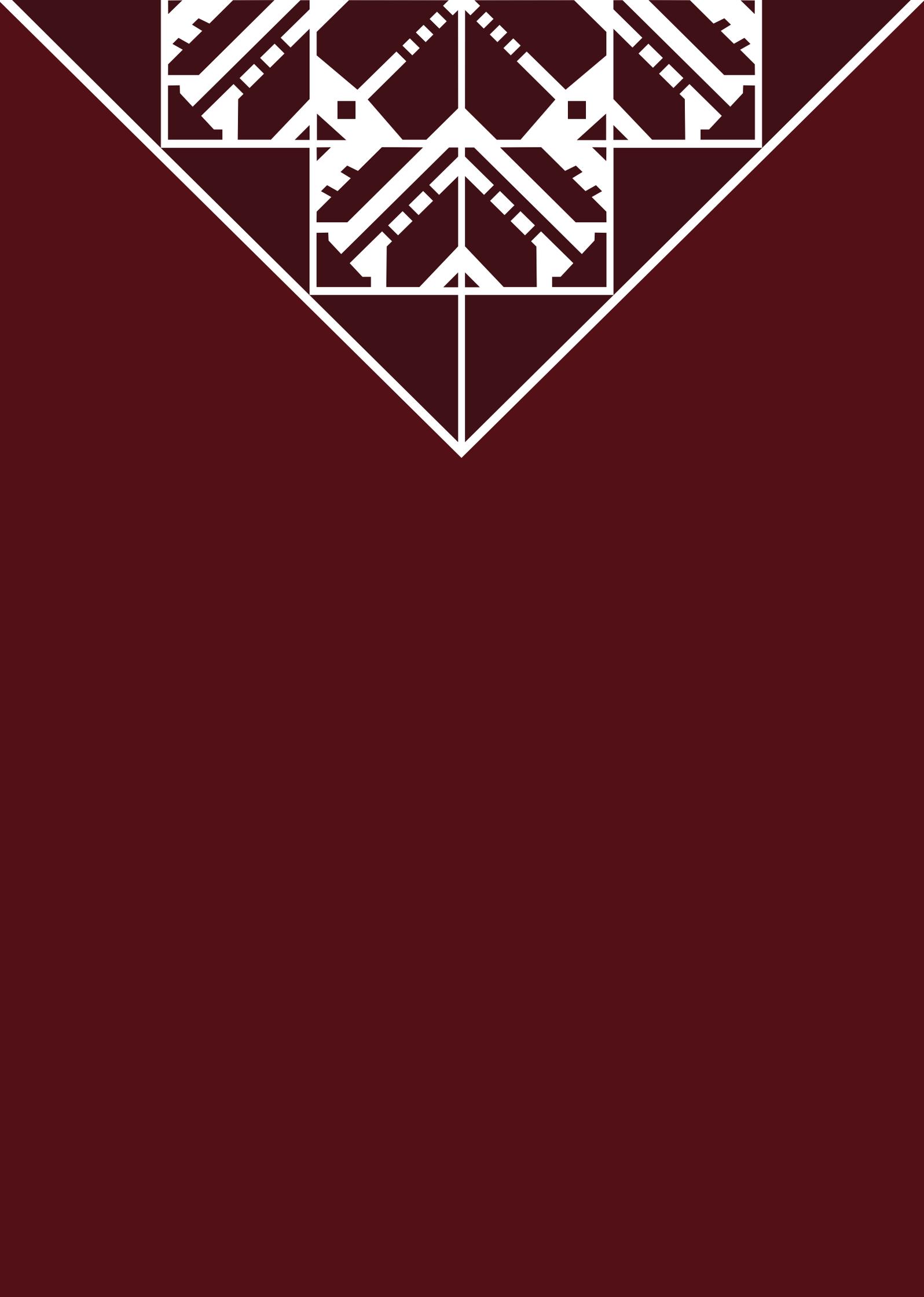


# **Violence against women and girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

**Formative research**

**March 2017**



# **Violence against Women and Girls in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

**Formative research**

**March 2017**

**Part of: Utilising Innovative Media to  
End Violence against Women and Girls  
Through Community Education and  
Outreach Project**

**Most women suffer from one or more forms of violence; they just keep it a secret, even from their families and close friends. They feel ashamed and think that they could deal with it on their own.**

**(Female, Bethlehem, 31-40 year old)**

**The challenge for me is to do work around the house, but not be noticed by the neighbours. The challenge for my wife is to do all the work and make most of the decisions but show the neighbours that I am in charge.**

**(Male, Khan Yunis/Gaza, 41-50 year old)**

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# List of acronyms

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**AWRAD:** Arab World for Research and Development

**PA:** Palestinian Authority

**DFID:** UK Department for International Development

**CEDAW:** Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women

**FGDs:** Focus group discussions

**IDIs:** In-depth interviews

**IPV:** Intimate partner violence

**NGO:** Non-governmental organisation

**NIS:** New Israeli Shekel

**NRS:** National Referral System

**OPt:** occupied Palestinian territories

**PCBS:** Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

**PLC:** Palestinian Legislative Council

**UNRWA:** United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

**SAMRC:** The South African Medical Research Council

**VAWG:** Violence against women and girls

**WATC:** Women Affairs Technical Committee

**WBG:** West Bank and Gaza

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# Research team

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## **AWRAD:**

Dr. Nader Said, Team Leader and Author; Reem Ziad-Ghattas; Nicholas Herbert Hyman; Mohammad Shuaibi.

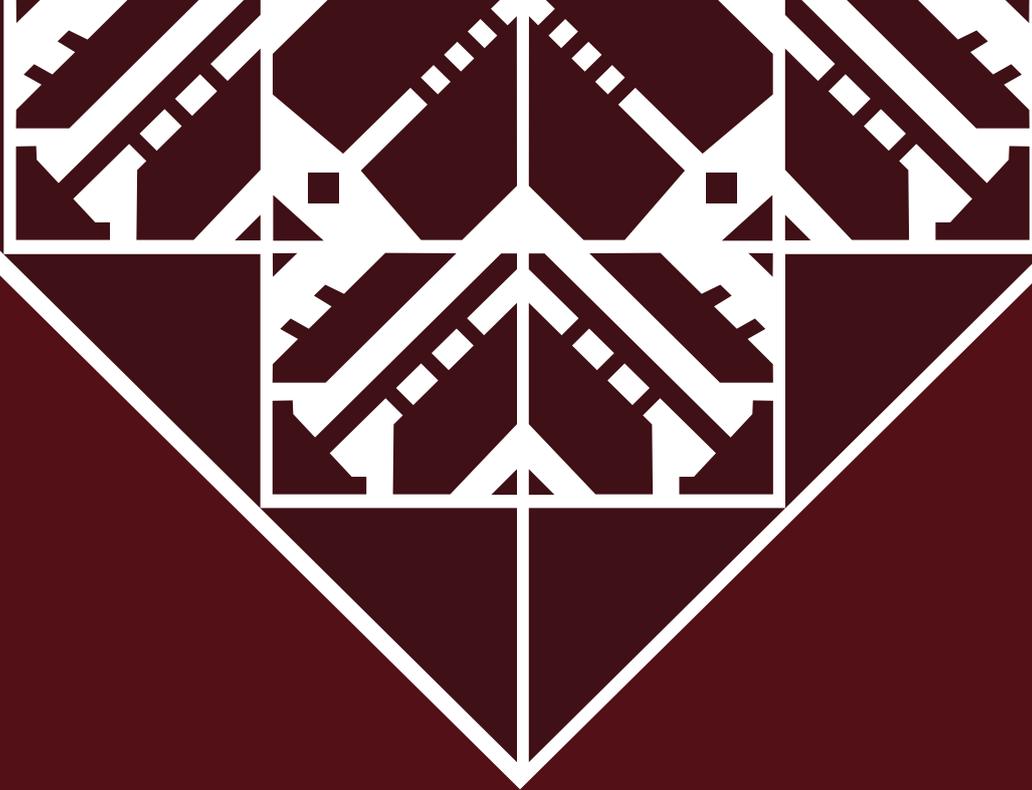
## **News Networks:**

Osama Jafary and Laura Thomas

The project is implemented by the Ma'an Network in strategic collaboration with 16 local partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the OPT.

## **What Works:**

This document is an output from the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? Global Programme, funded by UK Aid from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) for the benefit of developing countries. The funds were managed by the South African Medical Research Council.



**Part 1:  
Introduction,  
rationale,  
and methodology**

# Introduction

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The current study presents the results of the formative research phase of a larger project that is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and supported by the 'What Works' consortium to prevent violence against women and girls (VAWG). This project titled: "Utilising Innovative Media to End Violence against Women and Girls Through community Education and Outreach" is undertaken in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). It is implemented by Ma'an Network in strategic collaboration with 16 local partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the oPt. It focuses on all areas of the West Bank and Gaza. The formative research has been carried out by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD).

As a whole, the project aims to reduce the number of women and girls who experience violence by taking a comprehensive approach, which includes increasing the exposure of Palestinian TV audiences to relevant, realistic examples of VAWG's effects on individuals, families and communities, thereby changing societal attitudes. It also aims to show how social norms about gender drive VAWG and present alternatives to these norms. To serve these aims, the formative research gathered information on:

- The context of VAWG including prevalence, its effects and consequences on VAWG survivors, their families and the wider

community, and the profiles of perpetrators and victims/survivors,

- Experiences of and dynamics leading to different forms of VAWG with a focus on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV),
- Prevalent attitudes in oPt toward gender roles, identities and VAWG,
- Existing services and response/support mechanisms to VAWG and women's experience of these, including identifying potential gaps in these across both the West Bank and Gaza,
- Gendered societal dynamics in the oPt (i.e. who are the key gate keepers in communities, what are the prevailing myths, stereotypes, images and dynamics of gender relations depicted in Palestinian media),
- The role of media in reinforcing or dismantling a culture of VAWG,
- Recommendations for media-based educational programs and campaigns that will help with dismantling a culture of VAWG.

More specifically, the formative research serves to inform the project, and in particular the media programming content, for the drama series, comedy program, and national media campaign. While the study places VAWG in the broader context of the various types of violence including occupation-related, economic and legal violence, it keeps the focus on IPV.

# Research methodology

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The formative research is based on both desk research and field research in the oPt using qualitative research methods. The qualitative data collection tools included: in-depth interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Baseline quantitative research will be carried out in the next phase of the project, which will set the benchmarks against which the progress and impact of the project will be measured.

## 1. Desk review

The information collected through a desktop review prior to the qualitative formative research included basic socioeconomic and demographic information on the incidence of VAWG, media usage, some assessment of the extent to which prevailing media promotes or discourages VAWG, and in what ways prevailing myths, stereotypes, images and dynamics of gender relations are depicted in the media. The research team gathered and analysed available government level statistics and policy information and secondary sources including NGO and academic literature on the above-mentioned thematic areas<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Qualitative tools

During the formative phase, qualitative data were gathered through FGDs and IDIs. These focused on gendered attitudes to violence, community-level public and private power dynamics, the gendered impact of occupation, attitudes to VAWG, perceptions of violence, experiences of VAWG, existing responses, and support mechanisms and the adequacy of these. Due to their different nature, the FGDs and in-depth interviews gathered different kinds of information (e.g. FGDs revealed more about dominant norms while the information on personal experiences of violence were mostly explored in the IDIs), which were compared and contrasted in analysis. The study population includes women and men in the West Bank and Gaza aged 18 and above.

All participants had no cognitive impairment and gave their informed consent as per ethical standards approved by the The South African Medical Research Council (SAMRC) Ethics Committee<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For a list of references, please refer to Annex 2.

<sup>2</sup> Protocol ID: EC014-5/2016 on 29 July 2016.

# FGDs

A total of 61 people (35 women and 26 men) participated in six FGDs. The FGDs included women survivors, male perpetrators, young men and women, and practitioners (e.g. social workers, counsellors, protection workers) representing all adult age groups. They covered the various regions of the West Bank (33 participants) and the Gaza Strip (28 participants), as indicated in Table 1 below. The FGDs focused on views of gender roles, norms and expectations, dynamics and justifications of violence, witnessing violence, knowledge and views of VAWG, types of VAWG, evaluation of services and service providers, assessment of the role of Palestinian media in addressing VAWG, and proposals for improved media content and messaging.

FGDs were held separately for older women, older men, younger women and younger men. The rationale for age and sex-disaggregated groups is to allow for as wide a range of responses as possible, which participants would perhaps not feel free to voice if in mixed groups, due to expectations of deference to age and gender hierarchies. A FGD was also held with social and health workers who provide support for women and girls exposed to violence.

**Table 1: Distribution of focus groups**

Region	Age group	Gender
Central Gaza	18-30	11 Males
Gaza City	30-60	10 Females
North Gaza	18-30	7 Females
North West Bank	30-60	15 Males
Central West Bank <sup>3</sup>	30-40	4 Males (social and health workers)
South West Bank	25-65	14 Females
<b>Total</b>		<b>61 participants</b>

<sup>3</sup> There was no specific focus on East Jerusalem in this study; UN Women is currently sponsoring a study that seeks to capture the very specific circumstances of the region.

# IDs with survivors and perpetrators

IDs were held with female survivors of violence and male perpetrators of violence. The participants were identified by the research team during the FGDs and the lists of institutions that provide service in the field of VAWG. Key issues explored were personal experiences of dominant gender norms and expectations for both genders. For women, there was a strong focus on possible experiences of VAWG, existent response and support mechanisms, and what kind of support/responses could better meet the needs of survivors. For the male respondents, questions focused on political realities, societal expectations of male heads of households, and expectations of protecting one's family's honour.

The research team interviewed six women survivors and four male perpetrators. As Table 2 indicates, the selection of IDs was based on

region, age, sex and marital status (married, single, widowed, divorced or separated). The IDs used a life-history approach, allowing for the possibility of raising a broad range of experiences of the impacts of societal gender norms, gendered power dynamics, VAWG and responses to violence, without constricting the range of respondents' answers as a more structured approach may do. While the interview guides contained a range of potential questions, the research team was instructed to use these as guidance only, and not as a questionnaire, to allow for a free-flowing interview. In some cases, follow up interviews were organised with additional relevant social workers and other personnel of institutions that worked on some the cases to explore the progress of the case and to further understand the relevant unfolding events.

**Table 2: Distribution of interviews with women and men**

Region	Age group	Gender	Marital status	Place of residence
South West Bank	20-30	Female	Divorced	Urban
North West Bank	30-40	Female	Married	Rural
Central West Bank	20-30	Female	Single	Rural
North West Bank	40-50	Male	Separated	Rural
Central West Bank	30-40	Male	Married	Urban
Gaza	30-40	Female	Divorced	Refugee
North Gaza	20-30	Female	Widowed	Urban
Central Gaza	40-50	Male	Married	Urban
Gaza	20-30	Male	Married	Refugee
Gaza	30-40	Female	Married	Urban

# Expert informants

In addition, the team interviewed 10 expert informants from relevant institutions that provide violence-related health, social and psychological support and counselling to women and girls. Others were specialists in gender, media and human rights. The expert interviews were held in all regions of the West Bank (5) and the Gaza Strip (5) as illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Distribution of expert interviews**

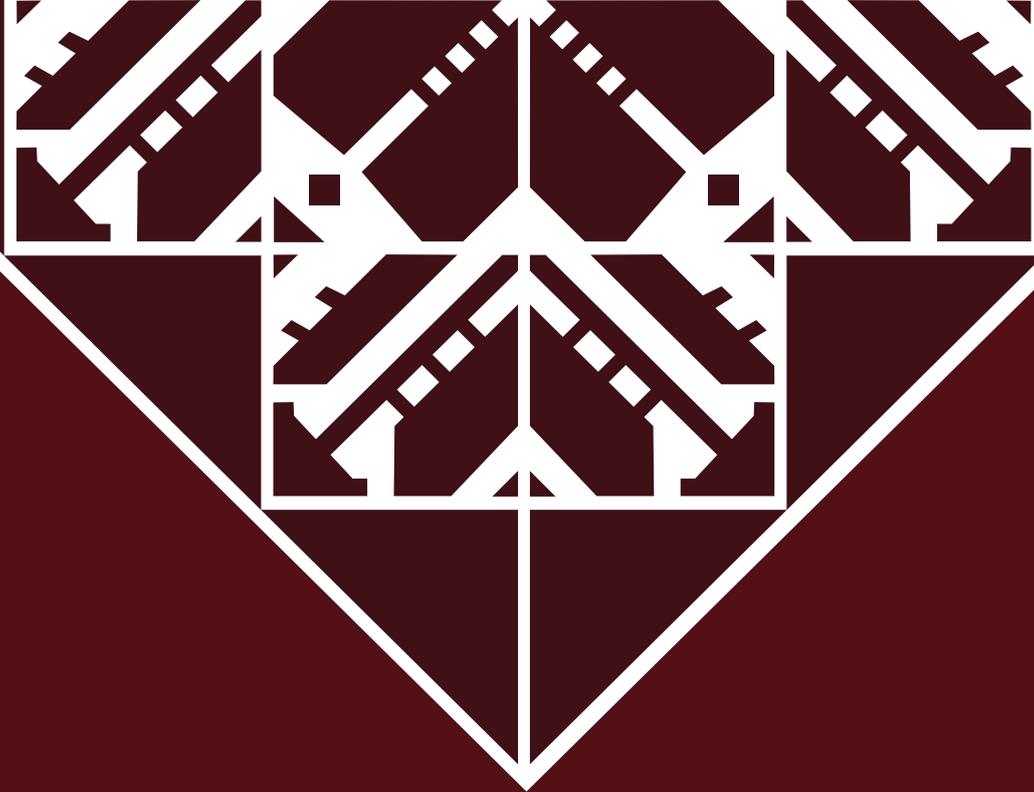
Region	Age group	Gender	Type of institution
South West Bank	41-50	Female	Media and women's empowerment
South West Bank	30-40	Female	Justice and human rights
Central West Bank	30-40	Female	Media academic and training
Central West Bank	41-50	Female	Social and legal counselling
North West Bank	41-50	Female	Social and economic empowerment
Gaza	41-50	Female	Health services
Gaza	30-40	Female	Social and economic empowerment
Gaza	51-60	Male	Lawyer/human rights
Gaza	51-55	Female	Media and gender
Gaza	61-70	Female	Health and social services

# Data analysis

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Data analysis was carried out using standard qualitative research methods, with emerging information being coded and categorised into themes within a highly-vigilant and learning process, keeping in mind the voices of women and girls as the main stakeholders in this study. Most of the themes were drawn from the initial list used in the creation of the research tools. However, other themes were added according to the researchers' discretion, particularly if interviews and focus group discussions revealed factors that had not previously been considered in the development of tools. Researchers who have been directly involved in the process of data collection reviewed the transcripts and extracted the most pertinent words, concepts, phrases and themes with relevance for the spreadsheet. This was accompanied by the extraction of full quotations that were used anonymously in the report.

Analysis was carried out by the primary researchers and research assistants, with the support and guidance of the Principal Investigator, and the support of the project team. The research team had regular contact with supporting experts in the broader project team (including research experts from SAMRC, staff of the Gender Unit at Ma'an Network, and local experts in Palestine) to discuss emerging issues as well as initial findings. Following the completion of information categorisation and preliminary analysis, AWRAD conferred with the Ma'an Network team and representatives of the partner organisations to further verify and validate the results, conclusions and recommendations. The consultation workshop with the partners was held on the 9th of November 2016 with 21 participants.



## **Part 2: Background and context**

The following part of the report provides a contextual background of Palestinian society. It focuses on the social, economic, political, legal, institutional and cultural circumstances and arrangements within which VAWG is produced and perpetuated. It places VAWG within the prevailing gender roles and norms in the country and presents key developments in this regard.

# Section 1: Socio-economic background

The gender structure of gender inequalities in the West Bank and Gaza (WBG) is uniquely complex. It is characterised by a long tradition of women's engagement in political life and aspirations to gender equality, running alongside a traditionally male-dominated social structure and culture. At the same time, the restrictions imposed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and political divisions within the Palestinian territories are leading to significant changes in the established gender relations, and a reversal to conservative social norms and behaviours towards women. Like women, men are not a homogenous group in terms of their views of equality; while a majority are sceptical of the movement towards gender equality, there is an influential minority of educated and politically active men who are supportive and engaged in advocacy and lobbying activities seeking to achieve gender equality.

Combined, the WBG covers a small geographical area of about 6,200 km<sup>2</sup>, of which 5,860 km<sup>2</sup> (5,640 km<sup>2</sup> of land and 220 km<sup>2</sup> of water) is in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 360 km<sup>2</sup> is in Gaza. The 2016 population estimates show that the total population is 4,816,503, of which 2,935,368 live in the West Bank and 1,881,135 in the Gaza Strip<sup>4</sup>.

## BOX 1: 2016 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

- Of every 100 persons in the oPt, about 44% are classified as refugees<sup>5</sup>, 42% of whom reside in the West Bank and 58% in the Gaza Strip.
- The population is distributed between urban areas (53%), rural areas (31%), and refugee camps (16%).
- The sex ratio (the number of males to females in the population) is at 103.3.
- The total fertility rate declined in 2013 to 4.1 births, as compared to 6 per woman in 1997; the rate remains much higher in the Gaza Strip, at 4.5 as compared to 3.7 in the West Bank.
- The annual population growth rate is estimated at 2.4%, of which 2.5% is in the West Bank, and 3.3% is in Gaza.
- Children under 15 constitute 39.2% of the population, while youth (18–30 year old) constitute 25.9% of the total population.
- West Bank and Gaza have among the highest population densities in the world: the WBG area averages 654 persons per sq.km, but is more than 10 times higher in Gaza, with 4,722 persons per sq.km.

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) – 2016.

<sup>4</sup> PCBS, 2016. [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang\\_\\_en/881/default.aspx#Population](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/lang__en/881/default.aspx#Population)

<sup>5</sup> As defined by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA).

The demographic dynamics of WBG present extremely difficult challenges for the future. Economic development prospects are uncertain with declining economic growth while the labour force is growing at 4% a year<sup>6</sup>, leading to increasing unemployment and poverty. In addition, gender gaps persist in the fields of labour participation, wages, laws and decision-making. Social services are lagging behind in quantity and quality, while marginalised regions, such as refugee camps and rural areas, and groups such as women, still face additional challenges in accessing these services. Furthermore, gender relations remain a concern where the customs, norms and laws continue to provide men with the power to control women. These challenges, which are fairly common in countries with similar demographic profiles, are uniquely compounded by the restrictions imposed by Israel on land use, access to water and economic opportunity. Israel's control over the Palestinian Authority's (PA) fiscal revenues further challenges the PA's ability to deliver services to Palestinian men and women.

The high fertility rate and unemployment rate among educated women, and low labour participation rates are among the distinct features of the situation of women in Palestinian society. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) data reveals that 22% of women aged 20-24 years gave birth

before the age of 18, and this percentage is higher in the Gaza Strip compared to the West Bank (25.1% and 19.6% respectively). The female participation rate in the labour force is increasing, where it is 19.1% in 2015 compared with 10.3% in 2001, but remains low. The male participation rate in the labour force was more than three times higher than women at, 71.9%. In addition, a gender gap in the average daily wages continues, where the average daily wage for women was 76.8% that of men (NIS 81.9 for females and NIS 108 for males in 2015). The unemployment rate was 39.2% for women against 22.5% for men in 2015. It should be noted that women's unemployment was the highest among women with 13 years of schooling and above, standing at 48%.

In addition, women occupy few central roles in important institutions. In 2014, only 15.6% of judges were females and 25% of journalists were females in Palestine. Moreover, Palestinian women ambassadors accounted for only 5.8%; 41.8% of employees in the public sector (civil servants) were women. Women comprised 3.4% of the police. In contrast, the literacy rates reached 94.9% for females and 98.5% for males in 2015<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, females comprised more than 60% of all students enrolled in higher education. Females also comprised more than half of students enrolled in schools<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> E. Sayre & A. Al Botmeh. Youth Exclusion in West Bank and Gaza. Wolfeson Center. Dubai School of Government, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> PCBS, International Women 2009. [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/WomenDy2016E.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/WomenDy2016E.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education and Higher Education, <https://www.mohe.pna.ps/moehe/factsandfigures>.

# Section 2:

## Gender roles and norms in Palestine

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The inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the Palestinian national agenda is noticeable, albeit insufficient to offset centuries of prejudice and discrimination. However, the continuation of discrimination is grounded within "the socially-rooted conceptualisations of differences in women's and men's sexualities and their biological nature" which are "so frequently evoked to the extent that they become part and parcel of the individual and collective consciousness"<sup>9</sup>. In this regard, the conception of the "natural role" of women is one of the most deeply rooted drivers of violence. During the past decade, there was an increase in political and security instability in the Arab region, with dwindling economic growth and increasing unemployment rates. This paved the way for religious fundamentalism and an increase in voices calling for bringing women back to the home.

Consequently, women's fulfilment of their "natural role" associated with the reproductive process becomes compulsory and coercive in most settings. In the end, this leads to women's lives becoming regulated through the sharia, constitutions, laws, and predominant social norms, in ways that far exceed what applies to men." According to Said (2011, 236) "this gives men the power and legitimacy to

control women (as well as their bodies and minds) in all aspects of life. This also works on normalising discrimination, especially within the realm of family law." At the same time, "the system provides tools for controlling women and keeping them in their 'natural place'. The dominant system sustains that by curbing women's impulses, instincts, and sexual desires and by transferring these sexual aspects of women to the favour of men – at home and in the privacy of sex." To Said (2011, 236), assumptions about men and women "are predominant ... in mainstream culture – a culture that calls on the community to do everything possible to rid women of 'the devil therein'. Consequently, these assumptions are the hidden forces behind calls for forsaking women's rights and behind allowing men to make decisions on women's behalf – always framed in the interest of maintaining the status quo and 'collective good of society'."<sup>10</sup>

This culture of discrimination is still dominant. For example, while a majority of Palestinians express concern about the situation of women in society and the need for gender equality, they are unwilling to place it at the top of their agenda. For example, AWRAD's latest opinion poll among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip<sup>11</sup> shows that the improvement of women's participation in decision making is

<sup>9</sup> N. Said – Foqahaa, Arab Women: Duality of Deprivation in Decision-making under Patriarchal Authority. *Hawwa*, Volume 9, Issue 1-2, 2011, pages 234 – 272. [http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/156920811x578539;jsessionid=vrOCOm\\_rN86axKlty9AApFbB.x-brill-live-02](http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/journals/10.1163/156920811x578539;jsessionid=vrOCOm_rN86axKlty9AApFbB.x-brill-live-02)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also, Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 1997. See also, Nawal Al Saadawi, *Woman Against Her Sex*, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> AWRAD, 27 September 2016.

ranked 15th (out of 18 priorities), with less than 1% placing it as the number one priority. Previous AWRAD polling<sup>12</sup> had shown that the majority of men and women do not believe that a man has the right to beat his wife if he believes that is needed. This, however, doesn't provide much comfort, as around 30% continue to believe that a man has a right to beat his wife (37% among men and 24% among women). Furthermore, a specialised survey among Palestinian women active in their communities revealed 53% of them had experienced or witnessed domestic violence<sup>13</sup>.

Prevailing social norms, traditions and expectations serve as incubators for VAWG in Palestine. Household and communal structures are patriarchal, with males exercising dominant if not complete power in social settings and relationships. Women are expected to be deferential and subservient, with men making all key decisions. In typical gender relations, men are expected to participate in the public sphere, such as working and earning wages, while women are confined to the private sphere and expected to be responsible for child-rearing and domestic affairs. Men who kill women claim that their actions were carried out to preserve their honour, as they know they will receive a lighter sentence than admitting to cold-blooded murder. Specifically, perpetrators of honour killings are defended under Article 340 and Article 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code, which, respectively, state:

**“Any man who took by surprise his wife while she was committing adultery with another person and killed, wounded or harmed both of them or either one of them is entitled to a pardoning excuse.”**

**Article 340 Jordanian Penal Code**

**“Perpetrators may take advantage of the extenuating excuse, in case of having committed crimes in a fit of rage that were the result of an unlawful and dangerous act by the victim.”**

**Article 98 Jordanian Penal Code**

One of the most influential factors in shaping social structures and behaviours is the presence of the Israeli occupation. The occupation limits the productive capacities of men and women, with severe consequences. First, the restricted economic opportunities leave many men, particularly youth, unemployed. This contributes to feelings of inadequacy and an inability to fulfil the socially prescribed masculine roles, which has been identified as a driver of VAWG.

In addition, the constricted economic space leaves many families with limited means, forcing many to resort to financial triage. Families devote their sparse resources to their male children or family members, leaving females underserved or entirely neglected – a form of economic VAWG. This situation may also force women into early marriage, as their families are eager to shift the burden of an unemployed family member.

<sup>12</sup> AWRAD, 9 February 2012. <http://awrad.org/page.php?id=QmpOZW40Da265329A3HrMgeF7rm>

<sup>13</sup> AWRAD, 27 June 2016. [http://awrad.org/files/server/Women%20online%20pres%20english%202016\(1\).pdf](http://awrad.org/files/server/Women%20online%20pres%20english%202016(1).pdf)

# Section 3:

## Legal, social and political drivers of VAWG in the oPt

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VAWG constitutes one of the primary legal, social and political challenges for Palestinians. It manifests itself in many forms, ranging from psychological abuse, sexual abuse to physical harm, economic abuse and, in the worst cases, murder. Furthermore, VAWG is inflicted by a range of perpetrators, including Israeli soldiers, settlers and administrators, as well as Palestinian husbands, brothers, other family members, employers and strangers.

In Palestine, VAWG remains a sensitive and often taboo subject, which is one of the central obstacles to preventing it. Women who have experienced violence have very limited avenues to report this, or access to support through legal, community or social institutions. Not only do legal frameworks continue to justify and enable the use of VAWG, many in society consider various manifestations of VAWG to be acceptable according to social or religious customs as explained previously in the report.<sup>14</sup> As such, limited data and understanding on the extent and intensity of VAWG exists in Palestine, making the current project especially critical.

While various studies attribute VAWG to the high rate of unemployment, the constant economic and social pressures, and the legacy of violence linked to occupation, others highlight that those who experience violence have limited recourse and ways of reporting violence, and

<sup>14</sup> For more on the relation between legal and social causes of VAWG, please refer to: Mary Ellsberg and Lori Heise, *Researching Violence Against Women*, WHO and PATH, 2005.

they are often not protected by adults and institutions. In these situations, most women prefer to remain silent rather than file formal reports as victims of abuse<sup>15</sup>.

One of the central enablers of the perpetration of VAWG is the Palestinian legal environment. The legal structure across the oPt is a mix of various penal codes, legal systems, local legislation and executive decrees. In the West Bank, the Jordanian Penal Code of 1960 is still in effect, while the Gaza Strip is governed by a combination of Egyptian and British laws and East Jerusalem by Israeli and Jordanian systems.

The various laws subject women to institutionalised inequality, while simultaneously protecting individuals who commit acts of violence. The fundamental philosophical current present in these legal codes is that “women are owned by men.” Some of the most notorious examples in the West Bank legal system include exemption from prosecution if a rapist marries the survivor of the rape<sup>16</sup> and the lack of recognition of marital rape. The prevailing penal code also fails to codify punishments for, or even rudimentary acknowledgement of, VAWG outside of physical harm, such as psychological abuse or socially-based and economic deprivation. The courts continue to use antiquated legal codes from the Ottoman and Jordanian eras, and courts are dominated by male judges and staff.

<sup>15</sup> PA, *National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women (2011–2019)*, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Article 308 of the Jordanian Penal Code.

There have been some positive changes in relation to VAWG in the legal system. Recently, the courts added family counselling units that provide advice to families facing adversity. In addition, the Office of the Attorney General has recently established a Gender Unit with a view to create a more gender-sensitive adjudication process. The Palestinian Police established a Family and Child Protection Unit, which is the main gateway for women and girls to start their complaints process within the formal legal system. The newness of these attempts makes them difficult to evaluate, but all evidence shows that they lack competent human and material resources.<sup>17</sup>

Other positive developments in highlighting and combating VAWG include efforts of women and human rights organisations that have placed the issue of VAWG on the national agenda and as a real concern for decision-makers, donors and civil society organisations. The following developments contributed to the increased interest in the issue of VAWG and might have contributed to the rising levels of interest and knowledge among the research participants:

- 1.** The establishment of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Gender Units in all ministries. This culminated in a number of national strategies that focus on VAWG. For example, the National Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy (2011-2013) [Gender Strategy] adopts a number of conducive principles including:
  - Providing protection to Palestinian women at the national level;
  - Promoting women's rights as an integral part of human rights;
  - Addressing social and cultural constraints related to women's issues, particularly violence against women in the public and private spheres.

One of the strategic objectives of the Gender Strategy is to reduce all forms of VAWG. In addition, the Gender Strategy mentions the improvement of the status of women ex-political prisoners as another strategic objective. The Gender Strategy was adopted by

<sup>17</sup> For more on the role of relevant institutions including the police, the courts and the prosecution, please refer to: AWRAD, Comprehensive Analysis for Gender Based Violence and the Status of the National Referral System in the West Bank, 2016. <http://www.awrad.org/files/server/NRS%20report%20english%202016.pdf>

the national development strategy, endorsed by the Council of Ministers and widely disseminated through the media and other public forums. While the presence of a strategy is vital, its effective implementation continues to be in question as revealed in Box 2 below and in the interviews with expert informants.

Other important actions at the governmental level that supports women's rights and work to prevent VAWG, includes:

- 2.** The adoption of a number of conventions and agreements including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2009, Palestinian Bill of Rights (2008), and the Decision by the Council of Ministers to create a National Committee on Combatting Violence Against Women (2007).
- 3.** The introduction of the National Referral System (NRS): The Palestinian Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 18 of 2013 on the NRS for women victims of violence and published in the Palestinian Official Gazette on 5 December 2014. The System became effective and binding for all relevant institutions as of that date. It is considered to be a major achievement by the women's movement as it is a step forward in the struggle towards ensuring institutional commitment concerning VAWG. However, there remains little active work around ensuring state officials know and act on this (see Box 2).
- 4.** The presence of women's/rights organisations, media organisations with special focus on women's rights (Nisaa FM, Sawt Al Nisaa', others listed and discussed in part 4) and civic-minded political groups.
- 5.** Legal changes to the penal law. Most notably in 2014 when the PA President, Mahmoud Abbas, issued an executive decree freezing the legal articles that relieve perpetrators from punishment. However, in the absence of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) these acts cannot be officially repealed. In addition, honour killings have continued.

It is this need that drives the current research endeavour, informs AWRAD's research and will guide all our efforts throughout the project.

## **BOX 2: PERCEPTIONS OF THE NATIONAL REFERRAL SYSTEM (NRS)**

A survey of officials in 183 relevant institutions working on the issue of violence indicates that the NRS is in the initial stages of being integrated into the work of relevant organisations. The majority of officials have limited to no knowledge of the NRS, a level of knowledge that declines when asked about detailed components. For example, only 21% can confirm that they have knowledge of the NRS, while the majority (79%) state they have limited or no knowledge of the NRS. Further, although 55% of the organisations claim that they have received cases of battered women during the past six months, only 26% of all targeted organisations have referred a woman to another organisation. Additionally, it is significant to note that an organisation may not have received a referral through the NRS, but rather through a formal or informal system institutionalised in their organisation alone. This suggestion is borne out by primary data, in which only 14% of respondents say that they follow the instructions of the NRS.<sup>18</sup> The survey also revealed that the majority see no significant evidence of the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Violence.

<sup>18</sup> A survey carried out by AWRAD, June 2016 for the purposes of an assessment of the NRS with support from USAID.

# Section 4: Gender-based violence and domestic violence: Magnitude and distribution

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In December 2011, the PCBS released a survey<sup>19</sup> revealing that violence and abuse against women, men, youth and children is a major issue in Palestinian society.

The survey explored women's, children's and men's experiences of violence. It revealed that about 37% of married women were exposed to at least one form of violence – e.g. psychological, economic, physical, or sexual – by their husbands in their lifetime. There were differences between regions, with rates of 29.9% in the West Bank compared to 51.1% in Gaza Strip. The rate of those women who were exposed to psychological violence “at least once” in their lifetime was 58.6%. 55.1% reported lifetime exposure to economic violence, while 54.8% reported experiencing lifetime socially-based violence. Lifetime prevalence of physical violence from a husband was 23.5% and 11.8% to sexual violence. Only 30.2% of married women exposed to violence by their husbands had recourse to the house of one of their brothers or sisters, and 65.3% preferred to remain silent. Only 0.7% of women exposed to violence sought support or advice from a women's institution or centre.<sup>20</sup>

The most egregious manifestation of VAWG is honour killings. Honour killings are murders of women by male family members<sup>21</sup> who

<sup>19</sup> PCBS, Press Release. Main Findings of Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society, December 2011.

<sup>20</sup> All data reflects acts of violence at any point of their lives – ever.

accuse them of participating in illicit sexual behaviour. Since 2010, over 50 women have been murdered in honour killings across the oPt as reported to the Police.<sup>22</sup> In reality, these killings have little to do with honour; rather they are often committed for material issues, such as inheritance, control of resources or revenge<sup>23</sup> or purely out of the feeling for a need to establish power and assert masculinity as explained in other sections of the report.

PCBS (2011) also showed that intra-household violence is high: 51% of children were at some point in their lives exposed to violence inside the household by any perpetrator (45.8% in West Bank compared to 59.4% in Gaza Strip). 69% of those children were exposed to psychological violence and 34.4% to physical violence by their parents, as well as 66.3% to psychological violence and 34.5% to physical violence by their mothers alone.

The same report explains that the elderly are also subject to violence and abuse. 7.3% of the elderly 65 years and over were exposed to one form of violence by one individual of their household (8.5% in the West Bank compared

<sup>21</sup> In very few cases, women kill their daughters to protect the men in the family.

<sup>22</sup> AWRAD, Comprehensive Analysis for Gender Based Violence and the Status of the National Referral System in the West Bank, 2016. <http://www.awrad.org/files/server/NRS%20report%20english%202016.pdf> 2016, p 21.

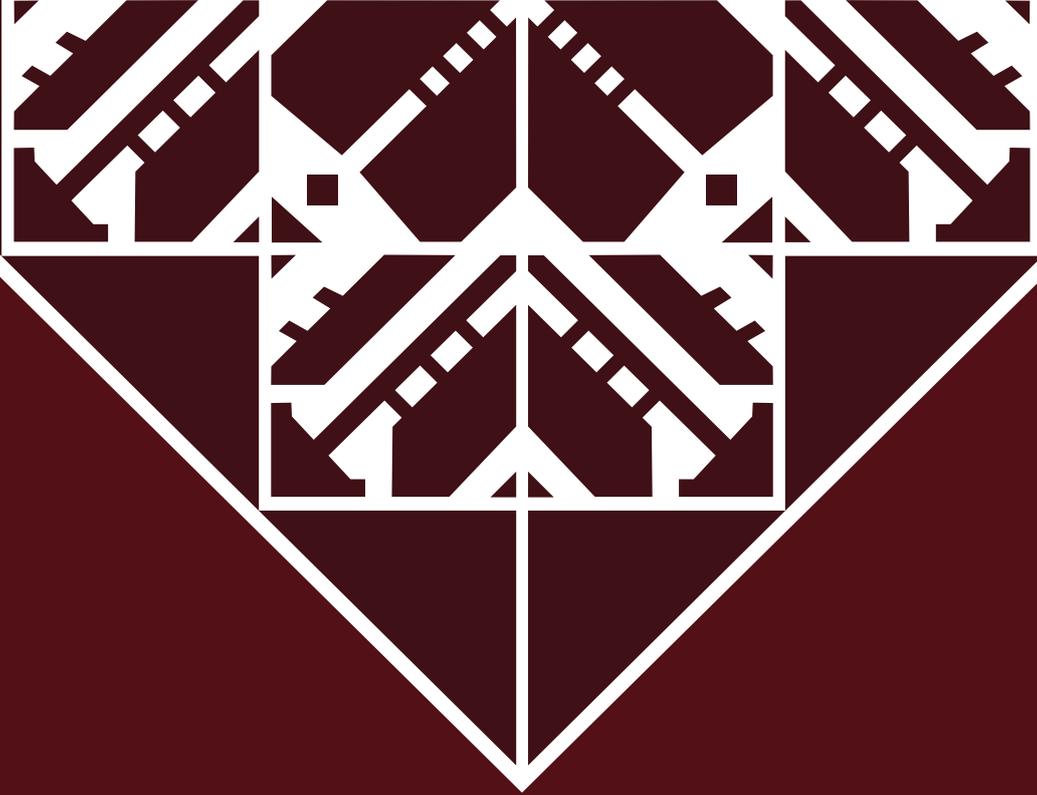
<sup>23</sup> TAM, GBV in the West Bank 2011–2015 (Killing of Women), by Luna Saadeh, 2016 (unpublished manuscript). Confirmed by the interviews and FGDs (social and health workers and legal experts).

to 4.5% in the Gaza Strip), with violence against older women being higher, at 7.9%, compared to males at 6.4%. Based on the forms of violence that were measured in the survey questionnaire, it is clear that health negligence was the most common form of violence the elderly are exposed to, with 17.1% reporting this; 18.3% among females compared to 15.5% among males. 11.4% of these individuals were exposed to psychological violence, 13.2% females compared to 9.3% males.

Violence is also committed by women, as the PCBS survey (2011) showed. Of wives asked whether they had perpetrated any form of violence against their husbands, 17.1% of women replied positively (13.3% in the West Bank compared to 24.1% in Gaza Strip). Most were in the form of verbal violence in addition to shoving, pushing and hitting.

The violence continues as a recent AWRAD survey (2016) reveals that 53% of women reported that they have experienced or witnessed varying levels and forms of violence.<sup>24</sup> Most cited violence at home, but many also mentioned work-related violence and sexual harassment in the streets.

<sup>24</sup> AWRAD, A press release on Palestinian women, 27 June 2016. [http://awrad.org/files/server/Women%20online%20pres%20english%202016\(1\).pdf](http://awrad.org/files/server/Women%20online%20pres%20english%202016(1).pdf)



**Part 3:  
Analysis of findings:  
Telling the story**

The following section of the report provides an analysis based on the qualitative data obtained from the field research. It contextualises VAWG within the dominant culture, gender relationships, family relationships, economic context, legal and institutional arrangements, and political realities. While the study will present all forms of VAWG, it will do that in relation to IPV.

## Section 1: Types of VAWG

The most common type of violence is violence perpetrated by intimate partners (in these cases husbands) and close relatives, against women and girls within the household. IPV and other forms of domestic violence are cited throughout the study and classified into its different forms below. While the study provides examples of other perpetrators and forms of violence such as Israeli occupation soldiers and settlers, and Palestinian police and employers, it attempts to illustrate the linkages of these forms of violence to IPV.

### Physical violence

Women listed a number of different forms of physical violence that they experienced from husbands and family members. Women talked about experiencing pushing, shoving, slapping, objects being thrown at them, biting, kicking, dragging, beating, choking, burning, and hitting with a bat or a cane. The most extreme case of physical violence is the killing of women where in some cases the killers would claim honour as a motive.

The following is one illustration of the intensity of physical IPV and how family members enable partners to use violence and the connections between IPV to other forms of violence within the household. In addition, it illustrates the role of drug use among men, especially in the last

few years in Gaza.<sup>25</sup> It is also about the ability of women to exit a violent relationship and move forward in life. A child survivor (married at 15 to a 17 year old boy) describes her two years of marriage to a drug user:

**In two years of marriage, I had a boy and a girl. Throughout the marriage he was taking drugs. He beat me so intensely that I couldn't feel my head sometimes. He would wake up at night and start tearing our clothes and creating havoc in the room. He was absent minded, beating me hard, breaking the glass, pouring water on me. He choked me using a pillow. Everybody knew that he did all of this.**

The husband was not the only perpetrator of violence against the woman; other family members from the husband's side and the wife's side enabled IPV and also perpetrated violence against her:

<sup>25</sup> An unofficial figure estimates the number of addicts to drugs (mostly Tramadol and its local version Tramal, a narcotic-like pain reliever and stimulant) at 250,000; this phenomenon is especially rampant among young and middle-age males. <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2012/04/12/269637.html>

**My ex-husband would allow his mother and his sister to hit me as they pleased: I felt that they enjoyed taking turns. When my mother-in-law didn't feel like hitting me, she would come up with any excuse and encourage my husband to do so. She felt that she was the queen of the house and that I didn't belong. My ex-husband used that to do more damage to me. This is a continuation of what my family had been doing to me; I will not go back to them as I cannot forget how they beat me.**

**(Female, Jenin region, 31-40 years old)**

## Sexual violence

Participants listed different forms of sexual violence that they had experienced or heard of other women experiencing, including non-consensual sex, rape by a stranger, incest, husband rape, cheating, and sexual harassment at home, at work and in the street. Child molestation and rape of boys and girls was also raised as an issue.

Child rape by relatives continues to be a taboo issue; yet cases are surfacing as some families become willing to file complaints with the Police. In addition, the media is becoming more active in uncovering such cases.

The silence surrounding sexual violence is especially true for young girls and less educated women who do not work for a wage.

The following is a case illustrating the most sensitive and shielded issue in society: pregnancy of a teenage girl outside of marriage. It also illustrates the dominant views of society and the desire of many families to keep their family honour from being tarnished among their community, especially in small villages. It comes from the files of the organisations that

followed the case and from interviews with social workers who worked closely on the case. It involves a high risk to both the girl and the social workers who needed to walk a very thin line to bring it to a conclusion with the "least harm" possible to the girl, her family and the social workers themselves. If discovered, it could lead to the killing of the girl, the shaming of the family and the resultant shunning of the family, which would have included the other girls of the family not being able to marry. The case illustrates the complex role of counselling organisations that work on these issues, and their limited options when seeking solutions, whether with governmental or non-governmental institutions, and the need for further sexual and reproductive health education.

**Young girls suffer in silence especially if the violence is related to an act that they have done with a boy; it could be a phone call or a Facebook conversation. Accusing her in her honour makes her accept further violence from her parents and brothers. The family keeps it within so that her reputation is not ruined, and so that she and her sisters could still be asked to marry.**

**(Social workers' group, Hebron, 31-40 years old)**

According to the health worker working in a relevant organisation (health worker interview, an unspecified region in the West Bank):

**A 14-year old girl came to us to check a 3-month delay in her period. She came late because she thought that her period might be delayed because she is young. She came in with her older sister.**

**When we checked, we found that she was pregnant. We didn't know what to do. We asked her to come to our clinic in the nearby city for further tests. When told about the situation, she was fully shocked as she believed correctly that she was a virgin. Her sister summoned the mother to explain the situation to her. The mother said "well, she has cancer and that is OK if she dies from cancer". They told the father that she might have cancer or that she is suffering from a hormonal condition. As such, they hid the pregnancy and made every effort to fake her situation. The case was handed to the social worker in the relevant ministry as this is a case of child protection according to the law.**

The protection social worker from a government institution continued:

**I had to visit the girl and her mother every week pretending to be to the rest of the family a health worker checking on her health. I was taking a huge risk and didn't inform the police as required by the law, as what she faced was clearly a form of constitutional rape. If it reached the police, they would have taken her away and the case would have been revealed. With the mother and sister, we agreed to take her to a private hospital in East Jerusalem to conduct a C-section as she was still a virgin. We knew then that her brother-in-law had sex with her but**

**without insertion; the consulted doctor said that the semen seeped inside and caused the pregnancy. Together we decided to hide that as well otherwise the whole village would have been rocked with the scandal. She would have been killed to avoid shame, and more violence may have taken place between the families in the village. We took her to the hospital so she could give birth. The baby was fine but we decided not to let her see him. I gave him a name and then he was immediately transferred to an organisation for children with unknown parents.**

The new social worker visited a few times to check on the case. She describes the situation as follows:

**When I visited her she told me that she was still going to school and carrying on with her life. She tells people that she recovered from illness. When asked about what happened to her, she would say: "I am not sure what are you talking about, I have no memory of anything, I have no feelings anymore".**

Sexual violence was also manifested in marital rape, which is not criminalised in oPt:

**My husband would beat me and then force me to have sex; I hated him and I despised every minute when he would touch me.**

**(Female, Hebron, 41-50 years old)**

Exposure to violence in early childhood, especially sexual violence, is traumatic and research has shown that it has a role in perpetuating VAWG.<sup>26</sup> Young boys are exposed to child molestation and rape. Without any form of support and a dominant culture that demonises homosexuality, some of these boys internalise feelings of inadequacy, guilt and resentment. In turn, they might become perpetrators of violence within their own home and against their partners:

**I am always ashamed and inadequate; while I was 10 years old, a male store owner took me to the back of his store and started touching me and had sex with me. I was hurt and ever since then I've harboured feelings of guilt, worthlessness and anger. I've never talked to anyone about it and never got any closure. I've never been able to forget it and I hate all the people around me including my wife and kids.**

**(Male, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

Increasingly, public spaces are becoming unsafe places for women. As women move about in public they may be exposed to sexual harassment:

**I've had to change the road I take to work and use a longer detour whilst carrying my baby to avoid daily harassment by a bunch of young kids who have nothing better to do than stand in the street and yell at women and annoy them.**

**(Expert interview, female, 30-40 years old)**

Sexual harassment at work is also a concern. This harassment could lead to a further deprivation of rights by a woman's partner who will use an incident of sexual harassment as pretext to deprive his wife from working. Where women are not married, fathers or brothers hearing of sexual harassment may also limit their daughters or sisters respectively from working:

**On the first day of my job my boss was clear about his intentions. He started groping me and threatening that he will fire me if I didn't concede. I never went back to work because my husband wouldn't allow it.**

**(Female, Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

## **Emotional, psychological and verbal violence**

Women and young girls faced emotional and verbal violence including suppression of opinion, scolding, disrespect, foul language, and a general feeling of exploitation and stripping of dignity.

**My husband, his father and mother kept using very bad language with me; they would scold me and say the worst things about my family. When my son grew up, he joined them.<sup>27</sup> I felt abused, suffocated and stripped of dignity in what was supposed to be my home.**

**(Female, Jenin, 41-50 years old)**

<sup>26</sup> For more refer to: Fulu et al., 2013. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25104345>

<sup>27</sup> Childhood scars that led to violence will be further discussed in the next section.

For many women, these experiences lead to distress and depression.

The subtlest type of violence, however, is the looming threat of violence that is embedded in the cultural arrangements, and backed by dominant religious and cultural discourse and social norms. Most women felt that they must perform self-discipline to be able to survive within their situations. According to an expert informant:

**Women go into marriage understanding that they must submit; much of the submission and obedience is indirect and subliminal. Husbands and wives know the roles and play by them. Women will always be afraid of the excessive authority and power that men have. Violence is always in the air, and as such women must always be careful.**

**(Expert informant, female, Ramallah, 41-50 years old)**

## Deprivation of rights and freedoms

A number of acts were defined as violent by women in relation to deprivation of their rights and freedom of movement. Those included blatant and coercive forms of incarceration of women in the house. This was reported by some focus group participants when referring to neighbours or other relatives:

**My neighbour would call me from the window of her house to ask for favours; her husband locks her**

**in the house and takes the key with him.**

**(Female focus group participant, Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

Many women and men cited restrictions on women's movement as a form of violence. Restrictions on movement included women not being allowed to leave their home or visit specific relatives.

**I had to force her to stay home and not visit her parents; every time she would go to them, she would come back and we would fight.**

**(Male focus group participant, Tulkarem, 41-50 years old)**

- **Deprivation of education for girls:** While enrolment rates among Palestinian girls are among the highest in the Arab region and higher than the rates for their male counterparts, and dropout rates from schools among girls are slightly lower than boys, girls still face discrimination in education. For example, some girls are not allowed by their parents or husbands to enrol in universities, while many more are asked or expected to stay in a university nearby, to dress modestly, and to abide by stricter rules, such as adhering to a specific time of departure to campus and time of return. These types of restrictions were common across all regions, and relate mostly to higher levels of conservatism among families, with students from villages most affected.

- Social workers, mostly females, who work in the field of counselling and protection, are faced with **threats to abstain from providing assistance** to women and girls exposed to violence.

- **New forms of violence** are being reported, including the use of new technology to extort and threaten women, a type of violence which disproportionately impacts young girls. Young girls who interact with boys or older men are exposed to threats of being exposed to their families and the community if they don't submit

to financial or sexual extortion.

- In most cases, women are faced with **“forced” abortions** in cases of out of marriage pregnancy. In other cases, babies are handed to specialised institutions such as the S.O.S Children’s Village in Bethlehem.

- There are some instances of **revenge crimes** where the whole family is affected and forced to leave the community. This is especially hard for women who are also faced with exclusion and tighter restrictions in the host community.

- Some of the participants considered the relatively **high fertility rates** among Palestinian women and the deprivation of use of contraceptives as forms of violence. This mostly applies when women are coerced to have more children than they prefer, or in cases where women are ill but are still asked to bear children, therefore risking their lives.

- Shunning of and **discrimination against divorced** women and others who do not conform to social norms, especially in conservative communities.



# Section 2: Factors, experiences and manifestations relevant to the production and perpetuation of VAWG

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This section focuses on the many and interlinked factors that produce and perpetuate VAWG that came up in the research. It discusses the cultural and religious norms that generate and perpetuate the presence of violence as an option that looms in the background of gender relations, as well as enabling violence to be an acceptable practice. It places this within the wider context of the construction of masculinity and femininity. It also discusses the dissonance between the changing roles of women and the cultural norms. Furthermore, this section presents the various social, economic, legal, institutional and familial factors as they relate to VAWG.

It must be noted, however, that the dynamics of violence are much more complex and interrelated than to be classified into categories and distinct causes. As such, the following classification of causes and manifestations of VAWG is provided to illustrate the reality but not to imply any separation of causes. Each case study embodies the multiple economic, political, cultural and social factors and must be viewed in a comprehensive manner. The analysis in this section is derived from the real experiences and practices of women and men, as well as the surrounding environment.

## **First: Cultural and religious norms**

### **1. Recognition and awareness**

While official government and non-governmental positions on the issue of VAWG are elaborated in the various documents and strategies mentioned above, the qualitative research reveals participants are divided about the level of importance of the issue and the implementation of these strategies. In addition, the findings show that while all participants believe that the issue of VAWG exists, they are not equally convinced that it is problematic or an urgent issue. For the vast majority of women, VAWG is a significant concern requiring immediate action.

**Violence is everywhere: men have full ability to use violence or keep it in the background as a threat. They use it as needed and in a way that is suitable for their dominant position within the family. Families are destroyed as a consequence.**  
**(Social workers' group, female, 31-40 years old)**

While some women growing up felt violence was something that happened to others, they became much more aware of it as they entered the institution of marriage:

**I always thought that violence is not something that I will endure. I was mistaken; the minute I entered the home of my husband, I suffered from all types of violence. Some of it came from him, but also my in-laws would feel free to abuse me because my husband would not protect me. They all felt that this was normal as women in the house were all exposed to it and accepting of that reality.**

**(Interview with a woman, Hebron, 41-50 years old)**

Recognition of VAWG as an issue was not limited only to female participants. Most males believe that VAWG is present and some felt that it was widespread:

**I look around me and I see that many families practice all kinds of violence against women, girls and children. It is assumed that older men can punish other members of the family to discipline them or to keep them under control. Our neighbour screams, uses foul language and hits the women and children in the house. Violence is getting out of hand.**

**(Young male group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

Most participants, however, felt that the vast majority of violent acts against women (especially IPV) are not known or reported. As such, data on VAWG is incomplete:

**Most women suffer from one or more types of violence; they just**

**keep it a secret even from their families and close friends. They feel ashamed and they think that they can deal with it on their own.**

**(Expert informant, female, Bethlehem, 31-40 years old)**

## **2. Associating masculinity with violence and femininity with coping**

Beliefs and attitudes on violence are not separate from the deeply rooted, yet changing,<sup>28</sup> views of masculinity and femininity in society. The participants in the focus groups were asked to describe their perception of their own acquired masculine and feminine traits. Participants in the FGDs were asked to provide personal traits that are considered by society as feminine or masculine. Table 4 lists the terms utilised by women and men to describe what they perceive as their own masculine and feminine traits.

The descriptions in Table 4 of one's own traits, which embody gendered social norms and upbringing, illustrate the following interrelated observations in relation to gender values, roles and expectations:

- **Women are generally more open to talk about their own feminine as well as masculine traits.** Men, on the other hand, were willing to describe their masculine traits but inferred the feminine traits only to women. This implies two interrelated social phenomena: one, women are more comfortable with their traits whether masculine or feminine and they are willing to speak about them more than men. It is also more acceptable that women express their feelings than men. While women view many of what society considers as masculine traits positively, most feminine traits are viewed negatively by males. This is not very surprising as while some masculine traits are considered to be demanding (responsibility, breadwinner, strength, and hard work), many others align with rights, authorities, decisions and privileges.

<sup>28</sup> Change is exhibited in polarisation where we notice more liberal and more conservative views growing side by side.

**Table 4: Socially-constructed feminine and masculine traits (self-description of own traits by the participants)**

Feminine Traits		Masculine Traits	
Females (My trait...)	Males (My trait...)	Females (My trait...)	Males (My trait...)
Shy	Obedience	Daring	With authority
Weak	Submission to orders	Challenge	Higher authority
Submission	Flexible	Dicatorial	Controlling of women
Unconfident	House chores (undemanding)	Strong will	Decision-making
Emotional	Emotional	Strong personality	Initiative
Cooperative/accomodating	Helpful in getting me ready for work	Determination	Physical abilities
Helpful	Housekeeper	Stubbornness	Hard work
Faithful	Weak	Power	Freedom to move/mobility
Passionate	Slave	Entrepreneurial	Financial authority
Patience	Weak personality	Breadwinner	
Sacrifice		Leader	
Empathy		Self-confident	
Romantic		Resilience/steadfastness	
Responsible (Home & child care)		Betrayal/cheating	
Motherhood		Violence	
Grief		Cruelty	
Resilience		Corruption	

- **Women perceive themselves more positively than men perceive them.** The vast majority of feminine traits as described by women are positive: caring, empathy, romance, responsibility, faithful, etc. In contrast, most descriptions of femininity by male participants were negative: submission, obedience, weakness, etc. Views of masculinity by men and women were mostly positive. In fact, when women described themselves, they identified themselves in the most positive (masculine) traits (as constructed in society) – see column 3 in the above table. They, however, have a different image of masculinity for men. On the one hand, they viewed masculinity from the

point of view of responsibilities and chivalry (breadwinner, initiative, leader, confidence, determination, etc.). On the other hand, some equated masculinity with violence, cruelty, betrayal, stubbornness and corruption. This implies that while women are increasingly acquiring feminine and masculine traits, men tend to avoid any association with feminine traits.

- **A changing image of feminine and masculine.** Most of all, the list reflects the dual social nature for both men and women who are acquiring feminine and masculine traits as they progress in life, but must label themselves as men or women within

their environments to facilitate socially transcribed interactions and preserve a more harmonious and scripted image of femininity and masculinity. This contradiction between realities (internal and real duality of traits) and pronounced and displayed characteristics feed into the prevailing hypocrisy about the changing roles of women that are not matched with equivalent progress in the cultural and religious norms and legal rights. The preservation of hegemonic social arrangements continues to leave the power of control in the hands of men over women, regardless of the changing reality of women's roles and images of self. Limited willingness to recognise feminine traits, while heavily subscribing to masculine traits of control and power, illustrates the widespread presence of what may be called a 'toxic masculinity'. This is where socially-constructed attitudes describe the masculine gender role as violent, unemotional, sexually aggressive, and so forth. These roles perpetrate the idea of ownership of women's bodies and souls and hence enable an environment of VAWG.<sup>29</sup>

### **3. Changing roles: preserving norms**

Views of the feminine and the masculine are not separated from the reality of the changing roles of men and women, which creates new tensions and issues, and which may shape VAWG. For many women, it is increasingly common to lead traditionally masculine roles, e.g. being the breadwinners, decision makers, or working in the Israeli labour market. But at the same time, these women must work hard to preserve their "feminine" image are encouraged by society to navigate through a process of attempting to gain what is commonly known as masculine rights – an uphill battle that women must go through mostly on their own. The vast majority of men, however, feel more comfortable preserving their traditional status and rights, while allowing women to perform masculine roles, including working for wages and providing for the family. This disjuncture between the traditional norms and relationships and the changing realities of women's and men's lives can create conflict.

<sup>29</sup> For more on toxic masculinity, please refer to: Rethinking the Man Question. Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations by Jane L. Parrart, Marysia Zalwsk, Perspectives, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2010), pp. 95-99, Institute of International Relations. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23616082>

Throughout the FGDs, there remained significant recognition of the dominant norms in Palestinian society that support men's dominance over women. This included access to land, property and also children:

**Men have the rights to ownership over all – property, women and children.**

**(Interview, female activist, Rafah/Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

**When the right to inheritance is negotiated, men become vicious monsters; they keep it all.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 51-60 years old)**

**When a man and a woman buy a property and both pay for it, the man will say "do you think that I am stupid to share the deed with a woman."**

**(Young male group, Khan Yunis/Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

As more and more women, opposed to men, enter the labour market and take on more burdens, men are still expected to fulfil their traditional roles:

**As much as things change, society still assumes that I should fully take care of the financial responsibilities of my family: yes, women work but they can choose to keep their money.**

**(Interview, Male, 31-40 years old)**

**I am totally responsible for providing everything for my kids; my husband is ill and I am buying my independence from my in-laws by working day and night so that I don't need them: if they give me money, they will control me and my children.**

**(Female group, Gaza city, 41-50 years old)**

The realisation of women's empowerment is an ongoing process for many women, albeit an agonising one with a heavy price to pay:

**They think that men are strong and resilient! For a woman to go through all the suffering that I had to go through, end up a divorced woman in a traditional community, and still be able to come to this meeting and look forward to life, that is resilience.**

**(Female group, Halhoul/Hebron, 18-30 years old)**

The above are only some examples that show the complexity of constructing labels around men and women. The increasing tensions around women's entry into work, and the public sphere, especially when men seek to retain power over the household and women, is a challenge. One of the interviewed men jokingly expressed what many men describe as a gender dilemma, where he had to hide the fact he worked around the house, yet still show he's in charge:

**The challenge for me is to do work around the house, but not be noticed by the neighbours. The**

**challenge for my wife is to do all the work and make most of the decisions but show the neighbours that I am in charge.**

**(Interview, male, Khan Yunis/Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

This socio-cultural backdrop helps explain the uneasy transformation in society in relation to gender norms. Roles and experiences are developing into more strenuous demanding roles for women and more pressure on men in coping with the changes. The asymmetrical relation between objective realities, where many women are working and providing fully or partially and many men are unable to fully or partially provide, and the subjective cultural norms where a strict application of old-fashioned norms are not aligned with the new realities, causes a high level of confusion and conflict. This state of changing norms and paradox seem to be aligned with equally inconsistent views on violence against women, girls and male children.

Changing gender roles does not match with the more static cultural norms and beliefs. Instead, it seems that a new pact became prevalent, whereby women can study and work, but control from men must be preserved. According to one woman, a negotiated repositioning of gender relations provided her with opportunities, but at the expense of other rights:

**My parents agreed that I could go to university for my higher education. They want me to study. But they had many conditions for allowing me to do that: strict attire with full Jilbab and Hijab, strict time limitations, and in the case that a good suitor knocks their door, they will decide on my marriage.**

**(Female youth group, Jabalia/Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

As illustrated in the quote below, the trade-off between new roles for women and traditional roles embodies more coercive arrangements between husbands and wives:

**My husband encourages me to work and bring in income, but then he also wants me to be the best mother, the best home maid and the best wife. He also wants me to be home on time, be obedient and religious, and to dress modestly outside of the home. Most of all, he wants me to spend my money on the house and children while he spends his money on smoking and going to the coffee shop.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 41-50 years old)**

Changing material roles while maintaining cultural norms is common even if the woman becomes the sole breadwinner. In some cases, as illustrated in the following quote, religious attire is utilised as a way to 'protect' women from being seen as transgressing roles, either by the family or surrounding community, and not necessarily an expression of religiosity:

**My husband can't find work since the closure on Gaza was enforced. He used to do very well working in Israel, but now he is sitting at home while I must look for work in people's homes as a cleaner. I must do it in secret as it could tarnish my reputation and that of my family. I wear the Niqab on my face now so that people cannot recognise me when I go and come back from work.**

**(Female group, Rafah/Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

Many men are also finding it difficult to change their views about prevalent social norms even when the women in their lives are educated and have paying jobs:

**A woman's place is the home even if she is working and bringing money to the house; my family will collapse if she is not taking care of the kids. We have no one else to do that - I can't do that because she is better as dealing with the kids than me. I am busy but also I don't want to be viewed as a sissy by my peers.**

**(Young male group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

#### **4. Cultural assertions: Preservation and progress**

The preservation of old norms within a developing reality is enabled through a plethora of cultural assertions, which are easily accessible to justify the current positions of women and men in society. While some of the participants don't believe in them, the men and women in the FGDs and interviews, mentioned the following dominant folkloric proverbs<sup>30</sup>:

- Even if a woman reaches Mars, she ends up in the kitchen
- Women are for cooking and reproduction
- Women are like rugs; you must strike them to clean them
- Women are like shoes; you wear them as long as they are comfortable
- Chop the head of the act from the first night (wedding night)
- Hit a woman and one kiss she will have recovered
- Hitting a loved one is like eating raisins (sweet)
- Women are inadequate religiously and mentally
- The family agonises over its daughters until death

<sup>30</sup> The originals of these proverbs are in Arabic.

- My Harem; God keeps you dignified
- From her father's house to her husband's; from her husband's to the grave

Even when society provides positive proverbs about women, they are meant to reinforce their traditional roles. The following were listed by the participants:

- Heaven is under the feet of mothers
- Behind every great man, there is a woman
- The woman who rocks the crib in her right arm, rocks the world with her left arm

Having said this, many participants recognise the positive changes in gender relations in Palestinian society. Some participants equated progress with education, openness and challenging the dominant norms:

**With education and openness to the West, many customs and norms have been broken and women now have more freedom and a role in all fields of life.**

**(Young male group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

Others believe that women and men are now more aware of gender equality than before:

**Women are now more educated; they are aware of their rights and obligations and they understand how to use the laws in their favour. The work of many women's organisations has had a positive impact.**

**(Social Workers' group, female, Ramallah, 31-40 years old)**

**I think that men have also changed: we hear many positive voices that**

**want equality and work for women's rights; many of them are in human right organisations and some are in political groups.**

**(Expert informant interview, female, 41-50 years old)**

**Things have changed: children now look at women in important positions, they read in schools about important women and they see that their mothers are working. All these images will influence how they perceive gender in the future.**

**(Expert informant interview, male, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

## **Second: Family relations and endogamous marriage**

The research uncovered the complex nature of familial relations where many of the marriages are endogamous (the practice of marrying within the same group/family) and both families (in-laws and own family) will cooperate to keep the women in a dysfunctional marriage. This highlights many of the challenges of referring women who experience violence to appropriate services, but also the overt and tacit support that exists for VAWG within households.

The research showed that when women faced with violence are forced back to their original family homes or try to seek support from them, they may face further violence or have their family force them to return to their marriage:

**Every time I come home crying and showing my bruises, my mother would push me to go back to him;**

**she would blame me and ask me to correct my actions, My brother got fed up with me once so he hit me and instructed me to think a million time before I leave my husband's house again.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 31-40 years old)**

Within an extended family dwelling, women are pitted against each other and are expected to serve as the preservers of the "best interests of the family in face of any dissent." Another woman from the same focus groups stated:

**The wife of my brother-in-law had five boys. She was proud of that and always felt that she should watch every one of my moves. When I was unhappy, she would send her older son to hit me and my little children.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 31-40 years old)**

Women who must play the role of a sole provider and protector of their families face additional pressures from their extended families. Countering that, women utilise any available resources to enhance their own economic and psychological position. The ability of women to insulate themselves and their families from the pressure of their surrounding relatives and community vary depending on multiple factors including their personal motivation, qualifications, access to work and connections, and the inability of the relatives to "put their money where their mouth is". The following case is illustrative:

**My husband has a severe disability; he can't walk on his own and he can't work. His family felt that they could take his place in controlling**

**us, but they couldn't because I had to find work and provide for my six children. I received some help and connections from the nearby women's centre. They helped me to obtain a small loan and start sewing dresses for women in the neighbourhood. The pressure mounted on me when my two daughters became teenagers; the family wanted to marry them out to "save me the burden of having to provide for them". They had other motives: they wanted to have them marry their cousins for free, with no cost. I told them if they were willing to provide for my family, they could make it happen. Of course they didn't and placed more pressure on me through my husband but I had to make decisions in the house and resisted and told them come back only when my daughters complete their university education. This is now my sole objective in life: to give my daughters the education that I didn't get.**

**(Female group, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

Complications are also exacerbated in case of endogamous marriage. In many cases, the families come together and work with the husband and wife to resolve their disputes. These resolutions, however, can come at the expense of the woman who ends up bearing the responsibility of protecting the family fabric and preserving long-held relations and mutual interests. While this pattern holds in many situations, in other cases families provide the needed support to reduce conflict or exit violent relationships.

Interestingly, family support to reduce or leave

violent relationships may also be found in rural and traditional family settings. The following case shows that rural women are not as accepting of violence as is generally believed. In fact, as much or even more reported violence came from women who reside in urban areas and refugee camps. The role of the family and the informal justice channels are also instrumental in dealing with the consequences of a dysfunctional relationship. In addition, the legal clauses that allow men to divorce women without any limitation, due process or recourse provide men a free hand in marrying and divorcing women as they wish. The case disputes misguided perceptions that religious, covered and assumingly well-behaved women will not suffer from abuse or that they will accept violence. In fact, this case shows that women who suffer come from all backgrounds and degrees of religiosity. It also shows the complexity of social norms, violence and behaviours: in the following case, the woman was supported by her male family members. The woman wore the Niqab, and was from a rural and highly traditional region in the middle of the Gaza Strip; she (18–30 years old) participated in a women focus group in Gaza:

**My cousin asked for my hand in marriage, but I didn't get a chance to know him before marriage. He had many conditions including that I don't complete my education and that I don't visit my family without his permission. My family agreed and felt that these conditions were normal and might change with time. Well, it didn't take long and he said that he wants to divorce – he couldn't live with me anymore. I was willing to stay and not be a divorced woman. The shame of being divorced would stay with me and I would have no future. I left his house and went to stay with my family, which was supportive at this time. He then**

**came to take me back and started beating me and my sister. Even though my father was worried about ruining his relationship with his brother, he still supported me; we went to the police but they asked us to go home and resolve it on our own, according to them, this was a family issue. My father asked the community and family elders to convene and asked for compensation. My husband divorced me and paid my dowry and a compensation for beating me and my sister. Now, I am feeling better and trying to find my way in life. He is a chronic divorcer; he married twice and divorced two other women after. His family doesn't know why he is like that.**

### **Third: Legal and institutional factors**

The most pronounced reason for staying in a violent relationship is what most women refer to as the 'vicious cycle' where women must jump through one hoop to another to untangle the complex network of factors that enables them to report violence and seek justice. Most participating women cited the insufficient legal system and the lack of application of some clauses that might be beneficial to women as being major obstacles to reporting violence.<sup>31</sup> Reporting to families, to the police and to the institutions does not provide women with the full protection and empowerment needed in their search for justice. This is also related to the dysfunctional referral system (NRS) discussed in other parts of this document.

Another significant challenge is the economic dependence of women on men and to the social shaming of women and families that endures such public display of disputes. In many

<sup>31</sup>The legal environment is discussed in Part 2 of the report.

cases, women stay in the marriage because they want to protect their daughters from the 'bad reputation' that comes with a public discussion of violence in households or divorce: they want to make sure that their daughters will have a chance to be married.

The vicious cycle is exemplified when women seek a divorce, which is considered in the religious culture as sacrilegious, especially for women. The desire of women to obtain a divorce is surrounded with major risks for women's reputations, as well as risking additional acts of violence. Some women list a number of divorce-related forms of violence including:

- Most women are asked to give up on their legal rights upon requesting a divorce (depending on the justification of the request). The Palestinian Law, like other laws in the region, allow women to obtain a divorce upon their full concession of their legal rights stipulated in the marriage contract and give back any gifts they have obtained during the marriage. This type of divorce is called (Khulou') which implies that women get a divorce only if they concede their legal dowry and any other rights in the house of property.
- Forced divorce (Ta'asofi): where women are faced with an arbitrary decision by the husband to divorce. In this case, a man could literally verbalise the word 'divorce' three times and the marriage will be annulled. The courts have no say in this case and he is not asked for any justification for his action.
- Quarrels over child custody are well-known. In some cases, men deprive women from seeing their children, while in other cases men are deprived of access. In some cases, women are left to provide for their children without any assistance as some men do not pay their legal alimony.
- Separation where women are abandoned and no action is taken by the husband, the wife or the courts to end the marriage. In these cases, women do not qualify for alimony nor are they able to move forward with their lives.

Seeking support from service centres by women who experience violence and adversity is very limited<sup>32</sup>. Most of these service centres have a primary focus of providing services after abuse, rather than preventing abuse. The few women who do access support from centres (either governmental or NGO) might find various levels of support depending on the complexity and nature of their situation. While the dominant discourse among experts is that many of the services provided by women centres are irrelevant and insufficient to change the core basis of an abusive relationships, or prevent the recurrence of abuse, the small pointers and social support offered by these centres could mean the world to an abused woman. Since many men refuse to acknowledge that there is a problem and often refuse to seek counselling or assistance, counselling centres focus their services on those who are willing to access them. And some women are fortunate and receive support that is helpful, as the next quote shows:

**My sister was treated violently by her husband. Abuse in that household is normal against women and youth and even the brothers of the husband would beat her. She would come back home with bruises and bites. Imagine...they bite her! I had to intervene and sneaked out with her to the nearby women's centre where I go to seek assistance myself. She saw that the counsellor could help her. We came back a number of times and the counsellor taught her a few tricks to help deal with her husband, how to calm him down and how to resolve disputes. One day passed without him hitting her. She marked this on the calendar as significant. Now there are full days**

<sup>32</sup> The latest available data by PCBS (2014) show that less than 1% of women facing violence seek services from government or non-government centres.

**where he doesn't beat her. Every time we talk she counts the days - beaten or not beaten. She tells me 'my calendar is my witness'.**

**(Female group, Gaza/Rafah, 31-40 years old)**

While some participants raised doubts about the funding sources and accused women's organisations of adopting a 'foreign agenda', some of the women still seek support from them. The funding, however, has additional dimensions in the Gaza Strip where some organisations provide women with food or shopping coupons to encourage them to participate in their training, awareness workshops, and other activities. This has reverse consequences in some cases:

**My husband forces me to go the activities of this organisation because they give women coupons. Once I couldn't find my identification card which is needed for getting the coupon. That is when he started hitting me and I ended up in the nearby clinic.**

**(Female, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

## **Fourth: Emotional distress and mental illness**

Emotional distress and mental illness are not yet recognised in the mainstream Palestinian society. Most families hide mental illness and in many cases live in denial of its existence. This pattern is in line with the belief that any acknowledgment of mental illness will harm the reputation of the family and the prospects for the marriage of its daughters. Families live in denial and normalise mental illness and emotional distress among their members, especially men, through a process of associating

violent actions as normal actions that men would do. This again reinforces the association of males with violence, but also denies males from being able to seek assistance, which would not align with their masculinity.

The lack of interest in emotional and mental dimensions of violence is not only limited to families, but is widespread in government and non-government institutions. This implies that there are very limited services for people, both women and men, who suffer from these challenges. Women pay a heavy price because of lack of awareness, denial and lack of services in this field. They must endure excruciating circumstances and must struggle to assert their claims that their partners might have a mental illness which in many cases produces drug addiction and crime.

The following case is illustrative of the role of denial of signs of mental illness that happens to close relatives. Actions that are reflective of severe mental and emotional challenges are defined by some families as normal. They are justified and denied based on the premise that it is normal for men to be tough and, if needed, violent. In addition, this case reflects the role of endogamous marriage of cousins and the denial of marriage as of one's choice. Furthermore, it sheds some light on the role of health services and the inability to cover health expenses. Finally, the story demystifies the supposed role of extended families in protecting their own women members, while instead contributing to the suffering. A.N (the woman interviewed, Hebron, 41-50 years old) told her story as follows:

**They made us marry. My cousin didn't want to marry me as he was in love with our other cousin. From the first night, he warned against uncovering an object that he had hanging in our bedroom. With time, I needed to know what was above my bed. I uncovered it and it was a picture and other memorabilia of our cousin - the woman that my husband loved. I**

had to ask him about that and the violence started and never stopped ever since. In getting to know him, I knew something was wrong: he was unstable, anti-social, angry at the tiniest thing and did not want to talk to me or even to his family. The only relation I had with him was sexual when he decided that he wanted me. He banned me from visiting my family: once I couldn't see them for eight months although they live in the same neighbourhood. He would lock me in and would take the key. His real personality started coming out when I got pregnant for the first time. He kicked me and stomped over my belly while his family members watched. The baby within me died. He said he did that because he wanted to stop the pain and the suffering. I, however, wanted more babies - I thought that maybe through them I could find meaning and they could stand with me in facing life hurdles. For my first child he didn't want me to go to the hospital as he didn't want doctors to see me. I had to go and I delivered our first baby. He didn't visit or pay for the hospital. With the continued suffering, I couldn't produce milk for the baby. I had to find an alternative and asked my father-in-law to buy me the expensive baby formula which he did the first time around. But then when I asked for more, his daughter told me to stop asking for it as they were too poor to bring me milk.

I had to work in embroidery and sewing to cover my expenses. Some philanthropists helped. But that was not enough to cover the medical expenses of my five children who all suffered from a blood condition that required extensive costs and follow ups. This doctor told me this happened because my husband and I are cousins. My husband wouldn't come to the hospital with me to treat the children nor would he allow me to go. I had to go anyway. Once one of my children had a fever reaching 40°C, but the doctor said that I had to have money to admit him to the hospital. He stopped treating the baby when I told him I didn't have the full amount. He had meningitis. The government hospital refused to treat him until I got the clearance from my husband who refused to come to the hospital or sign any papers. I had to take him to a private hospital, where they found that he needed soya milk as he couldn't take any other milk, leaving me with more expenses. The beating and the humiliation continued. My family refused to receive me or acknowledge my suffering. Every time I reached out to them they sent me back and said that I should be patient and I must obey my husband. His family was against me, saying that I should obey him or else I would suffer in hell. I had five more kids from him. The second time I had a miscarriage

after he had violent sex with me; the baby was six months along and when I came back from the hospital, we had to bury the baby according to religious rituals, but my husband refused. To punish me, he placed the baby in the freezer. For six days, my children would bring out and say “mum, the baby is cold, please give it some warmth”. I pleaded with my in-laws, but they said I should do what my husband says. I took action and buried the baby in the backyard. When he would see me breastfeed any of my children, he would throw them away and ask me to stop feeding them. One night he came to the room, woke me up and divorced me. Then his second divorce stage came when I got very sick and had to go to the hospital. He refused and I had to go with my mother. He came to the hospital and beat me in front of all the nurses and completed the divorce intent. Then, I can't describe how relieved I was. I was finally free. But the complications continued. He refused to pay alimony and wanted to throw me out of the room I lived in, but I stayed. I am very ill now and I have arthritis, which means I can't do embroidery and sewing. I am looking for any work or charity to support my family. My older kids (13 and 11) work as well and help provide for the family. I come from one of the most prominent families in the city, but alas, they refuse to acknowledge

**what I'm going through. Only some of them send me some money to get my medication which is very expensive. His mother always said “he is not crazy, he is just a man!”**

## **Fifth: Political factors and dynamics**

The dynamics of the prolonged occupation are important in leading to a deteriorating economic and social situation. In addition, the implications of the Palestinian political division, exemplified in the presence of two regimes having power in different sections of oPt (the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza), further undermines the economic and social context.

### **1. Occupation-related violence**

The list of violations against women related to the occupation of oPt is a long one. Participants in FGDs and in-depth interviews listed the killing of women in the consecutive wars on Gaza, the killing of women on checkpoints in the West Bank, beating of women in protest marches against the occupation, imprisonment of women and young girls, and sexual violence and harassment faced by women who work in Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Occupation-related violence and IPV are, in many cases, mutually-reinforcing.

The overall high levels of killing during the occupation wars and the specific experiences of women and children was highlighted by some participants. The 2014 war on Gaza led to the killing of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians. Of the Palestinian fatalities, 551 were children and 299 women.<sup>33</sup>

**How many Palestinian women and girls were killed in Gaza? You must remember the pregnant woman who was killed with her baby girl in the north of Gaza recently in 2015. The**

<sup>33</sup> Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, OCHA OPT, 2015.

<http://gaza.ochaopt.org/2015/06/key-figures-on-the-2014-hostilities/>

**Israeli military shelled the area and they were the victims.**

**(Expert informant, Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

The denial of mobility by the occupying forces have also created conditions which increased women's experiences of daily violence. The most extreme case discussed by participants was of a woman losing her life and that of her baby because of road blocks:

**One of the cases our organisation followed was of a woman who was trying to get to the hospital to deliver her fourth baby – we have no facilities nearby. She and her husband were stopped at the checkpoint near Nablus. They refused to let her onto the other side. Her husband pleaded with them while she continued to bleed. She and the baby died.**

**(Social workers' group, Ramallah, 31-40 years old)**

Women working in settlements are especially vulnerable to harassment and control as they lack any real legal protection. They are also negatively viewed in the community, especially as most of them work as domestic labourers.

**I worked in one of the nearby Jewish settlements collecting vegetables and packing them; the supervisor forced me into a corner and started kissing and shoving me against the wall. I screamed and other people were around; he called me an "Arab bitch" and then he said "don't you dare ever come back". My husband blamed me and added insult to**

**injury by scolding me in front of my kids and family members.**

**(Female, interview, Jenin region, 31-40 years old)**

Many of the male participants in the FGDs and in-depth interviews, expressed feelings and views that highlighted the many impacts that the occupation has on their feelings as men and how this may be tied to increased levels of IPV perpetration. This includes the aftermath of imprisonment, the inability to protect their family while under attack, and the inability to work in Israeli markets or to move freely to other regions. Another form of violence against men were the roadblocks distributed in all West Bank regions (including East Jerusalem). Here they must wait for hours to get to work or are exposed to physical and emotional violence by the soldiers. In general, the daily harassment by soldiers that men experienced and had to cope with resulted in the normalisation of violence, humiliation and abuse as a survival mechanism.

The following case illustrates what men and families must endure as a consequence of the occupation and wars waged on Gaza. It highlights the complex relation between conflict, political violence against all members of a community, and IPV, as well as the expectations of a masculine culture and the inability of men to reach out for help on issues that are deemed to undermine their masculinity. In general, it also reveals the lack of psychological and emotional support to men, who also suffer from the aftermath of conflict-related violence. These all contribute to increased levels of IPV.

**During the past war, our house was bombarded and demolished. We ran out at the very last minute but my son (13 years old) was killed. I felt that the world shattered around me. I couldn't protect my family or do anything for them afterwards. I became depressed and I felt that I couldn't touch my wife ever again –**

**we didn't have sex for months and I felt impotent. I started hitting my wife for the slightest altercation between us. I couldn't do anything anymore except hit my wife and children. I never talked to anyone about this and I will not do that in the future. I asked her to stay with her family and they are taking care of her and my children.**

**(Male, Interview, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

Many families suffer in silence when the husband is jailed, and after he is released. In part, this is due to a reinforced image of masculinity associated with men, where they are expected to be and act as heroes and not reveal any sign of weakness. While ex-political prisoners receive financial support from the government, there is a lack of psycho-social support.

**I was very active in the struggle. I married my wife out of love. She was also active in the struggle. We shared very progressive ideas and we lived very well. I was arrested by the occupation forces in the middle of the night. My wife and two children were terrified. I was sentenced for five years and my wife would come to visit me and she suffered so much from the harassment and abuse from the soldiers. I knew that but couldn't do anything about it. I felt empty in prison and start to read the Koran which influenced and changed my ideas over time to be very religious. I knew that this reflected psychological trauma, but it helped**

**me to cope. When I came out, I could not look at my wife and felt totally inadequate. I still had to control her and started asking her to dress more modestly and not to go out and see other people. Our life became a mess. I feel ashamed that I left them to suffer. I feel like I need to show to everyone that I am still the big man that I was before prison. She is patient and copes with my problems and wants me to be the hero husband in the eyes of the community, although I am at times abusive at home. I stay at home to make sure that I spend my salary on family.**

When the Israeli soldiers are women, some male participants saw that as another reason why women could not be trusted with power and should not have rights. To them, "liberated" women increasingly remind them of the female soldiers who are perpetrating abuse on them:

**I have to go through the checkpoint to Netanya for my work every day, and every day I am humiliated by the soldier: she is 19 and she is a very cruel woman. See, when women get their hands on a gun, they can be more vicious than men. I continue to hate myself as I feel powerless as a man, but I have no choice as I must feed my family. When I go home, I resent my life and my family and I vent my outrage on my wife and children.**

**(Male group, Tulkarem region, 41-50 years old)**

One of the hidden costs of the continuation of violent practices of the occupation and the expected patriotic role of women is when women must suffer in silence when their loved ones are killed or imprisoned by the Israeli occupation. Women are expected not to cry or express any public feeling of sadness. Instead, they are expected to show signs of celebration that their loved men are joining the ranks of martyrs.

## **2. Political division and the related increase in violence**

The political split between the dominant political parties since 2007, with Fatah/PA controlling West Bank Palestinian communities, and Hamas controlling the Gaza strip, was cited as leading to new types of violence against women not witnessed previously among Palestinians. Much of this violence is in Gaza, but is also present in the West Bank. The following case shows the relation between political feuds and IPV, in a situation where a women's family of origin supported a different party:

**They call me the traitor because my family is from a different political group. I'm blamed for everything that goes wrong in the family. My husband's family humiliates me every time there is any discussion about politics. Everyone joins in: the mother, the brothers and the sisters. My husband threatened my brother that he will divorce me and send me to my family's home if he doesn't straighten up and support the "correct" political party.**

**(Female, interview, Rafah/Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

The political division provided an additional factor that is used to provide more leverage to men in managing their relations with women:

**He divorced my daughter after one month of marriage when she was only 17, claiming that we are infidels as I am a leader of a competing political party.**

**(Male group, Tulkarem region, 51-60 years old)**

One of the participants was confronted by violence as she participated in an all-women march against the Palestinian internal political division:

**I didn't really think that the Police would hit women peacefully protesting the menace of the division. Instead, they came at us full force and they hit in me on the head and stomach with their batons.**

**(Female, expert interview, Gaza, 31-40 years old)**

Another woman expressed her dismay with what she referred to as verbal violence in humiliation of women through a public forum (e.g. the mosque):

**I hear the Imam calling all women who are of leftist leaning as scum; he says that we are deviant and deserve to be disciplined. This encourages men to be more violent.**

**(Female group, Gaza, 41-50)**

The ramifications of the political division are deeply felt within the households and create an

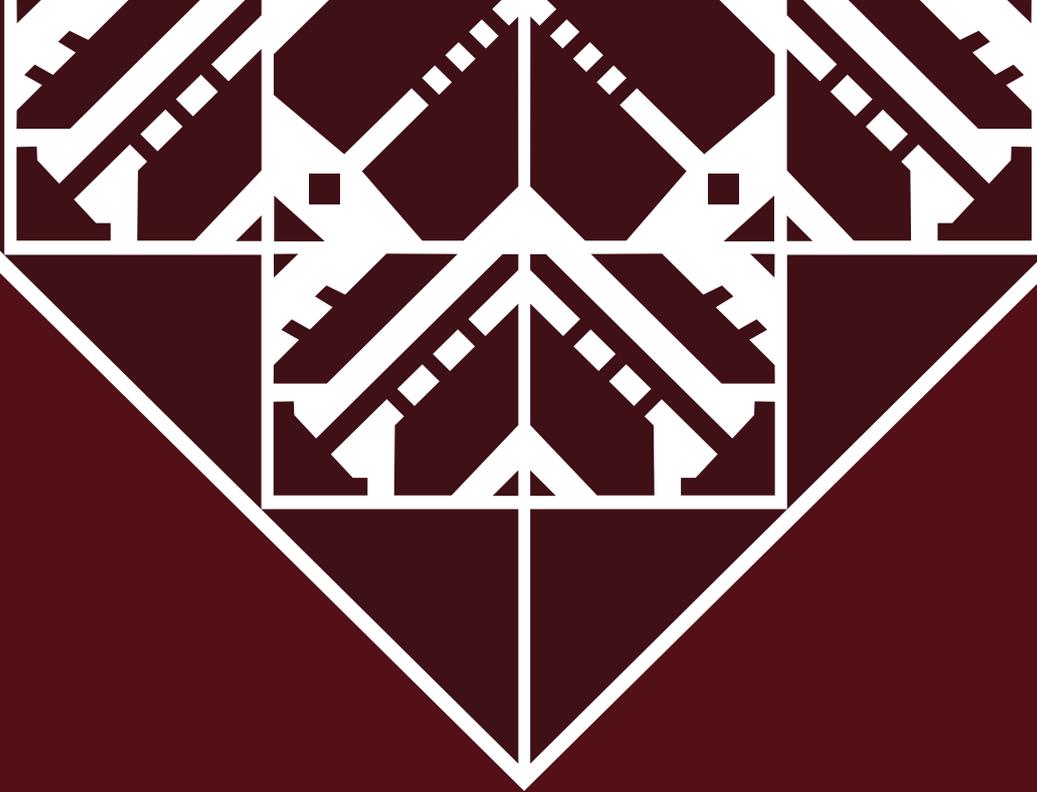
environment that is conducive to IPV. It is well-known that tens of thousands of government employees abstained from their jobs in 2007 after the militant take-over of Gaza by Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement). In protest, government employees never went back to work while continuing to receive salaries from the West Bank Government. The fact that they are bringing money to the family in itself did not guarantee that they sustain their patriarchal position and role within the family. One of the absentee employees was interviewed and highlighted this tension:

**I am still paid by the Ramallah Government, but I sit around 'like a woman' doing nothing and have no say in my own home. Throughout the past 10 years of so, I've lost respect for myself, but I also feel that my family has also lost respect for me and they treat me as irrelevant. To them I am not the man of the house anymore. I spend my time sitting in front of the house, going to the mosque, and lately staying in my room chatting with others, including some women. I resent everyone including my wife and children and I find any excuse to abandon them and quarrel with them.**

**(Male, interview, Khan Yunis/Gaza, 51-60 years old)**

medical costs. Others cited deprivation of the regular allowance allocated for the woman or to cover the expenses of the family. In some cases, allowances are used as a threat against women. Outside of the home, working women face harassment and exploitation working in difficult circumstances and for very low salaries.

Closely related to the political situation is the economic decline that the oPt is facing. Women cited many forms of economic violence that they experienced on a daily basis. Poverty is a common threat to women and families where unemployment and deprivation of basic needs causes much tension and emotional distress. Women cited their inability to meet basic needs of their families and inability to cover basic



# **Part 4: Evaluation of Palestinian media in dealing with VAWG**

Discussions with the participants in the focus-groups and in in-depth interviews revealed limited insights into the role of Palestinian media in dealing with violence. For most women affected by violence, young women and older women, the role of media was limited or non-existent. The expert informants were able to, more assertively, cite and analyse some practices and programs that are illustrative of how the media condones and challenges VAWG. The following is a discussion of the views of the non-expert and experts.

## Section 1: The views of women survivors, perpetrators, young men and women

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The views of “non-expert” participants are critical to understand the overall views of Palestinian public opinion, who are the target for the majority of awareness campaigns. Many of the views and inputs by “non-expert” participants were generic, yielding limited insights on the role of Palestinian media around VAWG. The generic statements reflected an in-principle agreement that the role of the media is vital in reporting on VAWG, raising awareness and changing social sentiments. The following statements are illustrative:

**TV and radio are the main source of information and as such would be very important in dealing with social violence. They play a great role in educating family members about the issue and help educate people to have stronger family bonds.**

**(Male group, Tulkarem region, 41-50 years old)**

This emphasis on traditional media – such as the TV and radio – was not shared by younger participants, who also highlighted a range of social media sources in shaping views:

**Social media is the main source of information now. Facebook is the platform for all good and bad. There are many people who portray women positively but many others describe women in negative ways.**

**(Young male group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

In addition, a small number of younger people take a more active role in looking for information on violence on their own, often using new forms of media:

**I don't wait for the media. Instead I look for numbers and stories on violence using the Internet. I do it sometimes for my university studies. Very few Palestinian websites talk about the issue.**

**(Young female group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

Most participants emphasised that the media has a role in combatting VAWG. However, there were no specific references to Palestinian media or examples of this happening through the Palestinian media:

**Of course media plays a role. The soaps sometimes show strong women and portray modern relations. In other cases, they promote violence through action movies.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 31-40 years old)**

**Arab soaps like Hajj Mitwali and others encourage men to marry a number of wives. The soaps show that it's cute and acceptable.**

**(Female group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

Some connected the ongoing portrayal of occupation-related violence to social and domestic violence. They argued that constantly showing violence numbed people to violence and made the use of violence acceptable:

**Our media shows so much violence by the occupation forces: they show injured and killed people, homes demolished and lots of blood. What do you expect after that? People become more accepting of violence at all levels.**

**(Male group, Tulkarem region, 31-40 years old)**

Others believed that the media, unjustifiably, placed too much emphasis on VAWG in its content:

**The media is causing the violence, by exaggerating the issue when it is not as widespread as they make it sound. They keep talking about it which and that makes women more defiant towards their husbands and fathers.**

**(Interview with a man, Nablus region, 51-60 years old)**

Following on from this, some participants, particularly men, blamed the media for encouraging women to be "too liberal" and rebel against their traditional roles. To some men, this was a key reason for VAWG:

**Women sit in the house and watch Turkish soaps and other programmes on TV, and they think that it is OK to behave freely and want to have relationships that are similar to the open ones that they see. They ask for too much and hence they force men to play a more strict role with them.**

**(Male group, Tulkarem region, 41-50 years old)**

Others disagreed and asserted that the media is not promoting gender equality, nor playing any effective role in dealing with VAWG:

**Palestinian media assumes that women have reached their goals and fulfilled all of their rights. To them, the issue of equality is no longer important.**

**(Female group, Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

Many participants also felt that there was a lack of emphasis and coverage in the media on particularly sensitive and/or taboo topics around VAWG, including honour killings, incest and rape:

**The media hardly mentions women who are killed for honour - they quickly talk about it and then it totally disappears from the media.**

**(Young male group, Gaza/Khan Yunis, 18-30 years old)**

**How many of us hear about incest and rape of young girls and boys? It is out there, and no one wants to talk about it, but the media must.**

**(Female group, Hebron, 18-30 years old)**

A number of participants in the study did give positive reviews of the Palestinian media's coverage of VAWG and its role of awareness raising. However, these were highly generic with lack of citation of specific evidence or examples:

**The role of the media is excellent these days; they educate and raise awareness.**

**(Young male group, Gaza, 18-30 years old)**

**There are instances of programs and talk shows that talk about women's rights and achievements.**

**(Interview with a man, Rafah/Gaza, 41-50 years old)**

Interviews with women victims/survivors yielded almost no mention of the Palestinian media.

Instead, a number of them cited educational programs with various women's organisations that work in the field as being important:

**I attended a number of workshops with the centre near my community. They wanted to teach us about our rights and to encourage us to be independent.**

**(Interview with a woman, Jenin, 31-40 years old)**

**The women's organisation nearby provided me with a booklet with names and phone numbers of organisations that help women to deal with violence. I used it to reach the counselling centre I am attending now.**

**(Interview with a woman, Khan Yunis/Gaza, 40-41 years old)**

Despite the generic assessment of Palestinian media, with few mentions of specific programs that discussed or tackled VAWG, a number of participants did provide concrete examples of these. The following few examples were listed:

- She and her rights (on Alwan Radio, variety station, Gaza-base and reach, with 12,746 likes on Facebook; we couldn't find any mention of the program anywhere. However, we found the community organisation Society Voice, which utilises the radio to air programs that it prepares on various issues important to women, including violence.
- Khoyout AlShams - Rays of the Sun (on Al Quds TV, an Islamic leaning station close to the Islamic Jihad group; airing from outside of Palestine; the program shows success stories of women and talks about issues that are of concern to women, with highly-conservative messages).

- Kalam Nawaem (airs on MBC, an Arab-wide station with variety of shows. The program looks at issues of concern to women and society at large and is largely working to appeal to a mainstream audience).
- Ahmar Bel Khat Al Areed (aired on a Lebanese station. It does not focus on women's issues as such, but deals with sensitive social issues. The participants that mention this program praised its focus on serious issues, its style, and the good looks of the moderator).
- Nisaa FM – Women FM (the only Palestinian and Arab station that names itself as Women FM. This is a specialised station with a relatively small reach among Palestinians, but is taken seriously as a committed and relatively progressive station).



# Section 2:

## Views of expert informants on the media

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Informants had different levels of knowledge and varying views on the role of the media. Some of the expert informants worked directly with survivors of violence, while others are media experts. Some represent partner organisations with Ma'an Network, while others are familiar with its work and the general Palestinian media scene. Expert opinions were generally critical of Palestinian media and their engagement around VAWG. Specific issues raised were that media coverage was insufficient and inconsistent, and that there was often distorted and ineffective messaging. These two issues are discussed in detail below:

### 1. Insufficient and inconsistent programming

Most of the experts felt that the Palestinian media is not sufficiently concerned about VAWG. While there are many efforts to provide education and awareness on women's rights and gender equality by women's rights groups and medias, such as Nisaa' FM, the issue of VAWG continues to be avoided.<sup>36</sup> Not one media program of any type was cited to specialise only in the field of VAWG.

Where there are media efforts to address VAWG, these are inconsistent and unsustainable. There is no concerted effort by any

<sup>36</sup> During the life of the research, Ma'an had started a new TV program entitled ElHaq Lameen which deals with issues relevant to gender relations with a focus on VAWG. This will be elaborated on further below.

organisation to provide a sustained effort in a programmatic fashion to deal with the issue in the media. To the experts, this is due to three interrelated factors:

- 1) All efforts are driven by external funding which tend to be short-lived;
- 2) Relevant Palestinian Government institutions such the Ministry of Women Affairs and Ministry of Social Development are not allocating any funds for media and education in the field of VAWG; and
- 3) Media institutions do not believe that a focus on VAWG is attractive to their audiences.

### 2. Distorted and ineffective messaging

Overall, the media experts felt that the Palestinian media dealt with the issue of VAWG without a real understanding of its complex nature and the underlying causes of violence in society. Some media outlets reported on crimes of violence but without any real level of investigation or scrutiny of the real story. Others treated these crimes in a neutral fashion, leading to distortion and reliance on formal, and primarily male-dominated, sources.<sup>37</sup> According to one expert (Female, Rafah/Gaza, 31-40 years old):

<sup>37</sup> For more on this issue, please refer to: AWRAD & Nisaa FM, Palestinian media monitoring of gender equality, 2014. [http://www.awrad.org/files/server/publications%20nissaa%20english%20report%202014\\_docx.pdf](http://www.awrad.org/files/server/publications%20nissaa%20english%20report%202014_docx.pdf)

**Palestinian media reinforces traditional perceptions of gender roles. The media presents women as victims and in many cases it implies that women are to blame. They dehumanise women by presenting a distorted image of the victim as deserving to be a victim. They might not do that with intention but they do it anyway.**

**You know in the case of VAWG, neutrality kills women. The media can't pretend to be neutral on this issue.**

**(Expert informant, male - lawyer, Gaza, 51-60 years old)**

Another expert (female, Ramallah, 41-50 years old) asserted that the media presents only cases of killing, which are sensational and therefore 'news worthy', but they have no concern over the ongoing violence against women on a daily basis and in all fields:

**They always associate the killing of women with honour or imply that that is the case without any real investigation. They perform no critical investigative reporting, and therefore don't show the complex story that has been building leading to the killing.**

Other experts blame the media for perpetuating VAWG by only telling part of the story. In so doing, the media normalise violence and desensitise the population to violence:

**They deal with VAWG in passing as if it is a normal occurrence. They don't talk about the victim as a human being who had dreams and ambitions. They don't go back to tell the real story where the killing might be related to greed and competition over inheritance. They don't show that the perpetrator may have had ulterior motives and that he is only claiming honour to cover his own crimes where some girls are killed by close relatives who want to cover their sexual abuse of the victim.**

**(Expert informant interview, Gaza, 60 plus years old)**

Furthermore, experts stressed that the media deals with cases of VAWG as isolated incidents. They do not deal with it as long term socially-rooted issue:

**The media jumps on a case as if it is only related to that individual victim, as an isolated occurrence. They don't analyse the root causes of the phenomenon and show that this is a social issue.**

**(Expert informant, Khan Yunis/ Gaza, female, 31-40 years old)**

In addition, the media does not investigate the true stories and the realities of violence. In some cases, the official and social sources claim that the reason of death is suicide or an accident, as opposed to that they were actually killed:

**The media takes the easy route to a story. They repeat what they are told without any serious**

**investigation. I know women who were pushed by their families to kill themselves as a sacrifice for her assumed misdeeds. They were made to kill themselves to save their families from having to do it, and so their brother or father wouldn't have to go to jail. The media needs to investigate deeper.**

**(Expert informant, female, Hebron, 41-50 years old)**

Experts felt that the distortion of violence against women in reporting and more broadly the lack of professional treatment of VAWG was due to a number of reasons including:

- The male-dominated media, especially at the highest levels;
- The limited awareness of gender analysis and gender-based violence;
- The limited skills of the journalists in the field of investigative reporting which requires research skills;
- The lack of standards for journalists on how to cover cases of VAWG as the current literature of the Journalists Union does not include such standards;
- The tendency of media professionals to be content with sympathy and condemnation at the expense of analysis and confrontation of the institutions that perpetuate VAWG (e.g. the school system, the religious establishment and some political parties) and the individuals who encourage violence such as some religious Imams.

In addition, some experts accused mainstream Palestinian media of self-censorship, compromising on the rights of women to satisfy some of the dominant institutions including the government and the religious establishment, or to avoid any confrontation with them:

**Palestinian media is in a 'joy marriage' with the political status quo; they want to please everyone,**

**especially of authority, which means they have to give up on women's rights. To gain more audiences, they sweep some important violence-related cases under the rug.**

**(Expert informant, female, Ramallah, 41-50 years old)**

Another expert argued that the media doesn't use the opportunity of a devastating story to educate and raise awareness, such as to focus on the legal rights of women or the drivers of VAWG:

**A big victimisation case should be used as an opportunity to advocate to change the status quo. It should be used to educate and raise awareness of local and international human rights of women.**

**(Expert lawyer interview, male, Gaza, 51-60 years old)**

On the other hand, an expert from the Bethlehem region reminded us of the case where the media played an influential and positive role. In this case, a young woman was killed by her uncle on the basis of honour:

**Her blood didn't go in vain; the media was outraged by the case and created a huge issue out of it. I remember how Al Falstiniyah station did a talk show inviting experts and calling the President's Advisor to face his responsibilities. It was then that the President deleted the clauses of the law that allowed men to kill women on the**

**basis of honour and get away with it. The law is now free from clauses that make it OK for men to kill women.**

The media is also facing challenges relating to how language is used, where traditional ways of talking about the issue tend to blame women for their victimisation. The expert cited the terminology that is used inconsistently to describe women facing violence:

- “Incident/accident” instead of murder
- “The said woman” instead of describing her as a human being or a citizen
- “Honour killing” instead of illegal/inhumane killing
- Use of the active voice to describe her role
- Use of the passive voice to describe the perpetrator

The experts describe other limitations relating to Palestinian media in dealing with VAWG:

- Failing to show any empathy towards women victims;
- Failing to deal with sensitive issues such as “honour killing” cases that involve pregnancy and incest; and
- Citing the most sensational crimes such as killing but not the hidden violence that affects most women on a daily basis such as humiliation, incarceration of women in the home, verbal and emotional abuse, and economic exploitation by the private sector.

Regardless of the critical evaluation of Palestinian media by key informants, some media houses do undertake good work in this area. Those cited include: Sawt Al Nisaa (Women’s Voice); Ded Al Samt (Against Silence); Nisaa’ FM, Shuaa’a Al Amal (Ray of Hope); Lazem Nihki (We Must Speak Out); Be’eyuon Al Nissa’ (From the Perspectives of Women); and Watan ala Wattar.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, some of these efforts are often limited for a variety of reasons such as: being discontinued due to lack of funding (Sawt Al Nisaa); not specialising in VAWG (Lazem Nihki and Ray of Hope), or not necessarily understanding gender-based violence and providing superficial accounts of the issue at hand (Wattan Al Wattar). Ma’an could work with some of these initiatives to maximise the benefits of exposure.

**BOX 3: A VIEW OF PALESTINIAN MEDIA AND VAWG<sup>38</sup>**

An idealistic and romantic image of women and their participation in the national struggle is common in the media, and is creating a distraction from the reality of women’s experiences and the violations that are committed against them. For many, women represent Palestine, the homeland and the struggle.

Traditional and romantic images are reinforced by religious-based media, which in turn reinforces women’s place in society and benefits their agenda of what women should be: mothers, modest and committed to religion. The other more liberal media is inconsistent, and continues to fall into the same trap without confronting the dominant culture and inequality.

This paradox leads to the ignorance of who ‘real women’ in ‘real life’ are, especially in the case of the private sphere, where women are constantly being violated. In addition, uncovering the true reality of gender relations and VAWG leads to distorted priorities and as such, the real suffering of women is not on the national agenda.

<sup>38</sup> Rima Nazzal, The role of Palestinian media in confronting violence against women, 25 November 2010. [goo.gl/jMOKM2](http://goo.gl/jMOKM2)

<sup>39</sup> For more on these programs and other well-known media material (videos), please refer to Annex 1.

### 3. Ma'an News Network (Website and Television)

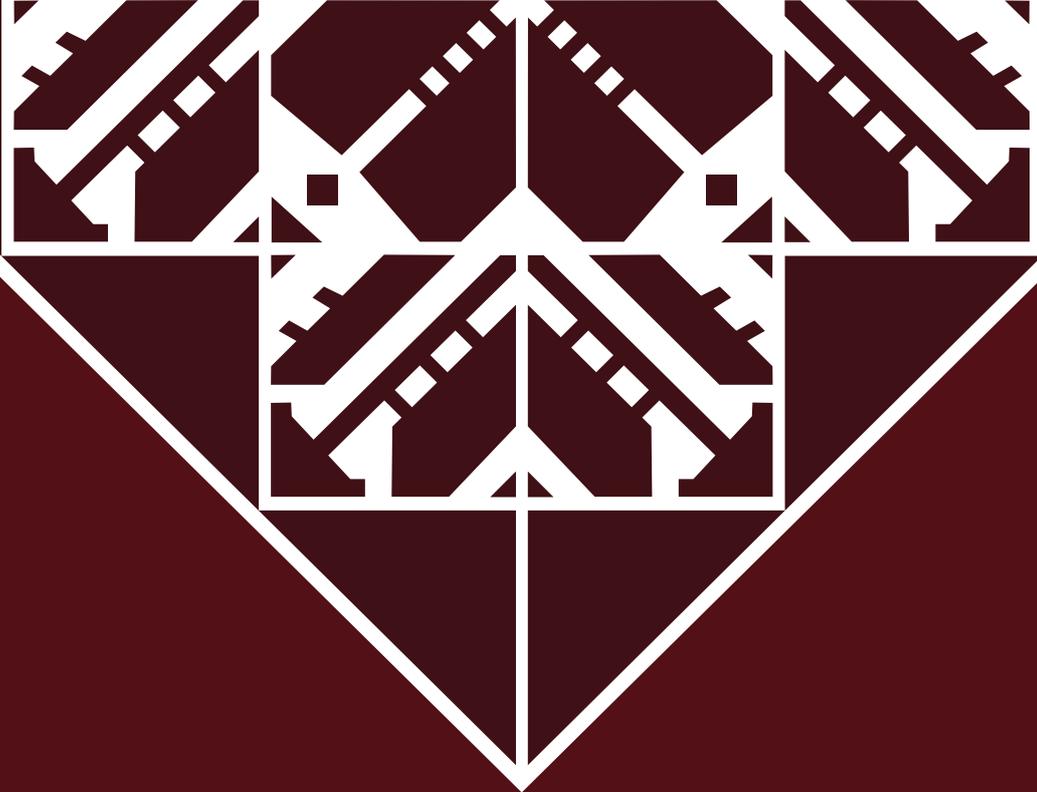
Ma'an was not mentioned by either non-expert or expert participants as particularly attentive to gender-related issues, including on the issue of VAWG. In fact, a number of experts believed the Ma'an Network is a mainstream, and somewhat traditional media outlet when dealing with gender-related issues. Other experts, representing the NGO partner working with Ma'an on its new project on VAWG, recognised that Ma'an is moving in the right direction to more appropriately and strongly working on gender and VAWG. They cited the following examples as evidence of these shifts within Ma'an:

- The creation of a specialised gender unit mandated with mainstreaming gender in the work of the network.
- A number of trainings on gender and media for editors, directors and other relevant staff.
- The allocation of a full section titled 'Women' on its main website page, which continues to provide news features on issues relevant to women and gender equality, with a focus on activities carried out by women's organisations.
- Reviewing the content of the website page by the research team during a period of one month (from 6 October to 6 November 2016), where 50 features were published, of which 5 focused on VAWG. When reviewing the section with articles, however, none of the last 50 articles were written by women. In addition, three of them were related directly or indirectly to issues pertaining to women. Having a specific section entitled 'Women' was a source of controversy among experts. One expert criticised the isolation of women in a standalone section, suggesting all news, programs and articles must have a gender lens. Another expert agreed, but believed having a section provides easy access for readers to find relevant information when needed. It was also noted by one expert that reporting on the killing of women has been improving with Ma'an.

- Ahwaluna (Ma'an TV): This program is concerned with various social and economic issues; some of its episodes focus on inequality between women and men and on the challenges faced by Palestinian women.

#### EL HAQ LA MEEN? (WHO HAS THE RIGHT?)

Ma'an started airing its program El Haq la Meen in early 2016. It is currently hosted by a well-known media expert and feminist, Ms. Nahed Abu Tuaimi. So far, the programme has tackled sensitive and controversial issues including the role of law in combating or perpetuating VAWG, the legal framework, the NRS, the role of counselling centres, abortion and reproductive rights, sexual abuse of children, crimes using social media, and marriage (legal conditions and requirements for a successful marriage). So far, 20 episodes have been aired and stakeholders from government and non-government institutions were included. The full list of episodes could not be reached through the Ma'an website and no specific page or link for the programme has been developed. In addition, Ma'an must start looking for means of sustaining the programme beyond the current funding from What Works and DFID. An assessment of the programme is necessary in the coming period.



**Part 5:  
Overall  
conclusions and  
recommendations**

*The following section provides conclusions and recommendations pertinent to the overall media scene as it relates to VAWG and to the role of Ma'an Network and its future programming.*

## **Section 1: Overall conclusions**

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*The Problematics of VAWG:* There is no doubt in the minds of all participants that VAWG is a social issue that deserves attention. Despite disagreeing on the extent and severity of VAWG, all realised that it is a relevant issue for Palestine. This realisation is not, however, translating into full-fledged advocacy and awareness raising campaigns that will be able to construct the issue of VAWG and transform it into a major problem that deserves to be on the top of the national agenda. Campaigns are there, but to a large extent they are reactive, inconsistent, and ineffective. This is reflective in the lack of a transformative power of the claims made by the number of organisations and other actors (governmental and non-governmental). Therefore, the cultural norms are relatively static while the economic and political realities are changing.

*Causes of VAWG:* Some research participants and officials believe that VAWG is not as problematic as claimed by the women and human rights groups, and continue to believe that it is an aberration and reflects broader outside (occupation-related) challenges facing Palestinian families. This limits people's willingness to tackle the issue.

Data presented above, however, showed the seriousness of the problem. Many felt that the main causes of VAWG are rooted in the political reality of a prolonged occupation where violence is daily, leaving the impression

that violence works and is justified at the conscious and subconscious levels, as many perpetrators and survivors have been exposed to violence as children. In addition, a focus is placed on the relationship between economic living conditions, including poverty and unemployment, and VAWG. Others emphasise culture and norms that provide quick and convenient access to a plethora of justifications for the use of violence or threat of violence by the "strong" against the "weak." The state of anomie (normlessness) in Palestinian society contributes to a sense of loss and desperation. Anomie is more pronounced during times of transition, economic and political difficulties, and vagueness, and where there are weak institutions with little trust in their ability to provide and protect. In this case, individuals tend to revert to coping mechanisms that do not necessarily match with the socially accepted values and norms. Instead they believe that they must protect themselves and achieve their goals through means of their choosing, including deviance, crime, violence, or withdrawal. The above gender analysis of the causes of violence focuses on cultural norms and religious interpretations, developments in gender relations and roles, economic conditions and unemployment, legal and institutional environment, and other internal and external political conditions.

*Diverse range of VAWG:* A wide variety of forms of violence were cited including physical,

emotional, economical, sexual and social. Politically-related violence connected with the occupation continues to be a priority including the killing of women, imprisonment, torture, deprivation of family through denial of family reunification in Jerusalem and Gaza, and mistreatment and harassment at the checkpoints including denial of entry or access to health services. There are also concerns about the overall impact of occupation on women in cases of house demolition and displacement, denial of movement and access to productive land, and basic needs such as water. The greatest concern, however, is with the related long-lasting impact on the emotional and social fabric. This negative impact is mostly felt on released women prisoners, released men prisoners, persons who suffer from disability as a result of war or imprisonment including women who suffer at various levels, and the overall hardship of burdens that must be carried by women as a result of loss of a male family member. All of these forms of violence have been connected to IPV throughout the research.

*Recognition of taboo crimes:* Socially sensitive crimes were cited, including rape and incest. In addition, sexual abuse of male and female children was emphasised. New forms of violence were also identified, including extortion and blackmail using social media, sexual exploitation of women in the workplace, treatment of sex-workers, pushing drugs on children especially in areas near Jerusalem, medical malpractice resulting in death or long term disability, and the cruel treatment of young people by their parents after using drugs. Some of these issues need to be further explored and researched.

*Women are mostly on their own:* In dealing with violence, most women and girls are encouraged to find ways to cope and try to change the situation on their own. They are mostly on their own silently suffering. Women who seek help resort to their primary families which in many cases encourage them to find ways to cope and continue in the relationship. In some cases, the women will be pushed by their primary families to go back to the husband's house. In some other cases, primary families become the main support mechanism for leaving violent relationships. Some of the most complex cases are in situations where there is an element of

mental illness or psychological challenge. In many cases, men and women are not diagnosed and in other cases are denied the diagnosis and treated as normal. Denial of mental illness leaves women and children in most cases, and men in some cases, suffering endlessly without any treatment. Most of these cases result in extreme levels of violence. Even in cases when there is an admission of the need for assistance at the mental level, there are no credible services in this field.

*Women are cut off from the public sphere:* While the research shows an improvement in access to services for women facing violence, most women are not using these services due to a vicious cycle of denial. Many women are convinced that they must face their fate. They are encouraged to cope and in many cases they believe that they have no choice but to continue and cope as they have no economic independence or any family support. Many stay for the sake of the children. Existing services are sporadic and limited. Many women do not trust external actors as they consider violence a private matter; some are ashamed and do not want to share their experiences with others. The majority of women suffer in silence. Those who reach institutional services provided by government or non-government institutions receive varying levels and quality of services. Some reported great improvement in their level of empowerment, while others felt that their involvement with the institutions was insufficient and led to further violence. Services for young girls are very limited, while concern with young boys facing sexual molestation for example, and men who suffer from violent relations, is almost non-existent.

*Need for concerted, informed and sustained media efforts:* Expert opinions were generally critical of Palestinian media. Most felt that the Palestinian media is not sufficiently concerned about VAWG. While there are many efforts to provide education and awareness on women's rights and gender equality, the issue of VAWG continues to be avoided by nearly all media houses. Current efforts are considered seasonal and inconsistent. There is no concerted effort by any organisation to provide a sustained effort in a programmatic fashion to deal with the issue in the media. Overall, Palestinian media is accused of dealing with the

issue of VAWG without a real understanding of the complex nature of violence in society. Some only report on crimes of violence but with the least level of investigation or scrutiny of the real story. Others treat these crimes in a neutral fashion, which leads to distortion and reliance on formal male-dominated sources.



# Section 2:

## Overall recommendations for capacity building of the media field

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In line with the goals of the formative research, the overall recommendations will focus on the role of Palestinian media in the field of VAWG. At the policy level, connections need to be made from the work of the Palestinian media to the National Strategy to Combat Violence. Media institutions must be in line with strategies that articulate VAWG as a priority. Unifying efforts around an agreed strategy will help garner a national effort and not scattered, funding-driven projects. At the same time, proceeding with the development of a national media strategy to combat VAWG is important.

Another key recommendation here is the creation of a core group of journalists who are informed and sensitive to gender analysis and VAWG. The following are some specific substantive recommendations on the types of capacity building needs for this proposed group:

- 1)** Sensitise the Journalists Union on the issue of VAWG and integrate concerns for the problem in their agenda and documents. In addition, work with the Journalists Union to improve the level of skills and competence around integrating VAWG as a key issue in their work. The Journalists Union must also include clear codes and standards on how journalists and media institutions report VAWG. This must also include raising awareness about the seriousness of the issue through presenting quantitative and

qualitative evidence.

- 2)** Train journalists in the field of investigative reporting, case study and statistical evidence-based analysis to highlight and capture the harms and costs inherent in the use of violence. They must show the complex and underlying factors behind VAWG, as well as historical events leading to the vicious cycle of violence, and not to treat VAWG as an isolated aberration. The media must adopt an approach that conveys the social and economic cost for all members of society and not only for 'isolated' women. It must also include specialised training and capacity building for key media institutions and new media to provide a more constructive presentation of the issue of VAWG through presenting the experiences of women survivors and the appeal of egalitarian families.

- 3)** Encourage journalists to deal with sensitive forms of violence including prostitution, rape, incest and child abuse. This must also include sensitisation on the use of language, where much of the language used at the present time, with or without intention, contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality, gendered social norms and violence. This must include the use of language that does not imply blaming the survivor or victim; and must portray the perpetrators as 'normal' men not exceptions or monsters, and must portray survivors and

victims as real women.

**4)** Sensitise journalists to adopt highest levels of respect with survivors, where their dignity, privacy and safety are guaranteed.

**5)** Journalists must be attuned to presenting positive images and to avoid images that might lead to more violence, directly or subliminally. An improved understanding of VAWG and gender norms will assist journalists to be able to make informed decisions in this regard.

**6)** Encourage women and human rights organisations to monitor the performance of media institutions as they present features on gender-related issues in general and VAWG in particular.

**7)** The role of the media and journalists must not only be limited to reporting, but must extend to education, awareness, advocacy and accountability of relevant officials and institutions.

**8)** A humanist approach to dealing with VAWG must be encouraged, where presenting women as victims might garner immediate and short-term sympathy, but to help resolve the root causes of VAWG requires care and analysis of the positions and views of all those caught in the vicious cycle. In addition, a proper resolution of VAWG requires recognition of all suffering by all relevant parties.

# Section 3: Ma'an-related recommendations

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In addition to noting and emphasising the above overall recommendations, Ma'an is encouraged to work on the following recommendations:

## **Institutional and policy level within the Ma'an Network**

- 1)** A clear commitment of the highest levels of management on the issue of VAWG. This should become a commitment that transcends individually funded projects to become integral to all of the work done by Ma'an.
- 2)** Policy imperatives must have a focus on social issues and a gender-related perspective. These imperatives must be communicated from the highest level of the institution through shared values between the higher management, the editors and all sections of the organisation. Any policy must support women and their concerns and not act as neutral, which implicitly supports the status quo.
- 3)** The development of an environment that is conducive to a gender-based analysis and is empowering for women staff to conduct their work in the best way possible.
- 4)** Utilise and benefit from the political leverage that the Network has and extend that to the social field where influential social journalists are empowered to play an influential role.

- 5)** The creation of a Gender Unit is a good step in the right direction. Such a unit must have a clear vision and mandate to integrate a gender-perspective in all of the work of Ma'an (not to isolate women and their concerns). The Unit must be further fortified with a budget, capacity training and with clear access to women's organisations and other experts.

## **Capacity building and training**

The current project with DFID and What Works has completed its training component. It is, however, expected that Ma'an will provide continuous training and follow-up to ensure the sustainability of its current efforts:

- 1)** Further build the capacity of the Gender Unit to play a leading role in the organisation. As previously stated, it must have a clear role in monitoring and integrating gender in all the work of Ma'an.
- 2)** Focus on the capacities and skills of editors and journalists through more training and awareness raising.
- 3)** Focus on investigative reporting and build capacity in research, evidence-based analysis and the use of qualitative and quantitative methods.
- 4)** Fortify the role of Ma'an through a sustainable work mechanism with relevant women's and human rights organisations.

- 5)** Unify the understanding of gender and VAWG among all staff, and monitor that language used is more sensitive and conducive to social change.
- 6)** Develop codes of ethics and conduct, as well as standards for Ma'an in the absence of national ones.

### **Content and messaging**

In addition to the general recommendations at the beginning of this part of the study, the following additional ones are directed at Ma'an:

- 1)** Must revive the reputation of Ma'an to be able to reach segments of society not reached before. The political image of Ma'an must be revamped to appeal to all political cross-sections of society. This will help get the message on VAWG across to the most vulnerable groups.
  - 2)** Adopt an integrative approach that integrates gender into all media produced by Ma'an instead of isolating women in their own section. This will help demonstrate that gender roles, rights and perspectives must be the basis for all sectors be it economic, political or social.
- In addition, experts felt Ma'an must adopt a more direct and proactive approach to dealing with VAWG. It should stay away from submitting to cultural and political norms and the mainstream institutions. While it should be strategic when presenting messages, it should not reinforce the negative images of women or consolidate the justifications of VAWG. This implies the adoption of an inclusive, humanist discourse that sympathises with all victimised parties; see the good in every one and feel for the suffering of everyone. This will help tell the full story and appeal to women and men instead of isolating men.
- 3)** In relation to religion, experts had different points of views. Most non-expert participants in the focus groups stated that religion could be a powerful tool to educate against violence. Others disagreed arguing that religion does not go far enough in providing rights to women. To them, religion and religious institutions provide the values that perpetuate VAWG. In general, Ma'an is recommended to keep its messaging with

any eye to the long term goal of a secular state where all citizens are equal, but in the meantime might find it appropriate to utilise some very supportive, unconditional arguments from religion or religious leaders who are willing to speak on behalf of non-violence.

- 4)** In terms of programming, talk shows, comedies or drama programs must not present issues relating to VAWG as a two-sided argument or debate, but rather provide a clear human rights argument throughout. They must work to educate, advocate and present an agenda of full equality based on human rights. In addition to the regular reporting and analysis, Ma'an is recommended to adopt a theme for every period of time, fully tackle it from all sides, and show the complete story behind it. Ma'an programming must show real-life cases and real-life situations that will help people relate to the presented media material. The material should not only be based on quantitative evidence, but also on real stories.
- 5)** Present role models that represent an egalitarian life style, that use communication and non-violence as their means to resolve disputes.
- 6)** Bring in speakers and writers who are clear about their positions and provide critical, change-oriented points of view (pro-women's rights; supporters of non-violence and outspoken politicians and experts who advocate against VAWG).
- 7)** Closely monitor the content and images provided in the work of Ma'an. This should be an internal task for the Gender Unit, but also a concerted effort by the partner organisations. The relation between Ma'an and the partners must continue beyond the current project and their role in monitoring the content and images must be institutionalised.
- 8)** Use social media to send out daily messages that promote the cause of equality, non-violence, compassion, and that educate on skills such as communication, mediation, relaxation, etc.
- 9)** Produce short drama/comedy sound bites/spots/skits that vividly show the human

aspect of the issue of VAWG. The real stories of women and families and the collective cost that all society members face due to VAWG must be highlighted. In addition, bring men as supporters and show that the issue of VAWG is not only about women and girls in isolation.

**10)** Monitor the new program presented by Ms. Nahed Abu Tuaimi called La meen Al Haq? (Who has the right?) and evaluate its progress, collect lessons learned and improve as needed.

**11)** Develop programs that hold officials, MPs, and NGOs accountable for the continuation of VAWG. Try to connect that to real-life stories and cases.

**12)** Have an educational campaign for

where women could go for services. The educational campaign must be realistic and specific, with concrete information of choices that women could use in case of adversity.

**13)** Review the stories of women obtained through this formative research and try to unpack and present the complexity of each in a simple presentation through art or documentation. Could also use some of the language used by the participating women and men.

In general, Ma'an must develop its own priorities from the above-listed recommendations depending on their resources. They must also coordinate their priorities to align with those of their partners.

#### BOX 4: MESSAGES PROPOSED BY PARTICIPANTS

These messages relate to the content of future campaigns. They were proposed by participating women and men who participated in the FGDs, as well as expert informants.

##### Messages proposed by women and men participants:

- Family free of violence is a real family
- Making relationships work is a joint responsibility
- I am a human being with feelings and dignity
- I have survived
- Violence: we all suffer
- The law punishes perpetrators
- Get help; it is very ok
- Educated and respected: Young girls are the future of the country
- Everyone deserves to live
- You are a treasure, you are deserving
- The right to live with peace of mind
- Respect all
- You are strong; do something
- We are here to help

##### Messages proposed by expert informants:

- Recognise violence
- Refuse violence
- Violence kills and dehumanises
- Violence breeds violence
- Nothing ... Nothing justifies violence
- We all pay a price
- Violence is not a solution
- There is an alternative ... imagine
- Let's start talking
- Non-violence .... Start with your family
- Survivors have the right to continue and persevere
- The media has a role
- All women... all strata of society suffer (from violence)
- The State must intervene
- The silence of the State encourages violence
- Safe work environment for women
- Safe streets for women
- Let your children talk to you, not to strangers, about cyber violence
- Violence = dysfunctional family
- Men and women are not enemies; we all suffer from violence

# Annex 1: List of media programs and material related to VAWG

## Women Affairs Technical Committees (WATC)

Two WATC programs were mentioned as important contribution to the media on women's rights and on VAWG:

Sawt Al Nisaa (Women's Voice): A bi-weekly and later a monthly newspaper published with Al Ayyam newspaper. Sawt al Nisaa continued throughout the years to cover all issues relevant to Palestinian women including VAWG.



Ded Al Samt (Against Silence): On Palestine Radio since 1997; hosted by a woman active journalist. Very-well respected as it provided serious treatment of the issues under discussion. The program is highly investigative and involves women and community members in the discussion.



Nisaa' FM: Mentioned above. In addition to its regular programming dealing with issues of relevance to women and families, Nisaa' FM has a specific weekly program specialised in the issue of VAWG called Kafa – Enough.



Shuaa'a Al Amal (Ray of Hope): Wattan TV aired 24 episodes of this program focusing on the legal and human rights of women with an emphasis on VAWG.

Lazem Nihki (We Must speak Out): On Al Falastiniah TV, this is program devoted to social issues in general with a clear emphasis on issues relevant to women and VAWG. An example of an episode on VAWG is below:

<http://alfalstiniah.tv/programs/lazemnehki/2907.html>

Be'eyuon Al Nisaa' (From the Perspectives of Women): A radio program that was produced by the Palestinian Women Working Society for Development. The program investigated a number of issues including VAWG, but was discontinued for lack of funding.

Watan ala Wattar: A comedy show that deals with many social issues including relations between men and women. While popular and in cases challenging some stereotypical gender roles, some experts believe that such comedy normalises violence and it treats it as a laughable matter. One of their episodes, however, looked at the very serious consequences of violence against women.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mwZCophA5A>

## **Films/videos:**

The expert participants cited the following specific films/videos that provide good analysis of the issue of VAWG:

Taket Sigara (Cigarette Ash): The video film describes the suffering and shunning of divorced women produced by the Directors' Society.

<https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2013/03/19/373228.html>

Menna wa Fina: A short documentary on sexual violence against young girls produced

by the Women Center Counselling and Social Counselling (2011).

Zenzana Bela Raqam (An unidentified dungeon): This short film focuses on sexual violence and incest.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tON1FVppZU>

3000 Layla (3000 nights): The film represents the story of Palestinian women in Israeli jails.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1rn7w3VNp4>

Law Arjaa' fe Al Zaman: One of the most powerful pieces dealing with the issue of the killing of women under the disguise of (honour). The group Dam, with Amal Murkus, provides this mix of rap music and pop to send a storing message to youth on the killing of women.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbYCCpWagNc>

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*'This report has been funded by UK aid from the UK government, via the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? Global Programme. The funds were managed by the South African Medical Research Council. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.'*



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