

Distr.
LIMITED
E/ESCWA/ECW/2007/Technical Paper.1
16 February 2007
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

**SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN
2000-2006**

Prepared by:

Eileen Kuttab,
Assistant Professor
Director,
Institute of Women Studies
Birzeit University
Birzeit, West Bank
Occupied Palestine

January, 2007

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07-0104

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Executive summary

In the first section of the report, we have first reviewed the more devastating effects of the Israeli occupation which have escalated during these years, from 2000-2006 and explained the ramifications of the elections for Palestinian Authority Presidency and the Legislative Council, in January, 2005, and January, 2006, respectively. Most of the first section is devoted to a description of the current conditions existing in the Occupied Territories, including Israeli measures that have imposed collective punishment on the civilian population with special focus on the impact of such policies on Palestinian women. One of these measures, the construction of the Separation Wall, is described in some detail since it is one of recent Israeli actions that are causing harsh conditions and widespread suffering to the Palestinian households especially women. The first section was concluded with a discussion of the economic repercussions of collective punishment measures on Palestinian households.

The second section of the report offers a demographic portrait of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It includes information on the size, age and distribution of the population, on rates of fertility and mortality, and finally, a closer look at the Palestinian household from within in terms of factors including marriage and divorce rates, and other issues and how they relate to women.

The final section, presents different socio-economic indicators of the situation of the Palestinian population. These include factors relating to political participation, labour and economy, poverty, education, legal and human rights, and health. Such indicators are used to analyze the gender gaps within the Palestinian society and the impact of such gaps on the position of women.

Hence using the mentioned population indicators indicate that describing the situation of women apart from the political and socio-economic context in which they live is not possible. It is especially difficult in a period when drastic changes are occurring at the political, social and economic levels. The period since late 2000 has been characterized by exceptional macro-economic density, including declining incomes and increasing poverty and unemployment. Despite war, dislocation, occupation and displacement, the West Bank and Gaza Strip did unite to form a political entity; but more recent developments, exemplified by the Israeli closure policy, construction of the Separation Wall, and ongoing violations of human rights, have affected each region differently and fragmented any unified reality. Even current efforts to create a united national leadership – Palestinians' only remaining hope for a modicum of stability, are facing serious difficulties.

Within this period, Israel has continued to violate human rights, deliberately and with impunity. The state of Israel has continued to order and implement the killing of unarmed Palestinian civilians, males and females, adults and children. It has tightened its economic and political siege and imposed yet more repressive restrictions on the movement of the Palestinian population. It has engineered further deterioration of economic and humanitarian conditions. Since the beginning of the second *Intifada* in September, 2000, the Israeli forces have killed 4, 656 people and injured an additional 48, 950, 16% of whom now suffer permanent injuries. A total of 7,628 houses have been demolished and 53,000 people displaced and forced to find temporary shelter (PCBS, 2006). Agricultural lands, historically Palestinians' principal means of survival, have been either razed or seized for the construction of the Wall or for other “reasons of security.” Together, these actions have devastated the lives of Palestinian people and crushed their aspirations for the future.

Given these conditions, Palestinian women are at risk. Neither formal nor informal structures are functional; their capacity to provide women with some degree of security or empowerment is virtually nonexistent. Consequently, while women do await a political resolution, they are not passive spectators regarding the events happening around them – whether human rights violations by the Israeli forces, or internal conflicts among the different Palestinian political parties. Persisting in their traditional role as active agents for peace and social justice, members of the women's movement are trying desperately to contain the conflicts which have infected even families and clans and which have fragmented the social network.

Although this report shows some of the positive developments that women, in part, at least, through women's organizations, have achieved in terms of education, health, formal political representation, and

other spheres, yet the course of women's empowerment is still in its early stages. Palestinian women have made real efforts to bridge the gender gap and to attain equality and social justice, but in the current political and economic conditions, it has proved impossible to follow an agenda that prioritizes gender issues separately from the national struggle. Of necessity, women's organizations and the women's movement as a whole have shifted their focus to emergency humanitarian assistance, in order to maintain their relevance and to meet the needs of women today.

One of the main findings that can be concluded from the analysis is that women in times of war and violence can be devastated the most as they are the protectors and the providers of care, they provide emotional and moral support and they have to cope with the losses of homes, land, and loss of members of family and relatives, and displacement as they have to cope with all these losses in the best way they can while they are not prepared or trained to do so. This adds the pressures on women and threatens their health situation, and their social being.

Another threat to women's empowerment is high fertility and early marriage. During wars and conflict, some households choose the practice of early marriage as a coping strategy for the harsh economic conditions as it can decrease the economic burdens of a family and lessen the bride price.

Lastly, a general finding that is paradoxical is that women in conflict situations are on one hand disempowered as all opportunities for empowerment like freedom of movement, access to work or education, and training are restricted due to the closure policy and the dysfunctionality of the national organizations and the weakness of the different support welfare organizations from providing support for women. Hence, this can impact negatively the situation of women in general. Yet, despite the overwhelming obstacles faced by the Palestinians from the Israeli occupiers, and the incalculable harm they have wrought, these same obstacles have, paradoxically, also played a role in empowering women. It has been also indicated that some women under pressure can sometimes challenge the situation and get empowered to face the difficult situations to provide for the family. However, it is difficult to talk about real empowerment of women within conflict situations as all opportunities are being challenged, and empowerment without a state and political stability continues to be complicated.

ABBREVIATIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

| | |
|-------|--|
| Badil | Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights |
| DFLP | Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine |
| FIDA | Palestinian Democratic Union |
| GAD | Gender and Development |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| ID | Identity Cards |
| IDPs | Internally Displaced Persons |
| IOF | Israeli Occupation Forces |
| MAS | Palestinian Economic Policy Research Institute |
| MoH | Ministry of Health |
| NGOs | Non-governmental organizations |
| OPT | Occupied Palestinian Territories |
| PA | Palestinian Authority |
| PCBS | Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics |
| PLC | Palestinian Legislative Council |
| PFLP | Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine |
| PLO | Palestinian Liberation Organization |
| PNA | Palestinian National Authority |
| PNIC | Palestinian National Information Center |
| VAT | Value Added Tax |
| UNRWA | United Nations Relief and Work Agency |
| WBGS | West Bank and Gaza Strip |

I. THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

A. THE SECOND INTIFADA

The years 2003 through 2006 have seen continuing attempts on the part of the Israeli government to repress the second *Intifada*, which erupted in September, 2000, in response to the negative consequences on the Palestinian population of the Oslo Accords. Israeli measures in these past three years have only served to intensify the very conditions which sparked the 2000 uprising – including growing unemployment and a sharp increase in poverty rates, and generally intolerable socio-economic conditions throughout the West Bank and Gaza. These measures include: willful killings, including extrajudicial executions, of Palestinian civilians by the Israeli Occupation forces (IOF); demolition of homes and devastation of crops; confiscation of lands and destruction of olive trees for settlement expansion; continuing construction of the Separation Wall and the imposition of numerous other restrictions on the movement of Palestinian civilians; and an overall tightening of the internal and external political and economic siege imposed on the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT).

One of the most notable developments of 2005 was the “Disengagement Plan” implemented in Gaza Strip by the Israeli government in September 2005. Although perhaps to the outside world, the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and the provisional withdrawal of Israeli troops looked like a positive step, the reality for Palestinians was anything but positive. In essence, the “withdrawal” amounted to implementation of a unilateral Israeli plan designed to free up some of its forces and curry international favor, while maintaining its control over the Gaza Strip's airspace, and access to the sea and land border crossings, thus leaving the essence of its occupation untouched.¹ Under this plan, Israel withdrew its forces from inside Gaza and redeployed them just outside it, while continuing to invade and attack from land and air. Since the “withdrawal”, Israel has also imposed unprecedented restrictions on movement between the Gaza Strip and the outside world. Beginning September, 2005, the Israelis closed all border crossings, including the Rafah crossing, for 80 days, until finally some of the restrictions were eased in an agreement between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority (PA). The crossing, however, remains under full control of the Israeli forces.

As the economic situation worsened during these years, the ability of the Palestinian Authority to deal with these pressures weakened. This development in turn undermined the PA's impact and legitimacy, and opened a space in which other political movements gained power. Among other factors, the PA's inability to protect the population or to serve them through the different governmental institutions tarnished the Authority's image and alienated the institutions of civil society, leaving the people to face the different challenges alone, without government support. Given this situation, it is not surprising that Palestinians turned to elections as a means for bringing about change.

B. ELECTIONS, JANUARY, 2005 AND JANUARY, 2006

The elections which were held for PA president on 9 January, 2005, and for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on 25 January, 2006, reflected the will of the people to exercise their right to vote. The overall integrity of the elections was confirmed by all international and local observers. They were an impressive show of democratic practice in the OPT. Yet the election results, which resulted in a Hamas² majority in the PLC, evoked an overwhelmingly negative reaction at both regional and international levels, represented by complete cessation of foreign aid to the Palestinian government and civil society. It also provided Israel with an excuse to renege on its agreement to pass to the PA the Palestinian money Israel had collected. Friction developed internally, also, between the executive institution of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, on the one hand, and the Hamas-led legislature and the new Prime Minister, Ismail Haniya, on the other. The tension spilled over into the larger community, especially in Gaza, where some large extended families or clans (*hamulas*) have clashed over factional and sectarian differences. Security has deteriorated and chaos spread amid the proliferation and misuse of weapons on the street. Officials have been

¹ Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Annual Report, 2005.

² Hamas meaning the Islamic movement.

attacked, foreigners kidnapped, and offices, whether belonging to the government, to NGOs, or to foreign missions, have been targeted. A number of Palestinian civilians have lost their lives.

Thus the elections, which were hoped would push forward democratic reform and stop human rights violations in the West Bank and Gaza, and thereby strengthen the Palestinian Authority against the Israeli aggressor, did no such thing. For its part, Israel took advantage of the political instability within the Occupied Territories to attack Gaza and parts of the West Bank and to continue its collective punishment of the Palestinian civilian population in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

Some of the means used by the Israeli government to impose collective punishment, which were mentioned briefly in the paragraphs above, will here be described in more detail.

C. THE CURRENT SITUATION

1. *Collective punishment of the Palestinian people*

In March, and again in December, 2005, the Israeli Ministry of Construction approved the construction of additional housing units in the settlements encircling the Jerusalem area, as well in other West Bank settlements. This expansion, along with the construction of the Separation Wall, constitute continuing violations of international law, and were so described in the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in Hague on July 9, 2004. The Israeli forces also confiscated land for a “buffer zone” in the northern Gaza Strip. Unarmed civilians were killed as a result of shelling and incursions into residential areas and extra-judicial executions during demonstrations, at checkpoints and even during periods of calm.

For its part, the international community has punished the Palestinian people as a result of their electoral choice, paradoxically praising democratic practice but denying the legitimacy of the outcome. By cutting off all aid, the governments of Europe and the USA have made it impossible for Palestinians to earn a livable wage. Tens of thousands of public sector employees have not received their salaries for more than a year since the beginning of January, 2006. By pressuring Arab governments, companies and financial institutions, as well, into cutting the flow of funds to the PA, the international community has played a decisive role in further depressing the Palestinian economy.

Finally, within the Palestinian areas, the last three years have brought more violations of human rights, for which the Palestinian Authority itself is either directly or indirectly responsible. The lack of security, especially the proliferation and misuse of weapons, represents a serious internal challenge. Human rights organizations have recorded many violations of the rule of law, including attacks on both private and public property, among them prisons and court houses, which have threatened the security and safety of the Palestinian civilians.

Together, all these factors have amounted to collective punishment of the entire Palestinian population. Some of these are described below in more detail.

(a) *Loss of life*

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, a total of 4, 656 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli forces between November 28, 2000, and November 30, 2006. Of the overall number, 894 were children under 18 (14.7%); and 278 were females (5.9%). Some (9.6%) were targets of extrajudicial assassinations. Most of the civilians were killed by live bullets and missiles or shells launched by Israeli fighter planes, helicopters, and tanks. Others were killed by being run over by cars driven by settlers, by the collapse of buildings during military incursions, and by the inhalation of tear gas.³

³ PCBS, 2006. *Intifada Statistics*. Ramallah, Palestine.

Extrajudicial assassinations constitute willful killings committed by the IOF and predetermined and approved by the Israeli political and judiciary establishments. These crimes are being committed without any consideration for the fact that they threaten the lives of non-targeted Palestinian civilians. A number of children and women were killed in these circumstances, either while traveling to or from work or school, or as innocent bystanders.

(b) *Injuries*

From 28 September 2000, to 30 November 2006, the overall number of Palestinians injured was 48,950 according to the Palestinian National Information Centre (PNIC).⁴ According to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, the total was 31,161. Almost 16% of those injured have ended up with total, permanent disabilities. Because women are the care providers for dependents in Palestinian families, and because there are limited public institutions offering physical therapy, much less institutional care, the great majority of injured and disabled family members are kept at home. As a result, women have experienced an enormous increase in their reproductive responsibilities as they care for relatives who suffered disabilities.

In general, women and children are subjected to injuries away from direct clashes, either near or inside their homes, or when crossing checkpoints; thus, in the midst of the most ordinary daily activities, women and children are vulnerable. Even pregnant women have suffered in the conflict, with an increase in the number of still births resulting from the mothers' exposure to poisonous gases or to other sources of harm, either physical or emotional, resulting from various forms of violence.

(c) *House demolitions and land seizures*

Since the beginning of the *Intifada*, the Israeli forces have used house demolition as a tool for collective punishment. They commonly destroy houses and raze Palestinian agricultural land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the pretext of confronting attacks by Palestinian gunmen. Moreover, they destroy Palestinian houses located near Israeli settlements, or in areas near IOF posts, justifying their actions as "military necessity" or "Israeli security".

According to the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, a total of 7,628 houses were totally demolished since the *Intifada* began, 4,785 of them in the Gaza Strip. With little means to rebuild their homes, the uprooted and displaced families – an estimated 53,396 people – are forced to find temporary shelter with relatives or neighbours until they manage to find permanent alternatives. An additional 64,693 homes were partially destroyed, according to PNIC. The psychological trauma that the demolition of their homes causes, especially in women and small children, who spend most of their time at home, is incalculable. Throughout the whole experience of displacement, women and children lose their own private space and any sense of safety or security. In addition, more pressure is placed on women, as they bear the brunt of displacement and uprootedness as they attempt to create and sustain a healthy home life and to protect their households and families.

In terms of economics, because women play an important role in agriculture, land seizure due to incursions or construction of the Wall means the loss of a second or alternative income for the family. Perhaps equally important is the social isolation which women experience when their activities are confined to the house, and to the loss of status which threatens them when they lose their productive role within the family.

(d) *Detentions*

At the end of November, 2006, according to the PNIC, at least 10,500 Palestinians, including 319 children and 117 women, remained in Israeli custody in 30 detention facilities throughout Israel and in settlements and other military bases in the OPT. Among these are 1,389 school students, 250 teachers, and

⁴ Palestinian National Information Center, 2006.

1,200 sick prisoners.⁵ Most arrests took place during house raids, especially in the West Bank, and during Israeli incursions into Palestinian towns, towns and refugee camps. In addition, hundreds of Palestinians were arrested at checkpoints or roadblocks, at crossings into Israel, or at points inside Israel. Most of the prisoners were transferred out of the OPT to jails and detention centers inside Israel, in a clear violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The conditions in which detained Palestinians live while in Israeli custody violate the fundamental rights of detainees. On the material level, prisoners suffer from conditions such as poor ventilation, overcrowding, lack of adequate sanitation facilities, poor food and water supplies and denial of medical care.

Affecting prisoners on both the physical and the emotional planes is the common use of torture. Human rights organizations continue to receive reports regarding various methods of torture used against Palestinian prisoners including minors and women. Also on the psychological level, prisoners confront delays or denials of access to legal counseling and relatives. These also are violations of the minimum standards for the humane treatment of prisoners.

The phenomenon of women prisoners in these past three years is remarkable in comparison to previous stages. From a total of 117 women detainees, sixty have been sentenced, 51 arrested but not sentenced, and 6 imprisoned as “administrative detainees”. Three women prisoners have given birth in prison in hazardous and humiliating conditions.

The so-called “administrative detentions” have been used by IOF to arrest and detain Palestinians without charge or trial for long periods. By the end of 2005, at least 700 Palestinians were still in custody under administrative detention orders issued by the IOF.

By the beginning of 2006, 182 prisoners had been killed in prison due to negligence and/or deprivation of medical attendance and care.⁶

(e) *Restrictions on mobility*

Closures, curfews, refusals of permission and other restrictions of freedom of movement are other forms of internationally prohibited collective punishment used by the Israeli forces to contain Palestinians. Israelis have severely restricted movement of Palestinians and internationals within and between the West Bank and Gaza strip, as well as between these areas, Israel and the outside world.

These restrictions on Palestinians' ability to move about have had severe repercussions. They have contributed to the ongoing economic crisis in the OPT, including the disintegration of all major industries and economic sectors. Restrictions on economic activity, combined with restrictions on the entry of goods, including foodstuffs and medical supplies, have severely violated Palestinians' rights to health care and education.

Like other Israeli measures, these restrictions operate not only in the physical dimension, but also in the psychological realm, as they frustrate and humiliate people, discourage them from carrying out their normal daily activities, prevent them from communicating with each other, and separate families. All these measures aim to alienate and estrange Palestinians from one another and the outside world, to the point that they will leave the country – an invisible form of the “transfer” advocated openly by the more hard-line Israeli government officials. They deepen Palestinians' isolation, separating them from their relatives and friends, and weakening the informal social networks of solidarity which have historically played such an important role in pulling the society together and strengthening collective solidarity and steadfastness. To some degree the Israeli efforts are succeeding: In increasing numbers, Palestinians who are able are immigrating to other countries, so untenable have their lives and their children's futures become.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

While Israel justifies these policies in the name of “Israeli security”, the fact that it eases them in certain instances suggests that they are used exclusively as punitive and humiliating devices.

2. *The Separation Wall and its ramifications*

(a) *Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) resulting from the Separation Wall*

The hardships caused by the Wall are causing many people to migrate to another locality either inside or outside the West Bank. Some of the families live on land where the barrier was constructed, or are too close to the barrier; others have lost their land or their means of making a living due to the barrier.

As part of their study, and in cooperation with the cooperation of the Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights (BADIL), PCBS conducted a household survey on the forced displacement of Palestinians caused by the Wall in Jerusalem. Most important among their findings was the fact that 32.9% of Jerusalemites have changed their last place of residence since the wall was built. Of these, 20% have done so involuntarily; and of these, 83.3% have been forcibly displaced once, 9.3% twice, and 7.4% three times or more.⁷

The study made clear that the Wall and its associated regime of permits and access gates restrict the freedom of movement of all Palestinians in Jerusalem. Ninety-four % of all households said that the time spent trying to cross checkpoints is a major problem for them. The survey confirmed also that many Palestinian households on the east side of the Wall face difficulties in accessing health services: 34.5% of households (88.3% of households on the East side of the Wall and 5.3% on the West side of the Wall) are cut off from health services located in the center of Jerusalem.

Findings showed also that the percentage of female-headed households forced to move is greater than the percentage of female-headed households that exist in Palestine as a whole. That is, whereas female headed households account for 10.2% of all Palestinian households, in Jerusalem, 13.7% of the households which have changed their place of residence were female-headed households forced to move by the Wall.

(b) *Loss of land, mostly agricultural land*

Despite the fact that the Separation Wall is not yet completed, a number of its effects are already painfully visible. About 165,000 *dunams* of land have been confiscated in the localities where the Wall was erected in August, 2003. This amounted to 124,323 *dunams* of private land and 40,460 *dunams* of governmental land, according to the PCBS Locality Survey on the Impact of the Wall. (2003). Of the total confiscated, about 106,000 *dunams* were agricultural land; of these, 22,298 *dunams* were ravaged and displaced to make room for the Wall. The rest of the Palestinian lands ended up on the Israeli side of the Wall. According to PCBS, a total of 11.8% of the households who had the misfortune to live in the path of the Wall have lost all their land, and 16.7% have lost part of their land. Some 71.5% of households did not lose any land. Most of the confiscated lands were agricultural (95.5%).⁸

In addition to all this, the survey showed that many Palestinians have had their private property damaged by the construction of the Wall. Most affected are agricultural goods: 34.7% of households reported damages to homes and commercial properties. As many as 10.2% of all Palestinian households in Jerusalem and 19.2% of those who own land there saw part or all of the family land confiscated as a result of the Wall.⁹

⁷ Badil. IDMC. 2006.

⁸ PCBS, 2004. Demographic and Social Consequences of the Separation Barrier on the West Bank, Ramallah- Palestine.

⁹ Ibid. 2006.

(c) *Resulting psychological damage*

The loss of agricultural land is important far beyond its economic worth, however. Palestinian people in general, especially those who farm and live off their lands, attach particular significance to land, and women are not an exception in that regard. The loss of land is a real calamity for families; women agonize along with their male relatives over the loss of their land and regard it as the end of their world. The expropriated land was their whole life; it was the source of life for their families and represented security and stability for the future. In the words of one woman, “Land is life, stability and security”, and with the Wall, “all of this collapsed”.

Another woman expressed her attachment to her land as follows: “Land forms the basis of our existence, it is our home and hearts, it constitutes our psychological safety; it is the only thing a man lives for; it is family inheritance passed on from father to son so that grandsons can still live thereon.” Land makes an irreplaceable connection between person and place; a homeland cannot be sold or exchanged. It is dearer than all words.

(d) *Lack of freedom of movement*

The overall economy in the barrier area suffers enormously because of restrictions on transportation, traveling and agriculture. Not only have many farmers lost their land and their greenhouses, or been prevented from reaching them; in addition, wells have been destroyed or ended up on the other side of the barrier. The splitting of families has dramatic effects on the family's economic situation as well. Such arrangements increase household expenditures for housing, food, and transportation, leaving fewer resources for the women and children who remain at home. All these problems caused by the barrier come in addition to the already severe conditions suffered throughout the West Bank on account of the checkpoints, closures of many cities and villages, and other restrictions on Palestinians' ability to move.

Even those families who choose to stay on their lands must ask for and obtain permanent permits to live there or special permits to travel across the Wall, if they live west of the barrier. Mobility has also been curtailed for households who live east of the barrier, especially those who live in enclaves such as Tulkarem and Qalqiliya, where the gates through the Wall are closed for most of every day. People who want to go on ordinary errands must get permits to do so; farmers must obtain permits to visit or to work on their lands. People must obtain permits to pass through the gates for their daily errands. There is no assurance that any of these permits will be granted.

Of course, even people whose land does not adjoin the Wall suffer from it. Many cannot reach their work, schools or health care facilities. People sometimes have to travel for a long time and wait at checkpoints for several hours to get through, a situation which means that many times they are attempting an impossible mission. The most vulnerable -- pregnant women and sick people, for example, are often prevented from reaching a hospital, even if they are traveling in ambulances. According to PNIC,¹⁰ 149 people altogether died at checkpoints when they were delayed by Israeli soldiers on their way to hospitals or clinics for medical assistance. Women have been forced to give birth at checkpoints after not being allowed through.¹¹

According to PCBS and other observers, the Separation Wall is particularly restrictive for women. One PCBS survey showed that the Wall affects the movement of most - 78% of women living on the east side of the Wall, and of 87% of women living west of the Wall. A qualitative study conducted by the Institute of Women Studies at Birzeit University investigating a sample of 23 households in 2004¹² found

¹⁰ Palestine National Authority, State Information Service, www.pnic.org, Statistics of Israeli Violations against the Palestinian people 28/9/2000-28/2/2006.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Institute of Women's Studies. 2006. “Impact of Separation Wall on Palestinian Households”. Report for the UNDP, Birzeit University.

that women are the most isolated social group due to the restrictions on movement. For women, the Wall has come to be like a prison. As it is necessary to obtain permits to cross roadblocks and gates, families prefer requesting such permits for male members so that they can travel to work. Women's mobility, then, becomes particularly constrained. In some cases, also, it is difficult to go through the roadblocks and gates because of their opening hours, which are not convenient for women.

(e) *Tearing the social fabric*

In Jerusalem as elsewhere in the West Bank, family life has been disrupted; and households are often separated because the workplace, residence or educational institution of family members is located not where the family lives, but on the other side of the Wall. In 21.4% of Palestinian households in Jerusalem, members have been separated from their relatives -- including fathers and mothers. In addition, 84.6% of all households have not been able to visit their relatives. One can expect damaging consequences on the development of children who are accustomed to living in a family environment. Separation from the rest of the family has had a negative effect on the coping ability not only of the family, also of the whole of Palestinian society, which has become more fragmented, with the fragments increasingly isolated from one another.

Thus the very fabric of Palestinian social life is being torn as split families become more common. Families are pulled apart as students or working members of the family must relocate to the places where they work or study if they are to continue to study or to make a living wage. Increasing numbers of workers and students have left their homes and are able to visit only occasionally, leaving women and children isolated and unprotected targets of settlers' raids. Children have less contact with their fathers and are left on their own for long periods, particularly if their mother is working. Although this temporary movement is not considered to be migration, it has serious implications for the family and the broader community, in terms of family relationships, gender roles, and social cohesion.

At this point, almost 40% of all households have one or more members who are separated from their relatives because of the Wall. Many have stopped visiting relatives due to time-consuming gates and checkpoints and longer distances to travel. Thirty-nine % of households are separated from their families. Some 21.4% of all the Palestinian households in Jerusalem have been split and are separated from their relatives, including from the father, mother, daughter, or son in the household. Marriages may be strained to the point of divorce because of the separations, including possible temptations in the workplace.

The Wall also curtails a family's ability to engage in cultural or social activities, such as attending weddings, funerals, lectures and workshops, and going to libraries, theaters, football matches, or other forms of socializing and entertainment. Only religious activities are not affected for a large number of people since most communities have a mosque and the mosque has become a social gathering place for men in rural communities.

(f) *Distortion of marriage patterns*

Even marriage patterns are being distorted by the Wall. Traditionally, Palestinian marriages brought couples together from across a wide geographic area, rather than limiting the choice of partners to nearby villages, as is the case in some societies. The Wall seems to be changing this. One of the striking findings of the survey is its impact on the choice of spouses: 69.4% of households state that the Wall has been an obstacle for the choice of a spouse since the beginning of its construction in 2002. They have expressed increasing difficulties in marrying a partner who does not live on the same side of the Wall, or hold the same residency status. 14.4% of the households found it problematic for a person to marry a person living in the area that ended up on the other side of the Wall.¹³ The situation is even graver for Jerusalem ID holders who fear losing their residency rights if they marry a West Bank ID holder.¹⁴

¹³ Badil, IDMC.2006. Displaced by the Wall, Forced Displacement as a result of the West Bank Wall and its Associated Regime. Bethlehem, Palestine.

¹⁴ Ibid. 2006.

According to the Institute of Women Studies study, couples are also marrying at later ages than before, particularly among rural families. The change is surprising when one takes into account the fact that the villages have long traditions of early marriage, with one or both partners under the age of 20. The newly-weds have traditionally been able to live in an independent house which the husband-to-be built either on top of his family's house or on another part of the family land. In short, both tradition and the accustomed availability of space made early marriage the expected pattern. But these same families now tend to delay their marriages as a result of the current economic situation. The young men are now unable to secure an independent dwelling or to provide a steady income to support a family. Marriage is becoming unaffordable.

(g) *Effects on employment*

Access to work has been also affected. The study showed that 31.8% of Palestinians in the Jerusalem governorate age 10 years or older are in the labor force, while 68.2% are outside the labor force. The overall unemployment rate on the west side of the Wall is estimated at 15.7%. On the east side, the unemployment rate stands at 26.3%.

(h) *Effects on education*

Access to education has also been affected. Although most students do not have to cross the Wall, yet 48.4% of households on the eastern side of the Wall and 8.7% on the western side said that the Wall has negatively affected their access to education. 43.9% of the students in the Jerusalem Governorate aged five and above have attended school; 24.7% began school but dropped out; 24.6% attended and have graduated; and 6.8% have never attended school at all. Non-attendance (12.3%) and the drop-out rate 28.8% were higher among Palestinians east of the Wall than among Palestinians in the west.¹⁵

In short, the survey makes it clear that the Wall is a measure which has already resulted in forced displacement of Palestinians and is likely to induce more. Thus the Wall has created a new category of internally displaced persons; and these new refugees must be recognized by the international community. The survey also indicates that Palestinian women and children, as well as Bedouins, constitute populations which are particularly vulnerable to forced displacement and other violations of their human rights on account of the Wall.¹⁶

3. *Economic repercussions of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian households*

The period since late 2000 has been characterized by macro-economic compression, declining incomes, and high rates of unemployment and poverty in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. However, economic, social and humanitarian conditions in the OPT have deteriorated at a more rapid pace since the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank in August, 2005. This period is distinguished by the Israeli's impounding of PA customs and VAT revenues, and the boycott of the PA presidency during 2002-2004.

The decrease in total government revenues was estimated to have been 71% during 2006 compared with 2005, and the decrease in total government expenses in 2006 is 36% compared to 2005. The decline in GDP during the first three quarters of 2006 compared with the first three quarters 2005 is estimated at 3.6% whereas the decline in the third quarter of 2006 compared with third quarter 2005 is 15.3%.¹⁷

According to the UNRWA report issued in November, 2006¹⁸ the present period can be described as: fiscal crisis resulting from the lack offsetting budgetary assistance to bridge the gap caused by the Israeli

¹⁵ Ibid. 2006.

¹⁶ Badil, 2006.

¹⁷ PCBS, 2006. Demographic and Socio-economic Status of Palestinian People at the end of 2006. Ramallah, Palestine.

¹⁸ UNRWA, 2006. Prolonged Crisis in the Occupied Territories: Socio-Economic Impact of the New Phase on Refugees and Non-Refugees. Gaza.

government's impounding of customs and VAT; the non-payment of regular salaries to 165,000 employees; and total absence of external assistance to the PA, which was one of the highest per capita recipients of aid in the world. Thus the present situation is characterized by a public sector starved of revenues, threatening the gains made in Palestinian public institution-building and state formation since 1994.

The gross domestic product (GDP) declined 9% in the first half of 2006. This six monthly downturn is of the same order of magnitude as the decline in GDP between 2000 and 2005, which according to the report is worrisome, especially since the third quarter indicators point out that the downward trend is deepening.¹⁹

Of greater consequence is the underlying weakness of the private sector indicated by the GDP data. The importance of strengthening the private sector is underscored by declining job opportunities in the Israeli labor market and the unsustainable character of public sector employment.

In regard to employment in the OPT employment grew more rapidly than the labor force in first half of 2006. There were 30,000 more people employed in QII-2006 than QIV-2005, a growth rate of 4.8% which slightly decreased the unemployment rate from 29.4% to 28.6% in QII-2006.

According to a PCBS labor force survey in 2005, the labor force participation rate decreased from 41.5% in 2000 to 40.7% in 2005, and the unemployment rate increased sharply from 11.8% in 1999 to 14.1% in 2000, reaching 23.5% in 2005.²⁰

According to a report produced by PCBS and the World Bank,²¹ donor aid focused on the very poorest of the Palestinian population, due to the lack of sufficient resources to reduce poverty or to meet the basic needs of the poor households. Donor priorities were reinforced by two perceptions: first that the poorest had exhausted their savings and were more vulnerable to malnutrition and permanent poverty, especially if the situation did not improve, and second, that the poorest would be unable to benefit from economic recovery because they were unskilled or unable to work.²² The report explained that although 68% of the needy receive assistance, yet a significant portion 32% of the needy are not covered. Needy individuals that are living in rural areas and in the Gaza Strip are less likely to receive assistance. Interestingly, needy refugees and individuals in female-headed households are more likely to receive assistance than are other needy individuals. This reflects agency on the part of both women and refugees, who are using their gender and refugee status, respectively, in their search for assistance. According to a series of PCBS Impact surveys between 2001 and 2003, the proportion of households below the poverty line ranged between 61 and 72%.²³

While the total Palestinian population grew by some 30% between 1998 and 2005, the number of Palestinians in poverty grew at more than three times that rate, despite the humanitarian assistance given to the poor. There were an estimated 1.3 million persons in 170,000 households living below the official poverty line in 2005-- nearly double the number in 1998. Most of the poor -- 820,000 persons in 104,000 households -- also lived in deep poverty. Among those living under poverty line in 2005 were 632,200 refugees in 81,350 households while deep poverty afflicted more than 406,000 refugees in 51,500 households in the OPT.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ PCBS, 2006. Labor Force Survey. Annual Report 2005. Ramallah -Palestine.

²¹ PCBS, World Bank. 2004. Deep Palestinian Poverty in the Midst of Economic Crisis. Ramallah, Palestine.

²² Ibid. 2004.

²³ Ibid. 2004.

²⁴ UNRWA. 2006.

TABLE 1. INDICATORS OF LIVING STANDARDS IN WBGs IN THOUSANDS AND PERCENTAGES

| Poverty rates | 2001 | 2004 | 2005 |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| All persons | 1 101 711 (33.64%) | 1 113 050 (30.60%) | 1 307 355 (34.75%) |
| Refugees | 556 312 (41.11%) | 504 643 (33.58%) | 623 222 (40.10%) |
| All households | 132 393 (27.87%) | 140 185 (25.60%) | 88 695 (29.49%) |
| Refugee households | 66 192 (33.88%) | 65 273 (28.97%) | 81 358 (34.30%) |
| Deep poverty rates | 2001 | 2004 | 2005 |
| All persons | 790 605 (24.14%) | 738 830 (20.31%) | 820 008 (21.80%) |
| Refugees | 424 784 (31.39%) | 326 366 (21.72%) | 406 115 (26.13) |
| All households | 92 630 (19.50%) | 89 895(16.41%) | 104 148 (18.06%) |
| Refugee households | 43 347 (25.22%) | 41 702 (18.51%) | 51 536 (21.73%) |

Source: UNRWA. 2006. Prolonged Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: Socio-Economic Impacts of the New Phase on Refugees and Non-Refugees. Gaza.

The burden of the poverty was borne disproportionately by refugees, who account for half of the deep poor and deep poor households in the post- 2000 period. Thus, although humanitarian aid has helped some poor households to cope, this assistance was neither sustained nor adequate enough to solve the problem. The aid that was given to Palestinian households, as reported by the households is shown in the following table.

TABLE 2. AID RECEIVED AS REPORTED BY PALESTINIAN HOUSEHOLDS IN THE OPT, QII 2006

| Humanitarian aid | OPT | WB | GS |
|---|--------|--------|--------|
| Aid provided by UNRWA | 45.60% | 17.10% | 61.70% |
| PA Ministry of Social Affairs | 14.40% | 11.10% | 61.70% |
| Relatives | 14.20% | 25.70% | 7.70% |
| International organizations | 9.10% | 19.20% | 3.40% |
| Other PA institutions | 5.10% | 10.10% | 2.20% |
| Charitable organizations | 3.50% | 2.50% | 4.00% |
| Friends, neighbours, charitable persons | 2.10% | 2.20% | 2.00% |
| Political parties | 1.60% | 1.40% | 1.70% |
| Zakat committees | 1.10% | 2.10% | 0.60% |
| Arab States | 0.10% | 0.20% | 0.00% |
| Other | 2.40% | 6.50% | 0.20% |

Source: Ibid. UNRWA, 2006.

As indicated in the table above, 5.6% of recipient households reported UNRWA as the main source of humanitarian assistance in QII-2006, above all other resources. This fact is true for 61.7% of the households of Gaza, and for 17.1% of households in the West Bank, and reflects the proportional representation of refugees in the two territories. Behind UNRWA came aid from the PA Ministry of Social Affairs and international organizations, both of which were more effective in the West Bank than Gaza Strip.

In terms of consumption, the report indicates that refugee household consumption remained an average of 5.4% below that of all other households, with similar discrepancies in overall food and non-food categories. When larger refugee households were figured into the calculations, the average difference between refugees and others increased to 7.5%. The gap (2002-2005) suggests that refugees were more susceptible to consumption poverty. While they suffer higher poverty rates, they were able to maintain their household consumption levels due to external assistance.²⁵

²⁵ Ibid., 2006.

II. POPULATION DYNAMICS

A. SIZE, AGE AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION

Population Statistics, demographic traits and household patterns play an important role in highlighting strategic socio-economic indicators in a gender perspective, as they not only provide an overview of the gender gaps in Palestinian society, but also project the kind of problematic that such issues can cause in the future, especially given the deteriorating political and economic conditions.

TABLE 3. SIZE, AGE STRUCTURE AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN WB AND GS END YEAR, 2006

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| West Bank | Size (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | Gender ratio |
| | | 1 257 676 | 1 223 086 | 2 480 762 | 102.8 |
| | Age structure (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | |
| | 0-14 years | 917.437 45.8% | 882 566 45.3% | 1 800.003 43.9% | |
| | 15-64 years | 1 011.812 | 970.453 | 1 982.65 | |
| | 65 years and over | 73.894 | 96.228 | 170.122 3.3% | |
| Distribution (percentage) | Urban | Rural | Refugee camps | Population of camps | |
| | 46.6 | 47.0 | 6.4 | 28.8 | |
| Gaza Strip | Size (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | |
| | | 745 467 | 726 125 | 1 471 592 37.0% | |
| | Age structure (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | |
| | 0-14 years | 364.854 | 351.285 | 716.139 48.8% | |
| | 15-64 years | 358.016 | 351.903 | 709.919 | |
| | 65 years and over | 15.241 | 21.25 | 36.491 2.6% | |
| Distribution (percentage) | Urban | Rural | Refugee camps | Population of camps | |
| | | | | 68.4 | |
| Total WB GS | Size (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | Gender ratio |
| | | 2 003 143 | 1 949 211 | 3 952 354 | 102.7 |
| | Age structure (thousands) | Men | Women | Total | Gender ratio |
| | 0-14 years | 917 437 45.8% | 882.566 45.3% | 1 223 45.7% | 105.2 |
| | 15-64 years | 1 011 812 | 999.329 | 2 011 141 | 103.5 |
| | 65 years and over | 50.244 | 67 352 | 117 596 3% | 80.0 |
| Distribution (percentage) | Urban | Rural | Refugee camps | Population of camps | |
| | 53.1 | 31.0 | 15.9 | 43.8 | |

Source: PCBS, Demographic and Socioeconomic Status of the Palestinian People at the end of 2006.

- The data for the West Bank and total WBGS do not include those parts of Jerusalem that were annexed by Israel in 1967.
- The gender ratio is calculated as the number of men to every 100 women.
- The population of the refugee camps is in thousands and percentages.

As social capital is one of the main resources of the Palestinian society, an overview on the population pyramid is important for planning and projecting future scenarios of development. Population growth seems to be one of the major challenges to the Palestinian Authority and other policy makers. This is due to the fact that the rate of population growth is still relatively high, while structural problems in the national economy have not been resolved.

According to the PCBS report published in December, 2006, the population of the Palestinian Territory was estimated to be about 4 million at the end of 2006, 2.5 million (63.0%) in the West Bank and 1.5 million (37.0%) in Gaza Strip.

Of the overall population, 43.8% are refugees -- an estimated 1.7 million at the end of 2006. Of these, 28.8% live in the West Bank and 68.4% in the Gaza Strip.²⁶ This large proportion of the population -- almost half -- adds a burden on the economy due to the refugees' economic and political situation, and at the same time hinders political stability. Conditions in Palestine cannot be stable as long as almost half the population, especially in the Gaza Strip, are living in miserable conditions, waiting for a strategic political solution and unable to improve their socio-economic condition. According to PCBS demographic data, 53.1% of the population lives in urban areas, 31.0% in rural and 15.9% in refugee camps. Yet the overall population of the camps in the OPT is 43.8% which is almost half of the population.

Another challenge is the proportion of the population that is under 15 years of age. This group reached to 45.7% at the end of 2006, 43.9% in the West Bank and 48.8% in Gaza Strip. At the same time, the percentage of the population above 65 is just 3.0%, 3.3% in the West Bank and 2.6% in Gaza Strip.²⁷ However, both sectors are dependent on their households for survival at a time when political and the economic structures are vulnerable and unable to meet their needs.²⁸

The table below (table 3) is a PCBS projection of population growth in the Occupied Territories based on the Census of 1997.

TABLE 4. POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR 2000-2025 (THOUSANDS)

| Year | West Bank | Gaza Strip | Total WBGS |
|------|-----------|------------|------------|
| 2000 | 2 012 | 1 138 | 3 150 |
| 2005 | 2 514 | 1 472 | 3 986 |
| 2010 | 3 067 | 1 871 | 4 938 |
| 2015 | 3 517 | 2 241 | 5 758 |
| 2020 | 3 962 | 2 618 | 6 580 |
| 2025 | 4 409 | 2 993 | 7 402 |

Source: PCBS, Population in the Palestinian Territory, 1997-2025 (PCBS, September 1999).

This projection is based on the 1997 census, on current fertility and mortality trends, and on a scenario that involves the return of an additional 500,000 Palestinian refugees to WBGS. As the table shows, the population is expected to grow to 5 million by 2010, and 7.5 million by 2025.

B. FERTILITY AND MORTALITY RATES

Assumptions include a decline in the total fertility rate by 50% between 1999 to 2025 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (based on the Demographic Health Surveys), as well as a decline in the infant mortality rate by 50% between 1995- 1999 and 2020 to 2024 (as projected) in both areas (also based on the Demographic Health Surveys). The number of Palestinians living in the Arab states is projected as a constant growth of 2.5%, and the number of Palestinians living outside the region as a constant growth rate of 1.5%. The number of Palestinians living in Israel is projected as a constant annual growth rate of 2.7%.

This projection predicts a drop in the proportion of the young people in WBGS over the next 25 years, with the median age rising gradually. One indication of this rise is the recent report of PCBS which has shown a slight increase in the median age for the OPT between 1997 and 2006 from 16.4 years in 1997, to

²⁶ Ibid. 2006.

²⁷ Ibid. 2006.

²⁸ Ibid. 2006.

16.9 years in 2006. According to the same report, the median age in the OPT is 16.7. Yet there are regional differences between WB and GS, as the median age increased from 17.4 years in 1997 to 17.8 years in 2006 in the West Bank and from 14.8 years in 1997 to 15.5 years in 2006 in GS. This is attributed to the higher fertility rates in Gaza Strip.

Palestinian fertility rates started to decline toward the end of the 20th century. According to data from the Population, Housing and Establishment Census of 1997, the total fertility rate in the OPT was 6.04 births, 5.6 births in the WB and 6.9 births in GS. The total fertility rate in 2003 declined to 4.6 births, 4.1 births in the West Bank and 5.8 births in Gaza Strip, according to Demographic and Health Survey 2004. The average number of children born to a married woman in the OPT in 2004 was 4.5, 4.3 in the West Bank and 4.9 in Gaza Strip.

Birth rates are influenced by numerous factors, such as reproductive and marriage behavior of women, use of family planning methods and programs, the development of health services, and the role of the state in mother and child care, in addition to local social customs and traditions. Education is another significant determinant of fertility in Palestine. For example, the mean number of children born to currently married women has decreased from 7.89 among the illiterate to 6.16 among those with elementary education, to 4.17 among those with secondary education, and to 3.84 among those with tertiary education.²⁹

In Palestine, the number of births to women aged 15-19 has been decreasing significantly. The number of births for a thousand women in the age group 15-19 declined from 114 in 1997 to 77 in 2000. In the OPT the crude birth rate in 2006 is 36.7, compared to 42.7 in 1997. The rate was 33.7 in the West Bank in 2006 compared to 41.2 in 1997, and 41.7 in 2006 in the Gaza Strip compared to 45.4% in 1997, indicating an overall decrease in birth rates in both areas.

However, fertility rates in Palestinian society are organically linked to the political and economic conditions. They reflect the lack of economic security, and they are also tied to political factors: the demographic issue is a political issue. Israel is uncomfortable with the thought of a growing Palestinian population, and sees a Palestinian majority as a threat to its existence. Despite the recent decline, when compared to other countries in the region, Palestinian fertility rates are high, and are among the highest in the world.

(a) *Life expectancy*

Life expectancy figures favor females. According to the statistics presented in table 1, life expectancy at birth in 2003 was 71.2 years for males and 72.7 years for females. The data show that life expectancy has improved for both genders by a bit more than one year in the last five to six years, since the collection of the census data in 1997. Both men and women are fairing well in this respect relative to many Third World countries and even relative to black women in United States whose life expectancy is 68.4 years.³⁰ Nor do the differences between Palestinian males and females follow the patterns in other developed countries, where life expectancy of males is higher than that of females. These figures may be due to the development of health care and health awareness programs which lead to a significant decrease in infant and child mortality rates, and due to the focus of the health care system on reproductive health of women.

According to the PCBS report of 2006, the life expectancy in 2005 is 71.7 years for males and 73.0 years for females. The decline in mortality rate in the OPT led to longer life expectancy. Yet there are regional discrepancies; life expectancy in the West Bank is 71.9 years for males and 73.6 for females, in contrast to 71.4 for males and 72.5 for females in Gaza Strip.³¹

²⁹ Abu Nahleh, L. Kuttab E. Nasser R. March 2006. Palestinian Women's Empowerment: An Assessment, Women Studies Institute, Birzeit University, Palestine. (UNESCO study).

³⁰ Weeks, John. 2005. Population. Sixth Edition. Belmont, U.S.A. Wadsworth Publishing Company.

³¹ PCBS, 2006. Palestinians at the End of Year 2006. Ramallah- Palestine.

TABLE 5. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS

| Socio-demographic indicators | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|------|---------------------------|-------------|------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Indicator | % or number | | Source (most recent) | % or number | | Source | Ratio of females to males |
| life expectancy at birth (years, female/male) | F | M | PCBS 2003 2006 | F | M | PCBS 1997 | 104.4 |
| | 72.2 | 71.2 | | 71.9 | 70.2 | | |
| | 73.0 | 71.7 | | | | | |
| Sex ratio (male/100 female) | 102.7 | | PCBS 2005 2006 | 101.9 | | PCBS 1997 | |
| | 102.8 | | | | | | |
| Average age at first marriage (female/male) | F | M | PCBS 2003 | F | M | PCBS 1997 | |
| | 19 | 24 | | 18 | 23 | | |
| Adolescent marriage (% of female in age group 15 – 19 ever married) | 48% | | Health Survey 2000 | 49.7% | | PCBS 1997 | |
| Number of births to 1000 women (age 15-19) | 77 | | Health Survey 2000 | 114 | | PCBS 1994 | |
| Total fertility rate (births per woman) | 4.6 | | PCBS 2003 PCBS 2006 | 6.04 | | PCBS 1997 | |
| % of single – never married women | 35% | | PCBS 2000 | | | | |
| % of widowed women | 1.4% | | PCBS 2000 | | | | |
| % of women divorcees | 1.4% | | PCBS 2000 | | | | |

(b) *Infant and child mortality*

Infant mortality rates (per 1000 live births) are 25.6 and 25.3 for females and males respectively. Mortality rates for children fewer than five are 21.6 for females and 26.6 for males (see table 2). These figures contradict Western scholars' contentions and expectations which posit that in Middle Eastern patriarchal societies, female infants and children are marginalized in terms of nutritional and health care relative to males, and that their infant and child mortality rates can be expected to be higher than those of males.

(c) *Maternal mortality*

A positive indicator of women's access to health care services, and consequently their empowerment in the health sphere, is the fact that the maternal death rate, which was the medium rate in 1997 was 70-80 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, improved considerably to a low of 12.7 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2003.

(d) *Prevalence of contraception*

Use of contraceptives is also far more extensive than is logically expected in a society that has one of the highest fertility rates in the world. In 2004, a health survey indicated that 50.6% of married women were using contraceptives, in contrast to the 45.2% indicated by the 1997 census data. In response to concerns regarding the timing of contraceptive use in relation to the number of children a woman has, the data shows that 72.5% of women younger than 30 years old begin contraceptive use after either their first or second child is born. Of these, 42.4% use contraception after the first child, and 30.1% use contraception after the second child. These figures contrast to the 47.9% of women in the older age category 30-49 who use contraceptives only after the birth of a fourth child.³²

³² PCBS. 2004. Demographic and Health Survey-Final Report. Ramallah-Palestine.

C. PALESTINIAN HOUSEHOLDS

(a) *HIV/AIDS*

Data show that the incidence of HIV/AIDS among the Palestinian population as a whole is low (1.8 cases for each 100,000 people). Figures are not broken down by gender. This number, however, may not reflect the actual situation. There are serious social stigmas associated with the disease, and consequently many cases may not be reported as diagnosed. This is speculation on the part of the researchers; the matter requires empirical evidence.

(b) *Sex ratio*

There was a slight change in the sex ratio between 1997 and 2005 as the table shows 102.7 males for every 100 females in 2005. The estimated number of males in the OPT at the end of 2006 is about 2 million compared with 1.95 million females; the sex ratio is 102.8 males to 100 females. In the West Bank, males total 1.3 million compared to 1.2 million females; the sex ratio there is also 102.8:100. In the Gaza Strip, males total 745 thousand compared with 726 thousand females, and the sex ratio is 102.7 males per 100 females.

(c) *Marriage and Divorce*

Average age at first marriage: Early marriage for girls is widespread among Palestinian women. In year 2000, 48% of females who got married were between the ages of 15 and 19.³³ More recent statistics show that the average age at first marriage for women is still low, 19 years compared to 24 years for men. It is well known that early marriage can lessen women's chances of education and labor force participation, in addition to posing various health risks. Individual-level multivariate data analysis would assess more accurately the negative influence of early marriage on women's education, labor force participation, fertility and health.

Education naturally reduces the age of first marriage for both females and males. The median age at first marriage among females in the age group 20-24 years increased from 1997-2003 from 17 for the illiterate and those with up to the 9th grade schooling to 21 for those with 13th and up years of schooling grade schooling or higher. The effect of education is even more pronounced among women between the ages of 30 and 65+. For these women, the median age at first marriage increases from 16-19 to 23-25 years.³⁴

(d) *Marriage rates*

Statistics gathered for the year 2003 show that 35% of Palestinian women aged (15-49) years had never married. The percentage of unmarried women decreases with age: 39.9% for women aged 20-24, and 12.8% for women 30-34. This means that about 87% of women in the age group 30-34 do get married. In general, longitudinal studies showed that between 1998 and 2004 there was a gradual rise in the number of marriages during the period 1998-2001. The number further increased in 2005.

The number of marriages registered in the OPT in 2005 as occurring in that year was 28,876 – an increase of 4.5% compared to 2004. In 2005, the number of registered new marriages totaled 16,706 in the West Bank (57.9%), an increase of 1,155 compared with the year before. In contrast, in the Gaza Strip, the number of registered new marriages totaled 12,170 in 2005 (42.1%) recording an increase of 87 marriages compared with 2004. The crude marriage rate in the OPT in 2004 was 7.7 marriages per 1000 population, 7.0 in the West Bank and 8.8 in Gaza Strip.³⁵

³³ Ibid. 2004.

³⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997. The Census. Ramallah-Palestine.

³⁵ Ibid. 2006.

(e) *Divorce rates*

Divorce rates are surprisingly low, given the straightforwardness of the divorce process in the Islamic faith. Only 1.4% of women in the year 2000 were divorcees.

About 4,211 divorces were registered in the OPT in 2005, compared to 3,449 in 1997. In the West Bank 2,456 divorces were registered in 2005, compared to 2,143 in 1997, while the crude divorce rate totaled 1.1 divorces per 1000. It is lower in the West Bank than in Gaza Strip at 1.0 and 1.3 respectively. It decreased from 1.2 in 1997 to 1.0 in 2005 in the Gaza Strip. 1,745 divorces were registered in 2005, compared to 1,306 in 1997. The crude divorce rate stayed the same in 2005 as it was in 1997.

One might expect polygamy to have negative consequences on the status and empowerment of Palestinian women. Polygamy, however, is not a widespread phenomenon in Palestine. Men with two or more wives constituted 3.6% of the population in 1997 in the West Bank and in Gaza (PCBS 1997). Multiple – but not simultaneous marriages are a rare practice among younger men, although the percentage increases to about 8%-11% among men aged 70-79.

III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

A. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Palestinian women have been an integral part of the national liberation struggle since time of the British mandate. As women participated in the liberation movement, a natural outgrowth of the broader political concerns was increasing resistance to gender discrimination within their own society, and they pushed for more political involvement and representation.³⁶ Women's involvement in the struggle has involved both formal and informal involvement through national representative bodies like the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the different Palestinian political parties and civil society organizations.

Women's involvement in the struggle has legitimized their role in the public sphere and to some extent changed the cultural stereotypes regarding their traditional roles. Yet women confront a paradox in the post-Oslo period due to the rise of what has been termed Palestinian "authoritarian populism".³⁷ This consists in the PA's having selected certain groups to participate in the political process, while at the same time clamping down on efforts toward a democratic mobilization of civil society, including the Palestinian women's movement. In the process, the women's movement has lost its visibility and its voice. This negative trend, combined with the difficulties involved in the move from an informal to a formal political life that mark the transition to statehood, contributed to a more general political crisis which in turn led to a further decline in mass political activity. Palestinian women are aware that the current period is a critical one which will determine whether or not Palestinian women will take their place on the political map.

By means of continuous work in NGO organizations, many women have managed to maintain their positions of importance and, to some extent at least, their effectiveness in bringing women's issues to the fore. At the same time, the professionalization of women's activism in this post-Oslo transitional period has caused the erosion of the mass-based organizations. It has created an elite leadership which is not responsible to specific indigenous constituencies, but rather seeks legitimacy for its symbolic role as a representative of the Palestinian cause.³⁸ In receiving funds from foreign bilateral and multilateral agencies, leaders of the women's NGOs have become more oriented to matters relating to public policy and advocacy and have provided expert input into official preparatory documents.³⁹ At the same time, however, they have to some degree modified their aims in the service of a foreign agenda.

The current period, therefore, represents a challenge to all democratic forces and social movements, including the women's movement. The leaders of Palestinian women's civil society organizations must turn back to their constituency and become more relevant to the needs and aspirations of their people. They must redefine their priorities and work through more decentralized, democratic structures that can integrate input from women at the grassroots. In this way, they can work to shape public opinion concerning the advantages of a future democratic state characterized by political pluralism and respect for individual liberties. They must prioritize an outreach policy similar to the one which existed in the eighties, when Palestinian women became the skeleton of the popular *Intifada*. If they are unable to do this, then the women's movement will be laying the conditions for a deeper, perhaps even irreversible, setback.

One of the major lessons that can be learned from the last elections and from the Hamas victory is any movement must serve the people and do their utmost to meet their needs, if it is to obtain people's confidence and establish their movement's legitimacy and credibility. Mobilizing the people in a discourse of resistance, while simultaneously serving them, was Hamas' strategy for enhancing its legitimacy and popular support. It

³⁶ Fleischmann, 1996. *The Nation and its New Women: Feminism, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948*. Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Georgetown University Washington D.C.

³⁷ Hammami, R. Johnson. 1999. *Equality with Difference: Gender and Citizenship in Transitional Palestine*, *Social Politics*. Fall 1999.

³⁸ Johnson, P. Kuttab, E. 2001. *Where Have All the Women and Men Gone? Reflections on Gender and the Second Palestinian Intifada*. *Feminist Review* No. 69, Winter 2001, pp. 21-43.

³⁹ Kuttab, E. 2006. "New Challenges for the Palestinian Women's Movement". In *Palestine This Week*, No. 95, March 2006.

is time for other movements to regain authority and dignity through democratic participation and the exercise of mutual respect. Although the Palestinian people may at times and in some ways look powerless, they are nevertheless able to evaluate what is before them and to recognize who is only paying lip service to their cause. They are quite able to distinguish movements and organizations which are really committed to their interests from those which are only using them to serve their own, far narrower interests.⁴⁰

Women's informal political participation in the various nationalist and secular democratic parties has been significant, at least in terms of visibility and effectiveness, if not in terms of numbers. Women's involvement in party executive committees ranges from 5% in Fateh to 19% in Fida. In party councils, it ranges from 20% in PFLP to 33% in Fateh. Clearly, women's representation in the different parties is not comparable to men's, due to family constraints and prevailing gender roles.

In the formal political body of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) women's representation participation increased from 2% in 1964 to 9% (25 women) in 1980 and to 10% (32 women) in 1992, while it dropped to 7.5% in 1996. Women representation in the executive committee stayed minimal.

Due to their involvement in the political struggle, women have been imprisoned in Israeli jails since the beginning of the Israeli occupation in 1967. About 3000 women prisoners incarcerated in Israeli prisons as early as 1979.⁴¹ This is a laudable indicator of women's political participation, albeit this participation relates to the national struggle, which naturally draws women more than any other political sphere.

According to PCBS (2006) statistical data on the second *Intifada*, 278 women have lost their life by the Israeli forces since the beginning of the *Intifada* which reflect 5.9% of all martyrs. As has been mentioned before, they were either killed incidentally, or when they were traveling from work or school, or as innocent bystanders caught in cross fire.

It has been realized that women's lives was affected drastically due to the political situation especially those who lost their breadwinners or children as they have been devastated psychologically and financially.

According to the same source, 117 women were still arrested since November 2000 until November 2006. Although they constitute a small percentage of the overall number of detainees, yet their conditions and their status is very difficult especially after being released due to the traditional obstacles that they face.

In the wake of the Oslo Accords, women's formal political representation and participation declined significantly. Moreover, their political participation and representation did not match their historical role in safeguarding the struggle and empowering families to cope and to remain steadfast. (This has also been the case in the experiences of women in other Arab countries.) For the legislative parliament in 1996, 27 women were nominated out of about 646 men nominees (the figures vary from one source to another.⁴² Of the total 88 elected members, only five (5.6%) were women. (One of these was later appointed by Arafat to a ministerial position). In the executive branch there are only two women among 30 ministers, a 6% representation.

In the PLC elections of 2006, 41.93% of the voters were females and 58.7% males. Only 15 women were nominated as candidates in the electoral districts, and no women were elected. In the electoral lists, 70 candidates were nominated and only 17 women won seats. The quota system which was adopted after being introduced and pushed by the women's movement was one of the main tools that helped the women win these seats.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 2006

⁴¹ Nazzal, 2006.

⁴² Said (1999) reports that the number of women nominees is 27 while Nazzal (2004) and the Women's Affairs Technical Committee report it at 25 women. The number of men's nominees is also contested: 646 by the former source and 552 by the WATC report. As for the number of women elected the number also varies in the different sources: Giacaman and Johnson (2001) report "four female candidates were elected to an 88-member Council", whereas all the other above mentioned sources report 5 women that were elected.

TABLE 6. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

| Indicator | % or number | Source (most recent) | % or number | Source |
|--|--|----------------------|-------------|--------|
| Seats in parliament in Single or Lower chamber (% female) | 5 out of 88 (5.6%) | WATC | | |
| Seats in government at ministerial level (% female) | 2 from 30 (6%) | WATC | | |
| Seats in government at sub ministerial level (% female) | 26 general directors in ministries out of 202 (13%) | Nazzal (2004) | | |
| Female legislators, senior officials and managers (as % total) | | | | |
| Number of women judges, lawyers | 8 judges | Nazzal (2004) | | |
| Leadership positions in the political parties (% female) | Party Executive Committees Fateh: 5% PFLP: 10% DFLP: 18% Fida: 19% Party Central Councils: Fateh: 33% PFLP: 20% DFLP: 26% Fida: 30% | Nazzal (2004) | | |

Source: Abu Nahleh, et al. 2006.

The role of the PNA Ministry of Women's Affairs

The Ministry of Women's Affairs was established in 2003. It extended the role of the Gender Planning Unit of the Ministry of Planning which was established in 1996.

Since its inception, a main objective of the Gender Planning Unit was to establish other gender units in the Palestinian Authority ministries and in the Palestinian Legislative Council in order to mainstream gender in the PA institutions. Placing the first gender unit in the Ministry of Planning had a symbolic meaning: it indicated an understanding that women's issues are of strategic importance and a recognition that they must be planned for within the PA decision-making process. Beyond this objective, the Gender Planning Unit had aimed to develop the status of women and to empower them to participate at all levels of the decision-making process. It aimed to ensure that all regulations and decisions and all programs implemented at the national level would take into consideration the concerns of both women and men and ensure the full participation of women in the state-building process. The perspective which informed the Unit followed the Gender and Development paradigm (GAD), a conceptual framework which stresses the role of the state in mainstreaming gender and challenging the patriarchal structure of society.

However, existing political conditions have made it impossible for the Unit to fulfill the task it undertook. Since the elections of 2006 and the victory of Hamas, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has not been publicly active. The new government says that it is in the process of evaluating the strategy and programs of the Ministry, in order to develop a new program that will be more responsive to poor women. Despite this, the Ministry is still continuing and hoping to finalize the projects begun under the Fateh government.

B. LABOR AND ECONOMY

The Palestinian economy has been undergoing deep deterioration during the second *Intifada*, as it is completely dependent on the Israeli labor market. Being cut out of the labor market comes of course in addition to the repressive Israeli measures which have increased workers' problems throughout the Occupied Territories.

The Palestinian economy was affected by two main factors during the past years: the continued deterioration of the social and economic situation due to the Israeli measures in the Palestinian territory erupted at the outbreak of the second *Intifada*, and the changes in the policy of the donor community that took place after the legislative elections of January 25th 2006, and forming of the new government.

In general according to the 2005 PCBS survey, 54.0% of the population is of working age. Of these, 40.7% are in the labor force, 76.5% are employed, 23.5% are unemployed, 6.6% are underemployed, and 69.9% are fully employed. 46.0% of the population are outside the working age, 59.3% of are outside the labor force, 49.3% are housewives, 33.5% are students, 11.9% are old and ill, and 5.3%, for other reasons, are neither working nor looking for work.

Women's share in the labor force is very low, despite the slight increase in female participation which occurred between 2000 and 2004: women were 12.7% of the labor force in 2000, and 13.5% in 2004. However, women's participation in the labor force decreased from 13.5% in 2004 to 13.4% in 2005 and 12.7% in first quarter of 2006 (a decrease of 28,000 women). In short, most women are outside the labor force, which means that they are highly dependent on men who are out of work themselves.

Palestinian women's low level of formal labor activity is primarily due to structural limitations of the economy rather than to ideological or cultural constraints. Palestinian labor markets are highly gender-segregated, offering women access to a very limited number of sectors. Moreover, these few sectors are in non-growth areas of the economy and are unable to absorb new female labor market entrants. The result is a persistently high rate of female unemployment.⁴³ The PCBS labor force survey in 2005 shows that women workers are concentrated mainly in the service sector -- in health care, education, general administration (where 50.3% of the employed women are concentrated). About a third of Palestinian women 32.5% work in the agriculture sector, 8.3% in commerce, 0.6% in transportation, 0.3% in construction, and 8.1% in manufacturing.

(a) *Employment by sector*

The results of the PCBS labor force survey of 2005 indicate that the labor force participation rate increased in 2005 reaching 40.7% compared to 40.4% in 2004. Of males, 67.6% participated in 2005, compared to 66.9% in 2004. The participation of females, on the other hand, decreased slightly during the same period from 14.5% in 2004 to 13.4% in 2005.

(b) *Unemployment*

The unemployment rate in the OPT decreased from 26.8% in 2004 to 23.5% in 2005. The male unemployment rate decreased from 28.1% in 2004 to 23.7% in 2005, while it increased for females from 20.1% in 2004 to 22.3% in 2005. Unemployment is concentrated among the youth aged 15-24 years at 36.4% for males compared with 46.1% for females.

In the same period, the unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip reached 30% in 2005; 29.6% for males and 35.2% for females, while among the youth (ages 15-24) unemployment reached 45.8%, 42.2% for males and 71.2% for females. These statistics help to explain the rage and frustration that young people are experiencing, which spills over from the economic crisis into the political scene. Results indicate also that

⁴³ Jad, Islah, *Female-Headed Households: the global debate and the Palestinian context*, (Ramallah: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute MAS, Dec 1999), p. 51.

0.7% of the unemployed males and 0.5% of unemployed females had not completed one year of schooling. Conversely, about 76.6% of unemployed females and 15.2% of unemployed males have completed 13 or more years of schooling. This means that education is positively related to employment, as the higher the level of education, the better the chances of employment for both females and males. This above situation led to a high increase in poverty rates for a significant number of households headed by males (from 19.8% according to the poverty survey in 1998 to 36.2% in 2003) and females (from 22.6% to 29.8% in the same years 2004-2005).

As for the distribution of workers among the different economic sectors, findings were that 20.8% of males (compared with 9.3% females) are working in service, including in shops and markets. Some 18.6% of males and 45% of females work as professionals and technicians. The percentage of Palestinians working in the public sector went from 22.5% in 2004 to 23.0% in 2005.

TABLE 7. ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

| Indicator | % or number | Source (most recent) | % or number | Source | Ratio of females to males Q2/04 |
|---|--|---------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Labour force participation rate (female/male) | F M 13.5 66.9 13.5 67.6 | PCBS 2004 PCBS 2005 | F M 12.7 70.1 | 2000 PCBS | 22.9 |
| Unemployment rate (adult 15+, % female/male) | F M 20.1 28.1 22.3 23.7 | PCBS 2004 PCBS 2005 | F M 12.3 14.4 | PCBS 2000 | 12.3 |
| Estimated earned income (figures show the median daily wage) | F M 60 65.4 | In West Bank PCBS 2004 | F M 57.7 50.8 | In Gaza PCBS 2004 | |
| | According to MAS Social Monitor Issue No. 8, 2005 (p.44), there is a gap between the two sexes in terms of wages, as explained in the Economic Participation section narrative | | | | |
| Female participation in services and other branches (as % of total) | F M 50.1 31.5 | PCBS 2004 | F M 45.9 27 | PCBS 2000 | |
| Distribution of female workers according to economic activity in 2003 | 50.1% in health care, services, education, general admin | | 33.6% in agriculture | 8.1% in trade, hotels, restaurants | 7.6% in industry |
| Length of paid maternity leave | It varies between 70 and 90 days | | | | |
| Females receiving social assistance (%) | 52.2% | Ministry of social Affairs 1999 | | | |
| Female heads of households (%) | 9% | PCBS 2004 | 9.5% | PCBS 1997 | |
| Poverty rates by sex of households (female/male) | F M 29.8 36.2 | Poverty Survey 2003 | F M 25.6 19.8 | Poverty Survey 1998 | |

Source: Abu Nahleh et. al. 2006.

(c) *Male/female wage gap*

Results of the PCBS 2005 labor force survey showed a clear discrepancy between wages of male and female employees. The median daily wage in 2005 for male employees in the West Bank was 65.4 NIS, but 60.0 NIS for females. However, in Gaza it was 55.0 NIS for males and 65.4 NIS for females, indicating that females were receiving a higher median wage than males. This figure reflects the fact that women who are

educated and work in the public sector or civil society organizations in the Gaza Strip are earning more than male workers, who are mostly unskilled and who work seasonally due to unemployment and closure of the Israeli labor market.

The Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) indicated in its May, 2005, issue of the Social Monitor that the wage gap between the two sexes has narrowed during the *Intifada*, with women's wages rising, and men's wages declining. This is partly due to the fact that so many men lost their jobs in the relatively high-paying Israeli labor market. It is also due to the fact that women are mainly concentrated in the service sector in the government and UNRWA institutions, which has meant that many women have kept their jobs. Women receive relatively higher pay in the service sector (64.7 NIS is the average daily wage), as well as the lowest wage in the industry sector (43.2 NIS). Half of women receive daily wages equivalent to 53.8 NIS or lower, while half of men workers receive wages equivalent to or less than 61.5 NIS.⁴⁴

C. POVERTY

Three years of *Intifada* and closures have plunged the Palestinian economy into deep crisis, causing dramatic declines in living standards. In 1998, the Palestinian National Commission for Poverty Alleviation defined two poverty lines -- official poverty and deep poverty -- on the basis of actual average consumption and expenditures of Palestinian households.⁴⁵

The fiscal crisis of the PA resulted in severe income losses for about one-fourth of the work force and their dependents-about 25% of the OPT population. The loss of income has most severely impacted the Gaza Strip, where almost 41% of employment was in the public sector, compared to 18.5% in the West Bank, with measurable effects on the number of persons already living in poverty.⁴⁶

The high unemployment rates and the political and economic crisis have led to a high increase in poverty rates among a significant number of households for both males (from 19.8% according to the poverty survey in 1998 to 36.2% in 2003) and females (from 22.6% to 29.8% in the same years).

Many households were able to survive only due to humanitarian assistance. Of recipient households, 45.6% reported UNRWA as the main source of humanitarian assistance above all other sources. In Gaza, 61.7% of recipient households cited UNRWA as the main source compared to 17% of West Bank recipients. PCBS estimated in 2004 that the effects of humanitarian assistance reduced the total deep consumption poor count by 13.5%. In 2005, assistance was responsible for reducing the number of deep poor by 20.6%. Despite increased levels of assistance in 2005, the number of poor persons in the OPT increased by an estimated 82,000.⁴⁷ The current phase of the economic crisis has hit refugees harder than the population at large with respect to employment and poverty.

Gender gaps in poverty

Due to the gender gap which exists in Palestinian society on all levels, inequality and poverty are dialectically connected. However within the current crisis, as unemployment and poverty have increased largely as compared to pre-*Intifada* stage, the gender gap has widened, especially for women.

According to PCBS, 9% of Palestinian households are headed by females, and despite the fact that this group is one of the highest recipients of public assistance (52.2% of female's headed households receive aid) (Ministry of social affairs statistics 1999), the poverty of the poor households maintained by women are worse than those maintained by men. About 73% of female-headed households suffer from deep poverty, unable to meet the minimum requirements for food, clothing and housing compared to about 63% of the male-headed households.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), Social Monitor, Issue No. 8, (Ramallah: MAS, May 2005).

⁴⁵ Palestinian National Authority, National Commission for Poverty Alleviation Palestine Poverty Report, 1998.

⁴⁶ UNRWA, 2006.

⁴⁷ UNRWA, 2006.

⁴⁸ Poverty report 1998, p. 40.

D. EDUCATION

Education is one of the main tools for social mobility and integration in the labor market as different statistical data has proved that the higher the education level, the better the opportunities for employment and status. In the context of gender equality and gender integration in the labor market, education becomes an important tool for women to attain a better status and bridge the structural gap in the labor market, although in this current economic crisis and high unemployment rate, the gender component becomes a lesser issue.

The statistical data shows that girls are catching up or even doing better than boys in terms in various measures of education in regard to enrollment rates in secondary and tertiary education, and they are performing better academically than boys. Literacy rates are improving significantly for women. Among adolescents 15 -19 years of age, the literacy rates for girls and boys are 97.5% and 96.6%, respectively, whereas they are 87.4% and 96.3% for adult females and adult males, respectively. According to the PCBS Annual Report of 2005, literacy rates for women increased from 83.9% in 2000 to 88.9% in 2005.

Women are also gaining ground in higher education: the tertiary enrollment rate of females in relation to males has increased from 77% in 1996 to 90% in 2001. The percentage of women attaining bachelor's degrees increased from 3.6% in 2000 to 5.8% in 2005 (increased 61%), while it increased for males from 7.6% to 9.2% in the same period (increased 21.1%). Among adolescents and young adults (ages 18-24), enrollment in higher education was the same for both sexes in 1996; and in 2003, the enrollment rate of females (27.1%) exceeded that of males (25%).⁴⁹

The statistically larger increase in women's enrollment rates may reflect a change in the social awareness of the value of education for women. In addition, the difficult economic conditions, and the resulting financial hardships suffered by a significant number of families forced many male high school graduates to abandon their education to join the workforce. In addition to this, thousands of young men have been imprisoned in Israeli jails since the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza in 2000. As university instructors or professors, however, women are not doing so well: only about 13% of university teachers/professors are females.

Gender gaps in education

There is a drop in the percentage of illiterate females compared with 2000 by 28.7%; the percentage of illiterate women is 9.4%. Yet there is a big gap in the educational level between males and females; the percentage of illiterates among females is three times that of males; the percentage of males who have diplomas and higher is higher than that of males, but the variations in the levels of education among males and females are smaller among the young age groups.

Although the Ministry of education has put an effort in promoting policies to encourage women to be integrated in vocational education in non-traditional technical and vocational training and education, the gap is still large especially that the labor market has not been responsive to these policies due to the economic crisis.

According to PCBS statistical data of 2006, the estimate percentage of population under 15 years of age is 45.7% which reflect the strategic importance of the education sector in the Palestinian territories. In a recent survey conducted by PCBS between 14th of December 2005 and 19th of January 2006 on Graduates in higher education and vocational training education, the overall number of students that are above 15 years of age are 473,000; 22.8% of the overall population that is 15 and above. While the graduates number over 15 at the end of 2005 was 296,000, reflecting 14.5% from the overall population. The survey has produced important findings that had strategic impact on the labor market. It showed that the highest percentage of persons working in the labor force are the graduates that are above 15 and have finished tertiary education, while the highest unemployment rate (34.7%) was of those above 15 and who graduated from vocational schools. The survey has also shown that 50.8% of the overall number of graduates from 1987-2005 who

⁴⁹ World Bank. 2005.

sought jobs immediately -- 51.2% of males, and 50.4% of females. 35.7% of males found jobs immediately and 26.7% of the females. Although there is a gap between both percentages, yet the gap is not as big, and the educational level as one of the main variables for work is being projected here.

Regarding student scholarships and the opportunity to enroll in higher education percentage of those who were granted scholarships becomes one of the indicators of attaining better education. It was found that 24.6% of overall students have been granted higher education scholarships. 24.8% of females and 24.5% of males were granted scholarships which is not a big discrepancy. The proportion of females that graduated from 1987-2005 and who were granted scholarships were 24.8% and 24.5% for the males.

TABLE 8. EDUCATION

| Literacy and educational attainment | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-----------|------------------------|-------------|-----------|
| Indicator | % or number | | Source (most recent) | % or number | Source |
| Youth literacy rates (% ages 15-19, female & male) | F 97.5 | M 96.6 | PCBS 2002 | | |
| Adult literacy rates (% female & male) | F 87.4 | M 96.3 | PCBS 2002 | F 79.7 | M 92.2 |
| | | | PCBS 2005 | | |
| School life expectancy (expected number of years of formal schooling, female & male) | F 8.4 | M 9.3 | PCBS 2003 | F 7.6 | M 9.1 |
| Net secondary school enrollment (% female & male) | F 75.7 | M 67.6 | PCBS 2004/2005 | F 61.5 | M 53.7 |
| % of females to male enrollment in secondary education | 108.8 | | PCBS 2003 | 86.4 | |
| Percent females to males in higher education 13+ years of schooling | 89.9% | | PCBS 2001 | | |
| | 3.6% | | PCBS 2002 | | |
| | 5.8% | | PCBS 2005 | | |
| Enrollment rates of males and females in the age group 18-24 in tertiary education (percentage) | F 27.1 | M 25.0 | World Bank Report 2005 | F 21.5 | M 21.6 |
| Number of Teachers/professors at Universities (female/male) | F 519 | M 3169 | PCBS 2003/2004 | F 240 | M 1743 |
| Percent of female faculty in Palestinian universities and colleges | 12.3% | | ICPD 2004 | | |

Source: Abu Nahleh, L. Kuttab, E. Nasser. R. 2006.

E. HEALTH

The health services in the OPT can be divided in two types: primary healthcare including comprehensive and continuous health services, which also includes diagnosis, primary care, health supervision, preventative health service management and chronic diseases, and the second type is secondary healthcare services including hospitals, which provide diagnostic and cure services. There are four parties

that provide health services in the OPT, Ministry of Health (MoH) which run a number of clinics and hospitals that provide health services to Palestinian people before the PNA took control over the affairs of the Palestinian territory. In 1994, the ministry was handed a worn-out health sector with infrastructure that was neglected for three decades. The 2004 data indicated that MoH runs 35% of the hospitals and 31% of the total hospital beds in OPT. Moreover, the MoH supervises 56% of the primary healthcare clinics that deliver services in the OPT. The second provider is UNRWA, which focuses on primary, preventative and comprehensive healthcare. It provides free-of charge healthcare for refugees in refugee camps and it runs 7% of the primary healthcare clinics in WBGs. They also provide secondary care in the West Bank only. The third provider is the Non governmental organizations (NGOs) which were one of the main providers before the PA arrived in 1993. Their role was very prominent in the first *Intifada*. They have the highest number of specialized physicians and they supervise 35% of the hospitals, and 30% of the hospital beds, as well as 36% of the primary care clinics in the OPT. The fourth is the private sector which has become an important sector in curative and diagnostic services.

TABLE 9. HEALTH INDICATORS

| Bodily integrity and health | | | | | |
|---|---|-----------|-------------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Indicator | % or number | | Source (most recent) | % or number | Source |
| Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) | 12.7, (21.3 in Gaza and 6.7 in the WB) | | Ministry of Health 2004 | 70-80 | PCBS 1997 |
| Child mortality rate (age 0-5, female/male per 1000 live births) | F 21.6 | M 26.6 | PCBS 2003 | F 21.4 | M 26.9 PCBS 1997 |
| Contraceptive prevalence (% of females 15-49) | 50.6% | | PCBS 2004 | 45.2% | PCBS 1996 |
| Female genital mutilation prevalence (%) | Not practiced in Palestine | | | | |
| People with HIV/AIDS (% female among adults) | The cumulative prevalence rate per 100,000 of AIDS/HIV (AIDS 1.29 & HIV 0.46) is 1.75 for both genders. Female rate is not identified separately. | | | | |
| Psychological abuse against women* | 52% | | 1st survey by Bisan 1995 | 44% | 2nd survey 1999 |
| Sexual abuse of women (%) | 27% | | 1st survey by Bisan 1999 | 30% | 2nd survey |
| | 33% | | same | 32% | |
| Physical abuse against women by an intimate partner (% of adult women who have been abused by an intimate partner, during 2005) | During 2005 Sexual abuse: 10.9 % Physical abuse 23.3% Psychological abuse 61.7% | | PCBS Domestic Violence Survey, 2006 | Before 2005 Sexual abuse: 15.5% Physical abuse: 33.9% Psychological abuse: 66.1 | PCBS 2006 |

Source: Abu Nahleh, L., and E. Kuttab, and R. Nasser, 2006.

Regarding Physical Abuse of Women, some of the above data was taken from the results of 2 surveys conducted by Bisan Centre for Research and Development: the first among 2410 wives and the second among 1334 wives in the West Bank and Gaza in 1999.

PCBS Domestic Violence Survey conducted in 2006.

(a) *Abuse of women*

Several studies on wife abuse and battering in the Palestinian society have been conducted by different women's organizations, as well as by NGOs, and governmental bodies. The studies have been undertaken in spite of the sensitivity of the problem, with both abused and abuser preferring to conceal wife abuse and battering behind the closed doors of the family home. The Bisan Centre for Research and Development conducted two national surveys: the first survey involving 2, 410 wives and the second survey 1, 334 wives. The same sampling procedure, i.e. systematic random cluster sampling, was used in both cases. Both surveys revealed the existence of both psychological and physical wife abuse in Palestinian society.

With regard to psychological abuse, 52% of the participants in the first survey and 44% of those in the second survey indicated that their husbands had insulted them, cursed them, used abusive language against them, or called them names at least once during the 12 months prior to the study.

In terms of physical violence, 33% and 32% of the participants in the first and second surveys, respectively, indicated that their husbands had slapped them at least once during the same period. Only a small percentage of the respondents said that the physical abuse had not included sexual abuse: 27% and 30% of the participants in the first and second surveys, respectively, indicated that their husbands had had sex with them against their will at least once during the same period.⁵⁰

Findings of a PCBS survey on domestic violence in 2006 showed that the percentage of women who had been or were married at the time and who suffered from male violence at least once during 2005 was as follows:

TABLE 10. PERCENTAGES OF WOMEN WHO HAVE SUFFERED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

| | During 2005 (%) | Before 2005 (%) |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Sexual abuse ⁵¹ | 10.9% | 15.5% |
| Physical abuse | 23.3 | 33.9 |
| Psychological abuse | 61.7 | 66.1 |

Source: PCBS, 2006. Domestic Violence Survey.

The findings also showed that sexual abuse is highest in the urban locality, 11.2%, while lower (10.9%) in rural areas and (9.8%) in camps. Psychological abuse was reported at 62.8% in urban areas, 64.9% in rural areas, and 52.3% in refugee camps. Although the refugee camps and rural areas experience more grave socio-economic conditions, yet the exposure of women in urban areas to abuse seems to be higher relatively due to the fact that the urban family is mostly nuclear and has less contact with the extended family, which can reduce marital violence. Yet as we see, the psychological abuse of women is very high. We attribute this in large part to the oppressive conditions that Palestinian families experience within the current political and economic reality.

Another interesting finding showed the negative correlation of violence to educational attainment and labor force participation. The PCBS survey indicated that women with elementary education are more likely to be subjected to violence than women who finished secondary or higher education. That is, 12% of women of elementary education are subjected to sexual violence, while only 8.5% of women who are educated secondary education and above. In terms of physical violence, 25.8% of women with elementary education are subjected to physical violence, compared to 19% with secondary and higher education. As for psychological violence, 62.5% of women with only an elementary education are subjected to psychological violence, compared to 58.4 for women with secondary education and above.

⁵⁰ Haj-Yehia, Muhammad, "The Incidence of Wife-Abuse and Battering and its Socio-demographic Correlates as Revealed by Two National Surveys in the Palestinian Society", (Ramallah: Bisan Centre for Research and Development, June 1999).

⁵¹ Sexual abuse has included within its definition the refusal of husband to use contraceptives in a sexual relation which can be more accurately interpreted as reproductive right than sexual abuse.

Interestingly, the occurrence of psychological violence is higher in large families (with five or more members) than in smaller families. The occurrence in large families is 64.2% of which is very high.

The relationship of domestic violence in relation to women's participation in the labor force:

TABLE 11. CORRELATION BETWEEN SEXUAL ABUSE AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE

| | Sexual violence | Physical violence | Psychological violence |
|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Inside labor force | 7.2% | 16.8% | 62.8% |
| Outside labor force | 11.2 | 23.9 | 61.5 |

There is no accurate statistical picture of incidents of domestic violence of the most lethal kinds, such as crimes of "honor." The Ministry of Women Affairs compiled a list in 2004 indicating 20 cases of honor killings. The violence practiced against silenced women who cannot talk about it led to severe psychological problems and resulted in 50 cases of suicide among women in 2004. A more positive development has been the marked increase in activism on the part of women's organizations and NGOs to combat violence against women. Networks have been established and campaigns opposing violence against women have been undertaken. Active citizenship is perhaps the best approach to breaking the culture of silence that surrounds this issue.

(b) *Health law*

The legal framework for Health law has been reviewed and the findings showed that it does not take into consideration any of the international laws, agreements or covenants of any sort. It is far from addressing the health rights of citizens generally, and those of women particularly, from a holistic perspective. The only commitment the laws reflect is their complying with the international agreement for women's health which focuses on providing maternal health care during pregnancy and after delivery. It also considers gender equality in receiving information and care relevant to family planning.

Although the Criminal Law addresses issues of rape, abortion, and adultery, the health codes do not address the consequences of such events on the women's physical, mental and emotional health, nor do they address the protection of related health rights from violations such as physical, sexual, domestic and public violence against women. They also lack codes that address women's (and men's) mental and psychological health.

F. LEGAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS WITH REGARD TO WOMEN

The Basic Law guarantees citizens' rights and affirms its commitment to guarantee basic freedoms and fundamental human rights. Yet the law is coded in the masculine gender and nowhere explicitly states that references to citizens or to Palestinians actually include both males and females. Some argue that they implicitly do since the use of the masculine form is conventional in Arabic, as in many other languages.

Theoretically, then, the Basic Law gives Palestinians, males and females alike, the opportunity to an education, employment, and political participation, and all other citizens' rights without discrimination.

The Elections Law issued in 2005 does specifically assure both male and female citizens the right to vote. Article 8 states that "Voting is the right of every male and female Palestinian in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and in the Gaza Strip who fulfills the conditions stipulated in the law to exercise this right, irrespective of religion, political opinion or affiliation, social, economic or educational status". Quotas are assigned on the basis of religion and gender. However, only the women's quota has been legislated. Article 5, entitled "Women's Representation", states that each list of candidates should include at least one woman among the first three candidates, and another among the four that follow, and yet another

among each five that follow. When calculated, the women's quota would amount to at least 20% of the total in a list of 66 candidates.⁵²

As mentioned earlier, the women's quota was achieved through pressure from the women's movement (including governmental and non-governmental organizations) and its allies. The women movement was not so successful, however, in gaining the right to a women quota in the Legislative Council as it was at the level of local governments. In Legislative Council, the gains of the women movement are represented in a quota of about 10%-12%, instead of 20% for which the women movement was aiming.

As for women representation in local government, where seats for representatives do not exceed 13, women representation should not be less than 2 so that at least one woman would be included among the first five names in the list and at least one among the names that follow. When there are 15 seats, as is the case in the Ramallah and Al-Bireh districts, women candidates must occupy each 5th seat in the list. Articles 19 and 28 regulate the formation of the committees organizing and supervising the election process, respectively. These articles do not specify a women quota on the committees.

Thus, at the level of local government, the PNA seems to have responded to the demands of the women movement in encoding the quota. However, the more limited conditions for women representation in the Legislative Council indicates that the PNA is probably not ready to go far enough in promoting women political participation. Possibly the PNA is unwilling to face opposition from parties that are against women's political participation in particular, and against women rights in general.⁵³

Whether women's political representation should be specified by quota and whether such a quota actually empowers women is a controversial issue. Some view a quota as discriminatory and limiting. Critics say that specifying a women's quota could limit women's representation to the number specified, while legitimizing men's majority share of the seats. The Palestinian women's movement, on the other hand, feels that a quota, is essential at the moment to guarantee women's political representation and it was for this reason that they campaigned and put pressure on the Parliament to recognize it in legislation. The women movement does consider the quota as empowering to women. Although this view ought to be respected, caution is required when the law is put into practice. Observations of the most recent municipal elections indicated that the quota was being applied mostly to guarantee men's share of seats rather than to achieve women's political representation. This, however, is an impressionistic view which needs further investigation.

Another legal aspect to be considered is the extent of the practice and rule of customary law which has disempowered women, since women issues are judged in the context of custom. All conflicts over matters that are culturally highly sensitive, such as rape, honor killing, sexual violence and physical abuse in the domestic sphere, are handled by customary laws.

Finally, it is worth noting that women empowerment cannot be measured only in terms of women representation in the labor force, or in the political system. Whether or not women are empowered depends as well on her role and status in the informal and private domains, for instance in the informal economy, in informal politics, and in household decision-making and control of resources. Other examples include the degree of women's participation in decisions taken concerning their daughters' education and marriage, the budgeting of household finance, and the use of contraceptives, as well as the right to abortion.⁵⁴

1. *Citizenship law*

Restrictions imposed on the PNA by of the Oslo Accords played a role in delaying the enactment of the Basic Law – the constitutional framework for citizens' rights. These restrictions, as well as conflict over

⁵² Abu Nahleh, L. et. al. 2006.

⁵³ Ibid. 2006.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 2006.

the final status of the Occupied Territories and refugees, have so far prevented the PNA from issuing the Citizenship Law.

2. Opportunities

Focusing on a variety of issues related to women and the Wall, the Institute of Women Studies last year conducted a study on the Wall and its impact on households from a gender perspective.⁵⁵ In the process, researchers realized that roadblocks, land dispossession, home demolition and displacement, women agency is undeniable. Women have played a vital role in Palestinian struggle to hold on to the land. They have held families together and enabled them to survive, and in the process, wrought positive changes in family relations, particularly gender relations. Women have been central in solutions both attempted and imagined. Their expressions of attachment to their land in proverbs, songs and legends inspired their fellow citizens and succeeded in empowering the women themselves.

Laws relating to gender needs, rights and interests are only one small step on the path of women's empowerment. The real leap occurs when the rule of law prevails, when legislated laws replace customary laws dealing with conflicts among individuals and groups, and when women's ability to utilize these laws receive fair and gender-aware treatment in the courts. The actions of Palestinian women during the years of struggle have helped them to acquire the tools to make this vision a reality.

Interestingly, the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University has concluded in a study on "Gender and Land, Property and Housing Rights in the West Bank and Gaza Strip", that existing legislation in theory reveals little or no apparent discrepancy between the rights of men and women to buy, own, sell and develop property, whether in the form of land, housing or other private property. In addition, the laws pertaining to mortgaging property and the registration of property likewise do not distinguish between the rights of males and females to register or mortgage property in their names. Indeed, the principal area of discrepancy in the rights of men and women was found to exist in the matter of property inheritance and the laws that apply to it.

Rather than law, the study found certain widespread values and modes of behavior to be the factors preventing women from attaining their under the law. Although laws can be empowering for women, cultural constraints can disempower women even more.

One of the main conclusions regarding Israeli Occupation policies, then, is that women are empowered and disempowered at the same time in the context of these practices. Sometimes, the very practices which make life so difficult for women simultaneously inspire coping strategies that empower women and sustain them as they carry out their roles in communities and households. Years of military occupation have meant that women are often responsible for managing household affairs and rationalization of purchase and expenses. Women have had to be creative to find ways to fulfill their daily needs. They invent countless ways of economizing and double their work in the home gardens. They cut down on the consumption of electricity and water. They may sacrifice many of their personal needs, such as food and clothing, in order to save these for their husbands and children. There is without doubt a contradictory relationship between oppression and empowerment which is projected in the Palestinian context under colonial occupation.

⁵⁵ Kuttab, E. Naser, R. and others. "The Apartheid Wall and Palestinian Household: Coping and Resistance: Gender Perspective" study submitted to UNDP, March 2005.