167 In contrast, abducted men were forced to convert or killed; Yezidi boys trained and used as child
168 soldiers. Many men and boys are still missing [52–54].

169 In this context, the media focus on Yezidi women is criticized, as this may result in a neglect of
170 consideration of the consequences for the entire Yezidi community [55] and lead to a victimization of
171 those affected [56].

172 The Yezidi woman Nadia Murad, who has been appointed “UN Goodwill Ambassador for the
173 Dignity of Survivors of Human Trafficking” [57] and who herself was abducted and detained as a
174 sex slave writes: “The Islamists knew how devastating that was for an unmarried Yezidi woman. Our worst
175 fears - those of our community and our clergy, so they will not be resumed - have been shamelessly exploited.”
176 [58]. In addition some of the former victims fear that the capturers come back to retake them as
177 prisoners and also that the ISIS members will escape punishment and go underground [17].

178 At the same time, some of the affected women are enormously strong; they are also instrumental
179 in the transmission of cultural heritage. Also to support this activism a gender-specific legal work
180 is required [59,60]. Law enforcement can take place both at national and international level through
181 International Criminal Court (ICC) [61].

182 3.3. (Health and) Mental Health of Yezidi women

183 As a result of the events of 2014, research has focused on the health and mental health state of
184 the surviving (female) Yezidis.

185 Recent research points to a high health strain to this population. In a great household study of
186 displaced people - most of them Yezidi - in Northern Iraq, Cetorelli et al. found a high prevalence of
187 non-communicable diseases: 19.4% had a hypertension, 13.5% musculoskeletal conditions, 9.7%
188 diabetes and 6.3% cardiovascular diseases [62]. All these diseases are associated with increased stress
189 levels [63]. In addition a high rate of adaptive problems such as psychosomatic and trauma-related
190 symptoms was found in Yezidi genocide survivors [64]. Those affected often do not understand the
191 reason for their condition and can not assign the symptoms to their understanding of illness [53].

192 In another study of this authors also a high two-week prevalence of infectious diseases was
193 found: 17.6 % had a respiratory infection in this time, 13.5% diarrhea and 12.9% a cystitis. In addition
194 9.0% reported about mental problems and 6.2% about chronic diseases. [28]

195 In Northern Iraq, the women chosen to join the special-quota program in Germany showed a
196 high prevalence of mental disorders: 78.1 were diagnosed with a PTSD, 63.0% with depressions and
197 2.7% with an adjustment disorder [65]. In Germany, these women showed more symptoms of
198 adjustment disorder rather than classic PTSD [66].

199 In this context, it should be noted that symptoms of traumatic disorders are often delayed.
200 Especially in migration, overcompensation is often observed along with initial stabilization. A phase
201 of decompensation with mourning and trauma processing often only begins when everyday life has
202 become established and the feeling of security increases. This delayed course was observed in many
203 cases among the Yezidi women, although some of them had shown strong symptoms since their
204 arrival. [65]

205 In a follow-up of 296 of these Yezidi women after a few months, 67% suffered from somatoform
206 disorder, 53% from depression, 39% from anxiety and 28% from dissociation. The prevalence of PTSD
207 was 57%; the rate increases with the number of experienced rape events. (Kizilhan, 2018)

208 Research that examined the stress level, found high values in the recorded perceived stress in
209 Yezidi women in IDP-camps in Northern Iraq in a standardized testing. Simultaneously the affected
210 women suffered from a poor health state and health related quality of life and a high rate of
211 experienced traumas. In this survey, this self-assessment was congruent with the results of the
212 examining medical doctors who found a high prevalence of diseases requiring treatment related to
213 mental stress. [32]

214 Evaluating the occurrence of PTSD and complex PTSD in female Yezidi who were victims of
215 sexual violence living in post-ISIS camps in Northern Iraq, Hoffman et al found a prevalence of 50.9%
216 for complex PTSD and 20.0% for PTSD [67]. The authors assume that a complex PTSD may be
217 triggered by post-ISIS camp stress.

218 Also in a study in Turkish refugee camps it could be shown that Yezidi refugee women suffered
219 from psychological health problems depending on war trauma while they had additionally common
220 problems such as unemployment and poverty [33].

221 Another study in Turkish refugee camps found a frequency of PTSD in 42.9% and of major
222 depression in 39.5% of the Yezidi refugees, while both disorders occurred more often in women than
223 in men. 26.4% suffered from both disorders. Women with PTSD reported flashbacks, hypervigilance,
224 and intense psychological distress due to reminders of trauma more frequently than men. Men with
225 PTSD reported feelings of detachment or estrangement from others more frequently than women.
226 More depressive women than men reported feelings of guilt or worthlessness. [68]

227 In a study with 416 Yazidi women and girls (65 of whom had survived sexual enslavement) in
228 IDP-camps in Northern Iraq more than 80%, and almost all participants who were formerly enslaved,
229 fulfilled criteria for a probable PTSD. Trauma exposure and enslavement predicted poor mental
230 health. In addition social rejection in the community of formerly enslaved girls and women mediated
231 the relationship between traumatic enslavement events and depression symptoms. [69]

232 The existing patriarchic and gender roles in the society can be an additional load factor for the
233 Yezidi women [33]. High moral conceptions, limitations, and internalized attitudes to 'honor' and the
234 'violation of honor' can lead to considerable worry and the fear of collective exclusion [53]. In a
235 qualitative approach, a Yezidi woman said about the women which became abducted and raped by

236 ISIS “They dishonored our women. Even if they return, they return dishonored (she means their
237 pregnancy)” [70].

238 There are records about even less acceptance for women who become pregnant by rape – the
239 deeply engrained culture of the Yezidi prefers that the women don’t keep the ISIS fathered babies. If
240 they keep the child, they live outside the traditional parameters of the community and the child will
241 not be accepted. In addition, they have to fear not to be supported. Thus, a high number of illegal
242 abortions, partly enforced by the community, took place. [40,71–73]

243 However, as a result of mass rape, the Yezidi community has established special rituals in its
244 holy city Lalish, to rehabilitate the abducted women. Although it is still believed that there is a danger
245 of being discriminated by the own community, and some Yezidi women committed suicide – inter
246 alia because of this fear - after having experienced rape, so far no cases of “repudiation” are officially
247 known; “They are still our children”, the high priest of the Yezidis supposedly said. [7,45,74,75]

248 While on the one hand these social context structures can be a burdening factor, on the other
249 hand specific resources result.

250 In addition to internal also external coping strategies can be used for trauma processing: Some
251 women attempted to find meaning in the massacre. It strengthened them in their intention to be
252 strong people who would not give up their religion; they sometimes became more politicized and
253 engaged in active self-defense in order to protect themselves from further possible massacres. They
254 were more committed to religious and cultural rituals as a way to strengthen solidarity among the
255 Yezidi community. The community acceptance and “silent support” of the women who were exposed
256 to sexual attacks may thus express an external coping strategy. [70]

257 To support the affected women and creating a basis for rehabilitation, healing and
258 empowerment, an intensive psychologic, organizational and material support of the surviving
259 women – including security, protection and help to open up and verbalize the experience is required
260 [76]. However, it should be noted that even within the established camps, refugee women are more
261 likely to face discrimination and gender-specific violence [30].

262 In 2015 and 2016 1,100 women – most of them Yezidi - were sent to a special-quota project to
263 Germany for a trauma therapy and rehabilitation. While on the one hand such initiatives can offer
264 required treatment possibilities [65], on the other hand it must not be forgotten that those affected in
265 the diaspora remain attached to, and empowered by, a “home” culture, fundamental values of
266 propriety, and religion [77].

267 There may also be difficulties in receiving psychotherapeutic measures: despite increasing
268 acceptance, only 16.4% of women participating in the program were in a psychological treatment and
269 5.5% had already completed one after two years [65]. Also, it is criticized that the explicit exclusion
270 of all adult male family members is against the wishes of some women survivors and may compound
271 to a lack of agency to determine the conditions of the own recovery and future [78].

272 3.4. Cultural-historical and religious context

273 *“The Yezidis are a minority in a double sense: As a Kurdish subgroup, they share the fate of the Kurds,*
274 *who have been persecuted and oppressed for centuries; In addition, as a religious minority, they were often*
275 *discriminated against by the Kurdish majority religion, Islam.” [79]*

276 The Yezidis (syn: Yazidis, Ezidis) understand themselves as a monotheistic religion belonging
277 to the region “Sinjar of the governorate Nineveh” which is their traditional main settlement before
278 Islam was established [80].

279 It would be too simplistic to regard the religious community as a homogenous group [79]. Also
280 before 2003 within the community have been controversial views regarding the Iraqi understanding
281 of nationality [81] as well as in the self-perceived belonging to the Kurds [82].

282 The history of the faith community – especially the pre-modern history - is difficult to
283 reconstruct, especially because there were written sources until the mid-20th century [83–85].
284 Researcher observe a common substratum with Zoroastrian and Yarisan traditions, that probably go
285 back to Indo-Iranian or local traditions [86]. This assumption is not undisputed [87]. However,
286 religious background of the community is not certainly known.

287 Over time Yezidism has incorporated a number of elements of Gnosticism and Orientalic
288 Mysticism [88] – such as the presence of several “holy beings” [89] - as well as of the later Christian
289 and Islamic faith history so that the Yezidi represent now a belief system which reflects a syncretism
290 of various cults of the area.[90,91]. As a result, the Yezidi religion has a "flexible and adaptable belief
291 system" and no fixed dogmatic-theological categories and systems [92]. Thus, also the existing
292 religious texts are not normative works [93].

293 In this context, it can be spoken of an “oral tradition” of the Yezidi, in which (lyrical) songs and
294 prose narrative play an important role. Only the last two centuries – and especially the last decades
295 – have an increase in the importance of written sources recorded [94–97].

296 In the Yezidi belief system, the one and only god is fundamental, also the seven archangels play
297 an important role. The reformer Sheik Adi introduced a cast system including “Sheikhs” (highest
298 religious authority), “Pirs” (saints, priests) and “Murids” (laymen, disciples) in the 11th century.
299 After that every member of the community has a specific role in the social hierarchy. [92,98,99]

300 Within the strict endogamy of this closed society, marriages between the casts and different
301 religious communities is forbidden [100] - the compliance of this rules is according to the Yezidi faith
302 a prerequisite to enter the paradise [101].

303 The events of massive attacks by the IS are also to be considered in a historical context: The
304 history of the Yezidis is characterized by recurring phases of oppression and attacks by Muslim or
305 Ottoman rulers. Thus, historical resources record 74 episodes of genocide [102] [39,43,45,103,104].
306 Thus, Yezidis are facing three types of trauma: their individual recent trauma, a historical trauma
307 and a collective one too [44].

308 These recurrent experiences of oppression and persecution are deeply rooted in the collective
309 memory of the community and are reflected in songs, stories and transmissions [11].

310 Even the exiled Yezidi community is affected by the fate of their faith brothers, who revive these
311 individual, collective and generational memories. [43]

312 While guilt, shame and depression are frequent as a result of the genocide in the Yezidi
313 population, the recurrent experiences have led to a determined, long-standing ethnic pride, which is
314 now available to those affected as a resource[105].

315 First research indicates that in response to the attempted genocide by ISIS and the situation of
316 displacement cultural attitudes are changing. This may concern as well every-day traditions and
317 behavior [106] as attitudes towards toward suicide, rape and pregnancy as a result of rape and doubts
318 in respective religion’s correctness [107]. On the other hand religious and ritual life has become more
319 intense for some affected rather than declining - probably because of the peoples’ need for
320 supernatural help, new opportunities, and a sense of defiance [108].

321 The increasing proportion of the community living in the diaspora also leads to a transformation
322 of religion. Thus, Yezidis - especially intellectuals - have begun to construct and theologize the
323 religion of the Yezidism [109,110]. Many – especially older members - fear of „dying out” [7], also
324 because the Young generation of Yezidi living in Europe increasingly questions traditions and rules
325 [109].

326 4. Discussion

327 In the context of the Yezidi genocide a transgenerational trauma must also be assumed among
328 the community; the renewed experiences of ISIS are thus a resurgence of a deeply rooted violation of
329 societal structures.

330 Depth psychology research indicates that experiences such as war, persecution or oppression
331 remain in a collective "trauma" of a community or people. This trauma is "inherited" at the behavioral
332 and cultural level as well as at the molecular biological level to the subsequent generations. The
333 implications of this have been studied for various groups that have also been victims of genocide or
334 long-term repression - such as native Australians, former black slaves in America or Holocaust
335 survivors [111–114]. Indeed, the same behavior patterns that were found in people who experienced
336 the Holocaust can be observed in Yezidis, namely feelings of insecurity, tension, worry about their
337 children’s survival, and feelings of powerlessness and helplessness [53].

338 It was shown that even many generations after the traumatic experiences the descendants suffer
339 from increased vulnerability to various diseases. Thus, suicide rates, self-harm and destructive
340 behavior occur more often if actual and historical trauma are accumulating. [112]

341 However, traditional exposure therapy is based on a western, individualistic understanding of
342 culture and values.

343 So, it is not always effective with persons who have grown up in a collective society. Also, the
344 success of the treatment largely depends on how society deals with the events. [115]

345 Taken this into account, it is clear that there are not only consequences on the individual level.
346 The actual extent of the events for the population can hardly be foreseen at the present time and will
347 only reveal itself in subsequent generations. This vulnerability is promoted by the existing political,
348 cultural and social uncertainty and distribution of the surviving Yezidis.

349 Nonetheless, the current state of research on the health of Yezidi survivors - and especially
350 Yezidi women - should also be viewed critically. Although recent research has provided first
351 approaches and shown a high health burden, it must be noticed that there are only few surveys,
352 which are made more difficult by the scattering and heterogeneity of the population. Thus, some of
353 the research has a low number of cases or only qualitative approaches. In addition, it must be taken
354 into account that a large proportion of presented research is published by the same few research
355 groups that might lead to a specific point of view.

356 5. Conclusion

357 The Yezidis in Northern Iraq represent a cultural and historical "old" religious community with
358 strong local links and deeply rooted social structures. The history of the community is marked by
359 recurrent phases of oppression and persecution. As a result of the genocide committed by ISIS, the
360 Yezidis once again experienced massive violence. The experiences of those affected are strongly
361 dependent on their gender. After a large number of the Yezidi population was murdered, Yezidi
362 women in particular experienced massive sexual violence such as recurring rape and sex slavery.
363 Many Yezidi women are still in the hands of ISIS.

364 Research that examined the health status of surviving Yezidis who were able to escape or were
365 freed suggests that there is a high level of health strain in this population. In addition to various
366 infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases also play a role. The situation may be aggravated by
367 the living situation in IDP-/refugee Camps: while an uncertain and precarious situation may trigger
368 the emerge of mental diseases, the hygienic and precarious housing situation may favor the
369 appearance of infectious and chronic diseases. In addition, the medical care is often insufficient.
370 Research indicates a high burden of mental health problems in the surviving Yezidi women,
371 especially PTSD and depression.

372 Looking at the research on transgenerational trauma, it can be assumed that the recent events in
373 the context of genocide by ISIS revive past experiences in the history of the Yezidi community on the
374 one hand and consequences could be passed on to the descendants on the other hand. As well as the
375 narrow cultural and religious rules of the community, this can be both a resource and an additional
376 burden for those affected. In this context, the way the (Yezidi) society deals with the sexual assaults
377 is of particular relevance.

378 The actual extent of the attacks is neither predictable for the affected individuals nor for the
379 community of the Yezidis. In addition to the development of specific, culturally sensitive therapeutic
380 measures, long-term care and support of the affected persons and their descendants as well as the
381 Yezidi community in dealing with the trauma seems indispensable.

382 **Supplementary Materials:** The following are available online at www.mdpi.com/xxx/s1, Figure S1: title, Table
383 S1: title, Video S1: title.

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