

Palestinian Women and Security:

Why Palestinian Women and Girls
Do Not Feel Secure



Geneva Centre for the
Democratic Control of
Armed Forces (DCAF)

Palestinian Women and Security:

Why Palestinian Women and Girls Do Not Feel Secure



Geneva Centre for the
Democratic Control of
Armed Forces (DCAF)

About DCAF

The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) promotes good governance and reform of the security sector. The Centre conducts research on good practices, encourages the development of appropriate norms at the national and international levels, makes policy recommendations and provides in-country advice and assistance programmes. DCAF's partners include governments, parliaments, civil society, international organisations and security sector actors such as police, judiciary, intelligence agencies, border security services and the military.

DCAF has been working in the Palestinian Territories since 2005. It assists a wide range of Palestinian actors, such as ministries, the Palestinian Legislative Council, civil society organisations and the media in their efforts to make Palestinian security sector governance democratic, transparent and accountable.

Note

This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo). The contents of this publication are the exclusive responsibility of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of AECID.

Palestinian Women and Security: Why Palestinian Women and Girls Do Not Feel Secure

A DCAF study, researched and written by Stephanie Chaban, Reema Daraghmeh and Garance Stettler

Editorial Board

Anja Ebnöther
Roland Friedrich
Hilde Jakobsen
Regula Kaufmann
Jonas Loetscher
Arnold Luethold
Nicolas Masson
Eman Redwan
Daniel de Torres

Design and Layout

Wael Dwaik

Translation Support

Intissar Abu Khalaf
Rania Filfil
Jumana Kayyali
Insaf Al Khmour
Osama Nazzal
Yaseen N. Al-Sayyed

Transcription Support

Mohammad Saba'neh
Thaer Al Atari

Publisher

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
Rue de Chantepoulet 11
P.O. Box 1360
1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland
Tel: +41 (22) 741 77 00
Fax: +41 (22) 741 77 05
www.dcaf.ch

Cover Picture: © Nicolas Masson / Crossing Qalandia Checkpoint, West Bank, 2009

ISBN: 978-92-9222-112-6
© DCAF 2010. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i>	7
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	8
Introduction	9
Background	10
Methodology	12
Maps of the Palestinian Territories	14
Findings	17
Military and Political Violence	18
The Occupation	18
The Factional Conflict	21
Perceptions of Insecurity in the Public Sphere	23
Violence and Insecurity in the Street	23
Violence and Discrimination in the Workplace	25
Violence and Discrimination at School and University	26
Negative Perceptions of Technology	27
Perceptions of Insecurity in the Home	29
Economic Insecurity	29
Access to Education, Restrictions on Movement and Clothing	30
Violence in the Family	31
Personal Status Issues	35

Perceptions of the Response Mechanisms	40
Core Security and Justice Providers	40
Public Services	43
Women’s Organisations and Human Rights Organisations	45
The Legal and Regulatory Framework	47
The Recommendations of Women and Girls	51
Improving Services	51
Awareness and Education Campaigns	54
Conclusion	57
Annexes	61
Annex 1: Focus Group Discussions: Questioning Route	62
Annex 2: Selection of Organisations Offering Services to Palestinian Women	63

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) with Palestinian women and girls between June and November 2009 in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. These interviews and discussions aimed to draw out the perspectives of women and girls on issues relating to their security and gather them in to a cohesive report. This report does not intend to provide specific recommendations, but rather to highlight some of the key security issues identified by Palestinian women and girls. DCAF hopes that the report's findings will encourage relevant stakeholders to integrate the perspectives of women and girls into the national security debate within the Palestinian Territories.

During individual interviews and group discussions, Palestinian women and girls were asked about their security concerns, their experiences of violence, their perceptions and use of services provided by local authorities and/or the international community, and were also asked to offer recommendations for improving services and, thus, their own security. Women and girls revealed that their feelings of insecurity are related to the ongoing conflict, society's tacit acceptance of violence against women, their own lack of awareness of service providers, and their distrust of the available services. They gave detailed descriptions of the security threats they face; whether in the public sphere, at work/school, or at home, violence permeates all aspects of their everyday lives. Despite this pervasiveness, women and girls explained that they were reluctant to resort to women's organisations, human rights organisations,

or security and justice providers, such as the police and courts, because of the strong social stigma attached to reporting abuse. They also admitted to being unaware or distrustful of the organisations in charge of protecting them, at times questioning the very existence of such organisations, especially shelters. Women and girls were also concerned that the personnel at these organisations lacked the necessary professional skills and ethics to adequately and confidentially respond to their needs. Finally, many women and girls believed the legal system to be discriminatory and unfair to them.

Hence, the recommendations of women and girls include awareness-raising events for all components of society, including men and boys; training for members of social services, women's and human rights organisations, hospital staff and the police; more coordination between the different service providers; legal reform; and increased female representation and participation in these organisations and in political life in general.

Although many women and girls admitted to not using available services, DCAF believes that their recommendations should be carefully examined. Palestinian policy-makers and international actors should also take them into account when considering measures for responding to the security needs of women and girls. A democratic debate on adjusting security services to the security needs of the population should integrate the perspectives of all Palestinians, including those of women, both young and old. Moreover, if services are to be used by women and girls, their needs and willingness to use such services should be precisely assessed. This report only constitutes a first step in this direction.

Acknowledgments

DCAF would like to thank the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) who funded this project. DCAF is also grateful to the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD) for its collaboration during the implementation of the project.

The final draft of this report would not have been possible without the generous feedback provided by the members of the Advisory Board for the Palestinian Women and Security Project. DCAF expresses its sincere gratitude to all those who met to discuss the methodology and the findings of this report. Particular thanks go to the following individuals:

- Ms Tahani Abu Daqqa, former Minister of Youth and Sport
- Ms Khuloud Al Faqih, Shari'a Judge, Islamic Judicial Council
- Ms Ilham Al Hamad, Head of the Ombudsman Department, Ministry of Women's Affairs
- Ms Fatema Al Moaqat, General Director, The Alimony Fund
- Mr Nasser Al Rayes, Project Director, Al Haq
- Dr. Islah Jad, Director, Institute for Women Studies, Birzeit University
- Ms Amal Khreisheh, Executive Director, Palestinian Working Women Society for Development
- Ms Zahira Kamal, Director, Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Status of Palestinian Women

Table 1. Some Key Figures	
Female population:	1,853,214 ¹
Female life expectancy:	73.2 years ²
Female literacy rate:	90.9% ³
Fertility rate:	4.6 children ⁴
Female marriage rate:	58.1% ⁵
Never-married women (over 15 years):	39.3% ⁶
Early marriage rates:	14% of 15-19 year olds and 59% of 20-24 year olds ⁷
Median age at marriage:	19.4 years ⁸
Widowed females:	1.3% ⁹
Divorced females:	1.1% ¹⁰
Female-headed households:	8.8% ¹¹
Female holders of a Bachelors or higher degree:	7.6% ¹²
Female labour market participation:	15.4% ¹³
Female participation in the Palestinian Legislative Council:	12.9% ¹⁴
Female judges:	11.2% ¹⁵
Female prosecutors:	12.1% ¹⁶
Females with at least one disability:	52,228 ¹⁷

Women's participation in Palestinian society has considerably developed over time. In the first half of the twentieth century, the role of Palestinian women followed the needs of an agrarian society. Access to higher education and the political sphere remained the privilege of the female elite of the urban areas. In the decades before the 1967 War, Palestinian women established women's groups and charity organisations. Following the War, women became more politicised and nationalist in the wake of a military occupation, further cultivating women's rights movements in the 1970s and 1980s.

Following the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), Palestinian women's organisations took on a growing list of issues, such as violence against women, access to education, women's empowerment, and citizenship and equality within the law. Palestinian women institutionalised research on Palestinian women: an institute of women's studies was created at Birzeit University; a Palestinian Women's Bill of Rights was first drafted; Gender Units were established in the newly formed ministries and, eventually, a Ministry of Women's Affairs was created.

Although human development indicators have gradually improved, Palestinian women still face obstacles in exercising their rights and in ensuring their security. While various forms of violence against Palestinian women and girls are acknowledged, many studies lament the lack of available data documenting the true extent of such violence. Moreover, Palestinian women and girls who speak out are often blamed for the violence inflicted upon them, and their families are shamed for not exerting greater control over their sexuality.

According to a study released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in 2006,¹⁸ 61.7% of ever-married women experienced psychological violence, 23.3% physical violence, and 10.9% sexual violence at least once during the year, respectively. The survey also provided information on violence against never-married women: 25% of never-married women were exposed to physical violence and 52.7% to psychological violence by a household member, at least once during the year. No data was collected on instances of sexual violence against never-married women, as it was viewed as too taboo to collect. However, it is believed that the bulk of sexual violence against women and girls is located within the family.¹⁹

The motivation for this project

The inspiration for this report came from a public perception study on Palestinian security sector governance that DCAF conducted in 2006. In that survey, a majority of the population polled (57%) was not satisfied with the way Palestinian law enforcement agencies responded to violence against women.²⁰ During DCAF's activities in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian citizens, as well as representatives of women's organisation and the security forces, have repeatedly expressed the necessity to integrate women's specific security needs into Palestinian security sector reform.²¹ They have also demanded the development of adequate services to respond to violence against women and girls.

DCAF launched this project in order to gain a better understanding of Palestinian women's security needs and to give voice to women and girls in the Palestinian debate on security. It is hoped that the ongoing discussion on security sector reform will develop Palestinian solutions to some of the problems described in this report.

Notes

- ¹ PCBS. 2008. *Palestine in Figures, 2007*. Ramallah.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ PCBS. 2009. *Press Release: On the Eve of International Population Day, 11/7/2009*. Ramallah.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ PCBS. 2007. *Palestinian Family Health Survey, 2006: Final Report*. Ramallah
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Rashad, H., M. Osman & F. Roudi-Fahimi. 2005. *Marriage in the Arab world*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau
- ⁸ PCBS. 2008. *Press Release: "Youth in Palestinian Territory Statistical Indicators: On the Occasion of the International Youth Day 12 August 2008."* Ramallah.
- ⁹ PCBS. 2007. *Palestinian Family Health Survey, 2006: Final Report*. Ramallah.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ PCBS. 2009. *Press Release: On the Eve of International Population Day, 11/7/2009*. Ramallah.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ PCBS. 2007. *Palestinian Family Health Survey, 2006: Final Report*. Ramallah.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ PCBS. 2009. *Press Release: "On the Occasion of the 13th of December, the International Day for the Disabled, PCBS Presents Data on Disabled Persons in the Palestinian Territory."* Ramallah.
- ¹⁸ PCBS. 2006. *Domestic violence survey (December 2005 - January 2006) main findings*. Ramallah.
- ¹⁹ WCLAC. 2005. *The Legal and Social Status of Palestinian Women: A Gap Analysis Report using CEDAW as Reference*. Available at

http://www.mediterraneas.org/article.php?id_article=278

- ²⁰ Bocco, De Martino, Friedrich, Husseini and Luethold (Eds.). 2006. *Palestinian Public Perceptions. Politics, Security & the Barrier*. Geneva: DCAF-IUED, p. 36.
- ²¹ DCAF-Palestinian Council on Foreign Relations. 'Summary Report: Moving Backward or Forward: Good Palestinian Security Sector Governance or Accelerated Tribalisation'. Khan Younis/Gaza Strip. 3 May 2007. DCAF-SHAMS. 'Summary Report: Delivering Security to the Palestinian People'. Tulkarem. 10 June 2008. DCAF-SHAMS. 'Summary Report: Delivering Security to the Palestinian People'. Hebron. 10 November 2008. DCAF-SHAMS, 'Summary Report: Delivering Security to the Palestinian People'. Qalqiliya. 24 November 2008. DCAF-SHAMS. 2008. Forum - Delivering Security to the Palestinian People. Ramallah. DCAF Spotlight No.1. May 2009. 'Palestinian Security Sector Governance: The View of Civil Society in Nablus'.

Methodology

In order to gather information on their security needs, DCAF conducted 35 semi-structured focus group discussions with Palestinian women and girls in seven governorates of the West Bank and of the Gaza Strip. The study only covers areas where services provided by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) are available and functional, and where PNA institutions are able to perform their tasks with a full or relative degree of autonomy. Since this is not the case within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, where Palestinian institutions cannot operate autonomously, this area is not included in the report. However, DCAF is considering the possibility of conducting additional focus group sessions and in-depths interviews as well as roundtable discussions to address the specific needs of Palestinian women and girls living in occupied East Jerusalem.

The focus group approach encourages discussions among participants and allows them to introduce issues that were not necessarily mentioned by the facilitator. The discussions thus covered a variety of issues related to women and girls' perceptions of security. Yet, there are some limitations to the type of information participants are willing to share in a group setting, especially when sensitive issues are discussed. For this reason, and in order to complement the information gathered during group discussions, DCAF also conducted eight in-depth interviews with Palestinian women and girls who had participated in the focus groups.

The sessions were organised and conducted by DCAF in cooperation with a local partner, the Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development (PWWSD). PWWSD selected and invited participants based on the criteria defined by DCAF. Each focus group comprised between six and 12 participants. The discussions lasted one and a half hour on average and were conducted in Arabic by a female facilitator who followed a questioning route designed by DCAF.¹ She was accompanied by a female note-taker who tape-recorded the discussions for later transcription

and translation into English. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, it was decided that no males would be present during the discussions. In the Gaza Strip, PWWSD took an essential role by providing focus group facilitators who followed the questioning route provided by DCAF.

Focus group participants were selected based on a double-layer² approach. Participants were chosen according to the following criteria: area of residence, age, and main sphere of social activity.

Layer 1: Area of residence

The focus group sessions were conducted in seven governorates: Ramallah, Hebron, Jenin and Nablus in the West Bank; and in North Gaza, Gaza, and Deir al Balah in the Gaza Strip. This selection establishes a balance between cities where many services are available and isolated rural areas where services are sparse. It includes regions that are traditionally conservative and tend to rely on tribal practices.

Within these seven governorates, participants were split in groups corresponding to three residential identity markers:³

- Cities: characterised by industrial and commercial activities, comparatively broad range of health, educational and social services.
- Villages: characterised by agricultural activities, comparably limited range of health, educational and social services.
- Refugee camps: characterised by a high density of population, poverty, limited access to services and education.

Layer 2: Age and main sphere of social activity

Age

In each governorate, participants were selected according to three life-cycle categories. The main reason for this choice is the importance

of seniority in Palestinian society. The aim was to minimize the impact of power relations between young women and older women. Since younger women are unlikely to express opinions that contradict older women's views, they were placed in separate categories.

- Adolescents (15-18 years old)
- Young Adults (18-35 years old)
- Adults (35 years old and above)

Main area of social activity

The main area of social activity was added to the age category in order to create homogenous groups. The aim was to gather women with similar social backgrounds in order to encourage participation, including on sensitive topics. Four specific target groups were identified:

- Schoolgirls
- University students and recent graduates
- Working women
- Housewives

The social criteria and age groups were randomly attributed to residence areas in all selected governorates. A few additional focus groups were also conducted with vulnerable target groups: Bedouin women, who have limited access to social services (including health services and education); female ex-prisoners; and relatives of prisoners and of political activists killed for political reasons, whose financial situation is affected by a breadwinner's absence.

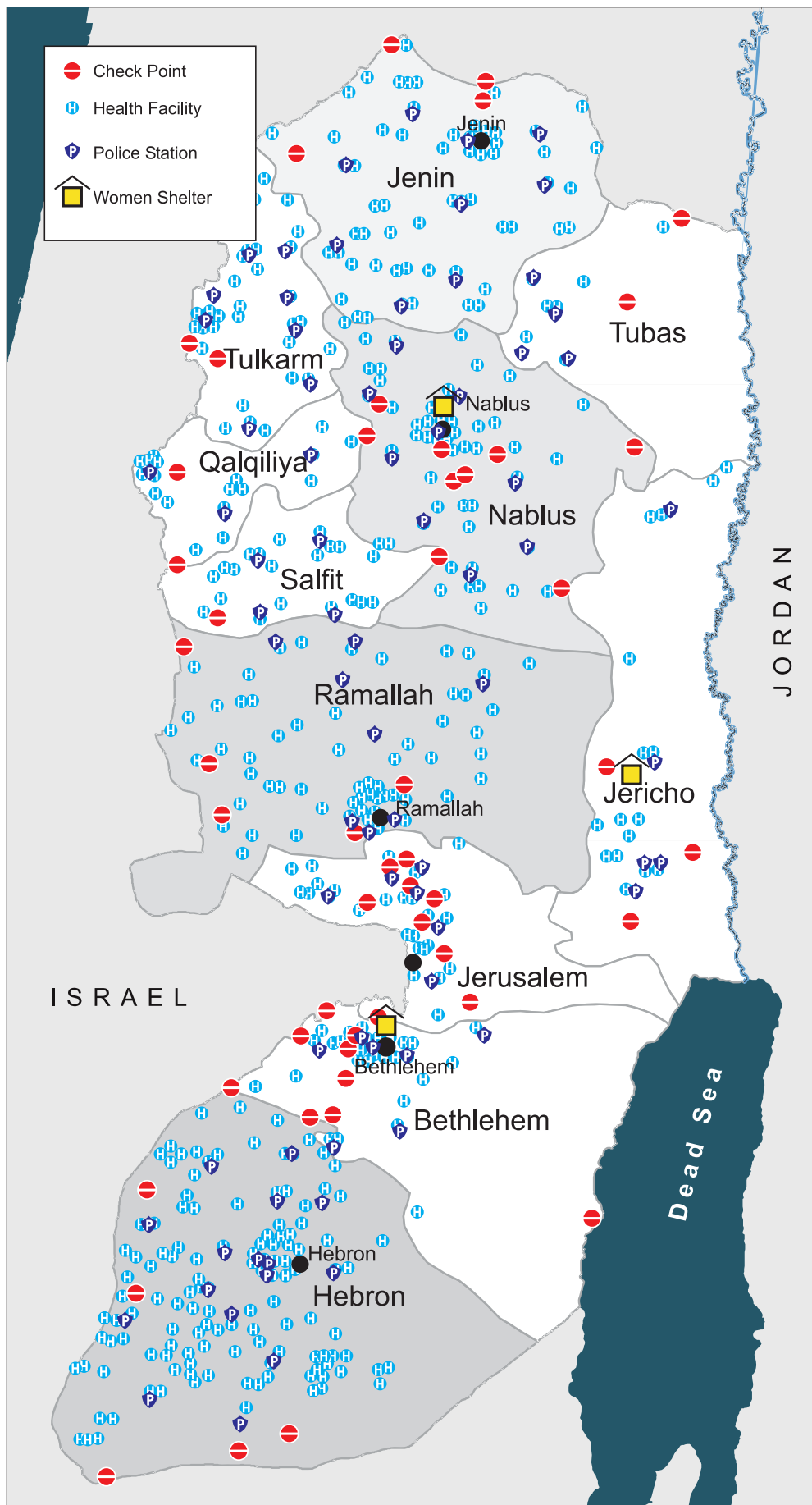
The names of women quoted have been removed to protect their privacy, so have the names of specific camps and villages where the discussions took place.

This report is based on over 700 pages of transcripts from the focus group discussions and individual interviews.

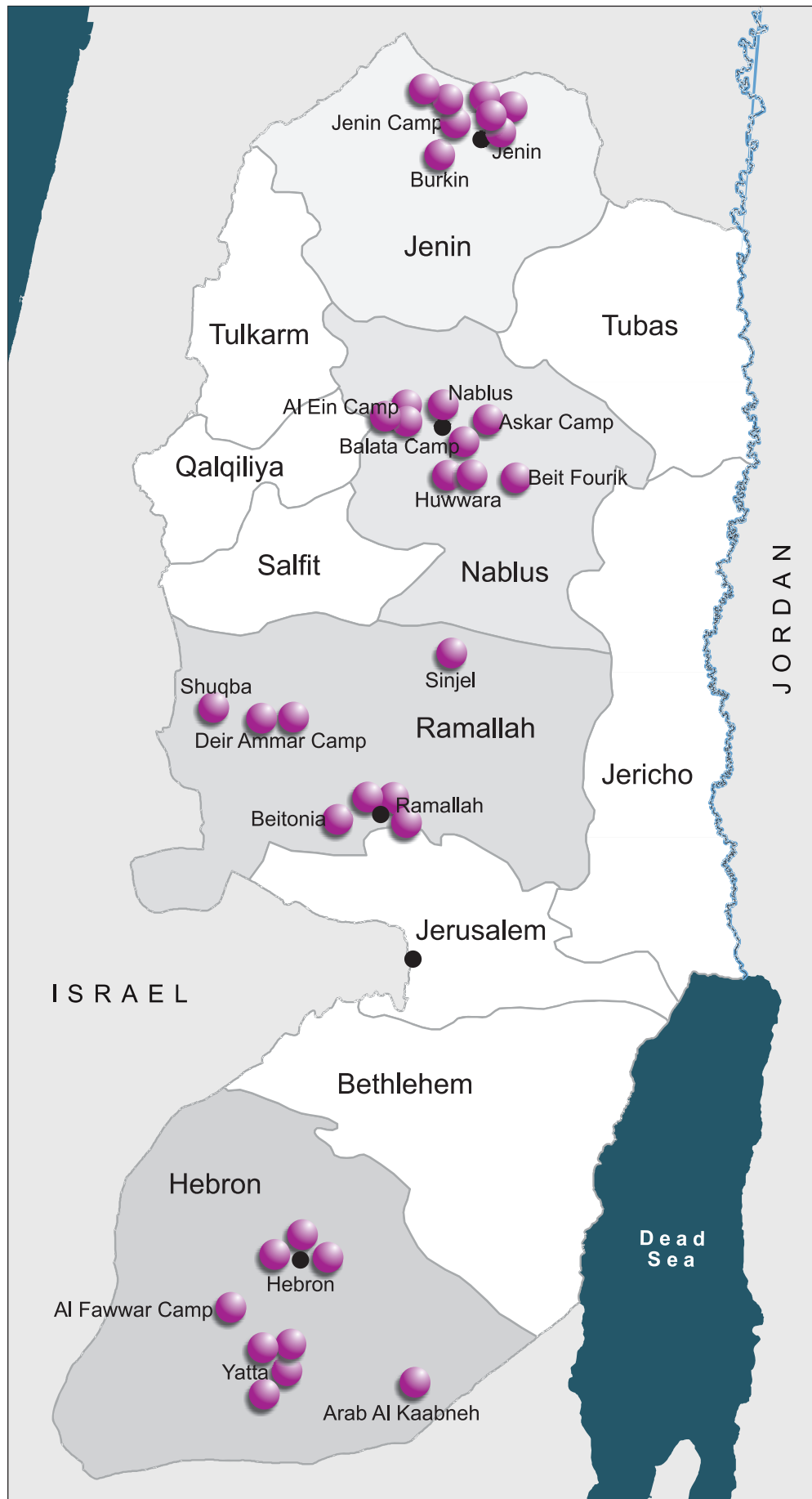
Notes

- ¹ The questioning route is included in the annexes, p. 62.
- ² See Krueger, R. A. and M. A. Casey. 2000. *Focus Groups. A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- ³ The same categories were applied in Bocco, De Martino, Friedrich, Hussein and Luethold (Eds.). 2006. *Palestinian Public Perceptions. Politics, Security & the Barrier*. Geneva: DCAF-IUED.

Health Facilities, Shelters and Police Stations in the West Bank



Focus Groups Conducted in the West Bank



Focus Groups Conducted in the Gaza Strip



FINDINGS

Military and Political Violence

Whenever I think that there are Israeli soldiers around us, I don't feel secure, and as long as there is an internal conflict between the political parties, I also don't feel safe. All these things have a big influence on our lives.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Palestinian women and girls' perceptions of security are deeply affected by the political context in the Palestinian Territories. While the cultural, social, economic and geographical divisions between the West Bank and Gaza Strip have increased security concerns for all Palestinians, these divides uniquely affect women and girls. In this vein, women and girls related their feelings of insecurity to the Israeli occupation and to the factional conflict between Fatah and Hamas.

The factional conflict, which peaked in June 2007 when Hamas took power of the Gaza Strip, has had a detrimental impact on women and girls' perceptions of security. In general, women mentioned political violence, arbitrary arrests, armed clashes, and killings as affecting their own safety as well as the security of their children and families.

Violence directly instigated by the occupation was also cited as a source of insecurity and instability. Israel's Operation Cast Lead,¹ conducted between December 2008 and January 2009 against the Gaza Strip, left women and girls traumatised and feeling particularly vulnerable. Strong memories from the invasion of Jenin Camp during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 left women and girls from that area with similar feelings of insecurity and helplessness. In addition to these military operations, Palestinian women also perceive the mechanisms of the occupation, primarily Israeli checkpoints and the presence of Israeli settlers, as major sources of insecurity.

The Occupation

I would say that you achieve security when your State is stable and independent. (...) But it is

impossible to feel secure when your country is not free.

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

When reflecting upon violent acts committed by the occupation in the Palestinian Territories, women felt particularly vulnerable to military attacks both inside and outside their homes.

The main reason for insecurity is the Israeli occupation. Is it possible that while you are sitting inside your house, it will be destroyed by a [missile]. I do not feel secure enough to send my kids to school for the same reason. I am not able to move freely or even go to visit my friends due to that. Everywhere you are at risk for Israeli attacks.

University Student, Village (Gaza Strip)

I fear the Israeli occupation that evacuates our houses and bombs them, even if you are not politically active, as our family. Sometimes you will be hurt without knowing the source.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Deeply affected by Operation Cast Lead, women in the Gaza Strip recounted the events and their traumatic ramifications:

Despite all forms of violence and the phosphorus, which was put all around us, we decided to remain in our home; the soldiers attacked our home while we were sleeping and my daughters remember the last war everyday.

Relative of Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

The occupation is still here and will affect all efforts of improvement and development. The last war on Gaza shows that the occupation does not have any rules or regulations towards killing, destroying or demolishing homes and the infrastructure of Palestinian society.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

A few women even considered that, in light of the violent acts committed by the occupation,

addressing violence against women no longer constitutes a priority:

Before the war, women were complaining of family violence and they still suffer. Women were concerned with their personal security (...). Now, the war has created an even more difficult situation. Women have become less concerned with violence practiced against them.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Mothers living in the West Bank, viewing the violence of the war on Gaza from afar, were deeply impacted by the fighting and feared for their children despite the distance:

We saw a school being shelled in Gaza, so how can a mother send her child to school the next day?

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

The threat of house demolitions, whether viewed as a form of collective punishment or as collateral damage, persists as a form of insecurity perpetrated by the occupation. Women from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank city of Jenin specifically spoke of the trauma they experienced when their homes were demolished by the Israeli forces during past military operations.

We can't sleep because we don't feel secure inside our homes. (...) My son was killed; my home was demolished while we were sleeping inside. During the night we feel scared and we keep waiting for the morning to come.

Relative of Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

I am scared of my house being demolished over my head while I am sitting inside, and this is because of what we experienced during the last war on Gaza.

Relative of Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

I fear the occupation and house demolitions because, until now, we have not been compensated for the demolition of our houses in 2002. Until now, I feel that I will die of fear when someone knocks on the door at night. I ask myself how I can open the door without my husband. They came to our home and destroyed everything inside it.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

The occupation is the thing that makes me fear most. I am afraid of my children being arrested

by the Israelis [soldiers] or our house being demolished.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Many women and girls described violent acts committed by Israeli soldiers and settlers. Some women personally witnessed such incidents, while others only discussed incidents they had heard about. Whether they had directly witnessed them or not, women expressed genuine feelings of fear towards these situations. They also noted the arbitrary character of the occupation's arrest practices. Women's feelings of insecurity were heightened by the impression that they might be victims of violence for unknown reasons or for no reason at all.

The majority here say that they feel secure with their parents, but do you really feel secure when an Israeli soldier comes to your house and takes you and your parents to the prison if he wants?

University Student, City (Hebron)

I fear the occupation and being abused by them [Israeli soldiers].

Housewife, City (Jenin)

I was once on a bypass road and there was a settler passing by. There is a risk of being shot, killed or attacked. There are arrests at checkpoints. We are far away from social and economic security.

Working Woman, City (Hebron)

The fear of violence perpetrated by Israeli soldiers and settlers also spills over to farmland and orchards as women recounted problems they faced as they tried to harvest their crops and fruit. This physical insecurity often translates into economic insecurity:

In our village, as farmers who go to their farms to look after the olive trees, we really feel that we are in danger when we go there, because the settlers attack us most of the time. They come and start shouting in a very rude way that they are the owners of the land. Each time we go there, they prevent us from reaching the trees, so we go back without having anything. So can you imagine how we feel when we see our property, our fathers and grandfathers' legacy is leaving our hands while we watch without being able to do anything?

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

We have figs and almond trees, but we are not allowed to go near them. We can't take the harvest and sell it, so my whole family has lost that source of income.

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

Finally, checkpoints represent another source of insecurity for Palestinian women living in the West Bank.² Israeli-imposed permanent or flying checkpoints not only constitute a threat to women's freedom of movement, but they also place women and girls in a vulnerable position whereby they may be subject to multiple humiliations. The list of humiliations covers a broad spectrum. At a minimum, women are afraid of not being allowed passage or being late for work or classes. To a greater degree, women and girls may be asked to remove their niqab (face covering) or lift their jilbab (long coat) for a male soldier's inspection. Alternatively, a male soldier may flirt with or sexually harass them. These practices are seen as offensive and infringe upon the modesty of women. In the extreme, pregnant women may be denied passage, as has been the case with women being forced to give birth at checkpoints.³ The idea of being subjected to humiliating comments or acts, or of being coerced to act in a humiliating way is a source of fear for women crossing checkpoints.

We face humiliation from the Israeli army. Pregnant women suffer at the barriers, some Israeli soldiers urge some people to do unusual or immoral things like kiss girls, undress or even hit their father.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Many women face violations at checkpoints, especially when commuting in order to receive treatment; even during birth, many women have delivered at checkpoints, and some of them lost their infants or foetuses at checkpoints. This is an important problem that has not been addressed sufficiently in the media.

University Student, City (Jenin)

I wish to say that girls face a lot of harassment at the checkpoints by the Israeli army. It happened to me when I went to attend my brother's court hearing. The soldier insisted I give him my telephone number. I refused, he insisted and I refused several times. Every time I went to court, he asked me, "Don't you want to give me your number?" This is harassment.

University Student, City (Jenin)

I teach in a village in Qabalan. I go out in the morning and I do not know if the checkpoint is open or closed. I have to be there at 7 am. I have many fears when my workday begins.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

There are many things you would like to do but with the checkpoints, this is a problem. The shortest trip will cost you 45 minutes or more because of the checkpoints.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Women expressed feelings of powerlessness at checkpoints because defending themselves against humiliating acts committed by Israeli soldiers is not a viable option:

Once I was at a checkpoint crossing to Jerusalem and a soldier approached a girl and he even held her. She slapped him in the face. They put her in jail. She was defending herself, but still she was put in jail.

University Student, City (Ramallah)

Harassment experienced by Palestinian men at the checkpoints also translates into violence against women as men unleash their displaced anger upon their families when they return home:

I agree with my colleague, who said that there is no security at any level in Palestinian society. Even when men go through checkpoints, you see the Israeli soldiers humiliate them. (...) Of course, this affects them psychologically, so when they go home, they will find their space to practise their control.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Checkpoints also reinforce feelings of insecurity when women do not carry appropriate identification. The system of identification in the Palestinian Territories is complicated and ultimately dictated by the Israeli military authorities. In Palestinian society, when a woman marries, she commonly moves to where her husband resides. Moving to a different city, village or governorate may require special identification; not having this identification subjects women to the threat of arrest by the military. There is an unknown number of wives in the Palestinian Territories who are 'undocumented,' i.e., without proper identification for the community they live in, thus limiting their freedom of movement, their opportunity to work or obtain an education, and augmenting their feelings of insecurity:

I had no identity card for ten years. It was a source of insecurity. I was living in extreme worry (...). Also, when I had to pick up local transportation, or even while there were checkpoints, I could not sleep well during the night. I kept worrying about my husband and my children. I felt afraid that at any time they could send me back to my place of origin and because of this, I would lose my children, husband and house. When I received the identity card, I really felt secure, I could feel secure and I could move to any place freely. I could sleep peacefully with my family at night. Really, personal identity will affect a family's security (...) For ten years I used to fear that the Israeli occupation would ask me about my card.
Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

The Factional Conflict

Palestinian politics became more polarised when Hamas took power of the Gaza Strip in 2007. Factionalism increased and the primary rivalry between Fatah and Hamas left many Palestinians at a loss for how to move forward. Women and girls routinely cited the factional conflict as an even greater source of stress and insecurity than the occupation. Women frequently mentioned being afraid for their families because of political infighting. As mothers, wives and daughters, women expressed serious concerns for their relatives' safety in this context. They frequently mentioned the politicisation of daily life as a security issue and a threat to their families' stability.

We have the factional problem; it is more dangerous than the occupation. We are from the same religion and yet, we kill each other. (...) We are one nation, in one country; we should care for each other regardless of our political affiliations.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

We are busy fighting each other and the cause is lost.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

The apparent reason for these feelings is the speed at which factionalism might infiltrate the home and the family, affecting women and girls in the private sphere, as well:

The struggle between political factions negatively affects our community and we, as women, do not have a role in this struggle.

On the contrary, women are afraid for their children if they are from different political factions. There is a possibility of that they will fight, shoot or kill each other, so families are fragmented.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

There are different political factions in the same house and in the same family. It creates a phenomenon of fear. Families are always preparing their members so as to face the conflict. (...) What prevails is the use of power, not wisdom.

Working Woman, Hebron

Having lost their sons, husbands, brothers, or any of their relatives, almost all Palestinian women have had a trauma or more during their life due to the political catastrophe from the Israeli occupation. We have seen Gaza before the period of internal conflict between Hamas and Fatah; there were horrible scenes from both sides. (...) if those incidents had happened here, in the West Bank, what would happen to my husband, children, or brothers? There is not even one Palestinian woman who is living in security.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Some women from Jenin specifically mentioned the lack of freedom of expression within the political arena as a type of insecurity. They felt that speaking about politics put them at risk of being arrested or imprisoned.

I think that it is very important to have protection for women when they express their opinion or have a certain political affiliation. Women must be protected (...) because we all know that women who are supportive of opposition parties are frequently arrested.

University Student, Camp (Jenin)

Control of the Gaza Strip by Hamas has reportedly contributed to increasing social pressure on women living there. Following a particular dress code, primarily wearing the hijab or jilbab (veil or long coat), is perceived to be a protective factor for women and girls on the streets of the Gaza Strip. Many women and girls who choose not to veil themselves are placed in an increasingly vulnerable situation that limits their freedom of movement and, in some cases, threatens their lives:

Now there is talk about wearing the hijab and jilbab, which are compulsory. This constrains

women even more and affects their security, which is so sensitive from different perspectives. This will prevent some girls from continuing their education.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

I am thinking of sending my daughter out of the Gaza Strip because she is not wearing the hijab. And I am afraid that while she is walking in the street there is a risk of her being abused by someone. Recently, we heard about girls who were beaten or burned by acid for not wearing the hijab. I am urged to have my daughter take a taxi [to go to and from our house], and it is preferred to send someone else [along] to protect her.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

It appears that due to the perceived safety of the modest dress code, families in the Gaza Strip are now utilising the hijab and jilbab as a form of 'protection,' imposing it upon their daughters during times of escalated fighting:

At the time of the war, most of my friends and my family were afraid for their girls more than for the boys, to the extent that they made their girls wear the hijab and jilbab while sleeping (...).

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Notes

- ¹ In late 2008, Israel launched a 22-day military offensive on the Gaza Strip. In the aftermath of Operation Cast Lead, nearly 1,400 Palestinians were killed, and scores more injured. B'Tselem. 2009. Press Release: 9 Sept. 2009: B'Tselem publishes complete fatality figures from Operation Cast Lead. Available at http://www.btselem.org/english/Press_Releases/20090909.asp. Accessed on 29 November 2009.
- ² As of late 2009, 60 permanent checkpoints (18 alone in the city of Hebron) and a weekly average of 65 flying checkpoints each week were documented. See B'Tselem. 2009. "Restrictions on movement: Information on checkpoints and roadblocks". Available at http://www.btselem.org/english/Freedom_of_Movement/Statistics.asp. Accessed on 29 November 2009.
- ³ United Nations. 2009. *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for human rights and reports of the office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General: The issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints: report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*. Available at <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C7067BCF833833DE85257571006853D3>. Accessed on 29 November 2009.

Perceptions of Insecurity in the Public Sphere

In our communities, women's movements are restricted. There is no complete freedom to go out and come back.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Very little attention has been paid to documenting and combating violence against Palestinian women and girls in the public sphere. Yet, focus group discussions with Palestinian women and girls reveal that the public sphere, especially the street, is perceived as a 'male only' space and, thus, a source of insecurity and instability. Fear of entering the public sphere prevents women and girls from taking part in professional and educational activities.

The types of insecurity Palestinian women and girls perceive in the public sphere include verbal, physical and sexual harassment, the spread of rumours and gossip, and the threat of kidnapping. Women and girls also experience harassment and discrimination in the workplace, at schools and at universities. Many women, especially mothers, view the use of technology (i.e., cable television, mobile phones and the internet) as a threat to girls and young women's safety.

Violence and Insecurity in the Street

Verbal and Physical Harassment

Palestinian women and girls frequently cited male harassment in the streets as the most common form of insecurity in their daily routine. Since the public sphere is perceived as a potentially insecure environment, female access to it, while acceptable, is often curtailed or restricted to specific areas. Family and community members fear for women and girls' safety and often limit their movement. In the street, the presence of shabab, or young men, not only impedes women and girls' freedom of movement but also threatens their physical safety.

The lack of employment opportunities has had effects on the youth [young men] so they keep wandering the streets making trouble and harassing our girls.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

I would say that walking in the street is the most [dangerous] because of the young men from the university. The street is the most dangerous because of their flirting.

University Student, City (Nablus)

Reports of verbal harassment, unwanted flirting, and inappropriate touching are common, causing young women and girls apprehension and anxiety:

Flirts and words. We face this several times. You start thinking about what you are doing or what is wrong with you. You start having doubts about yourself, about what you are wearing or what you did wrong or what happened to make [men] talk like that. Is it true? You start having doubts about yourself.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

I don't think there is a difference between a girl wearing a bikini and a girl wearing a whole outfit (jilbab), both of them will face the same looks and verbal harassment from men in the street. Sometimes, after what I hear in the street I look at myself and wonder if I am wrong with the way I dress, but I realised that it's not me, it's the people who are sick in their mind, and this has become widespread in our society.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Young men harass me in the street; not only verbal harassment, but also they touch our bodies. This leads to the insecurity of women on the street.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

When we walk, some guys throw words at us about how we dress. How can you feel secure if you cannot walk in the street? (...) You are putting your head in a scarf and your body in

the jilbab and you still see the eyes looking and the comments on your body and other things. Why is it like this here?
Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Rumours and Gossip

Rumours and gossip directed at women and girls prevail among the communities where they reside, irrespective of whether in cities, villages or refugee camps. Since Palestinian women and girls are placed at the core of issues related to family and community honour, their movements in the public sphere are seen to reflect upon their nuclear and extended families. Women's access to the public sphere may be deemed immoral or inappropriate, depending on the situation. Thus, rumours and gossip, whether based on actual or perceived actions, serve as a potent form of female control and a source of fear and insecurity:

If any one of us goes out of her home too many times during the week, the community starts talking about her; people at our camp do not like to see women outside their homes. Women prefer to stay home and to postpone their work rather than have people talk about them.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

What people say plays a major role. Our families are affected in an abnormal way by gossip. I feel they care more about what people will say rather than about their children's comfort or the like.

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

Working women voiced dismay over their communities' monitoring of their movements and the implication that working outside of the home indicated something illicit in their behaviour:

Sometimes the nature of work requests you to be late in the evening. Then people start asking questions and want clarifications from you. Sometimes you are accused and hear words to the effect that you should not go out of your home.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

If [a woman] goes out at 6 am, people start talking about her; they do not appreciate that she is working.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

The thing that oppresses you most is when you hear people around you gossip, whether men or women, this will frustrate you. For

example, there were girls who used to work at our institution; they were forced to quit their jobs to avoid the scandals because they [the community] considered the girls' work to be a big scandal. There are other girls who go to work in other places, but they face the same destiny, which is to quit their jobs and stay at home. So the society that you live in has a double effect on you; it could be the reason for your progress by supporting you, or it could be the reason for your destruction.

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

Likewise, young women were discouraged from remaining outside the home during later hours:

If there were something called security here, you would find girls walking in the street after 6 pm. But she has to be home before that time, because people will gossip and talk about her. I live in the city of Hebron but my friends are from the village. They can't stay outside the house after 4 pm, they will be considered late, and people will talk about them.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Palestinian women who do not outwardly conform to their expected roles within society are at risk of judgment and harassment. For example, electing to not wear the hijab or jilbab (veil or long coat), a form of dress observed by many Muslim women, is viewed in some communities as unacceptable.

I suffer from verbal abuse because we live in a society that is controlled by traditions. For example, when I go out of my house, I hear lots of curses just because I am an old woman and I still don't wear a veil to cover my head. Sometimes some women stop me when I walk in the street to tell me: Why don't you cover your head?

Housewife, City (Jenin)

There is interference in everything whenever we go around. We feel we are not safe. When I go from home to work, I find thirty women asking me why I am not veiled, so I feel I have no social safety.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

In some instances, women felt compelled to adjust to society's demands in order to access the public sphere and develop their own careers:

People are attentive to appearances, and they are free with their own perceptions, but I do

not have to expose myself, or my body. Hence, I changed myself and, at the next [professional] meeting, I dressed in a longer skirt and covered my head. I took this initiative in order to strengthen myself vis-à-vis men. This is what women must do. There are many examples, even when a woman uses public transportation (cars); men think that women using public transportation are available. If you want to go out to work you must protect yourself.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Ultimately, gossip and rumours, whether factual or not, were just as immobilising as verbal or physical harassment. One university student in Nablus stated that every movement she makes must be calculated in advance. Produced by family or community members, rumours and gossip result in internalised self-regulation mechanisms through which women attempt to protect themselves (also see story page 28).

Threats of Kidnapping

While little hard evidence exists of women and girls actually being kidnapped in the Palestinian Territories, the threat of kidnapping, especially by taxi drivers, is a genuine perceived threat. Many are able to recount stories of girls rumoured to have been drugged and sexually assaulted after entering the vehicles, causing young women and girls to be especially wary of being left alone in taxis.

We fear being kidnapped, especially in taxis.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

In public taxis, there are a lot of problems happening, most of the people are complaining of this.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

My neighbour's daughter was going to a wedding party; she was exposed to harassment by the taxi driver.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

Fear of kidnapping also pervades other sections of the public sphere:

In the park, for instance, there are many guys that scare me, because they might kidnap someone. Sometimes I fear this thing.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Mothers were generally fearful and expressed concern over their daughters being abducted from their homes or while walking in the street:

Kidnapping of the girls, I am always afraid for my daughters, especially after hearing a lot of incidents on that. So you keep feeling insecure even in the presence of Palestinian police.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

At any time, I feel that someone will enter my home and harm my daughter.

Working Woman, Village (Gaza Strip)

Whether these fears are founded or not, they further add to the hysteria that compels women and girls to curtail their presence in the public sphere.

Violence and Discrimination in the Workplace

According to the 2005 Arab Human Development Report published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Arab women have one of the lowest female labour participation rates in the world, with Palestinian women experiencing the largest employment gap with their male counterparts. As of 2009, the female labour force participation rate was 15.4%.¹

The Labour Status of Palestinian Women

- The labour force participation rates for females decreased from 16.2% in the 2nd quarter 2009 to 15.4% in the 3rd quarter 2009.
- The overall unemployment rate for Palestinian women in 2009 was 29.8%. Refugee women experienced greater levels of unemployment compared to non-refugee women, 38.7% vs. 23.9%, respectively.
- The unemployment rate among females who did not complete any years of education was 5.3%. The unemployment rate for females having completed 13 years of education was 40.2%, compared with 16.9% among males.
- The vast majority of Palestinian women are employed in services and other branches at 62.5%, 18.9% are employed in agriculture, fishing and forestry, 9.2% in mining, quarrying and manufacturing, and 7.6% in commerce, restaurants and hotels.

- Females who worked as an unpaid family member totalled 19.4%, compared to 5% of males.
- The average daily wage for females in the Palestinian Territories is 79.8 New Israeli Shekels (NIS), compared to 80.9NIS for males.

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. 2009. Labour Force Survey (July-September, 2009) Round (Q3/2009). Press Conference on the Labour Force Survey Results. 2/12/2009. Ramallah.

Working in an already depressed economy with high unemployment rates, women's current labour force participation is exploited and devalued. It was commonly reported by women that employers exhibited discrimination in the workplace and provided preferential treatment to their male counterparts, contrary to the Palestinian Labour Law of 2000:

Discrimination based on gender is recurrent. Males take department responsibilities, but females do not.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

At work, if you ask for a day off, the administration may refuse as opposed to the request of a man. They do not find it a problem under the pretext that he is a man and he needs to work. Many times they do not realise why the leave is important to you. The problem is that you have no alternative.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

It was also noted that employers did not view women's work as necessary, implying that women were neglecting their familial duties in choosing to work outside of the home:

Most organisations have women, but the laws serve men. We need more flexibility for working women. My son is sick and I am late for work, but the administration does not accept such an excuse; they keep saying you should not work and you should stay home.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Furthermore, women reported that their due compensation was not provided in a timely manner in addition to particular rights, such as sick leave, maternity leave, equal pay, and job security not being afforded.

As women working in governmental organisations, it is well known that you have

to defend your rights alone. When we ask for our annual leave, we always face objections. Sometimes it is refused for uncertain reasons. Maternity leave for mothers, in comparison to the ideal cases, is not completely granted. Women also do not have enough rights in employment classifications and are deprived of salary raises.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

First, based on my own experience, and my work at the unions, there is no security because employers do not give women labourers even the most basic rights, such as sick leave, maternity or nursing leave, and they are even denied their rights for wages; they work for 8-10 hours in return for 10 NIS [New Israeli Shekels] or 20NIS the maximum. Other problems are arbitrary dismissal and verbal abuse. I have seen many cases where there is discrimination in wages against women although they work harder and produce better quality than men. Hence, women are paid half men's wage.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

I do not feel secure at work; at any moment they may lay me off, as I have no contract and no security.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Likewise, employment with non-governmental or international organisations was seen as tenuous given the organisations' tendency to be project-based and short-term in an already volatile work environment:

Job tenure is a concern, as you know we have kids and economic conditions are unstable, hence anything can happen at any moment. Programmes of NGOs may end, and what next? We as Palestinians are always worried since there is economic instability and people suffer at all levels.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Violence and Discrimination at School and University

Palestinian society has a long history of viewing education as an investment in future generations and as a form of resistance, especially in light of the region's on-going conflict, displacement and upheaval. Female education has featured prominently in Palestinian society, even if the first women to benefit were from the upper classes.²

In recent years, female attendance at universities has superseded males'; likewise graduation rates are now in favour of women.³ Despite these advances, female university students reported discrimination among the university administration, professors, and their male peers when attempting to take part in university life:

At the university, the ones who are dominant are the male students. Girls feel inferior. As a girl, if you want to participate in certain activities they say to you: No, you are a girl. Even for specialisations in the university, some of the colleges are only for males; at most they accept eight males and only two female students. This leads to domination of male's rights over female's rights. Also, in the student council you will hardly ever find female members.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

Akin to the street, males dominate the open space of the university, causing females to regulate their own presence and participation:

In any activities inside the university, males will exclude us from the university, especially after 2 pm. You will never see females in the university after 2 pm, only if we have late lectures.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

In the cafeteria [at Al Quds University], after working hours, there was a woman there. I don't know exactly what happened, but a guy came and attacked her. After this, the university issued a decision that banned the presence of any girl on its premises after working hours.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Schoolgirls also felt threatened on their campuses, citing instances of violence, and rape and sexual harassment in their school bathrooms:

In addition to the occupation, when you go to school, and you do not like going to school, there could be somebody treating you with violence. The teacher or head teacher may treat you with disrespect.

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

There are scary stories that happen at the school, like rape in the toilets.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

I heard about a school student who went to the school toilets where a young man who had followed her there raped her.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

Negative Perceptions of Technology

Contributing to the larger debate on Palestinian women and girls' access to the public sphere is the increasing use of modern technology (i.e., mobile phones, cable television, the internet) in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, alike. More difficult to monitor and at times allowing for greater freedom of social connection through phones calls, texting, email, and chat rooms, mothers perceived such technology as a threat to the safety of females. This threat stems from the assumption that such media might facilitate immoral acts and place young women and girls in potentially dangerous situations. While mothers generally expressed concern for both sons and daughters, it was the younger female population they wished to protect most, further curtailing their access to the public sphere:

Our girls and young women dress so fancy; I notice them on the phone or the net chatting until 1 am. Where are their parents? How can they allow them to act as such? This is a problem on its own; the way they dress and the chatting until very late at night.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

The progress of technology, such as computers, mobile phones and the internet, they have become basic things in our lives, but to tell you the truth, I am worried about my daughters because of these things.

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

Yesterday, I saw a girl from grade five with a mobile phone and she was talking on it. What will happen to her when she grows up?

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Honour killing cases threaten security; they are against security. The main reason for this is the cultural invasion that is found in our community as a result of telecommunications, like accessible TV channels and the internet. Misusing these devices will lead to honour killings.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Additionally, the consumption of televised or internet-based pornography by young males was also viewed as a source of insecurity for females even though the act is male generated. Despite this, mothers felt unable to control these behaviours in young males, instead turning their attention to females.

Violence results from the availability of the internet, especially for the youth. They leave everything and sit at the computers. They learn a lot of unacceptable things. Mothers become afraid of the brother in regard to his sister. It will lead to sexual abuse issues and this will make mothers afraid.

Former Prisoner, City (Gaza Strip)

I am worried for my adolescent sons; most of them are anxious. They are smoking a lot,

staying at internet cafes for a long time, they come late at night, and have sexual deviations in addition to addiction problems; they have become almost uncontrollable at this stage.

Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

Sexual abuse exists because of the things they see on TV and many young men drink and get drunk.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

A young woman's perceptions of women's insecurity in the public sphere

M. is a university graduate who is unmarried and lives with her family in the Jenin Governorate.

Well, you see, boys have the freedom to go out whenever they like, while girls are banned from going out. My sister's friend is not allowed to attend the English course in the summer and some girls are banned from going on field trips. In other words, we can say that they are banned from entertainment in general.

Because they might be in the same place with males - and this is something forbidden because this might damage their reputation - they are seen as bad girls if they go to such places. We also have a terrible thing in our society: you can find uncles, cousins, grandparents and even neighbours interfering in females' business. For example, the way they are raised, or their everyday life, like going out to their studies; they choose her specialisation and allow her only to attend Al Quds Open University [distance learning] and no other university. They also prevent girls from choosing their husband, they choose him for

her; they force girls to get married at the age of 17 or 18. All these things are kinds of abuse and violence. They would also convince girls or force them to do something that they don't want, something that they don't feel convinced of, or something that is against their beliefs and I think that this is a serious kind of abuse and violence.

They [parents] think that they are protecting their daughters by keeping them imprisoned at home. When the father goes out and hears a story about a girl, he thinks that it might also happen with his daughter, so he is convinced that he has to be as hard on her as possible by preventing her from watching TV, using the internet, going out with her friends or even not giving her enough money. He considers that these things are a kind of protection. Maybe this is easier for him than sitting with his daughter, and talking to her about the things that she must avoid to protect herself, or how to strengthen her personality and make her strong enough to defend herself and avoid things that might cause any harm to her.

Notes

- ¹ PCBS. 2009. Labour Force Survey (July-September, 2009) Round (Q3/2009). Press Conference on the Labour Force Survey Results. 2/12/2009. Ramallah.
- ² Fleischman, E. 1995. Jerusalem Women's Organizations during the British Mandate 1920s-1930s. Jerusalem: PASSIA.
- ³ Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics. 2008. Palestine in Figures, 2007. Ramallah.

Perceptions of Insecurity in the Home

We do not have the freedom to choose work, husbands or a specialisation. There are cases of women beaten or raped by their husbands. All this shows that there is no security.

University Student, City (Nablus)

Many Palestinian women and girls claimed their home as the safest place for them, and viewed their family or husband's presence as reassuring. However, a number of them also gave detailed explanations about the threats they felt they were exposed to in the domestic sphere.

Women and girls identified both external and internal threats affecting their security at home. These include several types of violence: psychological, verbal, physical and sexual, in addition to issues surrounding the personal status law. Women also cited concerns about economic security and their right to an education.

Economic Insecurity

For many women, poverty is one of the major causes of insecurity in Palestinian society, as well as a source of insecurity in the household. Specifically, women highlighted the link between poverty and violence, including family violence. While some women were concerned about thieves breaking into their house, most were particularly preoccupied with their family's precarious economic situation. Married women explained that when their husbands were unemployed and unable to provide for their family, the whole household suffered considerable stress:

Lack of money is the basic reason why men are more violent in their houses. If their monthly income is not sufficient for paying their debts [at the beginning] of the month, they become anxious and violent for the rest of the month for not being able to satisfy their children's requests.

Housewife, Camp (Nablus)

Poverty leads to a lot of violence inside our homes. The husband is not able to afford household requirements, so he will take out his anxiety on his wife and children. If my daughter asks for something from her father, he will beat her because he is not able to provide it. He does not hate her, but he feels helpless.

Former Prisoner, City (Gaza Strip)

Working women also complained that they were sometimes unable to dispose of their income because either their husband or their father had control over the household expenses.

I am 45 years old and I worked in Jordan for 15 years; I have been working with the Palestinian National Authority for 5 years. I give my pay [to my husband] to avoid problems. (...) I am supposed to keep it but I am not free to do so.

Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

According to Article 4 of the Amended Basic Law of 2003, the principles of Islamic Shari'a shall be a principal source of legislation. In line with the common interpretation of Shari'a law in the Palestinian Territories (Hanafi school), a woman's income is her own to dispose of as she pleases; the male head of the household is required to provide for the family. This does not always happen. In fact, some women mentioned instances of daughters giving parents their salary during the first years after they graduate from university as a form of reimbursement for their education.

Violence may take different forms; for instance parents can demand that their daughters do not marry until they finish their education and work, so that they [give a portion of] their salary to their parents before they are allowed to get married. (...) Sometimes, parents add a clause to the marriage contract that stipulates their daughter has to give them a portion of her salary.

University Student, Camp (Jenin)

Housewives, university students, and working women, alike, mentioned the importance of

work and of disposing of one's own income, as most of them viewed work as source of relative independence and security.

Access to Education, Restrictions on Movement and Clothing

Young women and girls frequently mentioned how their families restrict their movements, control their clothing and make decisions on their behalf regarding their education and career. Although these restrictions affect women's behaviours and appearance in the public sphere, and although they are influenced by the wider social context, they are directly related to families' perceptions of women's role—both in private and in public. For this reason, these restrictions can be interpreted as a family issue. Families often presented restrictions on movement and clothing as protective measures against a dangerous or hostile environment. Parents and elders declared they were making these decisions in the best interest of their daughters.

My father always tells me that he trusts me, but he doesn't trust the people around me. For example, when I want to go to the dentist, he asks me to take one of my brothers with me, even my ten year old brother. When I ask him about the reason, he says that this is better, and that our religion asks us not to leave the girl alone, so she has to take someone with her.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Some young women expressed concerns about family pressure regarding their clothing. As a woman's modesty (or lack thereof) has an important impact on her family's reputation, relatives often try to influence or compel women to wear what they deem as appropriate clothing. In some cases, young women were required by their families to adopt a more conservative form of dress in order to continue their education:

One of my classmates is being pressured not only by her parents but also by her grandparents who keep asking her to wear a veil. They also tell her not to go out. (...) She is almost in tears when she talks about it.

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

At home, [families] exert a lot of pressure upon girls regarding how they dress and appear in

public; they do not consider it a girl's right to choose her own clothing.

University Student, Camp (Nablus)

[My family] tried to force me to wear an abaya [long coat] and prevented me from going to college. They asked me to compare myself to my sisters [who wear an abaya]. But I was not convinced, so I resisted and, in the end, I did not wear it.

University Student, Camp (Jenin)

Many young women and girls noted that brothers also regularly control their sisters' clothing and limit their freedom of movement. While some women considered it normal for their brothers to interfere in these aspects of their lives, other perceived it as a form of violence:

An example of family violence is when brothers prevent their sisters from wearing makeup, from wearing certain clothes, or oblige them to wear an abaya [long coat].

University Student, Camp (Jenin)

Mothers also expressed fears in sending their daughters off to school and university, some going so far as to escort them:

In the previous year, I heard a lot of incidents that happened [sexual harassment], so I became very worried for my eldest daughters; so I go with them to their schools.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

I have two daughters at university; if they come a little bit late from their ordinary time, they [people] start talking about them, they keep asking where they were, and at the same time I am anxious and worried until they come back.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

In other instances, daughters may be detained in their own homes. Parents may attempt to 'protect' their daughters from the harassment of the street by preventing them from leaving their homes or from travelling within their own communities unescorted:

You walk in the street and some useless guys are playing songs. Girls do not feel able to move. You sit in your yard at home and you see dozens of them, walking and going round and round. Our parents feel unhappy and send us back into the house. They think this is for our own good but they should not act as such.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

Because of the inappropriate behaviours of men, women and girls are strongly deterred from entering the public sphere. These actions indirectly condone the harassment and abuse instigated by young men while at the same time punishing females.

Parents are often worried when their daughters leave the house, as the whole family's reputation may be damaged by a female's public behaviour, especially when out late. Such fears and frustrations may compel parents to remove their daughters from school or university completely, thus denying them an education or, at the very least, limiting the time spent there. For some families, the distance travelled for an education was not the only concern; in some instances a co-educational system posed a perceived threat to their daughters:

Many girls dropped out [of school] because they have to go outside our area. Many left their schools for this reason. Their families are very concerned about that. When a girl finishes the Tawjihi [high school exam] she doesn't continue her education because her family won't allow her to go to Yatta or Hebron.

University Student, Village (Hebron)

Our schools have a co-educational system from the first primary class until the Tawjihi. Many families deny their daughters the right to education because of this educational system.

University Student, Village (Hebron)

While some women believed their parents' concerns were justified, others felt it was unfair for them to discriminate against their daughters.

In some families, they discriminate between boys and girls. They may educate girls up to university and prohibit them from working. Or they may say: "Get high marks and we will send you to university. And if you get lower marks, we cannot afford sending you to university and you will go to an intermediate college." But boys would be allowed to study medicine, even with marks like 60 or 70%. Why?

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

In our society, right after girls graduate from high school, even if they have excellent marks, they are urged to study in the surrounding university, not in one that would require her to live in a hostel. Also, if at the same time their brother has 50% on the high school exam,

parents will favour him to study, [and he will be able to choose] any field, anywhere he wants. So there is discrimination also in education.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

Village schools have only up to grade 10. Afterwards, girls would have to go to the city to study. Their parents prevent them from pursuing their education. Or, if they enrol in a university, they will have to travel everyday back and forth.

University Student, City (Nablus)

Many students also pointed out that it is common for families to select their daughters' field of specialisation. Professions that involved a good deal of contact with males were frequently deemed inappropriate while the teaching profession was consistently preferred.

[Families] compel girls to study certain specialisations, such as education. But few families accept [that their daughters choose] fields like engineering.

University Student, Camp (Jenin)

Violence in the Family

Women and girls described Palestinian society's tacit acceptance of physical violence against them within the family circle as eliciting feelings of powerlessness. It is an unwritten rule that speaking out against this type of violence will cause more problems, as women and girls will likely be stigmatised by their families and by their communities. The stigma of asking for help outside of the family, coupled with a lack of confidentiality among response mechanisms, leaves women feeling re-victimised and suspicious. The very real fears of losing one's children, or facing divorce, increased abuse or even murder, cause women to employ the strategy of keeping quiet.

Women are afraid to talk about their situation because it will be used against them.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

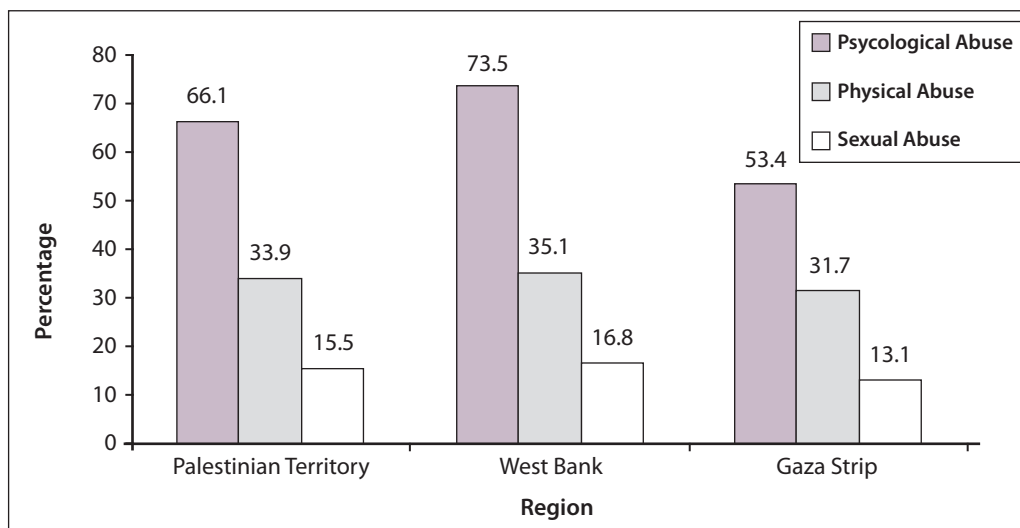
[Women] hide violence because they fear a harsher type of violence.

University Student, City (Nablus)

If I faced a problem like this, I would keep silent with my secret (...) Yes, it is difficult to speak up (...) you would risk to be killed.

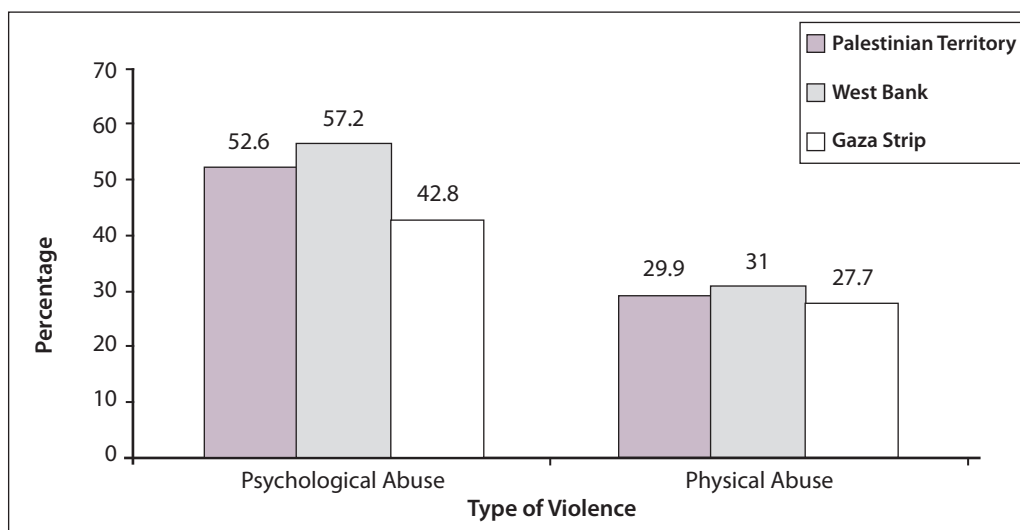
Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

Table 2. Percentage of ever married women exposed to any violence by husband, at least once during the period preceding 2005



Palestinian Bureau of Central Statistics. Statistics on Domestic Violence. Available at: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabID=4114&lag=en>

Table 3. Percentage of never married women aged 18 years and over, exposed to any violence by a household member, at least once during the period preceding 2005



Palestinian Bureau of Central Statistics. Statistics on Domestic Violence. Available at: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabID=4114&lag=en>

This happened to someone I know: her sons beat her and she was bruised. When she was brought to the hospital, she did not say that her sons had beaten her. She said that she had fallen from the stairs, because she was afraid.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

For many women, the question of security at home is related to their community's understanding of women's roles within the family. Many women spoke about husbands taking their stress out on their wives and children

when they came home after a difficult day. A number of women felt it unfair that social norms favour men, but some women actually agreed that certain types of violence against women practiced within the family circle are justified, encouraging a culture of blame:

Maybe it is your fault if your father is maltreating you or humiliating you. It could be your fault and not always his. Maybe he is only trying to educate you.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Most families consider that the girl is responsible for being abused. They always say: "If you had not worn these clothes or behaved like that, you would not have been abused."

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

I think that women have to understand their husbands and obey them in all cases. (...) You have to know how to deal with [your husband] to avoid his anger. (...) So I think that mothers have to raise their daughters and teach them to obey their husbands in order to be able to live with them and to have a family.

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

My sons and daughters fought. My daughter disagreed with her brother. Therefore, he beat her with a chair. My daughter screamed and said we should call the ambulance and all of her sisters were with her, but I prohibited them to call the ambulance because they would investigate the issue. I said to my daughter: "I would rather you to die than to call anyone from outside the house." At that time, some neighbours tried to intervene, but I did not let them. I told them to let my son beat his sister because she deserved it. (...) Until now, I keep saying that every girl fighting with her brother deserves to be abused.

Housewife, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Verbal Violence

Women often mentioned the pervasiveness of verbal violence within families. Some of them explained that even though this type of violence is insidious and socially accepted, they considered it as a source of insecurity and fear.

The first type [of violence against women] is verbal violence. To hear verbal abuse within a family is a normal phenomenon. There are some men who don't have the slightest respect for their wives. They treat them as servants who are only there for housework and childbearing. There is a lot of physical abuse at home. We heard a lot of women who were beaten and kicked out of their homes during the night. And later women returned to their homes because they did not have anywhere else to go.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

Verbal abuse is considered an ordinary thing in a woman's life [so] she doesn't have to inform anybody about it. It is as simple as that.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Inside families, there are differences between males and females. The male is dominant and controls the female even inside her home; sometimes he abuses her, not only verbally but also physically. In Palestinian families we do not consider cursing or shouting as violence.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

Physical Violence

In general, physical violence in the home is commonly believed to be instigated by the husband or father. However, within the Palestinian home, any member of the family may perpetrate violence; this includes fathers, brothers, sons, or even mothers-in-law or extended family.

There is domestic violence exercised by a husband or by a husband's family.

University Student, City (Nablus)

We know that there are women who are beaten not only by their husbands, but also by their sons.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Our neighbour was beaten by her husband every night. Neighbours used to knock on the door. He would say: "This is my wife, so no one should intervene." He was stricken with cancer and died. (...) Now the problem is that her son beats his mother since his father's death.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Many problems occur as a result of the constant inspection and interference of mothers-in-law with the wives and children of their sons. They practice verbal and even physical abuse.

Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

However, physical violence between spouses does persist:

I believe that physical violence has an extreme effect on women because I personally was one of the victims. I was badly beaten [by my husband]. For around four years I was abused. Then, I decided to stop this with the support of my father who told me: "If you are beaten, so go and beat him. Try to protect yourself". But in our upbringing and traditions, it is always said that a woman has to tolerate abuse without defending herself. So, suddenly I stopped in front of my husband, held his hand and said: "Do not beat me anymore!"

Housewife, City (Jenin)

I was treated in a bad way by my husband. I've always been beaten and abused without telling anyone, not even my family.

Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

[My niece] was physically and verbally abused [by her husband]. They had three boys and three girls, and her husband always tried to convince their eldest son to side against his mother, to the extent that when he was beating her, their son would just watch his mother without doing anything. He would sometimes say: "Dad, do you want me to help you?"

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

Some women explained that one of the reasons why they tolerate beatings by their husbands is because they had also been subjected to violence in their parents' home (also see life story page 39). Others acknowledged the difficulty in breaking the cycle of violence and mentioned the problems of growing up in a violent home.

I have a friend who was married to a man who had been married before. He abused her. He also took another wife. You wonder why this woman accepted the situation? Because her father was much worse than her husband.

Working Woman, City (Hebron)

A mother may keep silent [about beatings]. She may say she is not complaining for the sake of her children. In my opinion, with this attitude, she is ruining her children, not helping them. If the children see how their mother reacts to their father, it is quite natural that they will behave in a similar way with their husbands [in the future].

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

The cycle of violence passes from generation to generation. From an early age, Palestinian children are taught to obey their elders, particularly their father. In the father's absence, brothers are often taught to look after their sisters and other female family members. For this reason, brothers often assume patriarchal duties, including intervening in the lives of their sisters; sometimes they take their authority too far.

When her brother learned that she was taking to this man, he brutally beat her. (...) He also tore all her books apart and forbid her to go back to college. She is not allowed to leave the house. She has a strong personality, but what happened to her is beyond reason.

University Student, City (Jenin)

An example of the family's violence is when the brother prevents the sister from going out in a certain outfit, and imposes on her wearing the jilbab, or when she is prevented from wearing make-up.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Often our families educate us just to obey orders from our brothers and to do whatever they ask for; they ask us not to speak up (...). In addition, even if your brother beats you, you should bear it.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

A lawyer's view on the penalties law

The penalties law doesn't consider a woman as a full witness (...). Despite this term of the penalties law, a woman can try to file a complaint without a guardian. She can do it against a relative of the fourth degree, but she can't file a complaint against her father, brother or husband. It is considered that, as first degree relatives, they can never constitute a real danger to her. If any of them causes damage to a woman, due to a flaw in the law, she won't be able to file a complaint against them. We do our best to explain that within the framework of the penalties law. I was assigned to defend a case in the area of Tulkarem where a woman was raped by her father. What would the position of the law of penalties be in such a case where the guardian himself is the one allowed to file a complaint on her behalf?

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank

Sexual violence

As in most societies, the issue of sexual violence in general, and within the family specifically, is highly sensitive in Palestinian society. When discussing family sexual violence, women mentioned cultural taboos as an important motivation for not speaking out about abuse, as the fear of scandal compels women to remain silent. Women frequently perceived the consequences of denouncing the abuse as more severe than the abuse itself. Many, thus, believe that there is no way of fighting sexual violence perpetrated by family members.

[Women experience] abuse inside their homes: they are sexually abused by either

their relatives, like their brothers, fathers or uncles, or by neighbours. This is the worst type of violence, because an abused girl is not able to complain to anybody. Even if she tells her mother about it, the mother will advise her not to tell anybody about [being abused by a family member]. (...) Either the girl tolerates this situation, or she tells someone else, but finally she will be killed.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

I know of so many [women] who were sexually abused by their husbands or even their brothers, also possibly their fathers, and the women must keep silent.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

There are a lot of women subjected to sexual violence from their husbands.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

Some young women noted that, even at home, women are at risk of being sexually assaulted. They indicated that women's obligation to maintain a modest appearance extends to the inside of their homes, sometimes implying that women are responsible for "provoking" men's abusive behaviour:

You can even be at home (...) and dressed properly, but you still fear how your brother looks at you and how your father looks at you. Our communities are somewhat scary. You must try to cover yourself up with your clothes, or you would attract the attention of your brother or father. (...) We had cases of rape by brothers, fathers or uncles living in the same home. A woman cannot wear anything she wants.

University Student, City (Ramallah)

There are also indications that family members sometimes not only tolerate the sexual abuse of females, but also arrange for their female relatives to provide sexual favours to uncles, brothers-in-laws or other family members. It is difficult to obtain specific information about these problems, as women are extremely reluctant to discuss these issues. For the same reason, it is also problematic to assess the extent of such practices. Women often mentioned situations where a female family member was known to have been sexually abused by a male relative but was pushed to remain silent, in order to preserve the family's honour.

Personal Status Issues

Forced and Early Marriage

Although very little information is available on forced and early marriage in the Palestinian Territories, women and girls clearly perceive such practices as a security threat. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics, the median age of marriage for women in the Palestinian Territories was 18.9 in 2000, rising slightly to 19.4 in 2007¹, one of the highest rates of early marriage in the Arab world.²

I am afraid of being urged to marry at an early stage of life or being urged to get married to someone who I do not like.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Early and forced marriage not only deny a female the opportunity to choose her own partner, but may infringe upon her right to an education, and endanger the mental and reproductive health of young girls:

There is a girl in grade 7 whose father forced her to get married. He does not want her to go to school. She keeps working all day long. She kept missing school and the teacher did not accept this. She went to the head teacher and told her the story. She dropped out of school and got engaged and married and started a home with her husband. (...) The girls keep mocking her and they say one day she will come to school pregnant. They make fun of her. Poor one, we should feel sorry for her.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

In my class, 15 girls dropped out of school and got married. How can families accept that their girls wed at the age of 15 or 17 years. It will be good if we have a law that states the girl does not marry before 17 years; otherwise some families would make them get married at 14 years.

University Student, City (Jenin)

I have another friend who used to be in love with a man and before he could ask for her hand in marriage, her parents forced her to marry another man under the pretence that she was 21 years and too old to marry (she was like an old maid); they forced her into another marriage. The marriage decision is not in her hands, not like the young men; they choose.

University Student, Camp (Nablus)

Girls in our community marry at the age of 15 or 16. If a girl exceeds that age, no one would court her. She will be viewed as a spinster.

Housewife, Village (Hebron)

Yet, some families viewed early marriage as a protective factor:

If her father is not able to protect her [his daughter], he marries her off to someone who can protect her. By doing so, he gets rid of a heavy responsibility.

Working Woman, City (Hebron)

Polygamy

While allowed in the Palestinian Territories, polygamy is only practiced by about 3.6% of households.³ Despite its limited prevalence, the threat or act of a husband taking on another wife concerned married women who might tolerate the practice for fear of being divorced and left destitute or without their children:

My husband married another three women. I have a lot of essential requirements for my family, but my husband neglected my children and me, and no one helps us. I am patient, not referring to anyone but God although my husband did not divorce me, and I am still patient.

Relative of a Political Activist/Prisoner, Village (Gaza Strip)

A woman may have fears for her home or that her husband takes another wife, so she does not feel secure. He may sometimes leave her for another woman, so she feels she has no one to protect her. She left her parents' home to go to her husband's and now she has lost the source of protection of her [natal] home; this constitutes a point of weakness for her.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Women argued that they must endure violence and other offences for the sake of preserving the family and maintaining custody of their children:

[A woman] can lose her job just to preserve her home. She may allow her husband to take another wife just for the sake of staying in her home with her children. She cannot give up on her children.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Divorce

If divorced, a Palestinian woman would need to return to her natal family or to the home of her brother. The stigma surrounding divorce for women is so great that it is often very difficult for a divorced woman to remarry since she is no longer a virgin and especially if she has children. Consequently, it is a very real concern that her next partner might be significantly older than her, have a disability, or she might have to accept becoming a second wife. Even if remarriage is not a concern, women may be required to forfeit their dowry or their children, the latter being an option that is rarely considered by the vast majority of women.

Moreover, women are often unaware of their legal rights. The common interpretation of Shari'a law in the Palestinian Territories allows brides and grooms to agree upon the distribution of income between them. Their mutual agreement should be enshrined in their marriage settlement. However, in many cases, women are not aware of the Shari'a precepts, and marriage settlements do not reflect the financial rights women are entitled to under Shari'a law.

In the end, if I get divorced and I raise my children up to the legal age for their father to come and take them from me, what is the purpose of all that work for me?

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Women are afraid that their husbands will take another wife. However, the worst thing is divorce. A woman would sooner tolerate her husband marrying another woman, rather than divorcing her. At least she would keep her home, but if she has to give up her home, she will go to her brother who will abuse her. They will not tolerate her children. This is a nightmare for women. So women make sure to obey their husbands; this point should be underlined 14 times. All the time, women keep tolerating their husbands. Our community is unfair with divorced women, even if they are working and have their independence.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

It is the woman's basic role [to tolerate a lot] even if she was beaten (...) by her husband. (...) Then she will forgive her husband and return back to him again, saying: "He is my husband and the father of my children, where should I go?" She will keep saying: "If I forgive

my husband it is better, because if don't, I may be divorced or the problem will be even more complicated. I will be deprived of my house and children, so it is much better to bear the pain and keep silent." There is no one standing beside her to protect her.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

We have laws for women, but for example, if any woman wanted to ask for divorce, there isn't any law that would make that happen for her, she has to go and see if the tribal law would do anything on that issue, but she has to give up all her rights in order to be divorced. And when we talk about child custody, she can't have her children with her even though the law guarantees that for her, because the family of her husband would come and threaten her that she has to give them the children. They would force her to do that, and in the end you will see that her family will also put pressure on their daughter to give up her children to avoid troubles.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Beyond the practical implications of divorce, females fear the social stigma attached to the status of divorced women and the loss of the sense of stability and security that comes from being married:

[Some women] are miserable with their husbands. They are unhappy in their families. But in order to please society and to avoid gossip or the stigma of being divorced, they will not separate from her husband and will continue living in the same misery. They prefer the miserable life with their husbands (...) to the stigma of being divorced. Divorced women in Palestinian society are deemed inferior and are seen in a negative way. When a woman is divorced, she completely loses security.

University Student, City (Ramallah)

When a woman is beaten or hurt, if she complains to her family, they say she should get divorced and come back home. When she is divorced, they start restricting her freedom, requesting her to stay at home, not even looking out of the window. See how society is treating her.

Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Inheritance

Women mentioned that even though they know they are legally entitled to inherit from their parents (Muslim women are granted half the share of their brothers), they are traditionally discouraged from claiming this right. It is a common cultural practice for Palestinian women to not claim their share of an inheritance, regardless of their religion; it is often left to their brother for 'safe keeping.' This practice is commonly based on the fear of money or property leaving the family's possession since when women wed they become a part of their husband's family.

Even in the issue of inheritance, if the woman demanded her rights, everyone would blame her. Because of traditions, she can't ask her brother for her inheritance.

University Student, City (Hebron)

If a woman asks for her rights, her family will fight with her. How come she asks for her inheritance while she is married? She will be deprived of her inheritance if she gets married, especially with someone outside the circle of her family.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Religion gives women inheritance, but people are totally depriving women from their inheritance.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Murder in the Name of Honour

Murder in the name of honour, also referred to as femicide,⁴ has captured the attention of many Palestinian women and girls, despite the lack of a clear sense on the prevalence of the practice. Mentioned during focus groups sessions and in-depth interviews, discussion of murder in the name of honour tended to revolve around women's fears more than actual cases, with a few exceptions. Women perceive the issue of femicide as a real danger. If their behaviour is viewed as a threat to the family's honour and reputation, they feared being subjected to this kind of violence. Rumours might grow out of proportion, affecting the woman's family, and ultimately putting her own life at risk. The prevalent feeling is that the whole community places female behaviour under scrutiny and that there is no recourse for women whose conduct is deemed unacceptable.

Some women are beaten or divorced and they get nothing of their rights. They are forced to give up their rights. We are in the twenty-first century and we are still talking about basic rights like alimony and financial security. We still demand that the Palestinian Legislation Council amend these laws. They are delayed due to paralysis. It has never been normal to practice violence, but I feel that violence against women is normally practiced against the backdrop of family honour. This issue is very sensitive in our society. We, as an association were involved in an issue that should be discussed from a legal, religious and social point of view. I was really moved by the regrettable incident in Qalqiliya when two sisters were killed. People claimed they were killed for family honour. I discovered later, or someone told me, that they were killed for inheritance issues. So, the law is used to escape a severe penalty.

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank.

It is like the so-called honour killing. This is due to fundamentalism in the family. If you hear that a girl flirted in the street, the family does not question what happened and who talked about her. They don't trust their daughters, they beat them and sometimes [kill them], then they bury them without anybody noticing.

Working Woman, City (Ramallah)

Women were keenly aware that guilty family members often exercise impunity when employing honour as a defence for murder.

There are a lot of honour killing incidents, so security should first be provided inside families.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Sometimes police will protect the victim of violence for a while, and maybe they will send her away from her family to Ramallah or Hebron, but finally when she returns back, they will kill her in the name of honour in order to wash away their stigma (...) Why is our community not questioning the abuser? There should be stricter laws for all, without discrimination between men and women.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

I know a story of a girl who was brought to Jenin's governmental hospital due to abdominal pain, but right after examining her, the doctor discovered that she was pregnant.

He came out shouting at her relatives that their daughter was pregnant and he called the police. Seven police cars full of officers came to the hospital as if they came to arrest a wanted person. They kept her in prison for three days, then they returned her back home only to discover that she was killed after a while. Then they discovered that her uncle had raped her.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

A girl may be raped and what happens then? She will be forced to stay home and her parents may kill her without anybody noticing anything. Nobody will defend or restore her rights.

University Student, City (Ramallah)

Sometimes femicide is used to cover up other types of familial disputes, most often concerning inheritance and other economic issues. One of the main reasons for this is the likelihood that murders in the name of honour are less severely punished than other types of murder.

My husband is a prosecutor; he handles so many cases of honour killings. In the past, [he had cases of] people who were fighting, thefts, murders and inheritance issues, but now honour killings resemble a fascination.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

For instance, in cases of adultery the law allows a man to kill in the name of honour; he may be held in custody for two or three days until things calm down and then released. But the women do not benefit from the mitigated sentence; she has no case of defence of honour. She will be killed. There was a crime I read about in the paper or on TV; a girl was killed for money but her family said it was for defence of honour. In fact, it was for an inheritance issue. But the case was solved more quickly when they reported it was for reasons of honour.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Notes

- 1 PCBS. *Population and Household Statistics*. Available at: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabID=4109&lang=en>. Accessed on 18 December 2009.
- 2 UNDP. 2006. *Arab Human Development Report 2005: Toward the Rise in Arab Women*. p. 91.
- 3 Kuttab, E. 2007. *Social and Economic Situation of Palestinian Women 2000-2006*. ESCWA.
- 4 Femicide generally refers to the murder of women because they are women. It is often used in place of honour killing so as not to legitimise the murder of women for the sake of a family's honour. The term was first utilised in the Palestinian context by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian. See "Mapping and Analyzing the Landscape of Femicide in Palestinian Society." 2000. WCLAC/ UNIFEM.

A Case of Physical Abuse and Early Marriage

A. is a 29-year-old housewife who is a mother of four. She lives in a town in the governorate of Hebron.

As a child, her father and stepmother routinely beat her. She describes instances of her stepmother beating her with a water hose until she bled. Her stepmother would incite her father to beat her, as well. As a result, he would beat her with a cable or sharp tools. The scars are still visible on her body to this day. A. felt unable to confide in anyone about the abuse. She was rarely allowed to visit her birth mother and, when she did, chose not to burden her with her problems. At school she was unable to reach out for help; at that time there were no counsellors in schools and all the teachers were male.

A. has been married since the age of 14. Because she was married at such a young age, she was only able to attend school until the eighth grade. Married against her will to a man whom she did not know and who was five years her senior; she recounts an attempt to prevent the marriage, but to no avail. A.'s resistance to the marriage resulted in more physical abuse by her father. More verbal and physical threats ensued, and her family signed the marriage contract while she was forced to consent to the marriage.

For the first eight years of her marriage, A. lived in the family home of her husband. Her mother-in-law routinely interfered in her life. Even now that she and her husband live in a separate home, her husband's family is still intrusive. They have always criticised her behaviour, questioned her readiness to work on the family's farm (despite having worked in their fields until the seventh month of all her pregnancies), in addition to her ability to raise her own children. They belittle her, and her own father's family has often sided with them.

When A. tried to convince her family that she could not continue with her marriage, she was told that a woman must stay with her husband, regardless of the situation. They warned her against gossip within the community should

she leave the marriage. In desperation, A. tried to persuade her husband to grant her a divorce. As a consequence, he told A.'s family and A.'s father threatened her with physical abuse if she continued to pursue the topic. A. has yielded in her desire to leave her husband now because she is afraid he will take her children away from her. Despite her resignation, A. admits that her husband beats her, sometimes in front of their children. He also pulls her hair, punches her and throws shoes at her. As a result of her own history of abuse and the abuse she endures in the relationship, A. admits to beating her own children in ways similar to the way her own father used to beat her. A. blames herself for being in an abusive marriage and wishes she had been "strong enough" to refuse the marriage as a youth.

Currently, her husband is an unemployed construction worker. A. describes their economic situation as very difficult. In fact, her husband has sold her gold* to pay his debts. She manages to work from home, embroidering or sewing garments that she sells; a single dress can earn her 300 shekels (roughly US\$80). Yet, she feels she has no financial independence since her husband sometimes borrows money from her, never returning it.

A. has never talked to anyone about the violence she has been subjected to over the course of her life. She is not aware of any women's organisations or counselling centres in her area. If she were referred to such an organisation in the city closest to her community she is not sure she would be able to go there because her husband and her family-in-law strictly control her movements. When asked what she needs, A. says she does not need anything. She says she only lives for her children now but, as an individual, she has lost all hope.

*Traditionally, when Palestinian women marry, the husband has to pay a dowry to his wife. It is typically gold jewellery and it is supposed to remain in the wife's possession. However, there are frequent cases of husbands or their family requiring their wives to sell their jewellery in order to pay off debts.

Perceptions of the Response Mechanisms

Women do not know from who they should ask for help. And, if they are referred to an organisation, they will be afraid that their husband beats them again or does something else.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Women and girls who face violence and discrimination often rely upon public and private services to assist them in their search for support, safety and justice. Such services are vital in preserving public order and safety, as well as reinforcing the human rights of individual citizens. Focus group discussions revealed that Palestinian women and girls fear scandals and family humiliation, if and when they seek assistance.

Many believe that the use of response mechanisms negatively affects the delicate balance maintained by women and girls as they negotiate their own long-term safety and their families' honour. Thus, women and girls have very little knowledge of what current response mechanisms can do, or they hold a very negative view of these services.

There are no organisations that will totally support women; no one dares stop a violent husband.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

In most cases, women considered it preferable to use conflict resolution techniques within the clan or immediate family than to resort to public or social services. It was believed that little assistance would be provided and one's situation would be made public when accessing resources outside of the family. The following provides women's perceptions of the efficiency of core security and justice providers, public services, women's and human rights organisations, and the overall legal and regulatory framework.

Core Security and Justice Providers

Women mentioned a lack of trust in the government's ability to impose the rule of law. Some women felt that they could not rely on anyone to protect them, and many described the current political situation as chaotic.

How can we feel security without the government providing security for us?

Housewife, Camp (Gaza Strip)

There is no government. Whom are you going to trust, Hamas or Fatah? There is ID discrimination, I do not know even if this organisation is related to Hamas or Fatah. Even inside hospitals there is discrimination based on political group.

University Student, Village (Gaza Strip)

When there is no security, it is not always the Occupation. The government still has some room for action away from the Occupation... the government and civil society are still weak.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Police

We suffer across the homeland due to the absence of the role of the police. The role of the police has been marginalised due to Israeli incursions. They are also preoccupied with internal and factional problems. I support the role of the police and law. A woman should be aware of laws because she can refer to them to solve her problems. She refers to the law when there is a big problem at the social or political levels. She has the right, for example, to have an active political role in the political parties. Women have the right to work as judges in Shari'a and civil courts. I want to help women through the law, the police and other means to ensure their protection.

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank.

Among Palestinian women and girls from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, little trust is exhibited toward the police and security forces. Reporting to the police was also perceived as inciting greater violence both from the police and from family members:

The police blame the victim. They say, had she not done this or that, she would not have faced such a situation. Instead of supporting her, they aggravate her condition, as she faces interrogation and violation that is worse than what she faced at home.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

As I said before, I do not recommend reporting to the police; this would constitute a bigger risk.

University Student, City (Nablus)

When women who were abused are referred to the police, they risk being abused by the policemen.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

Even police do not dare stop a violent husband. They will play the role of conflict managers; they will not arrest him first, then they try to convince [the wife] not to broaden the problem. And, if this happens, no one will support her. A woman brings the issue to the police and goes back to the same situation. There is no supportive structure for women's issues.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

While few women voiced faith in the police, the majority stated that going to the police to solve a family violence issue was tantamount to filing for divorce and inflicting a greater deal of pain and stigma upon the woman and her family (also see story page 49).

If you complain or file a complaint, you get divorced.

Working Woman, Village (Hebron)

We are scared of the police stations, which are not accepted by our community. People always talk about the women who go there. These women are not accepted by the society.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

Society considers it unacceptable that you go to the police to inform against your husband. So you will drop the case and go back to your life and accept all kinds of violence that you face.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

For example, there was a girl who was physically abused by her father, so when she went to the police and informed against him, everybody blamed her for doing that. They forgot that he abused her, and they only focused on how she could do that to him.

Housewife, Village (Ramallah)

Often, the family structures are seen as more powerful than the authority of the police, resulting in women returning to the home and being put at further risk for abuse.

When she went to the police, her family members came, took her and gave her back to her husband and forced her to give up the case.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Violence in the home was seen solely as a family issue and, thus, should be solved from within the family:

Habits would deter [a woman] from going to the police. If it were something that affects honour, both her family and her husband's family would object; it is impossible she could have access to the police. Both families would not allow her. Her family or brother may intervene, but not the police.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

It is not nice when security forces or police interfere in family business. We do not like this.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

I do not like problems at home to go out of the home. It is not right to go and talk to the police or tell anybody about it. I would not like the police to talk to my father or my mother.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Women claimed that the police did not see problems experienced by women, particularly abuse, as a priority. They believed that their situations were not taken seriously, that there was no one to talk with, and that their situation was not respected with confidentiality:

The police sometimes say to an abused woman to go back home because they are not able to listen to her because they are busy with something more important than women's issues.

Former Prisoner, City (Gaza Strip)

There is no specialisation inside the police. When an abused woman goes to the police,

she must find a social worker or psychologist to speak to. Moreover, there is no confidentiality at the police. Unfortunately, they talk about any subject to their friends and neighbours.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Even when you go to the police, [people] start questioning your honour and they start saying: "Who knows what he did to her to let her go to the police?"

Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Although the police are tasked with protecting the community, young women and girls actually see them as perpetrators, having warded off their sexual and verbal harassment in the streets:

There is an absence of security in the streets, especially because of the police who are responsible for maintaining security. For example, when I go to my work, I face a lot of verbal harassment from these officers. So what security are we talking about here?

University Student, City (Hebron)

And about the police officers, I've faced much of their harassment. I really feel sorry for them, because they don't even look like police officers or security men.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Girls always say that the police officers are a source of danger more than a source of protection, so we never feel secure here.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Even at the door of our school, there is a police car with two or three [policemen]. They are there sneaking looks at the girls. They are supposed to be there to prevent guys from doing this. But once, a girl from my school was going out and a policeman stopped her and asked for her phone number. He was hitting on her. If policemen act like that, what can we say?

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

A handful of women expressed some interest in the police, though their perceived role appeared to be secondary, or as a last resort:

I do not object reporting to the police; police services are necessary to document cases of abuse against women, so that this can constitute evidence to restore their rights in court, for instance.

University Student, City (Nablus)

If a woman has no other option available to her, for sure she will have to go to the police, as a last option.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

Courts

Similar to perceptions of the police's role in protecting women and girls, accessing the courts system is seen as bringing shame and scandal upon the family.

It is a shame to refer to court. What will others say about [a woman who goes to court]? How could her husband go back to her? Her family would rather keep her subjected to violence than asking for her rights in the court. That is because there is a possibility to be divorced, or left neither divorced nor married. Also [the woman] will be prohibited from seeing her children. So she will not defend herself against violence.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

So leave things to God, as much as violence is heavy on women, they should keep silent. It is a shame and stigma to complain to the court.

Housewife, Camp (Gaza Strip)

But in the end, it remains up to the woman to try to solve the problem because she cannot go to the courts unless there is no possible solution at all.

University Student, City (Jenin)

So we don't think of referring to the court because we solve our problems between each other. We will not let our secrets out of our houses.

Relative of a Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

My husband hurt me, my hand was injured, but I did not go to court because I don't want to widen the problem that will affect my whole family (...) The problem should be solved internally by the family; we have to avoid going to court.

Relative of a Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

The fear surrounding social stigma and shame can be directly linked to the lack of confidentiality in the courts:

At court we mostly suffer from a lack of confidentiality.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Many women perceived the legal system as unfair and see the courts as yet another impediment to women attaining equality and justice. Women who faced violence in the family were given little recourse:

The court doesn't do anything for girls who are killed and the law is unfair to women's rights. So we will find a lot of people who kill their daughters for inheritance or something else and it is justified for honour.

University Student, Camp (Ramallah)

The courts are not administering justice to women. If a woman complains against her father or brother on an inheritance case or any claim for example, she does not get her rights. They advise reconciliation and the settlement of the dispute [within the family], rather than take it to court.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Court proceedings are too long and most of the time they force women to relinquish their deferred pay or their children. And in the end result, they are alone and divorced, left to face the society.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Others blamed the judiciary directly:

I would like to correct your information, everybody says that there is no law, but the fact is that there is no judiciary that would apply the law.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Overall, 11.2% of all judges are female in the Palestinian Territories. In early 2009, two female judges were appointed to the Palestinian religious (Shari'a) court,¹ a rare feat in the Muslim world. The presence of female judges, both religious and secular, has not been felt in society, though:

They should appoint women judges. Only women understand women, I have not seen a woman judge so far, they are all old men, who can barely hear anyone.

Working Women, City (Jenin)

For those who use the courts, they are commonly viewed as a last resort:

The courts solve problems, but they should be the last way of solving a problem.

Relative of a Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

People go to court as the last resort.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Public Services

Schools

Among schoolgirls and university students, school counsellors and social workers were mentioned as a resource if their friends needed assistance or someone to talk with. While young women and girls suggested the counsellors for their friends, no one implied that they, themselves, would utilise these services (see story on page 49):

If she is a school student I would advise [my friend] to go to a school counsellor, but to no one else.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

If she is my friend at school, I will take her to the counsellor.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

However, confidentiality was frequently mentioned as a reason for not seeking assistance from the school counsellors:

Also, the problem is that school counsellors are not dealing with cases confidentially and professionally. You discover that any story is spread among school staff, so students do not trust this service.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

The school social worker may help students in solving their problems, but she may also reveal the students' secrets. In general, a girl who goes to the counsellor will be singled out for having problems (...) Whenever I talk with the school social worker about something, I find out that all the teachers know about it.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

In my opinion, it is impossible to see the counsellor. Every time I have a problem, should I go to the counsellor? But it is impossible to talk to the counsellor because she will tell the teachers and the problem will just keep growing

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

In many schools, the school counsellor was available for only short periods during the week, often having to split their time with another

school; this results in a ratio of one counsellor to many hundred students. Students must then wait a number of days to address their problems:

In my previous school, the school counsellor was coming only on Mondays, so we faced many problems throughout the week by ourselves. She was not there.

Schoolgirl, Village (Hebron)

Hospitals

Some abused women are admitted into hospitals and the hospitals give them counterfeit reports. They claim they fell off of a balcony or a window fell over them and so on. They don't say what exactly happened to them. They deny that husbands or brothers beat them. [Women] fear scandals and the community, so they don't defend themselves. They don't raise actions to the police to avoid gossip.

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank

Women mentioned verbal abuse by hospital staff and an overall insensitivity to their situation as chronic problems when accessing medical services for abuse. Reaching out for assistance in hospitals did not appear to be an option for women; in fact, abuse experienced by women was commonly denied, taunted and effectively erased from medical reports.

A friend of mine went to the hospital because she had tried to commit suicide by taking a lot of pills. The doctors in the hospital started making fun of her. They asked her: "What if everyone who gets beaten by her husband commits suicide?" They did not support her; they criticised her instead and wrote in the report that her bruises were caused by another incident.

Relative of a Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

The doctors and the security at the hospital tell violated women that they deserve the abuse, that they must have committed a mistake for being beaten.

Housewife, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Hospital staff routinely interfered in women's situations without permission. For many Palestinian women and girls, taking steps to address violence against them is already difficult and potentially dangerous. Thus, utilising

guilt and shame against a woman who is struggling with a difficult choice was viewed as unprofessional and manipulative.

If a woman is referred to a hospital to ask for a medical report, they could give it to her, but they will try to advise her, saying "This is your husband, or even your brother. How come you are going to complain about him to the police?" Issues will become complex, so the woman becomes afraid and decides not to complain.

Former Prisoner, City (Gaza Strip)

I need to say that they must be honest and provide reports when requested.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Or, one's political affiliation dictated whether services would be provided:

Issues inside the hospitals, police or courts are strongly related to political issues. I know of a woman who was from Hamas; her husband was beating her. She complained to the government, then they brought her husband to prison. But in the opposite case, another woman was beaten by her husband but she was not related to the government. In the hospital they started criticising her and told her to see for what reason she was beaten.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

As is the case with other response mechanisms, confidentiality and sensitivity appear to be non-existent within the medical system, causing women to think twice before subjecting themselves to shaming and re-victimisation.

They need to provide training to their staff; confidentiality is the most important thing. Some women get to the intensive care unit and some give birth to illegitimate children. Yes, the service is provided and there is a doctor in the operating room, but how do they treat women? Therefore, training is needed.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

The presence of armed groups and/or pressure of political factions on medical staff, in addition to breaches of medical confidentiality, constitute grave breaches of medical ethics and crimes under national and international law.

Shelters

Women and girls, for the most part, were unaware of any shelter services in the Palestinian

Territories. In fact, some denied that such an institution could exist. Overall, few perceptions of the shelters were voiced due to this gap in awareness.

The Social Affairs do not have such services [shelters].

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Women who had heard of the shelters mentioned them in a way that implied their existence was 'rumoured.'

They opened a centre some time ago, as I read in the newspaper, possibly in Beit Sahour or Beit Jala [near Bethlehem]. I heard that they opened a shelter but I forgot its name.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Or they expressed scepticism that the shelters have any power to protect women from their families or provide empowering services:

Many girls faced a situation where their families surrounded the safe house and threatened to shoot them if they did not go out. The safe house cannot provide them with the necessary protection. And they cannot go back to their families.

Schoolgirl, City (Jenin)

Sometimes the organisation itself makes you feel there is something wrong with you. I see that the safe homes or rehabilitation centres place all girls who are victims together in one place, and they start believing that they are excluded socially because they are placed in such a place.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Once notified of the shelters' existence, women voiced concern as to why they were unaware of their services. More importantly, women wanted to know why they had not been alerted to the shelters' presence, proposing a strategy for proper notification:

I think that they were negligent in promoting the program. They are supposed to meet with women's organisations, cadres and even with housewives, not only with working women, to promote this project, and inform us of the project and the shelter, so that cases can be referred to it from all areas. We are not informed.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Women's Organisations and Human Rights Organisations

Women's organisations and human rights organisations are plentiful in the Palestinian Territories (see Annex 2, pp. 62-66). Women and girls, the very individuals they are meant to benefit, do not feel the presence of such organisations. A 2008 survey revealed that nearly 74% of female and male respondents did not know of any women's or human rights organisations that defend women's rights.²

AWRAD Survey on The Role of Women and Human Rights Organisations

- 73.7% of Palestinians did not know of a women's or human rights organisation working in the field of women's rights
- 32.6% of Palestinians did not have any information about the organisations that defend women's rights
- 94.2% of Palestinians have not sought out the services of a women's organisation
- 83.9% of Palestinians had not participated in the last two years in an activity organised by a women's or human rights organisation working on women's rights
- 45.4% of Palestinians think that women's organisations and societies contribute positively toward improving women's status and rights
- 57.6% of Palestinians think that women's organisations and societies contribute to promoting women's awareness of their rights
- 42% of Palestinians think that women's organisations and societies contribute to promoting men's awareness of women's rights

Source: AWRAD. 2008. *Results of an Opinion Poll. Palestinian Women: Challenges and Priorities, Social and Economic Rights, Political Participation, Legal Reform, The Role of Women & Human Rights Organisations and Overall Trends.*

In light of this, many women and girls were unable to even identify a single women's or human rights organisation that provides services:

According to my experience at the mental support project where we work with women,

I cannot identify any party that seriously and effectively cares for women subjected to violence and who need treatment and follow up.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Here in the women's centre, I noticed there were many awareness programmes for women on early marriage, violence and other things (...) There are services offered by the Palestinian Authority but honestly speaking, we do not see a thing. We do not even know the names of these organisations or the services they provide.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

In fact, I am not fully informed about the organisations that are active in this matter, hence I would first search for the appropriate organisation for [a woman's] condition, and then I would direct her towards this organisation. As you have heard, we do not have such effective organisations with tangible results in the field.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

I don't remember exactly, but I saw some toll free numbers from many human rights organisations in the papers. I do not feel these organisations care about women's rights in a practical way; I do not think they are realistic or aware of what they are doing.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Those that were familiar with services were unclear on the objectives of women's centres and what role they played in assisting women:

Many people do not understand the role of these associations. They can only provide psychological support, but this [punishment] is not their area of work; it's the police's job.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

We have institutions here that are not specialised in receiving cases of physical abuse, or sexual abuse. These institutions can't provide protection for these victims from their families who want to kill them because they were raped.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Well, for the organisations I feel they cannot provide protection. One of the stories we heard is that a girl would refer to the organisation and people, like her family for instance, would come and if they found the counsellor or supervisor trying to help her, they would threaten him with

guns and this would impede the organisation's role. Nobody can precede the tribal law.

University Student, City (Hebron)

The lack of clarity surrounding women's organisations also cultivates a sense of distrust among women and girls, resulting in claims that such organisations were not truly working on behalf of women but, rather, manipulating or exploiting them:

People indicate that women's centres spoil women and take them away from morality.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Not all people believe in these organisations; they are not convinced of their role.

University Student, City (Nablus)

But other women's organisations are practicing violence against women by way of exploiting women's issues and gaining a budget. In general, women's organisations are always working with a known agenda, in spite of difficulties faced by them, like a lack of budget. They benefit from women's unawareness of the role of women's organisations. They have stopped believing that women's organisations are there to support and defend women's rights. They are there to employ women only.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

The inability of organisations to collaborate properly in order that services are rendered more effectively was observed:

Indeed, there are many organisations but with no communication. Each organisation operates alone, but communication is better.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Distrust of women's organisations was further exacerbated by the impression that human rights organisations are better able to advocate on behalf of women and gain tangible results:

I went to a human rights organisation in Jerusalem, and they are following up her [a friend's] case. Hence, it is possible that human rights organisations may be more useful for women than the other organisations that claim to be active.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Overall, the shame of seeking assistance often overshadowed the benefit of receiving services from the organisations:

In spite of the presence of specialised centres for women's issues, women and society as a whole believe these institutions are not good. It is considered a taboo (haram) to go there, and women feel ashamed to ask for help.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

No woman is brave to go to them [women's organisations]. Had we self-confidence, we would go to the police, but this is not acceptable. Even in Islam, [aman] cannot do this and he must be subjected to correction of this behaviour. But customs do not allow for this, even when the woman is abused.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Even if you direct women to certain institutions, they will not go, because they will say, "It is better to suffer silently than suffer with a scandal."

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

In fact, using women's or human rights organisations was argued only in special instances, conceivably if the issue could not be resolved within the family:

All types of violence are found and every type has its own situation; for verbal or physical violence [a woman] either keeps silent or refers to her mother or father. We refer to God in everything with our lives. But for sexual violence, [a woman] may refer to a women's organisation although I know it will not do anything.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

The Legal and Regulatory Framework

Secular Laws³

Main laws affecting Palestinian women

- Egyptian Family Law (Applied in the Gaza Strip), 1954
- Jordanian Penal Code (Applied in the West Bank), Nr. 16, 1960
- Jordanian Personal Status Law, Nr. 61, 1976
- Civil Service Act Nr. 4, 1998
- Labour Law, Nr. 7, 2000

- Public Health Law, Nr. 20, 2004
- Law of Service in the Palestinian Security Forces, Nr. 8, 2005
- National Election Law, Nr. 9, 2005

These laws impact the well-being and security of Palestinian women and girls at multiple levels: professionally, politically, economically, and health-wise.

Palestinian law is not unified as it is a mixture of Ottoman, British Mandate, Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli military laws. Marriage and family issues in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are governed by two different legal systems, the Jordanian Law of Personal Status of 1976 and the Egyptian Law of Family Rights of 1954, respectively.⁴ The personal status laws affect women and girls disproportionately because they encompass issues related to marriage, polygamy, divorce, child custody, inheritance, and, in some cases, murder in the name of honour. The legal system is perceived by women as unfair with regard to women's rights and legal recourse.

Palestinian women do not feel secure because the law is unfair. Also, as a community we do not have a specified legal system (...). Concerning the personal status law, we depend on the unjust Jordanian law that is not fair to women.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Women and girls feel the ramifications of this situation in a profound manner and voice dismay over the fact that no laws effectively protect women from violence and discrimination in the home, at the workplace and on the street.

There is no protective legislation for women.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

I am afraid that if I get married, there will be problems between me and my husband and I will not have my rights because rules and regulations, even laws, are missing. I know that law articles will not give me my rights and I do not know who I should refer to for help.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

As a woman, you also feel very comfortable because of the existence of law, but in our case

here in Palestine, there isn't any law that would guarantee any of your rights.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

What we really need here is a law to protect women, especially to protect them from honour killing crimes.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

According to some women, even laws that claim to promote gender equality fail in their rhetoric:

Many laws like the social security law and the penal code make women suffer (...) These laws go against women's needs, like the Labour Law where women cannot get promoted because of their status and the promotion is preferably given to men, since women will get married and have children, and [may claim] the right to marital and annual leave.

University Student, City (Nablus)

Despite laws in place, and despite awareness campaigns by women's and human rights organisations, it is perceived that women, as a whole, are not aware of their legal rights.

I do not feel that women are secure. Security is when there is a fair law for women, when I know that if I am abused, I will be able to refer to the legal system. Also, people will support me then. I have the right to know everything that happens in my life. Women should know their duties and rights. Unfortunately, most Palestinian women do not know their rights.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Links were made between dysfunctional legislation and the inability of human rights and women's organisations to function properly:

Because of the absence of a law - there has to be a law first - and then you can guide the institutions.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

We need to enact laws to protect Palestinian women and to establish women's organisations for women's issues.

Relative of a Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

Religious Rules and Tribal Laws

I attended several Shari'a trials and what I noticed was women's ignorance of their legal rights. Women's organisations must focus on educating women. A judge could be pursuing justice for [a woman], while oppressing her due to his unconscious culture. [Judges] sometimes call on the woman to stop working outside of the house for the interest of the husband. This conception is derived from a religious point of view. It entails that the husband is next to God. Such words and expressions are used in Shari'a courts as (...) psychological violence. (...) I wish we could change their conception of women.

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank

Tribal law features prominently in Palestinian life, both within the family and within the community. Many women and girls mentioned the mukhtar, or clan head, as a resource for mediating family disputes. They believe that resorting to these tribal conflict-resolution mechanisms is dictated by religion.

Our religion urges the couples that fight to go to rulers from their family or relatives to settle the problem or make reconciliation between them.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Keeping problems within the family, by utilising family resources, was mentioned as a preferable way for women and girls to resolve familial issues. However, recourse within the family was mentioned for the sake of keeping the peace and not causing scandals, rather than because women and girls believed justice would be served.

If the family can not resolve the problems, they should go to the chief of the family or the head of the big family, mukhtar, or a conflict resolution committee. But, they should not go to the government.

Relative of Prisoner/Political Activist, Village (Gaza Strip)

Refer to family because it is the only source of security.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

The mukhtar was not the only individual suggested to resolve family disputes. Various

women and girls named a number of other family members they could turn to should they require assistance; fathers, brothers, uncles, and in some cases, mothers.

I would not advise [a woman] to refer to her family, because she may have aggressive brothers who may beat her husband or his family and the problem will be bigger, but the woman could speak directly with her mother who can advise what to do without informing anyone else.

University Student, Camp (Gaza Strip)

In some instances, tribal law coincides with personal status law. In these situations, women acknowledged the inherent biases in the legal and regulatory system:

From a tribal point of view, in some cases the solution is not satisfactory and does not serve my interest. Like cases when the perpetrator of a rape is wed to the victim; he will rape her everyday under the legitimate cover of marriage. This is why the law needs to be changed so that [women] will have the strength to go to the police and file complaints.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

A young woman's perception of response mechanisms

There are services at hospitals. I remember when my neighbour was beaten, so she went to the hospital and there the doctor tried to convince her to go to the police to inform against her husband. They preserved confidentiality when they treated her, but actually she had to take this step and be strong enough to decide to go to the police. She had the idea in her head that this person was her husband or her cousin, so what would people say about her if she went to the police? She had to change all these wrong beliefs, she had to reject violence. She used to justify the abuse, thinking it happened just because he didn't have money, or because he was nervous or for any other reason. She had to change all this by deciding that it was enough, and that she no longer accepted to be abused.

They treated her first, and then they tried to convince her that she had the right to go to the police to inform against her husband, but she decided to protect him. She wasn't thinking about herself; her only concern was not to take her husband to the police to investigate him.

The reason is worrying about what people would say; that she put her husband in jail, which is not

accepted in our society at all. And she also knew that if he had been put in jail for a while, she would be afraid of him getting out because he would not forget what she did to him, so she would be in danger more than before.

Her husband would get mad at her more than ever because she did that to him, and he would beat her even more when he gets out. Don't forget the fact that her children would pressure her to accept the violence because if she decided to leave them, she thinks they would be lost, so she prefers to stay with them to raise them, rather than leaving them. She bears the violence against her for the sake of her children; she feels that she has to protect them. On the other hand, she wonders who will help her if she decides to leave her husband to go to her family. Her father and mother are dead, her brothers might accept that she lives with them but I don't think that their wives would accept that. So she doesn't feel any kind of protection or security, especially if she isn't educated. She also thinks of the economic side, that she doesn't have any job, so how can she survive?

M. is a university graduate who is unmarried and lives with her family in the Jenin Governorate

A schoolgirl's perspective of response mechanisms

I don't believe in counsellors. I saw that they did nothing for my classmate. I don't even believe in the police. There is no party that you can trust.

Things must be confidential. I may tell the counsellor what happens to me if this is useful. She has to help and keep the secret between us and

not to share it with my family and neighbours.

If I face a problem, I may vent to my friends. They may advise me, but I won't go to such organisations because I don't trust them.

R. is a schoolgirl in the 10th grade in the Jenin Governorate

Notes

- 1 Halpern, O. 2009. "Palestine: Female judges give Palestinian women hope of fair hearings". Available at <http://www.awid.org/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/Palestine-Female-judges-give-Palestinian-women-hope-of-fair-hearings>. Accessed 28 November 2009.
- 2 AWRAD. 2008. *Results of an Opinion Poll. Palestinian Women: Challenges and Priorities, Social and Economic Rights, Political Participation, Legal Reform, The Role of Women & Human Rights Organisations and Overall Trends*.
- 3 On 8 March 2009, the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA) Mahmud Abbas signed the CEDAW (Commission for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Agreement. The President advised all relevant Palestinian ministries and social services to follow up on the stipulations of the CEDAW Agreement. Signing CEDAW into action was primarily symbolic given that Palestine is not a State. The act was meant to publicise the PA's commitment to women's rights in the future State.
- 4 Human Rights Watch. 2006. *A Question of Security: Violence against Palestinian Women and Girls*.

The Recommendations of Women and Girls

Women must be fully aware of their legitimate rights- political, social, religious, and others. What are their full rights so that they can stand up for such rights?

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Palestinian women and girls remain increasingly distrustful of formal response mechanisms for combating and addressing violence against women. Yet, the reality is that few have ever accessed these services. While women and girls employ caution when approaching organisations offering assistance, opinions on how to improve these organisations were offered in a clear and forward manner. However, while advice on ways to reform services was offered, it still remains unclear whether women would actually consider using improved services or whether social taboos would deter them from so doing. Significantly, when asked what they would recommend to government officials in order to improve their situation, some women replied that they would not ask anything because they did not believe that promises would materialise.

At the institutional level, confidentiality was seen as crucial for any organisation to function within the community. Awareness of the issues affecting women and the sensitivity to deal with such issues was also stressed for employees of women's and human rights organisations, as well as for core security and justice providers. Additionally, women recommended the provision of wrap-around services, including psychosocial support and greater specialisation among service providers. Finally, legal reform was demanded as women proclaimed that the vast majority of laws within the Palestinian Territories not only discriminate against women, but also tolerate violence against women and girls.

Improving Services

Police

The fear of causing scandals within one's family is one of the most important issues preventing women and girls from approaching the police and lodging complaints. In fact, the act is so scandalous that even the police occasionally attempted to dissuade victims from filing complaints and would also insinuate themselves into tribal reconciliation efforts. Thus, confidentiality within the police services was recommended:

The police have no secrecy. We need full secrecy on these issues and women prefer to talk with a female officer about her issues (...) We need confidential institutions to work in this regard.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Palestinian women and girls also recommended that policewomen have more prominent roles in addressing violence against women:

There should be policewomen at every police station so as to deal with women's issues.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

We hope to feel the presence of policewomen because it could be easier to report to a policewoman. You would feel more secure.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Young women and girls requested greater protection while at university or school:

Maybe they can have police officers guarding girls' schools. There are many girls there and guys go back and forth just to say things to girls. They can be witness to this and punish the guys who do these things so that they deter them.

Schoolgirl, City (Ramallah)

Courts

Women and girls made very little mention of how to improve the court system in the Palestinian

Territories. For the women who did provide suggestions, the focus was on providing services that acknowledge the woman's experience and provide a safe place for her to seek restitution:

And you need to have a judge in the police department and a female judge in general where you can go sit. It will be different if the police department has a female judge, like a small court. This will be slightly better than the police we have.

Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Build a court for [women]; a court that says this is an abused woman beaten by her husband and a court where she can complain and have him imprisoned for two or three months.

Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Hospitals

Overall, women and girls were adamant that hospitals provide psychosocial support for victims of violence. Instead of solely treating the physical effects of abuse, counsellors and social workers must also support the victim psychologically and emotionally:

Every hospital must offer the services of a psychological counsellor, not only the schools.

University Student, City (Nablus)

There should be social workers at the police and at the hospital.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

There is a need for a psychiatrist to attend to [abused women] and cooperate with the physician to treat their trauma.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Similarly, women suggested sensitising hospital staff to victims' psychological and emotional needs:

Before bringing a psychiatrist, we need to train the physicians and nurses to deal with the human dimension of patients.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Shelters

Despite the existence of shelters in the Palestinian Territories, few women and girls knew of these institutions and their services, including the hotline. Equally few women considered the current shelter system as a source of support for women facing violence. Thus, shelters

geared towards treating the whole individual, especially her reintegration into society, were recommended:

We should establish shelters to deal with violated women, to treat women's issues in a professional way; to provide rehabilitation and reengagement in society. [They should not] only concentrate on awareness programmes, but also provide support, help, and rehabilitation to enable women to have normal lives.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

[We want] safe shelters for women in Jenin, such as those that you mentioned. Jenin needs shelters.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Social Services, Women's Organisations and Human Rights Organisations

Many women and girls were not aware of the services offered at women's and human rights organisations, did not understand the mission of such organisations or, in some cases, were not even aware of their existence. Thus, many women and girls recommended such organisations be more pro-active and provide information about their services:

Advertisements; we need to know where these organisations are and what they are doing.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Women feel reluctant to refer to women's organisations for help, so organisations should encourage women to come to them.

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

The creation of associations for awareness on women's rights at the camp level and elsewhere in Palestine; these organisations should inform about all their programmes, services and target groups. They should visit every house, and their services should be not only for women but also for men and students.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

I would like to ask for genuine women's institutions to handle their issues and defend them.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

We are in need of women's organisations that are available and accessible for every woman and girl to refer to and offer them help, support

and solutions for their problems in a safe place away from fear.

Housewife, Camp (Ramallah)

Despite never having accessed a women's or human rights organisation or knowing whether certain services existed, women and girls spoke in detail about the ways in which such social services might provide wrap-around services for victims of violence or, at the very least, provide more cooperation and collaboration with other institutions. This point was highlighted given the duplication in services prevalent in the Palestinian Territories, whether due to donor-driven agendas or limited contact between organisations. Such services might allow for better follow-up among providers or, at the very least, more appropriate referrals:

Psychological guidance can be integrated into the work of the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

We start with the first step. We find enough organisations. We need to train and empower the teams of these organisations like the police; they must have good departments that treat cases confidentially. If there are good organisations with unqualified staff, it will be a problem. Confidentiality is very important because women are afraid of scandals. Maybe the number of organisations is not sufficient, or the types of services [are not appropriate]. Maybe these services need to be explained and done in partnerships but, once again, confidentiality is important.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

I think that we really need a centre that specialises in mental health, and psychological guidance. I think that this centre has to integrate the work of the police, so that they can rebuild women's self-confidence, and provide protection to them.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Centres that are specialised in women's issues should be provided in every city and village. These centres should consist of a qualified team of lawyers, psychologists and social workers. These centres would be able to provide counselling and protection for women (...). These centres should provide security for women. They should also protect women from any exploitation.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Women suggested that organisations also target marginalised groups:

We might ask for centres to provide psychological support for men who beat their wives or sisters.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

There is ignorance from organisations regarding some target groups like released women prisoners or even women in prisons. There is even ignorance of some geographical areas. Also, there should be a certain level of coordination between organisations to avoid overlapping and duplication [of services].

Working Woman, Camp (Gaza Strip)

A professional and knowledgeable staff, with regard to issues affecting women and familiarity with social services, should be the primary focus of any social service organisation:

Open specialised centres to defend women's rights with a well-equipped and trained staff.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

We hope to have security centres specialised in women's issues, even if it is a hotline and the person receiving calls is highly professional, so as to reassure women and decrease their fears. And, at the same time, [we should] have specialised centres encouraging women to voice their complaints.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

They should establish centres with a professional team to help in resolving women's problems. It should be available to serve women 24 hours a day.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Political Participation and Representation

Women expressed the need for greater female representation at the grassroots and at the legislative levels. Ideally, they wished the political seats to not simply be filled by women but, rather, that the space be feminised in order to meet the needs of women and girls. At the very least, they asked for more female participation and representation:

We need female representatives in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Housewife, Camp (Gaza Strip)

Female representation should be in terms of quality, not quantity.

Former Prisoner, City (Gaza Strip)

There should be awareness sessions for women on elections, including women's roles in municipal councils.

Working Woman, Village (Nablus)

Legal Reform

What I feel sorry for is the fact that what we demand now in 2009 should have been achieved a long time ago. I believe that Palestinian women have two lines in life: the first line is resisting the occupation and the second is attaining their social rights. As women's organisations, if we pay attention to these two parallel lines, we can improve the situation of Palestinian women because of their special situation. (...) We fight for our rights at the community level to prove our intellectual capacities and abilities and protect our homes against arrests and martyrdom. (...) I acknowledge that we, as an organisation, can't generally meet the needs of Palestinian women.

T. is a mother of four, lawyer and prominent women's rights advocate in the West Bank.

Overwhelmingly, women and girls noted legal discrimination as the greatest impediment to eliminating violence in the home, accessing educational institutions and the labour market, and exercising their legal rights as citizens.

We need a law that protects women's freedoms and their right to education.

University Student, City (Nablus)

I would ask to set special laws against harassment and abuse.

Schoolgirl, City (Hebron)

I think there should be laws that are fair to women, laws that preserve them and grant them freedom, because it is futile to have institutions but not have a law.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

Furthermore, the personal status laws were specifically cited as legislation to be amended given the impact these laws have on all facets of women and girls' lives:

I believe that Palestinian women should be taken into account, especially in the legal system and inheritance law, marriage and their freedom to select their husband, and the issue early marriage.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Amend the personal status law and all [laws and regulations] concerning women.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Enact a family law to protect the family from violence.

Working Woman, City (Hebron)

First, we need to have our own law. So far we apply the Jordanian law. Enforce the Palestinian law, although it is not fully fair to women. If you read it properly, you will find it humiliating to women. We need more just laws for women.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

They have to change all laws regarding the honour killing crimes and violence against women.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

We need a law to regulate custody, separation, and divorce upon a women's request and all other similar matters.

University Student, City (Hebron)

Awareness and Education Campaigns

Palestinian women and girls stressed that awareness-raising campaigns must be an ongoing venture that provides tangible and long-term solutions. According to women, there needs to be a sustained effort, rather than occasional workshops and lectures. Additionally, all sectors of society must be targeted, not just women and girls. Thus, recommendations for awareness and education campaigns to address family violence, and violence against women, are categorised according to demographic; males and females, separately, families and the community, school curricula, and institutions.

Women and Girls

[We need to] empower women through awareness, especially those who stay home and have an elementary level of education. To have an aware and understanding mother

is much better for [girls'] independence from men.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

[We need] awareness sessions and workshops; psychological support that will increase women's trust in women's organisations and increase her reference to them.

University Student, Village (Gaza Strip)

I think that there should be awareness activities for women. There are women, not men, who abuse other women.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

We have to work on raising their [women's] awareness so that they are able to ask for their rights.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Men and Boys

There are no training courses for men. There should be equal training for men. As much as you encourage women to refuse violence and to express their opinions, the same thing should be done for men.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

It [awareness raising] should not only focus on intervening for women, but we should focus on interventions with men because they beat women.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

Why do they organise awareness sessions for us [women] only? Why don't they raise men's awareness? Or they can organise an awareness campaign with a play or something to show them what violence against women leads to and how it destroys the home and threatens women and girls and children and the whole family. Even men are destroyed because of this violence.

Working Woman, Village (Ramallah)

Families and the Community

We should start with seminars and school education to cover students and schools and parents; we need more counselling on issues like early marriage. This education is mostly geared to mothers, but fathers need to hear about it too since they are the decision makers.

University Student, City (Nablus)

The first thing is awareness. Families should know that they should not [be violent] and

that this is not a solution. The most important thing is awareness. If you raise the awareness of parents about these things and they are convinced, I mean awareness with persuasion and not merely talks.

Schoolgirl, Camp (Jenin)

Awareness sessions should not be only for men and women but also for different community layers and for all age groups, especially elderly people who are strongly committed to customs and traditions.

Housewife, Camp (Jenin)

School Curricula

We can start with young school pupils, in order to change their behaviour and avoid having a new violent generation, since violence is a chain. I'd start with the younger generation by conducting a workshop or school class about violence and conduct.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Education and curricula; you want to start from the beginning and amend the curricula to focus on these [violence] issues.

Working Woman, Camp (Nablus)

Institutions

We need awareness programs for the police and the staff in the hospitals about the abuse of women.

Housewife, City (Jenin)

Senior policy makers are very important. It is very important to raise the awareness of decision-makers, police and security services.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

The police must launch an awareness campaign by getting experts and counsellors to speak about violence. Also the police themselves must speak about the consequences of violence so that people become aware and know where to go.

University Student, City (Jenin)

Mosque preachers must play a role in focusing on these social, human and life issues, rather than keep urging people to attend prayers.

Working Woman, City (Jenin)

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

Palestinian women and girls face a wide range of security threats in their daily lives. In addition to political and military violence, women are exposed to insecurity and discrimination and violence at work, at school and at home. Yet, focus group discussions and individual interviews revealed that Palestinian women and girls who are confronted with violence are often reluctant to report it. Although they were clearly able to identify numerous threats to their security, women frequently expressed even greater concerns at the thought of using response mechanisms.

The fear of causing a scandal in the community or of being stigmatised by their own family constitutes the first obstacle for women seeking justice or assistance. The fact that most women are not aware of the services that exist is yet another difficulty faced by those who do search for help. But even when they are aware of available services, women's general distrust of response mechanisms frequently deters them from using such services. Women cited the services' lack of professionalism and confidentiality. They also expressed fears of being treated in a disrespectful way or of being subjected to more violence if they resorted to official response mechanisms. Women's lack of trust in the justice system and the belief that their claims would likely come to nothing also led them to prefer keeping silent.

The fact that many women were unaware of the mission or even of the existence of some service providers—including shelters—indicates that their recommendation to organise awareness and education campaigns should be taken seriously. This general lack of awareness was confirmed by service providers themselves during informal meetings with DCAF. Women recommended the awareness campaigns to include all of society, not just women and girls. Interestingly, this recommendation extended to service providers themselves, as women's experiences indicated that service providers were often insensitive when interacting with them.

Women and girls also called for the provision of wrap-around services and for more follow up and coordination between existing service providers. They advocated for legal reforms, as they believed the legal system to be unfair and to tolerate violence against women.

Although some of the recommendations provided by women and girls are very specific, it remains unclear whether they would actually use the improved services. The fact that many women admit to fearing the social consequences of using such services indicates that additional work at the societal level would likely be needed in order for women and girls to be able to benefit from these services.

Finally, women themselves pointed out that the focus group process was insufficient to address all their security issues, as some of them argued that each of the topics discussed deserved to be the subject of at least a whole session.

The present report does not aim to provide detailed recommendations or solutions, but to help Palestinians identify issues that may need to be further explored. DCAF currently collaborates with local stakeholders to support a socially and politically inclusive dialogue on security in the Palestinian Territories. It promotes local ownership in governance and security-related issues; it thus strongly believes in the ability of a locally owned debate on security to find solutions to the issues faced by Palestinian women and girls. The inclusion of women and civil society organisations, especially women's rights organisations, in this debate can provide useful contributions, as they offer their perspectives on problems that ultimately affect all of Palestinian society.

The issues identified in this study and the recommendations of Palestinian women and girls indicate that more research is needed in the field of Palestinian women's security, as is illustrated by the lack of statistics on violence against women. Quantitative research on the topic would allow

policy-makers to base their planning on women's needs. Indeed, while a number of problems have been highlighted during this research, their extent remains unclear.

One of the most striking findings of the report is the demand for awareness and education on women's security needs. Women themselves admit to being uninformed about both their rights and the missions of the institutions and organisations that offer assistance to women. They have also underlined the service providers' lack of tools to adequately respond to women's needs. As the demand for training on security-related issues in the Palestinian Territories is growing, DCAF believes that the needs of Palestinian women could be also addressed through specific training events.

DCAF has published a *Toolkit on Gender and Security Sector Reform*,¹ which includes tools on gender and police, gender and civil society oversight, as well as gender and justice. The toolkit recognises the unique character of each security sector context and thus advises to adapt the proposed strategies and recommendations in light of the local context. This publication could be used as a tool for training interested stakeholders in the Palestinian Territories, such as members of civil society, ministries, as well as representatives of the police and security forces.

Palestinian women's calls for legal reform deserves careful consideration. The complexity of the legal system in place in the Palestinian Territories also requires a thoughtful examination. Based on this report, Palestinian legal experts may wish to analyse all laws related to women's security, especially the personal status laws, in order to provide specific recommendations and potential amendments in line with democratic principles.

It is hoped that Palestinian stakeholders will build on the findings of this report and take this study as a step towards more substantial discussions on women's security needs. This report encourages local stakeholders to set up a wider consultation process with women and girls in order to find practical solutions.

Notes

1 Bastick, M. and K. Valasek (Eds). 2008. *Gender and Security Sector Reform – Toolkit*. DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN-INSTRAW.

ANNEXES

Annex1: Focus Group Discussions: Questioning Route

Introduction
The facilitator provides a brief introduction to the purpose of the study and explains the confidentiality rules for the session.
Opening Question
Can you introduce yourself to the group and tell us how you reacted when you were asked to participate in this study?
Introductory Question
A lot of reports say security is an issue for Palestinian women. What do you think about that? (Do you think it is true?)
Transition Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ If you asked your friends about their concerns for their security, what would they say?■ Would you say that women feel secure in your community? Can you give specific examples?
Key Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ What are Palestinian women mostly afraid of when they are in the streets/ at work (or school)/ at home?■ (If violence has not been mentioned in the previous responses) What about violence in the public sphere/ at work/ school and at home? Would you say women in your community are concerned about violence?■ Who can Palestinian women turn to for help if they are confronted with violence? <p>(Follow-up)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ If your friends were confronted with violence, who would you recommend they go to for help? And who would you recommend they avoid?■ What do you think of the way the Palestinian authorities handle violence against women? (Follow-up: if not mentioned, specifically ask about the police, social services, hospitals and courts)■ What do you think of the way other organisations (non governmental organisations) handle violence against women?■ What should be done to make Palestinian women feel more secure?
Ending Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ In your opinion, what is the most important thing that was said today?■ If you could talk to governmental officials, what would you recommend they change in order to provide more protection for women?■ Is there anything you wanted to say and did not get a chance to say?

Annex 2: Selection of Organisations Offering Services to Palestinian Women*

International organisations with field offices	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Asemblea de Cooperacion por la Paz (ACPP)	Empowerment	www.acpp.com/	+972.2.2409812
Action Contre la Faim (ACF)	Health, Relief, Psychosocial Aid	www.actioncontrelafaim.org	+972.2.5835739
Care International	Empowerment, Health, Psychosocial Aid	www.care.org	+972.2.5834069
Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)	Awareness, Advocacy, Security Sector Governance	www.dcaf.ch	+972.2.2956297
Heinrich Boll Foundation	Empowerment	www.boell-ameo.org	+972.2.2961121
International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	Imprisoned Women, Protection	www.icrc.org	+972.2.5917900
International Labour Organization	Awareness, Empowerment, Labour	www.ilo.org	+972.2.6260212
International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)	Health, Awareness, Psychosocial Aid	www.ippf.org	+972.2.6283636
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung	Empowerment	www.kas.de/palaestina	+972.2.2404305
Medecins du Monde (MDM)	Health, Relief, Psychosocial Aid	www.medecinsdumonde.org	+972.2.5838551
Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF)	Health, Relief, Psychosocial Aid	www.msf.org	+972.2.5827422
Oxfam	Empowerment, Health, Psychosocial Aid	www.oxfam.org.uk	+972.2.6566234
Save the Children	Psychosocial Aid, Awareness	www.savethechildren.org	+972.2.5836302
Terre des Hommes (TdH Switzerland and Italy)	Psychosocial Aid, Awareness, Capacity-Building	www.tdh.org	+972.2.5831953
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	Health, Empowerment, Capacity-Building, Awareness	www.unicef.org	+972.2.5830013
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)	Awareness, Empowerment	www.unifem.org	+972.2.6280450
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Awareness, Empowerment	www.undp.org	+972.2.6268200
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)	Awareness, Empowerment	www.unesco.org	+972.2.2959740
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	Awareness, Empowerment	www.unafpa.org	+972.2.5817167
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA)	Health, Psychosocial Aid, Capacity-Building	www.unrwa.org	+972.2.5890400
World Food Programme (WFP)	Awareness, Social Aid	www.wfp.org	+972.2.5820825
World Health Organisation (WHO)	Health, Relief, Psychosocial Aid	www.who.org	+972.2.5400595
Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)	Psychosocial Aid, Awareness, Capacity-Building	www.ywca-palestine.org	+972.2.6282593

* This list presents a selection of organisations active in women's affairs in most governorates of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Palestinian Governmental Organisations (West Bank)	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Ministry of Education and Higher Education	Awareness	www.mohe.gov.ps	+972.2.2983256
Ministry of Health	Primary Health Care	www.moh.ps	+972.2.2408690
Ministry of Interior	Support & Authorisations for Women Councils	-	+972.2.2429873
Ministry of Social Affairs	Social Aid & Empowerment	-	+972.2.2405641
Ministry of Women's Affairs	Legal Aid, Advocacy,	-	+972.2.2423315
Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)	Legislations & Support	www.pal-plc.org	+972.2.9846529
Police	Rule of Law, Protection	www.palpolice.ps	+972.2.2985822 +972.2.2969930

Palestinian Governmental Organisations (Gaza Strip)	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Ministry of Education and Higher Education	Awareness, Training	www.mohe.ps	+972.8.2865200 +972.8.2828814
Ministry of Health	Primary Health Care	www.moh.gov.ps	+972.8.2846949 +972.8.2846939
Ministry of Interior	Support & Authorisations for Women Councils	www.moi.gov.ps	+972.8.2881993
Ministry of Social Affairs	Social Aid & Empowerment	www.mosa.gov.ps	-
Ministry of Women's Affairs	Legal Aid, Advocacy,	www.mowa.gov.ps	+972.8.2841740 +972.8.2841640
Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC)	Legislations & Support	www.plc.gov.ps	-

Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research centres	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Agricultural Development Association	Awareness, Capacity-Building	www.pal-arc.org	+972.2.2424879
Al Khansa Women's Association	Job Creation, Education, Social Aid	-	+972.2.2981728
Al Nahda Palestinian Women's Development Society	Awareness, Empowerment, Advocacy	-	+972.2.2956853
Al Quds Open University	Research, Awareness, Capacity-Building, Education	www.qou.edu	+972.2.2964571
Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights	Legal Aid, Advocacy,	www.aldameer.org	+972.2.2954903
Al-Haq	Legal Aid	www.alhaq.org	+972.2.2954903
Al-Huda Women Society	Health, Social Aid	www.al-huda.org	+972.2.2400406
Al-Manhal Woman and Child Cultural Center	Legal Aid, Awareness, Psychosocial Aid	www.almanhal.org	+972.9.2381717
The Alimony Fund	Defence of Women Rights	www.nafaqa.pna.ps	+972.2.2954532

Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research centres	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights	Awareness, Women's Rights	www.mezan.org	+972.8.2820447
Association of Women Committees for Social Work (AWCSW)	Awareness, Advocacy, Job Creation	www.awcsw.org	+972.2.2984782
Arab Women's Union Society	Awareness, Women's Rights	-	+972.2.2965843
Asala	Capacity-Building, Social Aid, Microfinance	www.asala-pal.com	+972.2.2402433
Bir Zeit University / Women's Studies Center	Research, Awareness, Capacity-Building, Education	http://home.birzeit.edu/wsi	+972.2.2982959
Defense Freedom and Civilian Rights Center	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Empowerment	http://cldc.org	+972.2.2409473
Family Defence Society	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Protection	-	+972.9.2330333
Faten	Capacity-Building, Social Aid	-	+972.2.2961472
General Union of Palestinian Women	Awareness, Empowerment	www.gupw.net	+972.2.2401093
In'ash El-Usrah Society	Capacity-Building, Social Aid	www.inash.org	+972.2.2402876
Medical Relief Society	Health, Psychosocial Counselling, Awareness	www.pmrcs.ps	+972.2.2980550
Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions	Empowerment, Social Aid	www.pgftu.p	+972.2.2974564
Palestine Technical College	Training, Education	www.ptcdb.edu.ps	+972.2.2961066
Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR)	Awareness, Legal Aid	www.pchr.org	+972.2.2406697
Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy (PCPD)	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Empowerment	www.pcpd.org	+972.2.2965981
Palestinian Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development (Panorama)	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Women's Rights	www.panoramacenter.org	+972.2.2959618
Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association	Health, Awareness	www.pfppa.org	+972.2.6283636
Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights (PICHHR)	Awareness, Women's Rights	www.pichr.org	+972.2.2960241
Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (Miftah)	Awareness, Women's Rights	www.miftah.org	+972.2.2989492
Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy (Muwatin)	Research, Awareness	www.muwatin.org	+972.2.2960285
Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)	Awareness	www.pngo.net	+972.2.2963848
Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS)	Health, Psychosocial Aid, Protection, Relief	-	+972.2.2406515
Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center	Research, Awareness, Capacity-Building	www.pwrdc.ps	+972.9.2339942
Women's Studies Center	Awareness	-	+972.2.2347229

Local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and research centres (continued)	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD)	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Legal and Social Aid	www.pwwsd.org	+972.2.2986761
SAWA Centre	Psychosocial Aid, Protection	www.sawa.ps	+972.2.5324122
Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)	Empowerment, Capacity-Building	www.uawc-pal.org	+972.2.2425893
Women's Affairs Technical Committee	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Empowerment	www.watcpal.org	
Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling	Legal aid, Psychosocial Counselling	www.wclac.org	+972.2.2956146

Local NGOs - GAZA STRIP	Services	Website	Telephone Number
Abnaa Al-Balad Association	Social Aid	www.abnaa-albalad.org	+972.8.2482471
Al Bait Assamed Association Society	Psychosocial Aid, Health	www.assamed.org	+972.8.2828734
Al-Ata Charitable Society (Give Gaza)	Empowerment, Awareness, Relief	www.givegaza.org.ps	+972.8.2482130
Culture and Free Thought Association	Awareness, Relief	www.cfta-ps.org	+972.8.2051299
Gaza Community Mental Health Programme	Psychosocial Aid, Empowerment	www.gcmhp.net	+972.8.2888523
Hanan for Culture and Social Development Association	Awareness	www.hanancoo.org	+972.8.2068330
Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (Gaza Branch)	Conflict Resolution	www.pcdcr.org	+972.8.2847488
Palestinian Women's Association (Al-Majd)	Awareness, Capacity-Building, Legal Aid	www.almajdps.org	+972.8.2552569
The Society of Women Graduates	Awareness, Advocacy, Job Creation	www.graduates74.net	+972.8.2875918
Women's Affairs Center	Research, Training	www.wac.org.ps	+972.8.2877311

DCAF Head Office, Geneva

By Post:

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
P.O.Box 1360
CH-1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland

For Visitors:

Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)
Rue de Chantepoulet 11
CH-1201 Geneva 1
Switzerland

Tel: +41 (0) 22 741 77 00

Fax: +41 (0) 22 741 77 05

DCAF Ramallah

Al-Maaref Street 34
Ramallah / Al-Bireh
West Bank
Palestine

Tel: +972 (2) 295 6297

Fax: +972 (2) 295 6295

DCAF Beirut

Gefinor Center - Block C - 6th Floor
Clemenceau Street
Beirut
Lebanon

Tel: +961 (0) 1 738 401

Fax: +961 (0) 1 738 403

www.dcaf.ch