



September 2019

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September 2019
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This guide is the companion to another report entitled *Gender/Women, peace and security: implementation, challenges and limits in Palestine*. Both publications have been issued as part of the project “Involving the whole community in the fight against sexist violence and the guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights of Palestinian women in Hebron, Qalqília and Tubas (West Bank, Palestine)”, led by Associació HÈLIA and funded by the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD).

Translation into English by: Dustin Langan

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Occupation, conflict and patriarchy: impacts on Palestinian women

Decades of occupation and militarisation, periodic escalations of hostilities and Israeli policies of blockade, segregation and control that run contrary to international humanitarian law and human rights have had severe consequences for the Palestinian population and have affected the lives of Palestinian women in specific and multifaceted ways. Most of them have lived their entire lives or most of their lives under occupation and in a context of prolonged conflict that continues to cause death, population displacement, the gradual deterioration of the human rights situation, high levels of poverty and unemployment and serious health problems. Their experiences of occupation and conflict have also been conditioned by unequal gender relations in a traditional and patriarchal Palestinian society that determines specific vulnerabilities, limitations in the exercise of rights and inequalities in access to resources and opportunities due to the stereotypes and expectations regarding the roles that men and women should play.¹ Therefore, in their everyday lives, Palestinian women face multiple forms of violence and discrimination, both in the public and private spheres, in one more manifestation of what feminists, in their analysis of women, war and peace, have identified as a *continuum of violence*.²

The context is extremely complex and the situations faced by Palestinian women are diverse. The daily problems of a woman in Gaza can be very different from those of one who lives in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron or in some town in Area C of the West Bank.³ Their unique experiences are determined by the policies of exclusion, siege, isolation and subordination imposed by the occupation. In general, various studies suggest that the dynamics of the occupation have had and continue to have direct and indirect effects on Palestinian women and that they have not only perpetuated but also reinforced pre-existing gender inequalities in Palestinian society. Along these lines, Israel's military repression has conditioned the social construction of masculinities and its uses of violence also have intentionality from a gender perspective, to the extent that many of the occupation's policies and practices deliberately seek to question the ability of Palestinian men to fulfil their role of "protectors". This tension leads to situations of interpersonal violence and in controlled family spaces, stressing the difficulties in finding safe spaces for women in Palestine.⁴ The lack of operational Palestinian institutions, which, among other things, guarantee mechanisms of protection, as well as the political division between Palestinian factions, have also had a negative impact on this scene.

Without claiming to be exhaustive, this guide is intended to illustrate the range of forms of violence experienced by Palestinian women and its impacts, taking into account the

1. "Gender is the analytical category that shows that inequalities between men and women are produced socially and not a result of nature, demonstrating their social and cultural construction to distinguish them from biological differences characteristics of the sexes. Gender aims to give visibility to the social construction of sexual difference and sexual difference of work and power. The gender perspective seeks to show that the differences between men and women are a social construction produced by unequal power relations that have historically been established in the patriarchal system". Escola de Cultura de Pau, *Alert 2019! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*. Barcelona: Icaria, 2019.

2. V. For example, see Carol Cohn, "Las mujeres y las guerras: hacia un marco conceptual" in Carol Cohn (ed.), *Las mujeres y las guerras*, Barcelona: ICIP, 2014; Cynthia Cockburn, "The Continuum of Violence" in Wenona Giles and Jennifer Hyndman (eds.), *Sites of Violence, Gender and Conflict Zones*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004 and Caroline O. N. Moser, "The Gendered Continuum of Violence and Conflict: An Operational Framework" in Caroline O. N. Moser and Fiona C. Clark (eds.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, London-New York: Zed Books, 2001.

3. As part of the Oslo process, the West Bank was divided into three areas, each with a different governance status. In Area A (18% of the territory), the Palestinian Authority (PA) exercises control over security and civil affairs; in Area B (20%), the PA only controls civil affairs and security is provided by Israel; and in Area C (62%), the Israeli authorities have total control. As such, the city of Hebron is split into two areas: H1, administered by the PA, and H2 (20%), which is under Israeli control.

4. Interview with Vanessa Farr, international consultant and specialist in gender, peace and security, 5 September 2019.

repercussions of various Israeli occupation policies such as military operations, crackdowns on protests, settlements, raids, house demolitions, arrests and detentions, as well as the gender dimension of forced displacement and the problems that Palestinian women face in access to health, education and justice in a context shaped by the occupation, but also by the norms of a patriarchal society where discrimination and worrying incidences of gender violence persist.

Military operations and crackdown on protests

The dynamics imposed by the Israeli occupation, the context of conflict and the escalation of confrontation have had a severely deadly impact on the Palestinian population, including women. Recent disaggregated data indicate that between 2008 and mid-2019, 5,501 people had lost their lives as a result of hostilities and incidents with Israeli settlers, after participating in demonstrations or during tracking operations by Israeli forces, including 804 women and girls (15%). According to OCHA data, approximately 9,000 Palestinian women and girls were injured in the same period.⁵

In the last decade, the Israeli military operation against the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2014 was especially serious. In just two months (July and August), the operation killed 299 women, including 16 pregnant women, and 197 girls, and injured more than 2,000. The consequences of this escalation of violence were also evident in the maternal and neonatal mortality rates in Gaza, which doubled in the second half of 2014 compared to the first half of the year.⁶ The testimonies of Palestinian women about this crisis reveal the trauma caused by the bombings and the loss of family members, including children and husbands.⁷ Added to this are the consequences of the extensive destruction of the Gaza Strip: around 50,000 Palestinian women and girls lived in houses that were severely damaged or totally destroyed during the 2014 operation. Further forced displacement, the decline in access to the most basic services and the acute humanitarian crisis that continue

to affect the local population to this day, mainly due to the Israeli government's tight blockade as part of a strategy of collective punishment against it.

Palestinian women face an enormous burden in the care and maintenance of their families due to the extreme local living conditions, including overcrowding, a water supply of between three and five hours every five days and power outages lasting up to 20 hours a day. They must deal with a greater burden of responsibility for unpaid work and housekeeping.⁸ In addition, many women in Gaza believe that the blockade and power cuts contribute to higher levels of domestic violence against women.⁹ Some groups of women face special difficulties, such as widows. An estimated 700 Palestinian women lost their husbands in the 2014 operation and faced many problems providing for their families, given the context of economic decline, male social domination, lack of

access to services, aid and shelter hostels. Some have had to marry their brothers-in-law, in compliance with the expectations of a traditional practice, as a way to remain in the family home and avoid disputes over child custody.¹⁰

More recently, in 2018, the March of Return and the disproportionate use of force against civilians to repress it provides another illustrative example of the impacts of Israeli policies on Palestinian women and the uniqueness of their experiences given the state of gender relations in Palestinian society. On the 70th anniversary of the

Nakba, many Palestinian women joined protests that claimed the Palestinian refugee population's right of return and condemned the blockade of Gaza. The demonstrations prompted a tough Israeli response and the most serious acts of violence in Gaza since 2014, with more than 200 Palestinians killed and 18,000 injured.¹¹ According to OCHA data, between 30 March and 30 November 2018, a Palestinian girl and a Palestinian female medical volunteer clearly identified as such both died, while a total of 8,000 women and girls were wounded, 68% by inhaling gas and 10% by gunfire.¹² The investigations and testimonies collected confirm that the women participated in peaceful activities and did not present a threat at the time they were injured.¹³ Likewise, there are also consequences for wounded women and their families from a gender

Palestinian women face different forms of violence and discrimination, both in the public and private spheres, in another aspect of what feminism has identified as a continuum of violence

5. OCHA, *Occupied Palestinian Territories. Data on casualties*, 01/01/2008 – 26/07/2019, viewed on 21 August 2019. In the same period, 235 Israelis died in incidents related to the conflict.

6. OCHA, *The Gaza Strip: The long-term impact of the 2014 hostilities on women and girls*, December 2015.

7. Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), *Gaza: The Impact of Conflict on Women*, NRC, November 2015.

8. UN Women, *Gender Alert: Needs of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2018.

9. See the section Rule of law, access to justice and gender violence

10. NRC, 2015, op. cit.

11. For further information, see the summary on Israel-Palestine in the chapter on armed conflicts in *Escola de Cultura de Pau, Alert 2019! Report on conflicts, human rights and peacebuilding*, Barcelona: Icaria, 2019.

12. OCHA, "The impact on women of the Great March of Return", *The Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin*, December 2018.

13. Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), *Gaza's Return Marches: The Gendered Impact of the Excessive Use of Force by Israeli occupation forces on Civilians*, Submission for the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, September 2018.

perspective, especially when the victims are mothers. They are often expected to continue their housekeeping despite their injuries due to the added difficulties in accessing health care, such as the social norm that advises against leaving their homes unaccompanied, as well as the perception that injuries can affect young women's marriage prospects. A UNFPA study found that most of those attending the demonstrations had to obtain the consent of a male figure, such as their father or husband, and some of them acknowledged having refused to seek health care after inhaling gas to avoid tension in the family.¹⁴

Settlements, raids and demolitions

The endless expansion of illegal Israeli settlements into the occupied territories (between 200 and 250 in the West Bank and East Jerusalem with a population of between 520,000 to 600,000), the infrastructure and the system of Israeli military control deployed to protect them (which exacerbate the fragmentation of Palestinian territory), and the periodic attacks by settlers in a climate of impunity (about 90% of the complaints filed with the Israeli police regarding these attacks are closed without any type of punishment) are yet another source of violence against Palestinian women. The construction of settlements promoted by Israel has confiscated Palestinian territories, resources and transport routes, created a double legal system that privileges Israeli citizens and caused constant tension between both communities. Various reports detail the provocations and abuses committed by settlers against the Palestinian population, including women and children, who are exposed to various expressions of this form of violence in their daily lives. Cases include that of Mervat, a woman living in Hebron who suffered a miscarriage after being violently attacked by a group of settlers while she was throwing out the garbage,¹⁵ and the deaths of several members of a family, including the mother and an 18-month-old baby, in an arson attack carried out by settlers in the West Bank town of Duma that received greater international media coverage.¹⁶ Some of these attacks have been framed as part of what is known as the price tag attack policy, meaning the use of vandalism and violence against the Palestinian

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population in the face of any action that the settlers consider harmful to their interests, including measures taken by Israeli authorities. One must also consider the psychological impact on women, who are constantly alert to the fear that their children will be arrested, injured or killed as a result of the violence of Israeli settlers and who are more reluctant to leave their homes after having these types of experiences.¹⁷ Some recent studies even suggest that the Palestinian communities most exposed to violence from settlers and/or soldiers have a greater risk of gender-based violence.¹⁸

Regular night-time tracking operations carried out by Israeli forces, which are usually violent and take place at dawn, with heavily armed soldiers accompanied by dogs, also have severe and long-term repercussions on the mental health of women and children, including sleep disorders, stress and depression. The Israeli policy to destroy and demolish Palestinian homes, either due to the lack of building permits or as a punitive measure, is another practice that significantly affects women. In a context in which building permits are extremely difficult for the Palestinian population to obtain, many live in constant fear of seeing their homes destroyed, leading to anxiety and depression. The testimonies of women who have lost their homes suggest that Israeli forces often appear at night or at dawn to carry out demolitions and that in some cases they force residents to destroy their own homes in an especially degrading practice.¹⁹

Demolitions as a means of collective punishment were frequent in past decades and between 1987 and 2004, over 1,000 houses are estimated to have been destroyed. Although this policy was suspended for a few years, it was resumed in 2014 and from then until mid-2019, 78 Palestinian homes were demolished or totally destroyed, leaving 325 people homeless, including 138 children.²⁰

Arrests and detentions

Some statistics suggest that around 20% of the Palestinian population has been detained by Israeli forces before in the occupied territories. According to data from the Palestinian organisation Addameer, from 1967 to December 2013, around 800,000 Palestinians had been arrested, including approximately

14. OCHA, 2018, op.cit.

15. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), *Statement by Randa Siniara, First Palestinian Woman Activist to brief UN Security Council*, 25 October 2018.

16. Haaretz, "Ali Dawabshe's Mother Succumbs to Wounds Sustained in West Bank Arson", *Haaretz*, 7 September 2015.

17. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), *Palestinian Women Under Prolonged Israeli Occupation: The Gendered Impact of Occupation Violence*, Universal Periodic Review of Israel, Joint Submission to the UPR Working Group 29th Session, January 2018; Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), *Women's Voices*, Nov.2013-Jun 2017.

18. See the section Rule of law, access to justice and gender violence

19. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), 2018, op. cit.

20. B'Tselem, "Statistics on Punitive House Demolitions", updated 7 August 2019, viewed on 4 September 2019.

10,000 women. As of mid-2019, 38 Palestinian women remained in Israeli prisons. UN reports have warned that Palestinian women are regularly detained in the street, at Israeli checkpoints or during night raids. They are usually not informed of their rights or the reasons for their arrest and they are sometimes held in administrative detention for days or months.²¹ These female detainees are subjected to physical and psychological abuse, including beatings, insults, sexual harassment, prolonged isolation, sleep deprivation and intrusive body searches as a form of punishment and before and after court hearings. It has also been reported that during interrogations women are subjected to intimidation and threats that affect their families, such as the destruction of their home or arrest of relatives, for example, and that they are sometimes detained as a form of pressure on their husbands to surrender or sign confessions.²²

The complaints also point to confinement in prisons that do not consider the needs of women from a gender perspective, problems in detainees' access to medical treatment, lack of access to legal assistance and denial of family visitation permits due to "safety reasons". This latter practice has a profound impact on women, compounding their anxiety, depression and feelings of isolation.²³ Added to this is the situation of children detained in Israeli prisons, a practice widely condemned by human rights organisations that recently gained special notoriety due to the case of the young Ahd Tamimi.²⁴ In addition to the deprivation of liberty, these children are not guaranteed access to education while they remain in prison.

Forced displacement

The Palestinian population has experienced over seven decades of forced displacement. According to UNRWA, there are 5.4 million Palestinian refugees, though estimates from other organisations put the figure at almost 8 million, mainly living in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. In Gaza alone, an estimated two-thirds of the population are refugees. The long-term situation of forced displacement creates a context that accentuates vulnerabilities and has specific effects on Palestinian women (49% of the

Palestinian refugee population, according to UNRWA). Those who live in Gaza and the West Bank suffer human rights violations resulting from the Israeli occupation, the harshness of daily life and traditional attitudes towards women or what some analysts of the situation of female Palestinian refugees have identified as a "triangle of oppression" that affects various different aspects of their lives.²⁵ After interviewing more than 500 refugee women, a study by the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH) concluded that 33% of them had been exposed to direct violence by occupation forces and 37% to arrests or interrogations, while 88% confessed to feeling terrified when the Israeli Army attacked the refugee camp and 77% acknowledged feeling anxiety about the possibility of being expelled from their homes again.²⁶

Many Palestinian women have been subjected to successive forced displacement situations. For example, it is estimated that at the height of the Israeli operation against Gaza in 2014, half a million people were forced from their homes.

Some of them sought refuge in temporary shelters that were overwhelmed by the emergency or in the homes of relatives. Palestinian women have experienced overcrowded and precarious conditions for themselves and their children in these circumstances, as well as stress and anxiety stemming from the feeling of being a burden on their families.²⁷ These overcrowded situations, exacerbated after the hostilities of 2014 and the extensive destruction in Gaza also increase the exposure of women and girls to harassment and gender-based violence. In traditional Palestinian society, internal displacement and precariousness have also prompted action that is supposed to "protect" girls, such as early marriages, which affect their rights and possibilities for development. The ability of Palestinian women to cope with the problems arising from forced displacement or the destruction of their homes has also been limited by the Palestinian legal system of property and inheritance rights, which favours men.

Long-term forced displacement also affects Palestinians living in neighbouring countries, and particularly women. A 2012 study in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, based on a survey to which mostly women responded (82%), found that 52% had a chronic

Regular night-time tracking operations carried out by Israeli forces, which are usually violent and take place at dawn, with heavily armed soldiers accompanied by dogs, also have severe and long-term repercussions on the mental health of women and children

21. Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in her mission to Israel*, A/HRC/35/30/Add.1, 8 June 2017.

22. Amnesty International, *Conflict, occupation and patriarchy: women carry the burden*, AI/Index: MDE 15/016/2005, March 2005.

23. MIFTAH, PWSSD, WCLAC, TAM, Karama, *Palestinian Women: The Disproportionate Impact of the Israeli Occupation*, November 2018.

24. For further information, see Amnesty International, *Israel/OPT: Ahd Tamimi release a bittersweet moment as other Palestinian children languish in Israeli jails*, Amnesty International, 29 July 2018.

25. The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy MIFTAH, *Documenting Violations by the Israeli Occupation against Refugee Women in Palestinian Refugee Camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, cited in *Palestinian women: the disproportionate impact of the Israeli Occupation*

26. *Ibid.*

27. NRC, 2015, op. cit.

disease and 55% suffered from psychological disorders. More recently, armed conflicts such as the war in Syria have also forced new displacements of the Palestinian refugee population, exposing Palestinian women to more gender-based violence and restrictions on movement in countries such as Lebanon or Jordan.²⁸

Restrictions on movement, revocation of residency and family reunification

In their daily lives, Palestinian women are affected by a set of physically and bureaucratically imposed movement restrictions that impede them from moving about freely. The obstacles they face on a day-to-day basis include the separation wall, Israeli checkpoints, road closures, a permit system and a discriminatory legal system. This system significantly restricts their mobility and has many repercussions on human rights, affecting their access to healthcare, education, employment and social and family life. It has even affected the marriage patterns among the population, increasing weddings between people who live in nearby areas or on the same side of the wall in order to avoid the separation of their families.²⁹

In East Jerusalem, Israel has applied a set of discriminatory policies aimed at reducing the Palestinian population in this area, some with particularly damaging repercussions for women. One of them is the revocation of residency, denounced as a “silent deportation” policy that has affected a total of 14,643 Palestinians between 1967 and 2018.³⁰ Since its illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, Israel has come to view the Palestinian population as “permanent residents”, but they must prove to the Israeli authorities that Jerusalem is the “centre of their lives”. Palestinians who cannot document this or who reside outside of Jerusalem (in the West Bank, Gaza or another country) for a specified period of time risk losing their residency permit. In this context, many families are separated, including husbands and wives, parents and children and extended families, and this has a traumatic impact on Palestinian women affected by the policy. Meanwhile, Palestinian women who remain in Jerusalem without proper documentation admit to feeling that they live in something like a prison, with the constant fear that the Israeli forces will arrest them

UN reports have warned that Palestinian women are regularly detained in the street, at Israeli checkpoints or during night raids and that they are not usually informed of their rights or the reasons for their arrest

if they decide to leave home. The power of the Israeli authorities to revoke residency has also prompted the application of this policy as collective punishment by withdrawing residency permits from Palestinians accused of committing crimes (most of them men) and their entire families, with a disproportionate impact on women. In practice, laws in force in Israel since 2003 prevent Palestinians from obtaining residency permits through marriage, which leads to systematic rejections of applications for family reunification and costly bureaucratic processes that last years.³¹

The impacts on women are also identifiable in other aspects related to the norms that regulate family life. For example, in the event of divorce, Palestinian women lose their rights of residency and if the couple's sons and daughters remain with the father, they have no guarantees of being able to visit them. In the event of divorce, Palestinian women from Jerusalem who return to the city may attempt to regain residency in a process that can take years and during which their freedom of movement may be severely restricted, without access to services or permission to work. Various reports also agree that this legal context affects Palestinian women who suffer violence in their homes, making them more reluctant to report and seek help for fear of being expelled from Jerusalem and separated from their children.

Access to healthcare

Palestinian women's right to healthcare is directly affected by the consequences of the occupation, the destruction and deterioration of health infrastructure, blockade policies, medicine and power supply problems and difficulties linked to public governance issues, including unpaid debts in the healthcare sector amidst the persistent intra-Palestinian divide. The territorial fragmentation, Israeli settlements, mobility problems and system of security controls and permits in the West Bank expose women to a series of difficulties in accessing medical services. This is especially harmful for pregnant women, who require periodic monitoring in the pre- and post-natal stage.³² Many reports have documented cases of women forced to give birth at security checkpoints, in ambulances or taxis due to Israeli forces' refusal or delay in authorising their transfer to hospitals. This leads to high levels of anxiety

28. Rachael Spencer et al. *Gender Based Violence Against Women and Girls Displaced by the Syrian Conflict in South Lebanon and North Jordan: Scope of Violence and Health Correlates*, Alianza por la Solidaridad, 2015.

29. Suheir Azzouni, “Palestine” in S. Kelly and J. Breslin (eds), *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, New York: Freedom House, 2010.

30. HaMoked, *Quiet deportation*, 29 April 2019.

31. MIFTAH, PWSSD, WCLAC, TAM, Karama 2018, op. cit.

32. UNSG, *Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women*, E/CN.6/2019/6, 8 January 2019.

and stress for pregnant women, which are exacerbated as the delivery date approaches and particularly affect Palestinian women living in rural areas.³³

In the Gaza Strip, healthcare services are on the brink of collapse after more than a decade of blockade, following successive local Israeli military operations and problems of access for humanitarian assistance. Various organisations have denounced and collected testimonies about the impact of Israeli policies to control the borders of the territory, including the decline in permits to leave Gaza requested by patients (from 92.5% in 2012 to 54% in 2017), unjustified delays in issuing authorisation that compromise the ability of patients to receive treatment and medical care and aggressive interrogations of sick women despite their poor health.³⁴ Activists have also denounced the serious situation suffered by Palestinian women with breast cancer, who do not have the possibility of receiving adequate treatment in the Gaza Strip and depend on authorisations to receive care in Egypt or the West Bank.³⁵ The problems related to the deterioration and overburdening of health services also affect the prevalence of abortions, premature births and complications in childbirth. As mentioned in a previous section, maternal and neonatal mortality rates doubled after the Israeli operation against Gaza in 2014. Testimonies from Palestinian women recall that hospitals gave priority to those wounded in hostilities and many women abandoned health facilities with their babies in an insecure atmosphere. It is estimated that 45,000 women did not have access to basic reproductive services during the crisis and that around 5,000 births occurred in extreme conditions.³⁶

The degradation of the healthcare system places a special burden on women, taking into account the traditional division of labour in Palestinian society and gender expectations regarding their central role in providing care. In this context, many Palestinian women assume the burden of caring for their injured or disabled family members and postpone their own needs, despite having disabilities, stress, anxiety or depression. From a gender perspective, it should be noted that Palestinian women's access to mental health services is often restricted by stigma and/or social practices that assume they may hurt younger girls' chances of getting married.

In their daily lives, Palestinian women are affected by a set of physical and bureaucratic restrictions that prevent them from moving about freely, including the separation wall, Israeli checkpoints, road closures, a permit system and a discriminatory legal system

In this vein, Palestinian adolescent girls are considered a particularly vulnerable group due to various factors, including problems of access to health care owing to economic difficulties, a lack of family permission or someone to accompany them, a lack of female health personnel or a lack of information, and the early age at which they marry and become mothers.³⁷ Although marriages of girls under the age of 15 are less frequent today, many young women marry before the age of 18. According to official statistics, 20% of Palestinian women marry before their 18th birthday, compared to 1% of men.³⁸ According to data from 2014, 25% of women aged 20-24 in Gaza and 19% of those living in the West Bank had given birth before their 18th birthday. It should also be remembered that early marriages between Palestinian adolescents also imply impairment in the exercise of fundamental rights such as education and the enjoyment of childhood.³⁹

Another particularly vulnerable group in terms of healthcare is women with some type of disability. According to recent studies, most women and girls with disabilities in Gaza (65.4% of a total of 998) lacked access to basic services and suffered some type of violence, whether verbal (58%), physical (34%), financial (26%) or sexual (2%), while one third of them were isolated or unable to leave their homes. The vast majority of them (81%) were single women.

Access to education and economic security

The Palestinian population's access to education is shaped every day by Israeli occupation policies and violence that not only has direct effects on the student population, but has also caused the loss of many days of school. Palestinian female students are often subjected to gender-specific intimidation or humiliation in their transfers to schools and universities, especially at Israeli checkpoints.⁴⁰ Some reports have warned of the particular vulnerability of Palestinian girls and young women living in Area C of the West Bank due to their limited access to education and poor teaching infrastructure. In this area, as well as in the H2 area of Hebron, many children drop out of school due to their families' financial hardship and/or to help with housework or as a way to avoid exposure to situations of violence or intimidation.

33. Amnesty International 2005, op. cit.

34. MIFTAH, PWSSD, WCLAC, TAM, Karama 2018, op. cit.

35. Interview with Hala Riziq, a feminist activist in Gaza, 16 September 2019.

36. NRC 2015, op. cit.

37. UN Women, 2018, op. cit.

38. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), *Statistics Bureau: women represent half of the Palestinian population*, PCBS, 7 March 2017.

39. Women's Studies Centre, *Stories of Daily Resilience and Struggles from Jerusalemite Women's Perspective*, Analytical Documentative Study, July 2019.

40. Sophie Richter-Devroe, *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Palestinian Territories*, Policy Department C: Citizens Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, 2011.

Despite the obstacles, Palestinian girls and young women have generally made progress in their levels of literacy, education and training at the higher education level. In fact, 53% of the women who have reached the age to enter higher education are enrolled, compared to 32% of the men in the same age group, according to recent figures (2017).⁴¹ Some studies suggest that female Palestinians' greater proportion of involvement in higher education may be due to a higher social value placed on women's education in Palestinian society, but also to the fact that Palestinian men of the same age may be in prison or be forced to drop out of school and work to provide for their families.⁴²

In contrast to Palestinian women's rising levels of education, their access to the job market is still very limited and is among the lowest in the countries of the Middle East and the world. According to figures from 2017, only 19% of Palestinian women were in the labour force, compared to 71% of Palestinian men. According to official statistics, just 6.6% of women between 15 and 29 years old went from school to the job market, compared to 44% of Palestinian men of the same age.⁴³ The unemployment rate for Palestinian women has steadily been growing in recent years, reaching a record of 47% in 2017. Those with the highest level of education (more than 13 years of education) accounted for the majority of this percentage, with half of them unemployed, compared to 19% of Palestinian men.⁴⁴

Palestinian women's opportunities to obtain financial security are restricted by several variables. The violence and limitations imposed by Israeli occupation policies affect their participation in the job market. Thus, for example, after the Israeli military operation against Gaza in 2014, the serious damage caused to local farms significantly limited job opportunities for Palestinian women. However, other factors that shape women's access to the job market include traditional social assumptions that the man should be the provider of the family, a social division of labour that makes Palestinian women responsible for housekeeping by limiting their time available to work in other activities and the lack of services that help women to balance their work outside the home with reproductive and caregiving duties. According to a recent study on masculinities and gender equality in Palestine, 80% of the men

and 60% of the women surveyed said that a woman's most important role was taking care of the home.⁴⁵ In a positive sign, the younger generations support more equitable relationships between men and women in terms of the right to work, education and the sharing of housekeeping tasks.⁴⁶

In this scenario, many Palestinian women work in the informal sector or in unpaid family activities and therefore are at greater risk of being exploited and working under inappropriate conditions. As in other contexts, Palestinian women who work outside the home are also exposed to situations of gender-based violence. According to a study by Birzeit University's Institute for Women's Studies of the ILO, 22% of the women interviewed acknowledged having been victims of gender-based violence in their workplace, with a higher prevalence of the phenomenon in the West Bank than in Gaza.

Rule of law, access to justice and gender violence

Palestinian women face a landscape of discriminatory laws, multiple obstacles to accessing justice and the high prevalence of gender-based violence. The fragmented legal system in force in Palestine combines laws from the Ottoman era, British rule, Egyptian and Jordanian codes and decrees issued by the authorities in Gaza and the West Bank that include regulations allowing discrimination and violations of women's rights in spheres such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.⁴⁷ The division into areas with different systems of control and administrative jurisdiction in the occupied territories, together with the political split between the governments of Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, also helps to hinder Palestinian women's access to justice. Thus, for example, it has been reported that in Area C, abuses against women, including acts of violence in the home, are not investigated, favouring impunity and the perpetuation of violence. In East Jerusalem, female victims of gender-based violence face the dilemma of enduring abuse or reporting it to the Israeli police at the risk of losing custody of their children or being disowned by their families.⁴⁸ Moreover, the

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41. UNSG, 2019, op. cit.

42. Richter-Devroe 2011, op. cit.

43. PCBS, 2017, op. cit.

44. UNSG (2019), op. cit.

45. UN Women – Promundo, Understanding Masculinities, International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa, 2017.

46. Ibid.

47. UNDP, *Gender justice and the law: assessment of laws affecting gender equality in the Arab States region*, chapter on Palestine, 2018, and UNSG, 2019 op. cit.

48. Human Rights Council, 2017, op. cit.

social context maintains that these events should be kept private. Access to justice is also constrained by discriminatory and insensitive attitudes towards gender-based violence by judicial system employees, an area in which women are under-represented (in 2015, 82% of judges were men, compared to 17% of women).⁴⁹

Some studies indicate that gender-based violence in the home has increased since the Second Intifada (2000), partly as a consequence of frustration produced by Israeli policies, economic pressure and recurring cycles of conflict, which may lead Palestinian men to be more violent in domestic settings.⁵⁰ According to official statistics from a study in 2011, 37% of married Palestinian women had been exposed to violence by their husbands, compared to 29% in the West Bank and 51% in Gaza.⁵¹ More recently, another study found that during their childhood, many Palestinian men and women witnessed acts of violence against their mothers by their fathers or another man in the family (25% and 22%, respectively) and almost one in five men surveyed (17%) acknowledged having used physical violence against a woman in a romantic relationship.⁵² The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women has warned that particularly in Gaza, the political context appears to act as a mitigating factor that makes violence against women more acceptable. Moreover, there are no laws criminalising domestic violence and there is a certain social tolerance for violence against women in Palestinian society. In 2008, another study concluded that 22% of the people surveyed accepted that a man could beat his wife if he thought it was necessary.⁵³

More recent studies also highlight the interconnections between levels of exposure to the violence of the occupation and the prevalence of gender violence in the family and more conservative attitudes towards women. In this regard, Palestinian women living in especially complex areas such as Area C or Hebron face a risk of gender-based violence exacerbated by the stress and frustrations of Palestinian men. A recent UN Women study focusing on these areas found that women married

to Palestinian men who had been insulted, arrested or had been beaten by soldiers or settlers suffered higher levels of physical, emotional and sexual violence from their husbands. In these areas, spatial segregation has also reinforced patriarchal attitudes and the seclusion of women in the domestic sphere, restricting their participation in the community.⁵⁴ Sixty-one per cent of the women in Gaza think that the blockade and power outages influence higher levels of domestic violence against women.⁵⁵

Honour killings are another area of particular concern, as they involve various forms of violence against women, including femicide. These crimes are committed in a patriarchal context that attributes certain forms of behaviour to women and views transgressions as an attack on the family's honour. In this context, the use of violence against women is considered a means of discipline or formula to restore the family's honour. Even though it is an underreported phenomenon and there is a lack of official statistics, there has been a warning about an increase in honour killings of women.⁵⁶ Notably, the criminal legal framework reinforces social norms in this area by reducing the sentences of the perpetrators of these crimes. Recent changes to remove these provisions have only been applied in the West Bank, but not in Gaza.⁵⁷ Only in 2018 were the articles changed that had allowed a rapist to escape conviction if he married his victim.⁵⁸

Discrimination against Palestinian women as a result of the patriarchal context also includes issues related to both *sharia*-based and Christian personal status laws that regulate issues such as marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance.⁵⁹ Thus, for example, polygamy is allowed and the legal minimum age for marriage is different in Gaza and the West Bank, but in both cases it is lower for women. In another example, regarding inheritance, the *sharia*-based laws in Gaza and the West Bank provide that women receive half as much as men, but in practice many of them face pressure from their families to completely renounce their rights.⁶⁰

Palestinian women's chances to obtain economic security are restricted by factors such as the violence and limitations imposed by the occupation that affect their participation in the job market and by social perceptions that men should be the provider of the family

49. PCBS, 2017, op. cit.

50. Richter-Devroe (2011), op. cit.; Special Rap (2017)

51. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society*, PCBS, 2011.

52. UN Women – Promundo, 2017, op. cit.

53. Richter-Devroe, 2011, op. cit.

54. UN Women, *Caught up between a rock and a hard place: occupation, patriarchy and gender relations: a case study of Palestinian women in Area C and H2*, March 2018.

55. Un Women, 2018, op. cit.

56. HRC, 2017, op. cit.

57. UNDP, 2018, op. cit.

58. UNSG, 2019, op. cit.

59. For further information, see S. Azzouni, 2010, op. cit.

60. UNDP, 2018, op. cit.

Final thoughts

This analysis of the different forms of violence faced by Palestinian women and girls confirms the severe impacts of the Israeli military occupation and its policies of exclusion, fragmentation and subordination, but it also demonstrates that this situation cannot be properly understood without taking into account the patriarchal context and the institutions and social norms that continue to fuel discrimination, control and various expressions of violence against women.

This guide has attempted to provide a multifaceted look at the violence and oppression that Palestinian women and girls deal with on a daily basis,

Recent studies highlight the interconnections between levels of exposure to the violence of the occupation and the prevalence of gender-based violence in the family and more conservative attitudes towards women

assuming that it is a limited perspective given the complexity of the context and the many different situations to consider. Issues that have not been addressed in this document, such as discrimination and racism faced by Palestinian women with Israeli citizenship, the challenges for the LGBTBI population and Palestinian women's coping mechanisms and strategies for dealing with the violence of the occupation and patriarchy, among other issues, could enrich views on this subject. However, the foregoing confirms the unequivocal need to consider the experiences of Palestinian women to identify and deal with the overwhelming pending challenges for security, peace and guarantees of respect and the protection of human rights in Palestine.

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