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Early Marriage in Gaza Causes and Impact

Palestine 2015



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Introduction

Executive summary

This study, "Early Marriage: Causes and Impact," makes the case that the marriage of girls before the age of 18 is a violation of "children's rights", and, more broadly, of International Human Rights. Early marriage is very common in Palestinian society. The increase in early marriage depends on various cultural, social and economic factors. It is a crime against children. By not doing anything to stop it, society is taking part in this crime.

From this standpoint, we at The Women's Affairs Center (WAC), have taken it on ourselves to conduct this analytical study to further investigate the issue of early marriage in the Gaza Strip. As a preliminary step, we are focusing on the causes and impact of early marriage so that we can define its scope, and reflect on the necessary actions for intervention at the organizational and social levels.

Key Research Question: What are the causes and implications of early marriage? What are the psychological, health, and social effects on the girls?

Research Tools: This research has been implemented with a variety of tools:

1. The documentation and observation of 120 early marriage cases helped to define this study.
2. Our social workers have conducted several focus groups with women who experienced early marriage. The focus groups tried to document the most important issues that women have raised and the degree of violation they have faced.
3. Five focus groups were conducted in different areas of Gaza Strip.
5. A questionnaire was created to explore the critical factors that lead to early marriage and its effects on the young girls, and to also specify strategies to help organizations on the ground deal effectively with this issue.
6. 15 interviews were made with specialists from both genders, regarding social, legal and psychological issues of women.

Areas Covered: the Gaza Strip's five Governorates, Gaza, Northern Gaza, Middle Area, Khan Younis, Rafah.

Time frame: The time period of the study was until November 30th, 2014.

The study contains several sections:

The first section outlines the study's methodology, key research questions, objectives and frame of reference.

The second section is a literature review of the subject.

The third section examines the characteristics and features of the study sample.

The fourth section is a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the results--of the incidence, causes and consequences of early marriage in the Gaza Strip.

Finally, the fifth section contains the conclusion and recommendations.

The most significant results of the study: The majority of the participants reject the idea of early marriage. The study also asserts that intermarriage (marriage within the extended family) is one of the reasons for this practice: 55% of the women who married as children had married a first or second degree relative. 44% of women didn't have the chance to agree upon their marriage but their father did.

According to the participants in this study, there are several important reasons for early marriage. 35.1% attributed early marriage to customs and traditions of the Palestinian society. 15.3% said that intermarriage is one of the causes. 14.1% attributed early marriage to being one of many sisters, which created the desire to ease the burdens on the family. 13.8% of the participants thought that poverty is the reason behind their early marriage. 12.9% said that their own misunderstanding of the real meaning of marriage, and all that it entails was the reason behind their choice of getting married.

Violence and early marriage: 63% of the participants have suffered from domestic violence during their marriage. According to the participants, 37% have faced verbal violence, 30% have faced psychological violence, 24.3% have faced physical violence, 9.4% have faced economic violence and 4.5% have faced sexual violence.

The consequences of early marriage:

There are psychological, health, and social implication that the girls face during their early marriage, especially for those who are less than 18 years.

This study has revealed that the participants have experienced harsh psychological effects during their marriage such as deteriorating mental status, symptoms of depression, grief, anxiety and uncertainty. They also have to deal with violence caused by individuals around them. The results of this study have showed severe social implications for the girls, in addition to other health implication, for they have not reached psychological or sexual maturity and are not able to handle the burdens of marriage. This is especially true in a traditional society that focuses on the reproductive role of women and their subservience to the man.

On the other hand, the study has pointed out, through suggestions by the participants, the mechanisms for interventions that may help in putting an end for this practice. The majority of them agreed on the importance of raising awareness about the dangers of this problem. 43% of the participants asserted that education and awareness are needed for prevention, and that targeting girls and boys equally through intensive workshops is important. Moreover, 33% of the participants called for more pressure to modify the family laws related to marriage and to lay down strong, clear law which prevents guardians from making marital choices for the little girls. 31% of the participants suggested that there be education for teachers and social workers who work closely with the girls during puberty.

The study includes recommendations made by concerned parties such as relatives, educational, religious and legal organizations.



Section One

Study method

Introduction:

Because child marriage is an issue that endangers the foundations of the Palestinian family in Gaza Strip, (The Research and Information Program) at WAC has worked to study early marriage and its causes and impact. One of the trends that can be easily observed is the increase in girls under the age of 18 who are forced to get married.

WAC started its field work by documenting 120 cases of girls who got married under the age of 18. The goal was to observe their situation and look for the reasons behind their early marriage and its social, psychological and health implications. At the same time, this study explores theories and concepts that shed light on the reasons for and implication of this practice in Palestinian society.

Research question:

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2010), about 36% of married women in the Gaza Strip have gotten married before the age of 18 and 5% have gotten married before the age of 15. In 2012 the bureau also reported that out of 10 women there are 6 who have gotten married after the age of 15, whereas, the percentage of women were 49.2% and 50.8% were for men.

There are many obstacles in the lives of Palestinian women and girls that make it difficult for them to develop themselves or to take part in social and political affairs. According to a new WAC study, "The reality of Empowering the economy of Women, 2014", 31.2% of women considered early marriage as the first obstacle in their life that deprived them of the chance to continue their education.

In an attempt to understand the scope of this research question, WAC has documented 120 cases of women who have married early in Gaza Strip. The majority of them have asserted that they have experienced harsh psychological, health and social conditions during their marriage. The young participants recalled great difficulties as young mothers and wives.

From this standpoint, WAC initiated this study to find out the causes and implications of early marriage in Palestinian society. The center conducted another study about the same issue 15 years ago, where we had warned against the practice in the Gaza Strip where 41.8% of women have gotten married between the ages of 12 and 17 as of the year 1999. For this reason, WAC intended to find out about the status of child brides in the Gazan society after years of political, social, and economic changes.

Key Research Question:

What are the causes and consequences of early marriage? What are the psychological, health, educational and social effects on these l girls?

The study will focus on the following research questions:

1. What are the causes of early marriage in Gaza Strip?
2. Are the frequent Israeli incursions on Gaza Strip a major cause of early marriage?
3. How do girls under the age 18 describe marriage?
4. What are the psychological and social effects of early marriage on the girls; what are the effects on their health?

Research objectives:

1. To understand the causes that lead young girls to marry early.
2. To understand to what extend the Israeli incursion influences early marriage.
3. To define the psychological, social, educational and health consequences of early marriage.
4. To define the intervention strategies for organizations and other interested parties.
5. To provide recommendations to parties of influence and interest, to decision makers and legislative bodies.

Study Population:

The population is married Palestinian women who live in Gaza Strip or have been married and are under the age of sixty at the time of the study.

Research Sample:

Research tools: this study is characterized by different research tools:

First: The documentation of 120 cases of early marriage.

Second: Our social workers have conducted several focus groups with women who have experienced early marriage. Those women have shared important issues that contributed to the discussion such

as the degree of violation they suffered and the kinds of experiences that negatively influenced their psychological, social, and economic life, sense of self and well being.

A space or no?

Third: The conducting of 5 focus groups in Gaza governorates:

The first focus group: College graduates (Both genders)

The second focus group: social counselors who have worked or are working in schools or the educational sector.

The third focus group: Women younger than 18 years old who have married early.

The fourth focus group: Women older than 18 years old who married early.

The fifth focus group: activists and workers in the field of reproductive health.

Focus group topics:

1. What are the reasons behind early marriage in Gaza Strip?
2. How is early marriage viewed from the perspective of reproductive health workers?
3. How do girls younger than 18 describe marriage in general?
4. What are the psychological, social and health consequences for the girls who experience early marriage?
5. What are the interventions needed to reduce the incidence of early marriage?

Fourth: 15 interviews have been done with public figures including judges and activists in the field of women's empowerment to try to understand the issue of early marriage, its causes and its implication for Palestinian society.

Fifth: A questionnaire was created to identify the most important causes that lead to early marriage, and to figure out the intervention strategies that assist organizations in the field.

Sixth: A case study was conducted of girls who have experienced early marriage and implications.

Areas of coverage: Include all Gaza Strip five governorates, Gaza, Northern Gaza, Middle Area, Khan Younes, and Rafah.

Time Scope: The study was conducted through November 30th, 2014.

Study basis:

This study considers the forced marriage of girls under 18 year to be a violation of children's rights and, in a broader sense, against International Human's Rights. Even though early marriage has become part of the culture of at least certain sectors of Palestinian Society, it is still a crime against children. Through inaction, Palestinian society is playing a role in this crime. The judicial, religious and family spheres of society, are not taking any sort of move to put an end for this practice, which destroys childhood and deprives girls of opportunities to grow and to realize their potential as human beings. These girls in

early marriage are neither qualified physically or mentally for such responsibility or even aware of what marriage really means.

Seeking to protect the girls' honor and virtue, society has misunderstood the purpose of marriage. This can be attributed to lack of knowledge about the implications of early marriage and how early marriage negatively affects the girls mentally, socially, economically and physically. The girls also become victims of physical abuse that family members from the other side use against them. Because the families of the girls are not aware of the importance of education about sexuality and marriage, the new brides find themselves lost during the first wedding night. They also don't know about their rights or their responsibilities toward their husband. This sets the foundation for a miserable marriage life full of violence and fear. Moreover, suddenly they find themselves as servants in a strange house where they have to adapt to everything new without fully understanding the new environment.

When disputes erupt between the couple or the husband's family and the girls, violence is used and the girls are asked by their family to stay quiet. Families of the new bride even tell their daughters that it is a normal situation for all married couples. Some families go further and threaten their daughters. In some occasions, the girls lose their lives as a result of the violence used against them. What is the fate of the girls who are still alive? And who will help them?

In the midst of this suffering, most of the child brides do not understand what marriage responsibilities are or what their rights are. They find themselves in the center of a cycle of violence that exceeds their understanding; as a result they become silent or isolate themselves as refugees away from reality. In some cases, which we actually documented, they have tried to put an end to their lives; that's the harshest level of violence that the girls ever experience. These events start during a period when the girls are not able to choose or make a major decisions regarding marriage.

Early marriage is not a single problem but a complex of violations: depriving girls of childhood; making them suddenly mothers; subjecting them to all kinds of verbal, psychological, physical, economic and sexual violence. Living in a closed circle of fear at a young age, child brides lose the feeling of security and protection. In fact, they live through poverty and lose the opportunity to continue with education or create a professional life. Instead, they stay dependent on other people, as they are young and have no life experience.

The cycle of depriving child brides of their rights starts with the forced marriage and continues with the neglect of their dreams and ambitions. This situation creates a long lasting impact. It becomes too late to fix their situation after marriage because they are voiceless and they surrender to the harsh reality. This creates an unhealthy and insecure environment for the family.

Human Rights and Early Marriage:

Despite what article 16 states in the agreement of "the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" and the equality of men and women on all the issues related to marriage and family relations, young girls are still the weakest link. Early marriage is excused as a way of "protecting her". According to article 16: "The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age of marriage and to make the registration of marriages mandatory"

Early marriage deprives girls of their rights stated in "the Rights of Child" and "Human Rights", and the "Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women." Early marriage deprives women of protection, safety, health, education and self-development, and of living a normal childhood.

Early marriage has a negative impact on the interests of children and deprives them of the right to express themselves. In fact, the most unjust consequence is the deprivation of education which is very crucial for developing the skills and abilities of these young women.

Research Reference Frame

- This study targets married women who were married before the age of 18 and are now under the age of 60 years from all five Gaza governorates.
- The study draws a holistic map of the problem and explores the direct and indirect reasons behind this practice
- The study encourages a culture of participation, the exchange of knowledge and experience among researchers, and participants, and a sharing of all sources related to the study.
- This study is committed to learning from all resources, studies and articles that focus the problem of child marriage.
- Multiple tools were used in order to collect data and answer the research key questions. Every question was answered by more than one research tool, including: questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, case studies, and literature reviews.

Research Ethical considerations:

- The study took into consideration the privacy of the women who experience early marriage and who requested that their names and area of residence be hidden. This is an ethical priority considering that this study is trying to help these women prevail against the harsh reality, not expose them to more harm.
- Some of the women refused to continue their stories after mentioning family members because they did not want to make such information public. In the interests of the participants, these interviews were deleted.

The difficulties encountered during fieldwork:

- As a result of the parallel timing of this study and the Israeli incursion on Gaza, we delayed work for

the safety of the researchers.

- After the Israeli incursion adjustments were made to the study to take into account the effect of the incursion on the participants and its impact on their views regarding early marriage.
- The shock of the latest Israeli incursion has paralyzed daily life in Gaza and made it very difficult for the field researchers to continue their work. In order to revive and strengthen the team, we trained the researchers again. At the same time, we worked with other organizations to fill out the forms and reprint them again for updates.
- As with others in Gaza, the war caused severe trauma and depression for the women in this study. They showed a troubling psychological state and needed to share their family problems to overcome the difficult times.
- The difficult psychological state of the participants had a negative impact on the researchers. This inspired WAC to organize training for staff on how to take care of themselves and their own safety and, has helped to enroll them in other trainings and work programs.

Research Contents:

Section 1: Study Method

Section 2: Literature Review

Section 3: The Characteristics and Features of the Study Sample

Section 4: The Causes and Impact of Early Marriage: Qualitative and Quantitative Results

Section 5: Israeli Aggression and the Idea of Child Brides

Section 6: Proposed Intervention Mechanisms

Section 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

References:



Section Two

A photograph of a doll lying on its back on a purple, textured surface. The doll has a white face with large black eyes, rosy cheeks, and a simple black smile. It has brown hair and is wearing a pink long-sleeved shirt and a purple skirt. The background is a soft-focus purple and blue gradient.

Literature review

Introduction:

Marriage is considered one of the most important aspects of social life; if it is not the most important. It is organized around a system of customs, traditions, common social beliefs and standards which define its forms and practices. Marriage fulfills the individual's various social needs, most importantly the sexual needs, followed by the need to reproduce and to live an emotional life. At the same time, marriage meets ethical, social and economic needs, along with the need for security.

Marriage is a sacred bond between a man and woman. God has legitimized it for an important purpose: to bring spiritual and psychological stability to this holy union. As a system, marriage has faced some changes that have created social and psychological problems in Gaza, such as: early marriage that deprives child brides from education and pushes them to take over responsibilities in society too early. This has a negative impact on the social fabric and structure of the society.

In Arabic linguistics: marriage "Zwaj" means "binding and association." If you say "marry him" it means "pair with him".

In Arabic terminology: all laws about marriage are between a man and a woman whose purpose is "to create a bond for a mutual married life and to have children", according to the family rights law of 1954 which is currently applicable in Gaza strip, whereas the Jordanian personal status law of 1976 is applicable in West Bank. According to article 3 of that Jordanian law, "Marriage shall be a contract between a man and a woman, who is legally permissible to him, for the constitution of a family and production of progeny between them." Feminists have proposed ratification for this definition: "Marriage shall be a contract between a man and woman, who is permissible to each other and has equal rights and duties on the purpose of building a stable family."

Age of Marriage:

Articles (5-7) of Family Rights Law of 1954 state that:

"It shall be a condition precedent to the eligibility for marriage that the fiancé be eighteen (18) years of age or more and the fiancée be seventeen (17) years of age or more.

In the event the male adolescent, who has not yet completed eighteen (18) years of age, claims that he has reached the age of majority, the judge shall be entitled to permit him to marry in case he is of such a conceivable appearance.

No one may wed the male minor who has not yet completed twelve (12) years of age or the female minor who has not yet completed nine (9) years of age."

Jordanian Personal Status Law of 1976:

According to Article (5) of the law: It shall be a condition prior to eligibility for marriage that the fiancé and fiancée are of sound mind and that the fiancé has completed sixteen (16) years of age and the fiancée has reached fifteen (15) years of age.

The administrative decision no. (78) of 1955 currently applicable in the Gaza legislation courts states that: "The minimum marriage age is 15 years for females and 16 for males." The judge shall not permit the marriage of a minor who has not yet reached this age; it shall be noted that the legislation courts apply the Islamic calendar and not the Gregorian calendar.

Although this decision was executed in order to restrict the marriage of the young, it is considered a legal text. Therefore, it can be easily bypassed and revoked through an administration decision. In fact, there was a successful attempt before of bypassing an administration decisions at the judicial courts in Gaza Strip; such as the revocation of the administration decision regarding nursing children.

"WAC" has suggested that it should be a condition prior to the eligibility for marriage that the fiancé and fiancée have reached 18 years of age.

Early marriage:

According to the Palestinian Child Law No. 7 of 2004 and its amendments, the child is defined as "any human being under the age of eighteen years."

According to a UNICEF instrument regarding early marriage it was defined as "marriage before the age of 18."

Hence this study defined "early marriage" as: "Forcing marriage upon girls before the age of 18." The word "forcing" is used to indicate that the girls don't have any choice in choosing the husband, instead, other family members are the ones who decide. Even if the girls were given the choice, they are still too immature to make such a responsible decision



Section Three

The characteristics and features of the study sample

Study Method:

The descriptive-analytical method was used in this study to answer the research questions. We have tried to describe the reality of early marriage, its causes and its impact on Palestinian women in Gaza, and how to engage most effectively with this issue. We have compared and interpreted the results for the purpose of making meaningful generalizations regarding this subject.

Study Population

The actual population of the study consists of all married Palestinian women living in Gaza Strip, who are less than 60 years and were married before the age of 16. According the annual book of Palestinian Statistics that was published in 2013 by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the population in Gaza Strip is about 1,721,000 in which 49.2% or 837,254 are women.

Whereas the percentage of women in Gaza Strip between ages 15 to 60 is 52.1%, and the percentage of married women is 56.9%, the number of women who are married or have been married and are now less than 60 years is: 837,254 X 56.9% X 52.1% = 248,203.

According to the statistics made by the Palestinian Central Statistics Bureau in 2013, the percentage of early marriage in Gaza Strip is 36%. So the size of our study population that consists of women who got married at the age of 18 or less and are now less than 60 years is 89,353 women. The following table shows the distribution of the study Population according each governorate:

Table (1)
The distribution of study population according to each governorate

Governorate	Number of Women	Percentage
Northern Gaza	17,602	19.7%
Gaza City	30,916	34.6%
Middle Area	12,956	14.5%
Khan Younes	16,798	18.8%
Rafah	11,081	12.4%
Total	89,353	100%

Study Sample

The study sample was chosen through random stratified sampling, and equally distributed according to the five Gaza Strip governorates. The sample was allocated according to each governorate with designated social workers for each area and according to the percentage of married women in each age group.

Targeted sample size is chosen according to the following equation:

$$n = \left(\frac{Z}{2m} \right)^2$$

Where Z is the standard value corresponding to a known level of significance (e.g.: Z = 1.96 for a significant level)

Where m is the marginalized error: denoted by decimal sign (consider this marginal error: 0.04±.

$$n = \left(\frac{1.96}{2 \times 0.04} \right)^2 \cong 600$$

The revision of sample size in case of the final status of the population is done through this equation:

$$n \text{ Revised} = \frac{nN}{N + n - 1} \text{ (1)}$$

Where N is population size, whereas study population is N = 89,353, the revised sample size using equation (1) equals:

$$\text{Revised} = n \text{ Revised} = \frac{600 \times 89353}{600 + 89353 - 1} \cong 596$$

Thus; the appropriate sample size in the case equals to at least 596.

The following table shows population size distribution for each governorate in Gaza Strip according to the percentage of married women in each governorate:

Table (2)
Sample Size distribution according to governorates:

Area	Percentage	Population Size
Northern Gaza	19.7%	118
Gaza	34.6%	206
Middle Area	14.5%	86
Khan Younes	18.8%	112
Rafah	12.4	74
Total	100%	596

Study Tools

The questionnaire was designed by The Research and Information Program team of WAC. The focus was on six main segments that cover the most important issues which women have mentioned and which has been repeated during group work that was conducted before designing the form. In order to meet the objectives of the study, the researchers abided by the working groups’ comments regarding revision or adding of the tools’ text until the final work was created. The segments contained the following

important points:

- The first segment focused on the participants' demographic variations and characteristics, including their personal information before getting married such as current age, nationality, residence status, nature of family, number of family members, mother and father's education level and the income of their family before their marriage.
- The second segment discussed the personal information of the participant after marriage, including age at the time of marriage, number of children, current occupation, level of education and any kinship relation with husband.
- The third segment discussed the personal information of the husband after marriage including age at the time of marriage, current occupation, educational level, home location and residence status, and the level of family income.
- The fourth segment discussed different reasons of early marriage which were repeated during focus groups and also the reason behind women's acceptance of early marriage.
- The fifth segment discussed the implication of early marriage on the relationship with the husband and the nature of different problems arising as a result of this marriage, including violence. It also discussed the psychological, physical and social consequences and reasons behind this kind of marriage.
- Finally, the sixth segment discusses intervention mechanisms and the appropriate ways to stop early marriage

Statistical Processing:

Before data was statistically processed using computer, data was coded and entered in the questionnaire using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Entered data was checked for completeness and accuracy in order to be properly analyzed. Data analysis aimed to clarify the descriptive data of the respondents in the form of a percentile, based on research topics as given in the questionnaire. Moreover, it interpreted the results and connected it to the theoretical frame, and compared it with previous results and studies in the same field. Using proper statistical tools, redundancies and percentiles for each segment were analyzed and variations were connected to different segments of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Under the supervision of field researchers, the questionnaires were distributed to a group of women according to the specific standards of the sample, and according to the number of women in each specific age group in each Gaza Strip governorate. The results were obtained from the targeted respondents according to the specific sample number which is: 596 questionnaires.

Sample study characteristics and features

The segment addresses a group of special characteristics of the respondents:

First: Personal information of the respondents:

1. Current age:

The study shows that 31.5% of the respondents are 40 years old and older, 31.9% of the respondents are 31-40 years old, 19.5% are of the age group 26-30 years, 16.3% are 18-25 years, and only 0.8% are 18 years. These percentiles shows remarkably that 63% of the sample are 30 years and older.

Table (3)
Distribution of sample members according to current age

Current Age" group"	percentage
Under 18	0.8%
25 – 18	16.3%
30 – 26	19.5%
40 – 31	31.9%
Over 40	31.5%
Total	100%

2. Residence Status

The question regarding citizenship status of the respondents shows 62.6% of them are refugees and 37.4% are residents as shown in the following table:

Table (4)
Distribution of Sample Members According to Residency Status

Citizenship Status	Number	Percentage
Refugee	373	62.6%
Local	223	37.4%
Total	596	100%

3. Location of residence before marriage:

The study sample was allocated according to location of residence before marriage to each Gaza governorates: 23.7% from Northern Gaza, 29.4% from Gaza City, 15.6% from the Middle Area, 10.1% from Khan Younes and 11.2% from Rafah. The following table shows data:

Table (5)

Location of residence	Number	Percentage
Northern Gaza	141	23.7%
Gaza City	175	29.4%
Middle Area	93	15.6%
Khan Younes	120	20.1%
Rafah	67	11.2%
Total	596	100%

4. Living environment before marriage

The research show the study sample distribution according to living environment before marriage of respondents are: 15.3% are living in a village, 31.2% are living in a refugee camp and 53.5 % are living in urban areas before marriage. The following table shows this data:

Table (6)

The distribution of sample members according to living environment before marriage

Living Environment before marriage	Number	Percentage
Village	91	15.3%
Refugee Camp	186	31.2%
City	319	53.5%
Total	596	100%

5. House type before marriage:

The study sample was distributed according to house type of the respondents before marriage is as follow: 62.6% live in and own a house or villa, 17.8% live in an apartment in the family house, 15.1% live in a room in the family house, 4.4% are renters and only 0.2% said they live in "Other types". The following table shows those data:

Table (7)

The distribution of sample members according to House type before marriage:

House type before marriage	Number	Percentage
Own a house or villa	373	62.6%
An apartment in the family house	106	17.8%
A room in the family house	90	15.1%
Renters	26	4.4%
other	1	2%
Total	596	100%

6. Family structure before marriage: the research shows that 70.1% of the respondents lived in a nuclear family and 29.9% lived in an extended family.

Table (8)

The distribution of members of research sample according to family structure before marriage:

Family structure before marriage	Number	Percentage
Nuclear	418	70.1%
Extended	178	29.9%
Total	596	100%
Total	596	100%

7. Father’s Level of Education:

The research shows that 31.7% of the respondents have a father who is illiterate, 42.4% that haven’t completed secondary school, 18% that have completed secondary school, 6.9% that are college graduates, 0.3% that have completed graduate studies and 0.7% have completed vocational training. This indicates that those who tend to marry their daughters early “haven’t completed secondary school.” They consist of about 50% of the total sample. The table shows further:

Table (9)
Distribution of members of the sample according to their father’s level of education:

Father's level of education	Number	Percentage
illiterate	189	31.7%
Haven't completed secondary school	253	42.4%
secondary school	107	18.0%
College	41	6.9%
Graduate studies	2	3%
Vocational training	4	7
Total	596	100%

8. Mother’s level of education

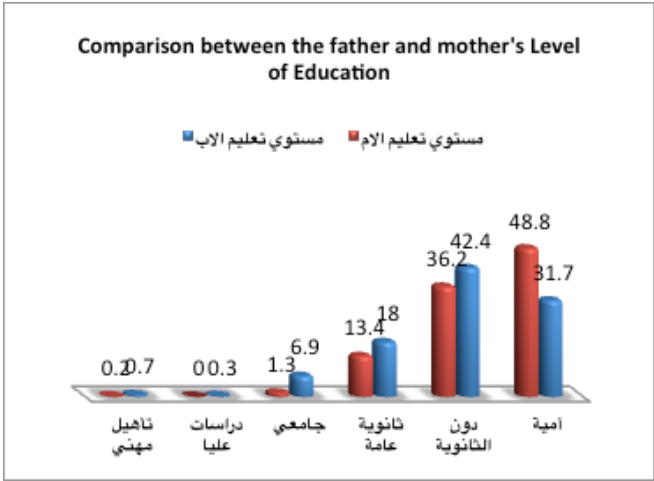
Results shows that 48.8% of mother’s respondents don’t know how to write or read, 36.2% are without secondary school diploma, 13.4% have a secondary school diploma, only 1.3% are college graduates, no participants mentioned that their mothers hold a graduate degree, and only 0.2% completed vocational training. Such data made it clear that 85% of the participants mothers are illiterate (cannot read or write) or do not hold a secondary school diploma--which confirms that the notion of early marriage is acceptable to mothers with lower levels of education. The following table shows these data:

Table (10)
Distribution of sample members according to the mother’s level of education

Mother's level of education	Number	Percentage
illiterate	291	48.8%
Haven't completed secondary school	216	36.2%
secondary school	80	13.4%
College	8	1.3%
Graduate Studies	0	0
Vocational Training	1	2%
Total	596	100%



After comparing the level of education of men and women, it is clear that the variable of “education” is significant. As the educational achievement of the father and mother declines, their tendency to marry their daughters off early grows more likely, as the following diagram shows:



9. The income of the family before the respondent’s marriage:

This study show that 63.1% of respondent’s families before marriage had a monthly income of less than 1000 New Israeli Shekel (NIS), 25.7% have a monthly income between 1001 and 2000 NIS, 7.4% had an income between 2001 to 3000 NIS, and 3.9% of respondent’s family had an income of higher than 3000 NIS.

Table (11)
Distribution of sample members according to the level of family income before marriage:

Family income before marriage	Number	Percentage
Less than 1000 NIS	376	63.1%
1001-2000 NIS	153	25.7%
2001-3000 NIS	44	7.4%
More than 3000	23	3.9%
Total	596	100%

Second: Personal information (After marriage)

1. Age upon marriage:

As we have mentioned before, our target group are women who married early at age 18 or less. The study results shows 2.3% of the respondents have married at age 13, 11.1% have married at age 14, 19.1%

have married at age 15, 23.8% have married at age 16, 36.6% have married at age 17 and 7% have married at age 18. As the following table demonstrates:

Table (12)
Distribution of sample according to age upon marriage

Age upon marriage	Number	Percentage
13 y. o.	14	2.3%
14 y. o.	66	11.1%
15 y. o.	114	19.1%
16 y. o.	142	23.8%
17 y. o.	218	36.6%
18 y. o.	42	7.0%
Total	596	100%

2. Current occupation:

The majority of the respondents 94.6% of the whole samples, are housewives. Only 0.5% are working in the governmental sector, 2.2% are in the private sector, 0.3% are in the NGO sector, 2% run their own projects, and 0.3% have other occupations.

Table (13)
Distribution of sample member according to current occupation

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Governmental	3	0.5%
Private Sector	13	2.2%
NGO Sector	2	0.3%
Housewife	564	94.6%
Project owner	12	2.0%
Other	2	0.3%
Total	596	100%



3. Respondents' level of education:

Most of the respondents, 61.9% , don't have a secondary school diploma , whereas 8.6% are illiterate, 22.5% have a secondary school diploma, only 6.7% are college graduates, and a small percentage have completed graduate studies or vocational training consisting of 0.2% for each.

Table (15)

Distribution of sample members according to their level of education

Level of Educaiton	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	51	8.6%
Without secondary diploma	369	61.9%
Hold Secondary Diploma	134	22.5%
College graduate	40	6.7%
Graduate Studies	1	0.2%
Vocational Training	1	0.2%
Total	596	100%

4. Kinship ties with the husband

Results show that 27.5% of the women respondents have married from a first-degree relative, about 27.3% have married from a second-degree relative, 45.1% did not have any sort of kinship ties.

Table (16)

Distribution of sample members according to kinship ties with the husband

Kinship tie	Number	Percentage
First degree	164	27.5%
Second degree	163	27.3%
No tie	269	45.1%
Total	596	100%

Third: Personal information of the husband

1. Husband's age upon marriage:

According to the research obtained from the respondents, 69.5% of the husbands were married between 18 to 25 years, which is the highest portion. 10.2% of the respondent's husbands were under 18, 15.9% were between 26 to 30 years, 3% were between 31-40 years, and only 1.3% were over 40 years.

Table (17)
Distribution of sample members according to husband's age upon marriage

Husband age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	61	10.2%
18 - 25	414	69.5%
26 - 30	95	15.9%
31 - 40	18	3.0%
Over 40	8	1.3%
Total	596	100%

2. Husband's Occupation

The research show that 17.4% of husbands of respondents are governmental employees, 5.2% work in the private sector, 1.3% are NGO employees, 42.1% are self-employed, 8.7% manage their own projects, and 25.2% are unemployed.

Table (18)
Distribution of sample members according to the husband's occupation

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Government employee	104	17.4%
Private Sector	31	5.2%
NGO sector	8	1.3%
Self-employed	251	42.1%
Owns a project	52	8.7%
Unemployed	150	25.2%
Total	596	100%

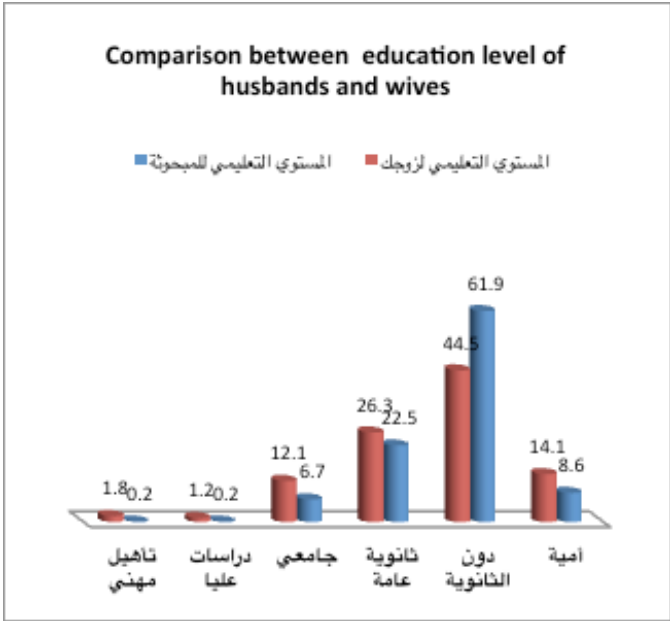
3. Husbands’ educational level:

The results show that most of the respondents’ husbands--44.5%-- have less than a secondary school diploma. In addition 14.1% are illiterate (can’t read or write), 26.3% have a secondary school diploma, 12.1% are college graduates, 1.2% have a graduate degree, and 1.8% had vocational training. The following table shows this:

Table (20)
Distribution of sample members according to husband’s educational level:

Level of Education	Number	Percentage
Illiterate	84	14.1%
Haven't completed sec- ondary school	265	44.5%
secondary school	157	26.3%
College	72	12.1%
Graduate Studies	7	1.2%
Vocational Training	11	1.8%
Total	596	100%

In comparing the level of education among wives and husbands, the husbands have a higher level of illiteracy than do their wives. The percentage of wives who didn’t complete secondary school is higher than their husbands, while, the percentages of husbands and wives who have completed secondary school are similar. The percentage of wives who have graduated from college is less than their husbands; this is attributed usually to higher school dropout among women after getting married.



4. Residence location after respondent's marriage according to each governorate:

The sample distribution of respondents' location of residence was done according to the distribution of married women in each governorate by "The Palestinian Statistics Center" in 2013. 19.8% of the respondents are from Northern Gaza, 34.6% from Gaza City, 14.4% from the Middle Area, 18.8% from Khan Younes and 12.4% are from Rafah

Table (21)

The distribution of members of the sample according to location of residence after marriage:

Area	Number	Percentage
Northern Gaza	118	19.8%
Gaza	206	34.6%
Middle Area	86	14.4%
Khan Younes	112	18.8%
Rafah	74	12.4%
Total	596	100%

5. Living environment after marriage:

The research shows that 21% of respondents are living in villages, 26.8% living in refugee camps, and 52.2% living in cities. The following table shows this:

Table (22)

Distribution of sample members according to living environment after marriage:

Environment	Number	Percentage
Village	125	21.0%
Refugee Camp	160	26.8%
City	311	52.2%
Total	596	100%

6. House type after marriage:

The sample was distributed according to house type after marriage in the following ways: 35.2% own a house, 25.5% live in an apartment in the family house, 30.9% live in a room in the family house, 7.6% are renting, and 0.8% live in other types of housing situations, such as the house of the husband's boss or the husband's brother's apartment (without paying the rent). The following table shows these results:

Table (23)

Distribution of sample members according to house type after marriage:

House type after marriage	Number	Percentage
Own a house or villa	210	35.2%
An apartment in the family house	152	25.5%
A room in the family house	184	30.9%
Renters	45	7.6%
other	5	0.8%
Total	596	100%



7. Family income after marriage:

According to the family income, 72.8% earn 1000 shekel, 23% earn between 1001 and 2000 shekel, 3.4% earn between 2001 and 3000 shekel and only 0.8% earn more than 3000 Shekel. The following table shows this:

Table (24)
Distribution of members of sample according to family income after marriage:

Family income before marriage	Number	Percentage
Less than 1000 NIS	434	72.8%
1001-2000 NIS	137	23.0%
2001-3000 NIS	20	3.4%
More than 3000	5	0.8%
Total	596	100%



Section Four



The causes and impact of early marriage:
quantitative and qualitative results

This section will discuss all data collected from the qualitative and quantitative sources. The main topics of this study will emerge from analysis of the data results concerning the research questions.

Child brides: A violation of women's rights

"Marriage referred to as a white dress and a wedding party":

For most of the interviewees that experienced early marriage, the idea of marriage was "wearing the white dress, shopping, wearing accessories and spending a magical time going out and taking vacations." As a result most respondents were shocked when confronted by the reality of their new married life. They didn't know that they have to take responsibility and serve a large number of people without complaining. In fact, 12.9% of the respondents said that they were married early as a result of their immature understanding of marriage as being shopping and fun.

One of the women who had an early marriage said:

"I was shocked; marriage wasn't what I had in mind, in reality it is different. I thought I would wear a white dress, have my own room, lock the door and wear new clothes and perfume, sleep next to a guy, put on make up, wear gold and have more freedom than what I had at my parents'"

Another woman added: "I thought I was going to wear a white dress, dance with my spouse and then get back to my parents' house and sleep in my bed again"...

A third woman agreed on this view of marriage: "I was 15 when I got married. I thought marriage would be living in my own house and having freedom to live my life. My dad told me that a strange man had proposed to marry you, but he didn't give me any choice. My father told me that I would move to the man's house"...

"Salma" is one of these girls who had married early. With regret, she explained: "I didn't understand anything about marriage. On the wedding night, I was scared because my mom didn't tell me anything. My husband asked me: why didn't your mom teach you what happens during this night? I was scared and still I am. Following that night, I didn't have my period for two months."

"Rwaida" shared her story during one of the focus groups: "I thought marriage is a dress, wedding party, gold and comfort, but everything turned to be a lie. Now I just completed secondary school and I wish I could continue my education. I thought it is running away from my family. I actually had a breakdown during the wedding night; I was lost for a whole week."

To some girls, early marriage is an opportunity to run away from the harsh reality they are living in. This is especially the case for those with an unstable social life, who face violence, who have limited freedom of travel or personal space.

“Shadia” shared her experience during a focus group: “I married a strange man; I stayed a virgin for 53 days. My husband’s family harassed my mother; they told her if she didn’t lose her virginity, she can’t be a girl. I kept screaming and crying, but on the night I lost my virginity, I started bleeding and I had to get to the hospital.”

“Shadia” shared her experience in one of the focus groups, she said: “Girls before marriage don’t have any clue about what marriage really is; they think it only going out. But after marriage they suddenly go through sexual relations, pregnancy, delivery, breast feeding, and nursing”.

“Mona” is one of the women who shared her story: “At first, you think about relationships and love. I was 16 when I got married, and at age 18 I had a boy and a girl. I had no clue what marriage is...”

“Falestine” was another child bride who added: “I got married and I thought marriage is kissing and hugging...”

In the same focus group, “Taghreed” added: “I got married when I was 19. I didn’t know what marriage is at that time...”

From the previous interviews, it became evident that most of the respondents did not have any clue about marriage, particularly their rights and obligations. Even their families did not help them in explaining married life and sexual relationships, which would have been helpful during their transition to married life. There are only two main areas where there is differentiation in experience: one, the protection provided by the husband’s family, her family, or the husband and two, the new wife’s ability to adapt to her new reality. For the later, some women choose submission to the situation as a way to cope with this unanticipated familial situation.

In an interview with the lawyer Eslah Hasnia, she said: “Early marriage is a crime against the girls because it takes away their childhood. The girls still need care and to live their childhoods, which is the most beautiful period of human life. Early marriage deprives them of the most beautiful years [of childhood] and [furthermore] is against child protection laws.”

The psychological counselor Nehad Egilan added: “Marriage should be prohibited for girls under 18. Before this age, girls need attention and to learn about marriage responsibilities and they need education. At college, they could learn about life, social relations, and mental and physical growth...”

Mariam shagora, a women’s advocate and the director of the Women Health Center-Jabalya, added: “We have to give the girl the right to fully grow and be able to have a healthy baby. I agree with empowering her through education because it has positive psychological and developmental effects on the family, so that we can avoid problems result from early marriage...”

Saif Abu Ramadan, the head of one of the families, called a mukhtar in Arabic, pointed out: “Most early marriages are a failure, especially after complicated issues between the girl and her husband, as neither of them know what marriage is. Also, issues arise between the girl and her husband’s family who want her to be a cook, a baker and todo all the house chores. All of this drives the girl to become violent and initiate problems with her husband...”

Preacher Saeed Abu Jebeen has a different view: “The law defines the age of minors as younger than 18 years, but during the time of Ottoman empire marriage was at age 9 years, then 12. However, in 1995, the sharia judge adopted a Jordanian law stating that the girl’s age of marriage shall not be less than 17 years and 4 months, or 15 years according to the Islamic Calendar, and the boy shall be less than 18 years and 4 months, or 16 years according to the Islamic Calendar. This is the age of puberty, and before that marriage shouldn’t be initiated, except for special circumstances. Some girls may be subjected to rape or violence; in these cases it is best to protect the family. However, marriage is prohibited before the age of 15 according to the Islamic Calendar.”

Abu Jebeen see that the husband is to blame, saying:

“There are two views related to this issue: first, the pro early marriage view where age doesn’t matter but what matters is how mature the couple is, especially the husband because the husband is the one who is responsible for everything. If he is not [responsible], I am against this kind of marriage. Because what matters is the family... whereas the girl should have deep understanding of what marriage is. Marriage seekers should also be educated on marriage responsibilities and rights...”

All of the participants of the focus groups agreed that early marriage is a crime against girls. It deprives them of a childhood, their right to education, and a sound physical and psychological life. Girls before the age of 18 are not fully-grown adults, as their feelings and hormones are in flux. Moreover, women under 18 are unprepared to take on the domestic responsibilities and social expectations of marriage.

Early marriage explained by Specialists:

In an attempt to understand the issue of early marriage through the point of view of different parties, we sought the opinions of specialists in women’s issues in the field of law and psychology. Lawyer Hanan Mattar who works at The Palestinian Center for Human Rights explained: “Early marriage is the practice of marrying a girl or a boy who is under age according to the Personal Status Law. It asserts that girls shall be 17 [years] of age and the boy shall be 18. However, there is an administrative decision from the Judiciary Chief Judge [that] allows the marriage of girls who are 14 years and 7 months and boys who is 15 years and 7 months. This decision is implemented in most judicial courts...”

Najah Shaaban who is a nurse at the Women Health Center in Burij, said: “Marrying girls early is a mistake, because girls at this age can’t practice their marriage duties. That’s why the World Health Organization defined childhood as less than 18 year.”

Advocate Mariam Shaquoura sees that: “Forcing marriage on girls who are less than 18 is a violation of children’s rights. At this age, girls have no knowledge of responsibility or have any kind of [set] personality.”

Preacher Saed Abu Jebeen asserts that marriage (Zawaj) means literally “joining and integration”. In Islamic Sharia marriage is defined as: “a contract between a man and a woman, who is legally permissible to him, for the constitution of a family and production of progeny between them. This is according to the law in West Bank, based on the Jordanian Personal Status Law...”

“As for girls: educated ones see married life as settling down and creating a family. However, some girls see it as having fun, wearing a wedding dress, or having her wedding at the biggest hall. Basically, they look at it materialistically...”

Educator and advocate Fatma Abu Amara explains: “At first, the girl has this idea about marriage as being a wedding dress, gold, perfumes, gifts and celebrations, and being very special among her friends. However, after few months, she finds herself in the midst of a new family, responsibilities and pregnancy. She basically figures out the true reality, even her ‘bride price’ was borrowed by the husband who takes her money to pay it off.”

Opinions that rose during focus groups agree with most of the study resources:

Most of those who participated in the focus groups, especially the girls who lived the experience, saw marriage through a materialistic point of view, as being a wedding dress, celebration, make up, bedroom and wearing jewels. They didn’t have a holistic view of it including taking on significant responsibilities. There was consensus among the women that they had no previous knowledge or detailed information about marriage and as a result they had to face psychological and physical problems that still stick in their memory.”

Intentional violation! Girls can’t choose or reject getting married at early age:

It is evident that the family’s claim that they’ve prepared their daughter for marriage through consultation is an excuse and is not sufficient nor right. Instead, this situation is considered forced marriage because at this age the girl cannot understand what she is going into. This was clear during the 120 interviews documenting women’s experiences of early marriage as well as the responses of hundreds of other women that we collected through a quantitative questionnaire.

The results of the questionnaire show that 44% of the women had their father make the decision on whether to marry or not. In contrast, we found that only 25.2% said that accepting a marriage proposal was a family decision and they agreed upon it. An even smaller number at 15.4% said that it was a personal decision before their families agreed, whereas 13.3% said that it was their mother’s decision, 5% said that the decision was through their uncle, and 3.4% said it was their brother’s decision.

Is early marriage a good or bad deal?

Teacher Wafaa Ghareeb says that some people think early marriage is a good deal but it is not. Bad economic situations push families to accept early marriage, and the temptations of money makes early marriage a good deal!

Eid warns about the prevalence of the terms of “protection”, “spinsterhood” and “honor” in our societies. Those terms are attached to young women’s personal choices and marriage becomes the only chance for her to be safe and live in dignity. Those are the foundations of early marriage and the violence it entails.

Gharib continues this train of thought: “We worry about the return of the Salafi strains that impose themselves as an authority for marriage and other women’s issues.”

A head of a primary school Fatina Arabid assert that economic circumstances such as poverty are causes, but there other factors such as the media and politics. Giving the occupation as an example: “Factors such as uneducated families, poverty, and political issues such as the occupation that leaves behind many widows, play a major role. Also, the media is playing its part by showing marriage in movies as an easy role.”

A former school principle and an advocate Fatma Abu Amara sees that “the social situation, poverty, and the increased number of females in the family has lead many fathers to think of marrying off their daughters. Not aware of the dangers of early marriage is another cause.”

“Hanan Geshta” is a social councilor in a girls school, she sees that “the girls’ family finds excuses for her to marry such as her cousin talking about marrying her, the fear of her becoming a spinster, or even the worry of her falling into bad company.”

Psychologist “Jawaher” said during a focus group: “there are some people who got married during the war so that they could get a house and welfare card, or get money and aid from different organizations.”

In the same focus group, “Rima” agrees with her by saying: “I know some people who married their daughter early so that they could keep welfare assistance.”

Saving “Bride Price” Through Intermarriage and Reciprocal-Exchange Marriage:

According to a study conducted by WAC, intermarriage or marriage with a first degree relative is prevalent in Palestine. In 2000, the number has reached 28.2% of all marriages: 31.4% in Gaza Strip and 26.4% in West Bank. This is common in cases of early marriage, especially in rural areas.

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics show that early marriage through intermarriage is rising.

Currently, the percentage of those who married their first cousin is 49% (52% in Gaza and 47% in West Bank).

The study shows that some families relied on intermarriage for many reasons such as an incentive to save the bride price or decrease it. Some cases were identified of exchange marriages that were made without a bride price. The continuation of this kind of marriage depends on the strength of the couple's relationship. Some intra-family marriages are made in order to keep the inheritance within the family. This kind of marriage is forced upon the girls, which explains the abusive behavior toward them.

During one of the focus groups, one of the participants pointed out that there are connections between intermarriage, early marriage, and marriage expenses by saying: **"The problem with intermarriage is there is no bride price, or expenses. In fact, many families use this kind of marriage to decrease marriage expenses. This is the reason for the prevalence of early marriage. I know a family who thinks that if a girl turned 15 and wasn't married would be a catastrophe."**

It is evident that there is agreement between the findings of the focus groups, the point of view of specialists during the interviews, and the questionnaire results, which polled the opinion of 596 women who experienced early marriage in Gaza governorates. These three sources were in agreement that the culture, intermarriage and the economic status played a role in early marriage. Among the women polled for the questionnaire, 35% say that culture is the main reason for early marriage while 15.3% point to intermarriage. This complies with the percentage of the women in focus groups who experienced early marriage: 54.8% were married to first or second-degree relatives.

During one of the focus groups, one of the participant said: **"men are also depressed as they are unemployed and have no choice other than marrying their relatives so that he could save on marriage expenses."** Palestinian society permits this reasoning, as reflected in the adage: **"Close ones are better than strangers."**

"Asmaa" is one of the girls who married her relative at an early age: **"I married my cousin when I was 15 years old; he is two years older than me. My father and mother had agreed to marry me off to my cousin when I was still very young. I have heard about our marriage since then; I only cared about wearing a white dress and being happy like any other bride."**

"Asmaa" added: **"my husband is also my cousin. Though we lived in the same neighborhood, [with his house] very close my house, I never saw him until our wedding night. There was no engagement period so that we could know each other more and we married very quickly."**

"Asmaa" remembers her wedding night and the crime that took place: **"I was very scared and shocked,**

I was a spoiled girl, now I am being degraded!

"Niveen" is a 19 years woman who lives in Gaza. She was married to her cousin when she was 16. Now she has a baby boy and girl and her husband is unemployed. Sobbing, she started her story: "My father was making a living as a tailor; even though it was a simple life, I was comfortable. I was spoiled; I got whatever I wanted. Now, I am degraded. My aunt wanted me for her son and my family agreed [because] they thought they were familiar with my aunt's family. I also agreed and after that my family encouraged me to get engaged to him. I thought he would take care of me and treat me as my family did. [But] he never took me out and never brought me gifts as I [had] thought... he just wanted a young girl so that he could shape her the way he wanted."

"I was living with my husband in a small apartment but we would dine with my mother-in-law. He called me "little girl" from the beginning. If I were older, he would not treat me like that. He calls me names and hit me with a stick until I start bleeding; the scars are still on my body."

"Get me out of this misery; I don't like my life. He even refused to let me continue my education, even though we agreed from the beginning to let me. My family does not want to sour their relation with my aunt. She knows about what happens between us -she actually controls my husband."

"When I got pregnant with my first child, I had complications. When we went to see the doctor, he told us: 'Because you were married early, you might have complications. Your uterus is not fully grown.' My husband did not like what he heard; he told me [that I was] so spoiled. He even doesn't let me visit my family. When I do, he calls me names. If he does let me visit them, he keeps asking me not to spend the money he gave me, which is for paying a taxi. He even doesn't let me see anyone, because 'I am still young and can't leave the house,' he says. Even my mother-in-law, she does not let me go with her anywhere. In fact, I get my allowance from her, and I use it to buy my son a biscuit."

"Neveen" has tried to put up with this horrendous situation and she still does, but it pushes her beyond her limits. In fact, she tried to commit suicide after her husband accused her of stealing. She said, "My grandmother gave me 100 shekels to buy a shirt, which costs 10 shekels. I gave back the rest of the money to her, but [my husband] started yelling at me: "Where did you get the money from?" Even though he did not have any money, and he gets his allowance from his mother to buy cigarettes. I could not handle it anymore, so I went and tried to cut [deep into an] artery. He did not care about that, and did not take me to the hospital. Another time, I tried to drink acetone (nail polish remover) because my mother in law kept saying: Don't complain to anyone, you little girl, and don't scream when my son beat you."

"Neveen" continued: "I am trying to accommodate to this miserable situation, but I just can't. I have been married for 3 years and it feels like 30 years. I wish I could return to my family's house where they take care of me. Now my husband is threatening to marry another educated, employed woman. He says, 'you are little...illiterate... ignorant'."

and my leg joints were shivering. I could not handle myself and I was unconscious. The next day I found myself in a hospital bed, after I had experienced a bleeding as a result of violence that night. I actually heard the doctor saying ‘how could you marry her off at this age?’ I was prescribed sedatives and a kind of ointment. I stayed in this condition for more than two weeks and didn’t come close to my husband until I had completely recovered. I was taking painkillers for a long time.”

From the questionnaire, 14.1% of the respondents think that being among many sisters is one of the causes of early marriage, while 13.8% said that poverty and the harsh economic situation is a cause. 6% of respondents think that girls dropping out of school is another reason.

Hanan Geshta, an educator in all-girls school, **thinks that poor academic attainment pushes the family to solve the problem by marrying their daughter early. This is illogical, as education would provide their daughter with a chance to succeed in professional training or other opportunities to improve their life situation – without the need for marriage.**

Fatina El Arbeed explains: “Girls describe marriage as a white dress, celebration and wedding hall. Unfortunately, most of them go back to school after they get divorced. During one semester at a school I work at, there were seven cases of ‘divorce and return-to-school.’ This has a strong effect on other girls, because the divorcee shares her negative experience with them...discussing private topics such as sex. It is actually a critical educational problem.”

According to respondents, 3.4% see that “poor academic attainment” is one of the causes of early marriage, whereas 2.9% see that girls use early marriage as an excuse to get rid of their family’s restriction such as wearing less modest clothes and moving around freely.

The reasons behind early marriage:

There are different reasons for early marriage in contemporary Palestinian society. First, there are direct reasons that are considered central causes for early marriage. However, we also see secondary factors that contribute to the occurrence of early marriage as discussed by experts and women interviewed who had been married before the age of 18.

Among the five focus groups, a young women and her family’s economic situation, poverty, culture, and accepted cultural logic such as “protection” for the daughter and “having too many girls” –let alone the unstable political situation in Palestine— are the main reasons given for early marriage. The fifteen specialists in sociology, psychology, and education agreed that the economic situation of a young women’s family, the use of aid cards, the approval of intermarriage within the extended family, the incentive to lessen marriage expenses, the issue of dropping out of school, and multiple daughters are all real reasons for early marriage.

The head of the Abu Ramadan family, Saif Abu Ramadan, started his discussion on early marriage with a

popular saying: “Have both the son and money early.” He added, “People prefer to have children early, so that they can have a son early. Wealthy families prefer having children early. On the other hand, poor families prefer marrying off their daughters early to reduce the economic burdens.”

Lawyer Hanan Mattar explains the reason behind early marriage as a protection for the bride, despite the situation of the groom. Culture plays a major role, especially in rural areas. “Mattar” asserts, “There is a strong connection between the educational level of the family and early marriage. In fact, when the level of education of parents is low, they tend to marry off their daughter early.” This supports what was learned from the interviews with young women who have been married young. They assert that early marriage is used as an excuse to lower the burdens of educating girls.

Through her work, the mental health counselor Mona Mousa agrees: “In reality, we found that aid stamps are the main reason for early marriage. People resort to marrying their young boys and girls so that they can establish a new family and obtain an extra flour sack. In other words, unemployment and poverty are actually the reasons. In addition, the shortage of money for educating girls is plays a role.”

Preacher Said Abu Jebeen agrees with this view: “There are economic reasons such as welfare from government and UNRWA. Once the boy reaches a certain age, they cut his share, [and] as a result, his family marries him off in order to continue his share of aid stamps. Therefore, there are some laws that have to be modified, so that people stop using them in twisted ways [i.e. manipulate the system].”

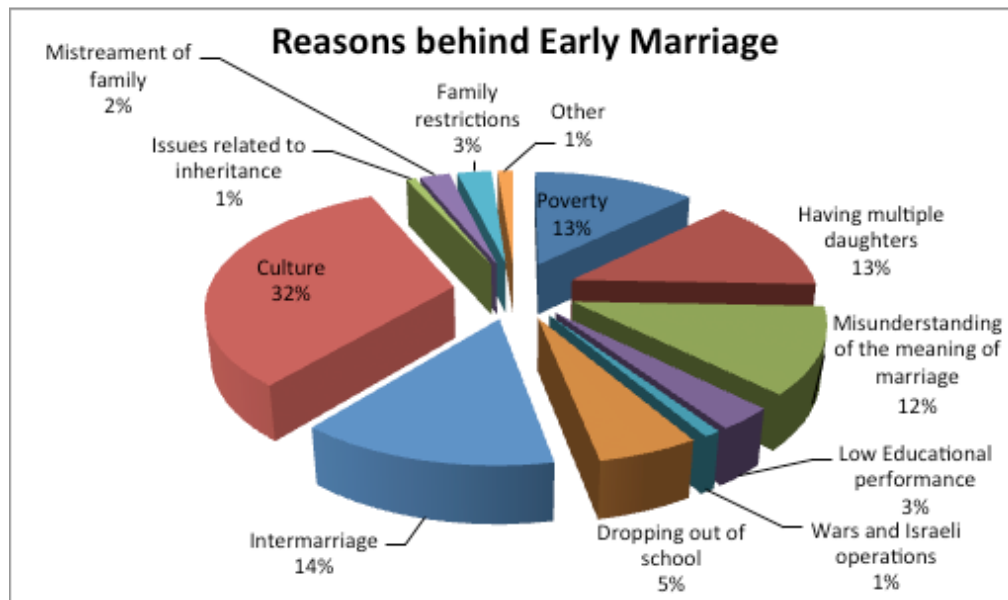
He added, “If the father has too many daughters, he would say, ‘Why should I spend money on her education?’ they just let her marry early, even if she was excellent at school. This can endanger society, because girls should get education so that they can teach their children.”

Reasons for early marriage as reported by respondents to the questionnaire:

The research's quantitative results show that there was no overwhelming agreement among respondents as to the main reason behind early marriage. The cause of early marriage breaks down among respondents into eleven categories:

- 35.1% culture
- 15.2% intermarriage
- 14.1% multiple daughters
- 13.8% poverty
- 12.9% young women misunderstanding marriage as “shopping, fun and celebration”
- 6% dropping out of school
- 3.4% poor academic attainment
- 2.8% the young woman's clothes and public movement
- 2.5% mistreatment of the young woman's family

- 1 % frequent Israeli operations and wars
- 0.8% inheritance
- 1.3% Other (including: the fear of becoming a spinster, being in a large extended family, the fear of engaging in relationships outside of marriage among members of the same family).



There are many reasons behind early marriage according to the cases in this study, such as the tough economic situation of the bride's family, which motivates parents to marry off their daughters, especially if there are many girls in one family. In fact, educating and raising large numbers of children in one family is extremely difficult financially, so as a result they turn to early marriage as a solution for the problem. In addition to economic factors, in some areas the expectation is for girls to marry in their early teenage years so that a 15 year old is considered "old." Single teenage girls are verbally and psychologically violated by being referred to as "spinsters" or are told that they "missed their chance" for marriage.

Given these pressures, some young women in the Gaza Strip are choosing to run away from this abuse and violence from their family.

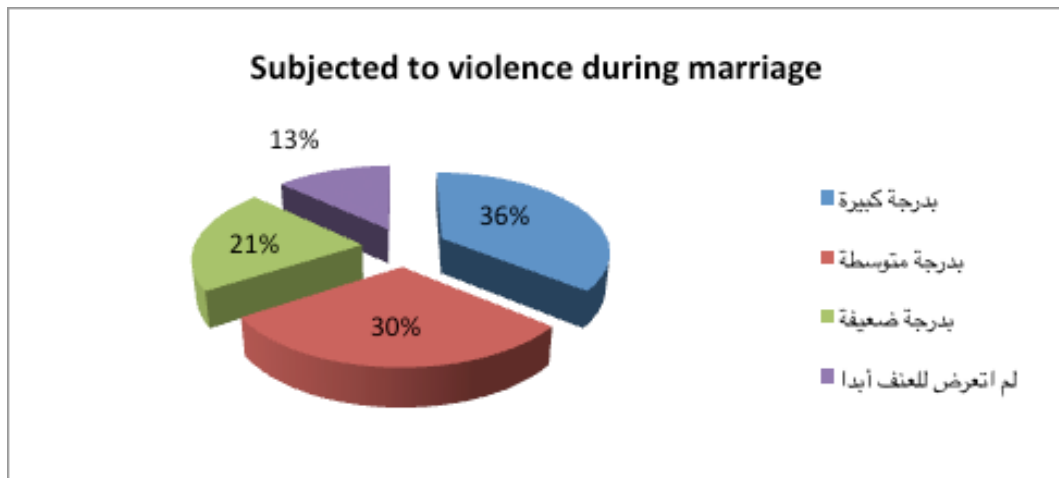
Early marriage and violence:

Living with violence... the husband is not the only one:

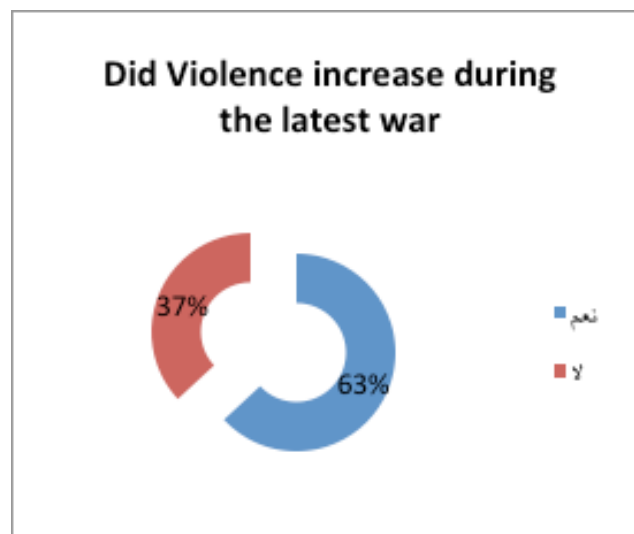
Child brides have lived through mental and physical violence as well as deprivation of education, and still are. There are many stories of suicide attempts or running away from their husbands' house. Some of those who seek refuge at home nonetheless are abused and hit by their own family (i.e. father or brothers) to force them to go back to their husband's house. The circle of violence extends to include

the husband's brothers, sisters and parents. When this kind of violence exists and continues, women's children will become a source of violence against them too.

In a direct question, respondents were asked about whether they were subjected to violence during their marriage: 36% said they were subjected to violence on a large scale, whereas 30% faced violence to a moderate degree and 21.1% to a small degree. By analyzing previous results, data shows that 1.89 out of 3 women were subjected to violence or by average percentage of 63%.



Asking the respondent about violence during the 2014 war, those who said that violence has increased after the war are 63.1%, whereas 36.9% said it did not increase.



The shock of the wedding night and the neglect of the bride’s family:

There is no education for young girls regarding their marital relationship, creating a family, or sex – even about the first wedding night. Many women feel that they will never forget that night, even a decade later. They actually called it the “night of fear, suffering and oppression” because of how young, inexperienced, and naïve they were on that night. Their families didn’t teach or talk to them about it so they were shocked, especially when their husband used violence and force during sexual activity. Confronting this issue is difficult when discussions of sexual abuse are considered taboo in Palestinian society.

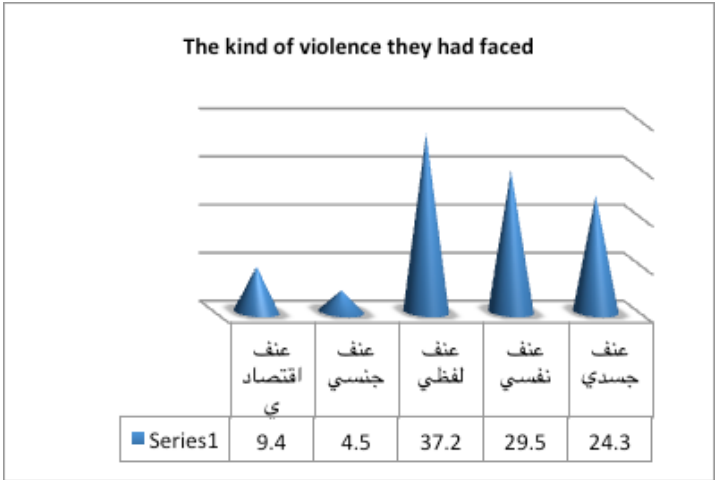
15% of the respondents suffered some kind of physical violence in relationship to sex. It was such a psychological and social shock, and so degrading of the true meaning of marriage, which is supposed to be about sharing and understanding.

Major problems in the sexual relationship:

It is evident from what women had to say about their sexual relations that there are big problems with their husbands. Sex is spoken about vaguely or is dominated by a lack of mutual understanding and consent. The sexual relationship is usually dominated by the husband who is not open to his wife’s feelings and passions. Therefore, women respond to this experience by saying “I hate sex” or “I hate my husband, if I knew marriage is this bad, I would never gotten married in the first place.” Some chose to escape their “marital duties” regarding sex by giving consent for their husband to marry another wife.

Domestic violence:

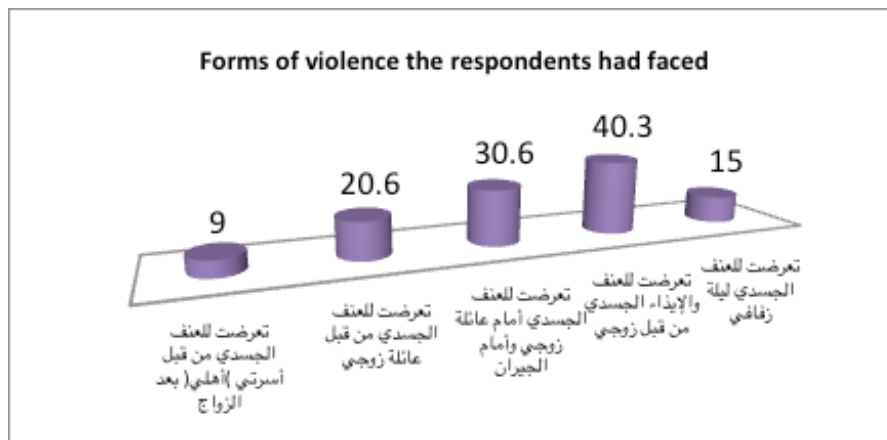
To understand domestic violence in better detail, we asked about the kind of violence respondents had faced in their marriages. Verbal and psychological violence are still the dominant forms, with verbal violence at 37.4% and psychological violence is 29.5%. Nonetheless, physical violence is still at 24.3%. Economic violence is 9.4%, whereas sexual violence is 4.5%.



One of the interviewed women who experienced and still experiencing sexual violence said: “My mom didn’t tell me what would happen during the wedding night. I was scared, terrified actually, and was crying. I have a weak physique and I can’t handle anything. I would hide my face, close my eyes and cry hard. I ran away from him and took a corner as a refuge, but he started hitting me and I started bleeding from my lips. I kept crying. For 5 years, I stayed terrified because he took me with force.”

“Islam” is another girl who experience sexual violence during early marriage: “He has deprived me of my basic rights. He didn’t give me the freedom to choose or reject [his sexual advances]. Sex seemed [to be] rape; he would pressure me. All of this after a physically exhausting day doing chores around the house. Also, his mother and sisters would humiliate me for spending money on myself.”

By studying and analyzing different forms of violence, it was clear that 40.3% of the respondents had experience with some type of violence and physical abuse by their husbands. They also asserted that they experienced different forms of physical violence: 30.6% experienced physical violence by their husband in front of his family and neighbors. Also, 20.6% of them had experienced physical abuse by her husband’s family. The study also shows that 15% experienced physical abuse on the wedding night. Even though most of them were uncomfortable talking about domestic violence, when they were able to talk about it they expressed many feelings.



It is evident that young girls go through marriage without much discussion with family or friends or counseling. In fact, everyone generally smiles and congratulates a young bride without explaining the typical responsibilities and burdens of marriage, including the nature of the sexual relationship, or her rights and duties. Her family relies on the husband to educate his wife, but he typically avoids this responsibilities. Without any kind of education concerning married life, young women thrown into early marriage are confronted with jarring experiences and lack the knowledge to challenge the completely inappropriate use of violence against them by their husbands or their husbands’ families or the other ways in which they are being manipulated or exploited. Early marriage systematically deprives the young

wives of knowledge or support to challenge unjust living conditions and domestic violence.

Abuse of the mother-in-law:

There is a conflictual relationship between the child bride and her mother-in-law. The mother-in-law tends to favor her son and maintain a negative attitude toward his new bride. This is the start of her son's new life, independent of her. so she tries to force herself back into his life by attempting to take control of the marriage and to get involved in what are otherwise seen as private matters between her son and his wife. Even though culturally mother-in-laws are considered to be just like a real mother to brides, this not common in the cases interviewed in this study. Instead, these mothers-in-law took advantage of their close relationship to their son and the aforementioned ignorance of their daughter-in-law regarding a healthy marriage to take dominance and even control over her son's marriage.

"Sanaa" talked about her relationship with her mother-in-law by saying: "I lived in my husband's family house for four and a half years. My life there was difficult because my mother-in-law would get involve in everything. Even though she is an old woman, she would feel jealous and try to listen to whatever is going in my bedroom. I had to block my bedroom window so that she couldn't hear, but she just wouldn't stop."

She added with much confusion: "Then, I decided to sell my jewelry so that I could have my own bathroom inside the bedroom and my own privacy. But this could not stop her; she would wake me up early to do house tasks. After my husband had started a new job where he had to work at night, she wouldn't let me sleep next to him in the morning and kept knocking on my door."

In the questionnaire, we asked the respondents about the degree of their problems with certain people around them during marriage to assess the social welfare of women in early marriage. They had to choose one of the following degrees of problems: "Significant degree", "Moderate degree", "Small degree" or "Doesn't apply" in case there wasn't any kind of problems. After analysis of the data, it became evident that majority of the respondents or 63.3% had faced problems with the husband. On the other hand, 48.6% had problems with their mother-in-law, 29.6% had problems with sisters-in-law, 25.6% had problems with their father-in-law, 25.3% had problems with their brothers-in-law, and 19.6% had problems with their own family. 6% had problems with another wife and 4% had problems with neighbors, whereas, 6% of the respondent had also other kinds of problems.

Respondents' different abusers

Source of violence	Percentage
Husband	63.3%
Mother-in-law	48.6%
Father-in-law	25.6%
Step-brothers	25.3%
Step-sisters	29.6%
Own family	19.6%
Husband's other wife(s)	6.0%
Neighbors	4.0%
Others	6.0%

The nature of the problems that respondent had with her husband:

After asking the respondents the nature of their problems with their husbands, the following details were given:

As one's economic situation has a major affect on people's general welfare, 27.9% of respondents feel that money issues and expenses are the main source of conflict with their husband. 14.4% of them feel that children and childcare caused conflict between the couple. 8.7% said that disagreement over parental roles or the division of chores caused conflict. 12.2% said that the involvement of others in the couple's relationship is one of the issues.

10.4% of the respondents see the nature of problem with their husband as directly correlated to conflicting ideas about women's rights and roles in marriage, including issues of privacy, domestic violence, and living amongst the husband's extended family. Those problems are interconnected and affect the women's security and safety; 5.5% see this as one of the problems. 3.2% of the respondents see that displacement and leaving the house is one of the problems. 3% said that the problem is related to the sexual relationship, such as weak sexual drive or frigidity. 3% said that their desire to continue education was one of the problems.

Psychological, medical, and social implications of early marriage:

Child brides, which we define here as women married before the age of 18, have different psychological, physical and social experiences of marriage which often have an adverse effect on their health. The ability of these young women to deal with these challenging circumstances depends both on the women themselves and the availability of support from individuals or groups in Palestinian society.

Psychological implications of early marriage:

Early marriage has a major impact on the psychological wellbeing of women. This was evident when we tried to investigate if women who experienced early marriage had any psychological problems. 82.6%

had revealed that they had frequent episodes of crying without any reason during marriage, 79.6% were depressed and felt despair, 77.3% of the respondents felt regret and physical stress soon after they thought about being married early. Moreover, they felt oppressed because they couldn't refuse to marry their husbands. 69.6% of the respondents isolated themselves from others and refused to build a connection with their husbands. 69% say that they can't concentrate.

The respondent suffered from two main psychological problems: At 54.3%, the most prevalent problem is the feeling of insecurity and fear around their family; the other problems, also at 54.3% of respondents, relate to nightmares, insomnia and sleep disorders. 50.6% felt insecure, uncomfortable, and unsatisfied during sex. 44% of the respondents asserted that they lost most of their trust in their husband; consequently, they don't feel satisfied with their married life. In fact, only 22.6% of the women reported feeling satisfied about their marriage life.

The focus groups and interviews with specialists in psychological and social issues asserted that child brides are susceptible to many negative psychological and physical symptoms, including: shock, frustration, inferiority and insecurity, regret, and resorting to violence against their children. These symptoms may intensify, resulting sometimes in depression and suicide attempts.

The respondents were asked whether they had any kind of psychological support during marriage; 40% said they did, whereas 60% did not have any kind of support. As women in early marriage suffer from an increasing number of psychological problems, it is evident they still need psychological support sessions. Most of the specialists asserted that, left untreated, these psychological problems can have catastrophic effects on women and their children.

Activist and the director of “Women Health Center – Burij Mariam Shagoura said: “The harsh impact of psychological pressure on girls, who are not yet 18 years old [and married], cannot be forgotten and becomes a part of [them] for a long time. This [pressure] will deteriorate their relationship with their husbands, family and society and their peace of mind.”

Shagoura pointed out that psychological impact includes: “Not having the opportunity to experience a normal relationship with her parents, being deprived the right to play, learn and have fun. The psychological pressure, inability to adapt, and life in a new family will [make] them [more vulnerable] depression and other psychological disorders.”

Najah Shaaban agrees: The deprivation of childhood and the withdrawal of the care and love of their parents hinder the ability of child brides to lead a family or create a peaceful relationships with her mother-in-law or neighbors.

Mona Mousa added that the psychological implication of early marriage includes: “Depression as a

result of family problems, constant anxiety, inability to take on responsibilities and constant worry about the future.”

Sawsan Helo said: “Child brides are more vulnerable to feeling depressed and are shocked by the new reality of married life. They expected a different life and [did not expect] living through despair or feeling worthless, or serving their husbands’ family.”

Head of family Saif Abu Ramadan denounces these conditions: “The child bride fears her new family. One girl would wet the bed; she was married at 14 years and 8 months and divorced when she was 15... what kind of justice is this?! Furthermore, many cases would experience nightmares and insomnia, and many of young divorcees and child brides need sessions of psychotherapy.”

Lawyer Eslah Hasnia said: “If a girl reaches 14 or 15, this means that she has started to develop a plan for her future. However, early marriage will hinder her ability to reach her goals. In fact, if young women she knew were successful in reaching their goals, she would definitely feel down.”

Social and psychological specialist Wafaa Eidsaid: “Some cases felt isolated and lonely in the new environment [of their marriage household]. The inability to understand what marriage is has affected the psychological wellbeing of young girls. They fear men, lack any self-confidence or ability to be part of the society –especially if their husbands control them and don’t listen to them.”

Specialist Hanan Daher added: “Early marriage will lower girls’ self-confidence. They become lonely and isolated and can’t make any decisions. That’s why they need time to get used to the new environment.”

Wafaa Abdallah Eid sees child brides in a similar fashion: “They face many problems especially during the first years of marriage. They experience fear and anxiety, or depression, as a result of short sightedness about [her] future and violence used against them by their husband and his family.”

Fatna Arabeed says: “Not living through childhood probably will [be] reflected in the the children of the child brides. ”

Hanan Geshta agrees: “The constant comparison that child brides make between themselves and their successful colleagues who continued their education will make them feel oppressed and sometime depressed. They will blame their family and will feel inner conflict.”

Preacher Said Abu Jebeen makes a point: “There are different girls with different educational levels. If the girl is smart, she won’t have a hard time in the relationship, especially if the husband is also decent. In contrast, if the husband isn’t decent, he will have trouble with any immature pride [from a

child]. Some husbands get married only for sex, so they expect [access to] forced sexual contact and this is the opposite of what the prophet Mohammed has taught us.”

The harmful psychological effects of early marriage on young girls are dangerous and cannot be neglected. Many cases stay hidden because these young married women don't reveal their secrets to anyone. In turn, this situation will cause disorder and pain to which her family, husband's family and society should be held responsible.

Social consequences:

Early marriage affects the child bride psychologically, socially, physically and sexually. These effects are interrelated and vary not only in relationship to the individual but also in relation to the girl's family and social circumstances. There is variation in different child brides' experiences. Social effects of early marriage are outlined here according to research tools; interviews, focus groups and a questionnaire:

1. Effects on the child bride:

- Deprivation of the care and love of her parents in the abrupt transition to marriage and motherhood.
- Deprivation of a childhood, which causes undue stress when the child bride is given serious responsibilities despite her immaturity
- Inability to manage marital, domestic and child rearing responsibilities expected of her by her husband and his family. As a result, her relationship with her husband's family and larger social circles will be negatively affected.
- Low self esteem. Due to the aforementioned disproportionate responsibilities given to an inexperienced young women, child brides feel inadequate despite all their energy and work for the new family. These feeling build up until the young woman starts abhorring herself and her life.
- Dependency. When the young girls are deprived of a normal life with their parents or education, they will stay immature. In fact, they won't have the ability to make crucial decisions for the rest of their life. They will stay dependent on the husband and others and if given the chance will not engage in making family decisions .
- Isolation is an early choice for child brides as a coping mechanism to avoid facing their problems.
- Domestic violence. This study shows that 65.8% had faced high and moderate degree of violence during their marriage. 37.2% of the respondents faced verbal abuse, 29.5% faced psychological violence, 24.3% faced physical violence, 9.4% of them faced economic violence, and 4.5% of the respondents faced sexual violence. Women reported on past incidences but there is a strong likelihood that domestic violence will continue for the rest of their married life.
- Unhealthy relationships. 63.3% of respondents suffered social problems with their husbands, 74.2% of respondents went through problems with their mother or father-in-law, and 54.9% of them had problems with their brothers or sisters-in-law. These young women are sometimes blamed for conflicts that arise from these unhealthy relationships: 20% of respondents have faced violence from their own family. Instead of protecting these young women, families become a

source of violence.

- Vulnerability and lack of support. Young women in early marriage are often blamed for the difficulties they face as wives and mothers and do not have family members or other people for support
- Arrested social development. Child brides face obstacles to further social development. In fact, they continue to face violating of their rights to work and the development of skills.
- Frustration. There is an increase in distress as young women grow older and realize the crime committed against them in early marriage.

2. Effects on the children of early marriage:

- The inability of child brides to raise and care for their children because the mother is still a child herself and unable to be responsible.
- Complications in pregnancy or child birth. Girls who are pregnant or give birth in their teenage years face greater risks for complications as their sexual organs could still be in development. Other risk factors include the mother's malnutrition, stress from abuse, difficult responsibilities, and unhealthy relationships, or lack of knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth. There are many examples documented in this study, such as losing their children's life because of unawareness about proper childcare.
- Difficulty in maintaining parental authority. Child brides appear to have difficulties maintaining parental authority over their sons, which makes it difficult for them to provide needed protection and guidance.

3. Larger effects on society:

- Social breakdown: The unhealthy relationships that emerge in instances of child marriage lead to increased family problems, such as divorce, and can adversely effect larger social networks in the community. Larger social acceptance of unhealthy interpersonal behavior such as domestic abuse, oppression of women, and the denial of education or freedom of movement is detrimental to healthy and successful communities. Though families participate in child marriage to ensure the continuation of strong family networks, this practice actually contributes to social breakdown.
- Decrease in educated women in the work force: When child brides are denied the right to continue their education, they lose opportunities for economic and professional advancement beyond a rudimentary elementary education.
- Decrease in women's participation in decision making: When child brides are denied education and are treated as incapable of making independent decisions, these women are less likely to assert themselves as members of their family but also as members of their larger community.
- Illiteracy: Child brides denied the right to literacy cannot help their children develop this necessary skill and are unable to access knowledge to help themselves and their family as contained in books and on the Internet.
- Increase in psychological disorders and suicide: Women denied a childhood through early marriage

show a high rate of psychological disorders and have a higher tendency for suicide.

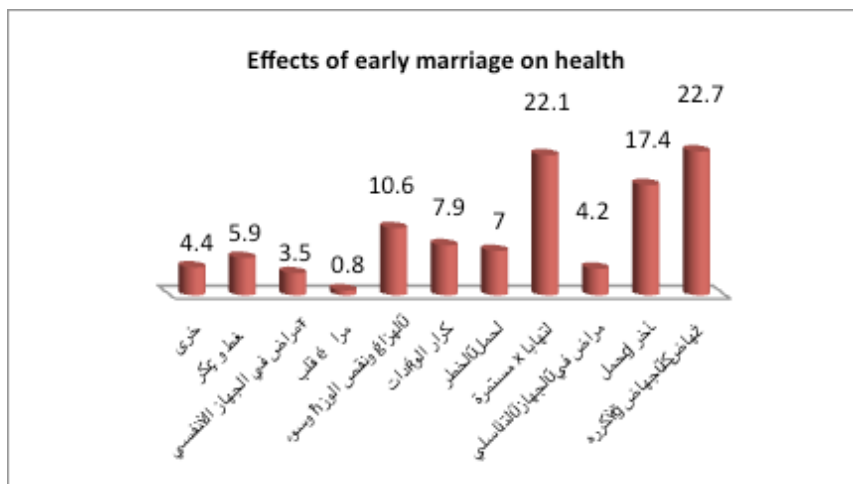
- Child brides don't have any opportunity to choose their husbands, as their fathers are the one who decide. 44% of the respondents say that their fathers made the decision to marry them off, whereas 25.2% said that the decision was shared by the family and the girls.
- There is an increase in the number of girls who marry early.
- The phenomenon of polygamy is increasing in numbers, as husbands of child brides want someone who is more mature and understand his needs.

Increasing marriage problems between the husband and the child bride will cause violence and sometimes lead to homicide, as a result, this will hinder development in society.

Young Girls are facing more challenges than any time before, according to the interviews, and according to the focus groups and what specialists had to say about the social problems of the girls. These challenges exceed the abilities of the young wives and hinders them from forming healthy social relationships. Being with another woman who shares her life with her husband has many social and psychological implications. This in turn will lead to divorce and the disassociation of the family fabric in society. This doesn't make sense. What does it mean: "being with another woman who shares her life with her husband? Who is the other women? The mother-in-law? This needs work.

Effects on Health:

22.7% of the respondents suffered from repeated miscarriages because of being young and unaware of matters related to pregnancy. 22.1% of the women had frequent infections. Delayed pregnancy was one the major problems which constitute 17.4% of the respondents. 10.6% suffered fatigue, underweight and malnutrition. High-risk pregnancies and repeated deliveries are present with 7% and 7.9%, respectively. Other health problems include, 5.9% with high blood pressure and diabetes, 4.2% with problems in the genitalia, and 3.5% with respiratory diseases, and about 1% with cardiac diseases. 4.4% had other kinds of disorders.



Investigating the causes of the health problems of respondents during early marriage, 21.3% said that malnutrition is one of the causes; this reason is related to the bad economic situation of the respondents, 17.3% said that lack of awareness and neglect of health consistent health care and follow up is one of the reasons. 15.3% of them said that the burdens of domestic chores they had to do is a cause, 13.6% of the respondents mentioned frequent pregnancies and deliveries, 10.2% of the respondents did caesarian sections, which has many implications for health, 9.7% said that living in unhealthy environment is one of the causes, 8.4% said that using contraceptives is one of the causes. 2.7% attributed the causes to participation in work with the family, whereas 5.7% said other causes related to health problems.

There was a consensus during focus groups that early marriage has very negative consequences for the young girls. During an early age, child brides are susceptible to illnesses as a result of incomplete physiological growth, and the inability of the uterus to have frequent pregnancies. Such situations can cause frequent miscarriages, bleeding during delivery, anemia, and osteoporosis as a result of decreased level of calcium, and general weakness that might lead to death.

Early marriage and its effects on child brides' education:

The points viewed by participants during the interviews are intercepted, even during focus groups; they all asserted the dangers of depriving child brides from education. In fact, they considered this practice to be a crime against girls. Because it ends their future, deprives them of their basic rights, and forces them to handle responsibilities that they are not physically or mentally . Returning to school, especially after marriage, can be very hard for girls unless there is a great will to go against family pressure and to stand up to violence. The girls' own families are the one who are responsible for this situation in the first place. In fact, imposing marriage as a condition for the girl to continue her education is an excuse to appear fair.

The following outline lists the implications of early marriage addressed in this study:

- Depriving girls of education at a young age, especially middle school, can lead to a decline in the girls' educational and intellectual levels. This creates conditions where they are treated differently by their husbands because they cannot get into meaningful discussions.
- Dropping out of school means less participation, a lack of understanding and ignorance for the child brides, as the purpose of their life becomes to serve others, including husband, children and in-laws.
- The difficulty of the curriculums can stand in the way between the child bride and her children. Sometimes it is even frustrating for the girl who, after a while, either decides to seclude herself or have a deep desire to continue her education. Please clarify what this paragraph means in the original. What do you mean by "curriculums?"
- Early marriage can be a cause of girls younger than 18 years old dropping out of school. This hinders social development.
- Deprivation from education at early age can be catastrophic and a violation of the young girls' right

of education. As a result of this social, cultural, intellectual and mental gap in the life of the girls, they blame their family and feel inferior when compared to other successful young women who have continued with their education.

- Depriving girls of entering college can hinder their developmental and psychological understanding of how to raise their own children, unless they are self-taught.
- Without education child brides will definitely feel worthless in society. It seems that serving others is the only valuable thing they do and soon they give up their dreams and ambitions.

Specialist Nehad Egilan says: “Depriving girls of education can be harsh to handle. Child brides have hopes and dreams to be educated and have a job, and be decision makers. However, when they are deprived of this opportunity, they give up all that. I deal with cases where women have become grandmothers; they always blame her family: ‘for getting me married early and when I even don’t know what it actually means, and depriving me of school.’”

One child bride “Salma” is an example for those girls who sought to complete their education but were forced by their families to marry early. She says: “I got married when I was 16 to a guy from my mother’s family side. He was 19 years old at that time and he is a worker. He dropped out of school when he was in first grade. My family consists of 4 girls and 4 boys. I am the 3rd one of the girls. My sisters were married when they were in secondary school,. Another married when she was a freshman college. I am the only one who got married this early. As they say I look beautiful. My family actually tried to get rid of me, because they know I am ambitious and I want to complete my studies. They took a short cut, especially as the economic situation of my family is bad and there aren’t any opportunities for me to continue my education.”

“Salma” added: “Despite all the family problems, the intervening in my privacy, and all the problems I hav faced during 10 years of trying to get pregnant... I successfully convinced my husband to continue my education. I actually passed secondary school with a “good” average which enables me to get into college. This could happen if the economic situation gets better. Someday, I will get into college; everything has a cost. Though, I won’t forgive my family for taking away my opportunity to study, going to college will stay a dream until I achieve it.”

There are psychological, social and health implication that leave a mark on young girls. These girls were deprived of a normal childhood . Suddenly they became wives and mothers, and now carry huge responsibilities; as a result, they give up hope and feel defeated from the inside. This leaves a scar that can’t be treated. Some wish to go back in time and some will try to give everything they have to their children, so they won’t face the same fate.

These consequences can be coped with managed and cut down in size, if there is appropriate and effective social and familial support for each situation. This can be done through thoughtful and effective organizational and social interventions and continual support.



Section Five

Israeli Aggression and the Idea of Child Brides

Is the Israeli aggression playing any role in reinforcing the practice of early marriage?

During the 2014 war and previous Israeli aggressions, Israel left thousands of Palestinians injured, dead and displaced. After a war ended another followed soon after, and Israel intentionally kept violating the legal rights of women, children and the general Palestinian population. As a consequence of this situation, Palestinian families were deprived of their security and stability.

During attacks or in other urgent situations, many men and women are forced to make irrational decisions. We took the opportunity to explore the impact of the latest Israeli aggression on marriage because we are interested in investigating this question directly with specialized people.

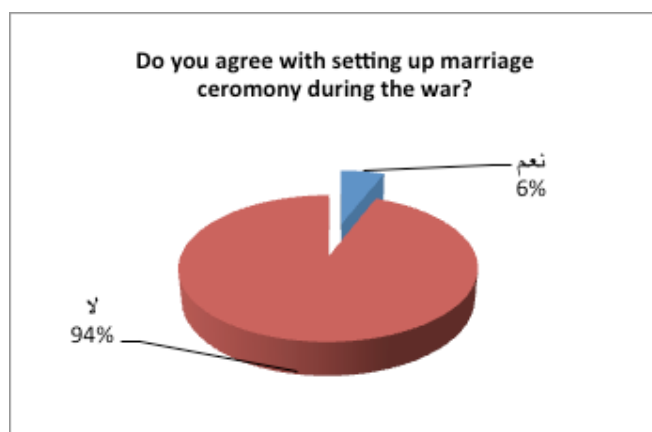
We went ahead with surveying the opinion of women who had an early marriage experience. 63.5% of those women were affected by the Israeli military operation: 54.9% of them had their house partially damaged, 8.6% had their house completely damaged and 36.6% had no damage.

62.6% of respondents said that they were forced to leave their homes during the 2014 war, while 37.4% didn't leave. 13.6% of the respondents had lost a member of their family.

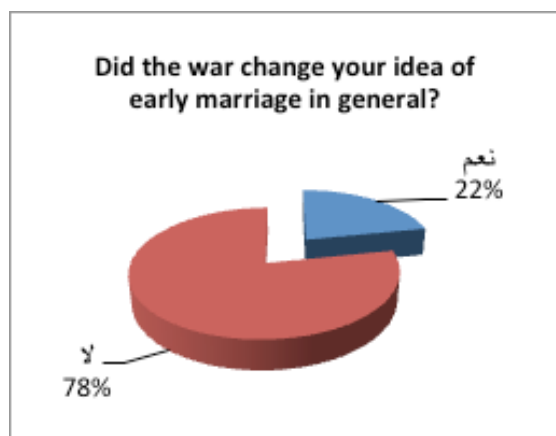
The women were asked whether frequent Israeli operations are a reason to accept the idea of early marriage. 85.6% rejected the idea because they don't want to place their daughters in a position where their husband could get killed. In contrast, 14.4% accepted the opinion because they want to keep their daughters away from violence, insults and rape.



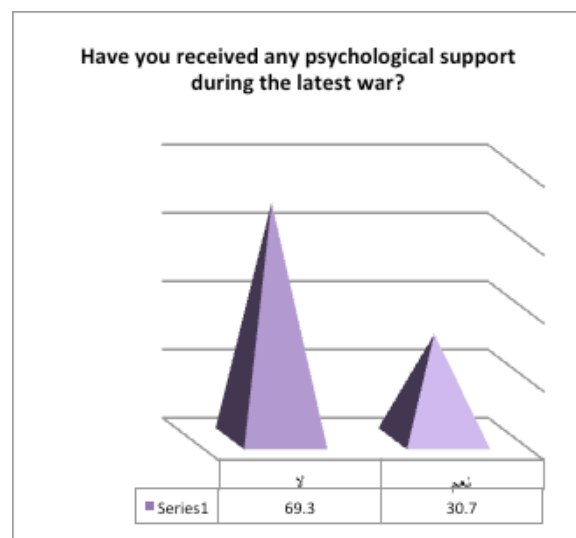
Respondents were also asked whether they would agree to marry their daughters during the war; 94% rejected the idea and 6% accepted it. The majority refused this idea because they believe that their daughters have the right to be happy. They think that celebrating a full wedding day would have a positive psychological impact on them.



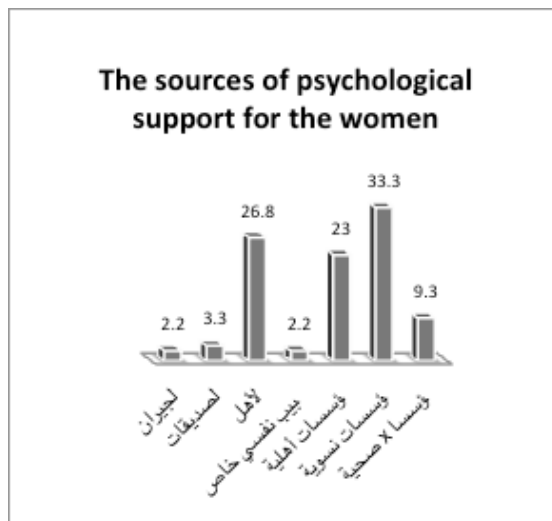
When the respondents were asked whether the situation created during the war would change their idea of child marriage in general, 78% said it would not affect their opinion, whereas 22% said it would.



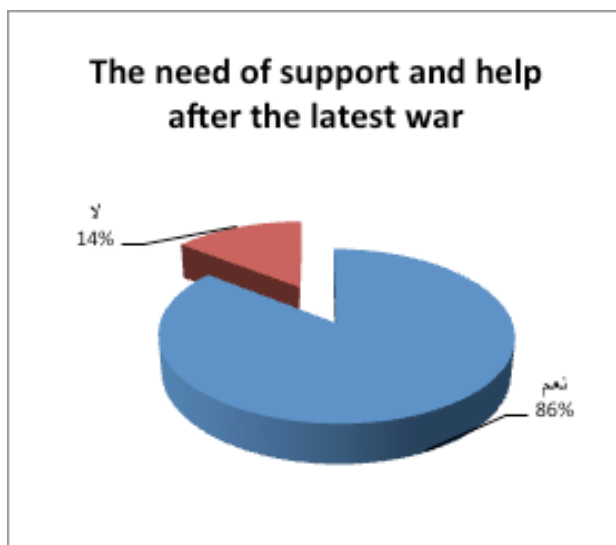
Psychological support during and after the war:
Being a venerable group that is also the backbone of the family, women need psychological support during wars. We asked the respondents whether they had any psychological support during the 2014 war, 30.7% of them had some kind of support, whereas 69% did not



We investigated further the sources of psychological support for the women. It turned out that 33.3% of the 30.7 percent that received support received it from women's organizations, 26.8% from family, 23% from NGO's, 9.3% from health sectors, 3.3% from friends, 2.2% from neighbors, and 2.2% from a private psychiatrist.



In order to learn more about how the women withstand life's social and economic problems, we investigated their need of support and help to build a stable family environment. 85.6% said that they need this kind of support. In fact, many said that the continuity of psychological support is crucial for it give them self-confidence and the capacity to face bravely the challenges in their lives.



Social worker Wafaa Eid explained: “since the beginning of the war we didn’t receive any early marriage cases, but the problem of demolished houses and being in a shelter pushed the fathers to marry their daughters early. They said that she will find a place where shd can be comfortable and where we can also take refuge. But right after the war, we received 20 new cases of divorce--and marriage problems, even violence had increased”.

According to specialist Nehad Egilan: **“It is very difficult to measure how much people changed their opinion about marriage as they still under the trauma of the war. However, in the long term, I think, there will be a change not only in marriage but also in behavior. In my opinion, those people who had their houses demolished and live in a shelter and have girls, will they marry them early? Yes, because they need a place for their daughter to stay in away from molestation. Especially as shelters have people from many different backgrounds. I met this woman at her demolished house, and she has a daughter. She told me: my daughter needs to go to the bathroom, there is no bathroom, it is only a tent, I have no idea where I would take her, I don’t feel that she is safe, I will marry her to the first guy who proposes to us.”**

Most of the focus groups agreed that war is a contributing factor in changing families’ point of view regarding early marriage. It is a result of fear and instability, and the death of many young men that decreases the girls’ chance of marriage. Also many families tend to marry or force their daughters and sons to marry early from fear that they might join the resistance or migrate. This behavior has been reinforced in every military operation since the 1987 intifada.

Some individuals in the focus groups disagree with this idea. For example, “Intisar” said: “Why do we blame everything upon the occupation? Why don’t we blame their families?”

Others agreed with her, saying that wars force families to avoid marrying off their daughters because they don’t want her to become a widow after a short period of time. Others see education as the only weapon for girls in the midst of unstable society.

“Rima” said: **“war doesn’t have to be one of the causes of early marriage; it can have a positive impact such as encouraging seeking education.**

Most of the participants focused on the military operations and political instability as indirect factors influencing early marriage in Gaza. Both the economic situation and the instability pushes families to marry their daughters early. The economic and social realities force themselves upon families. This is what happened at shelters during the war of 2014, when many weddings took place; many engaged couples took the opportunity to minimize the costs of weddings by getting married without any formal celebration. Furthermore, many were married to keep the opportunities for aid stamps. A male participant mentioned the notion of immigration and leaving Gaza by saying: **“Psychological**

pressure might be a cause because the father uses marriage as an excuse to stop the son's decision to immigrate. For those who had their houses demolished during the war, they accept early marriage to reduce burdens."

Different opinions were raised during the focus group among those who agree and disagree about the impact of the aggression on marriage. Most saw that harsh conditions , such as, the destruction of houses, displacement, and dependence on aid stamps, play a role in early marriages. In addition to the harsh social conditions, the large families, lack of education and lack of awareness remain consistent factors.

On the opposite side of this discussion sees a tendency among families to marry their sons early because he might get killed or join the resistance, and because they have the desire to have someone to carry the family name after their sons' deaths.

After three of "Belal's" best friends were killed, he spent his time alone and his father worried about him, so his father married him to a girl of 17. He was 19 years old. Now, he is 27 but his life is instable. He is facing many problems in his relationship and actually think of marrying again.

From previews discussions, it becomes clear that the Israeli Occupation is causing the loss of security and stability. It also influences the decisions of couples, but as the majority explained, it is not a direct cause of early marriage. They - female respondents and specialists - think that it potentially creates an unhealthy environment for social relationships. The occupation is to blame for violence, tension, and permanent social anxiety in the Palestinian society.

Section Six

Suggested mechanisms of intervention:

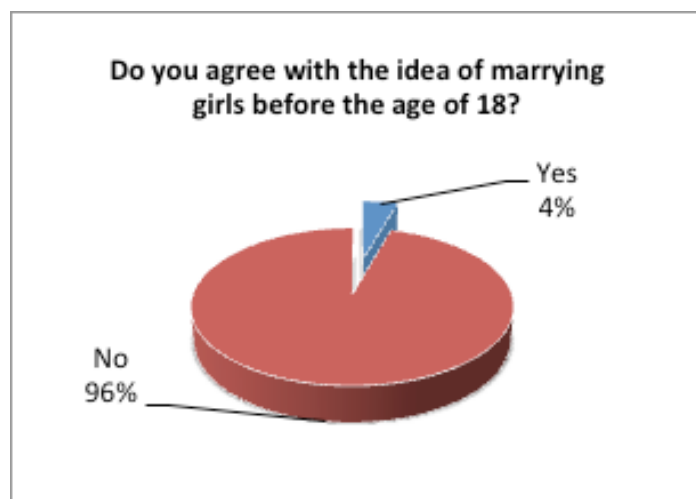
This section tries to set the foundations of intervention for early marriage. These suggestions were contributed by child brides who are the main source of data, in addition to opinions giving during focus groups or interviews with the specialists in this field.

The need for education and awareness about marriage relationships:

Most women didn't know how to deal with problems they had faced, or how to deal with their children or family. In addition, they didn't know how to react when they experience violence. The need for such education is crucial for them and their family.

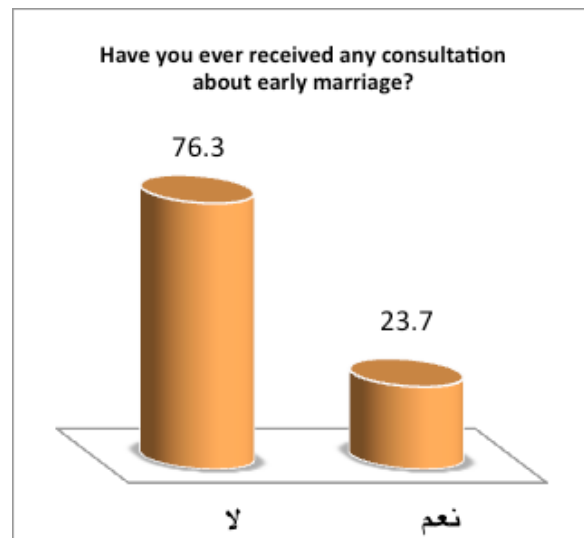
In this section, the study will addresses the respondent's opinion about early marriage and their suggestions of who can help with this issue. Then, address the action mechanisms for interventions that they need from society and organizations.

The Vast majority of the women, 95.6%, said that they won't marry their girls early before the age of 18. Only 4.4% of the respondents said they have no problem with early marriage.

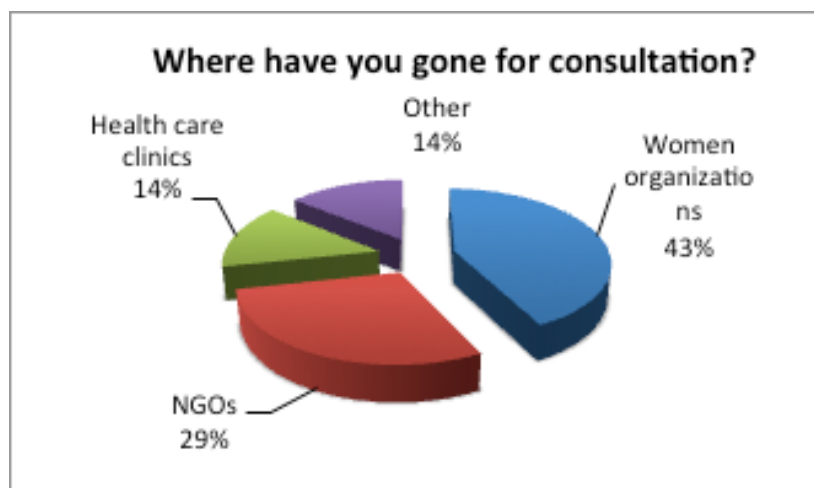


The study showed that 83% of the respondents have had their daughters marry before the age of 18. The rest of them, 17%, did marry their daughters before the age of 18, even though, they have asserted that they refuse early marriage. This shows that the choice to marry their daughters are not in their hands.

- In asking the respondents whether they tried to reach any kind of counseling about early marriage: the majority of them, 76.3%, said they didn't go, while 23.7% went for counseling, the following graph shows it:



- According to the previous question, for those respondents who went for counseling, we asked them who did they go to: 42.6% said they went to women organizations, 29.1% said they went to civil institutions, and 14.2% went to primary health clinics and with the same portion went to other sources such as books, magazines, media outlets or the internet. The following chart shows those results:



The respondents were asked whether they had received legal outreach, 68% said they had not, 32% had received legal awareness about early marriage from these sides, accordingly: women organizations, legal organizations, family and tribal chiefs.

Mechanisms of intervention:

There was consensus among respondents about raising awareness of the negative effects of the problem of early marriage. 43% see that more awareness and education are needed for youth from both genders about violence against women, especially young men. This can be done through intensive workshops. The respondents also demanded the education, direction and guidance of girls during adolescence period about the dangers of early marriage and its negative impact on all aspects of life. 33.1% of the respondents asserted the importance of putting pressure for the improvement of family laws related to marriage and the development of clear and strict legal text regarding early marriage which deters decision makers from forcing girls to marry at a young age. 30.7% demanded more education and awareness for the social councilors and teachers as their work deal with adolescent girls closely and effectively.

Needed Societal and organizational interventions

Interventions	Percentage
More education and awareness for youth	43.0%
Lobbying the legal system	33.1%
More education and awareness for teachers and social councilors	30.7%

Needed interventions to control early marriage:

There was consensus on needed mechanisms of intervention between respondents and study tools, in addition to other interventions:

There was agreement among everyone that the responsibility of reducing early marriage is everyone's. Both recruiting the legal system and spreading awareness among families can be a start for controlling early marriage. The educational environment is also important for educating and raising awareness of young girls and boys about this issue. The role of media is also important in recruiting public opinion against the negativity of early marriage and its effects on social development.

These are the interventions that focus groups and interviews have given; note their agreement with the opinion of respondents who lived through early marriage:

- There should be concerted efforts to curb this phenomenon: socially, legally, and religiously.
- It is preferable to designate the actual age for marriage between 20-25 years and don't depend on the outer look.
- Education should be compulsory and there should be a legal punishment for violations.
- Raising awareness among families and parents about early marriage, especially about its impact on women and men.
- Provide counseling for couples and engaged ones such as: how to have a safe marriage, dealing with marriage problems, having a successful marriage dialogue and effective communication.
- There should be a curriculum that focusses on sexual relations and reproductive health for adolescence in schools.

- Training an educational crew to explain these topics in schools, and enforcing the role of social and health counselors there.
- Make the stories about early marriage available for parents and families to make this issue clear, especially showing the important role of education and how enjoying childhood is more important than marriage.
- There should be some kind of interventions by head of families and tribes, because they can make a difference by influencing many groups in the society.
- The assertion that counseling and services at the women and legal centers should be free for all women.
- Enforcing the role of educational counseling regarding early marriage in sharia courts.
- Providing health education about early marriage is necessary for girls in school and for households.
- Doing workshops in different areas such as: youth and women centers, legal institutions, clinics and health centers.
- Sessions for educating and raising awareness about the impact of early marriage should be given to families.
- School girls, especially in middle school, should be educated individually and in-class about early marriage and its impact.
- Media and religious figures have an effective role. The government should also improve the economic situation of residents so that it won't be an excuse to marry off their daughters early.
- Preparing house visits to convince girls to return back to school.

How to end early marriage “legally”:

- There should be a strict law that defines the age of girls and boys to be 18 as minimum, so that they can finish secondary school. This law should also sets constraints for this issue, especially as it binds judges and related officials.
- End the legislative division which hindered the enactment of important laws, especially the family law “Personal Status”.
- Implementing advocacy and lobbying campaigns in all civil and governmental organizations for enactment of laws that assist in the fight against this practice.
- Decision makers should work to enact laws and legislations to end the phenomena of early marriage; laws such as setting a legal age and prohibit its violation are important.
- Activating the law which prohibits early marriage, as there are turning around the law by implementing the age according to the Islamic calendar. The law should be strict and compulsory.
- Raising awareness about the thalassemia exam for those who are planning to get married, and make the participation in such course compulsory.
- There should be a lobbying campaign for raising the age of marriage and canceling the administrative decision regarding early marriage.
- A strict law should be formulated regarding early marriage.
- It should be made clear to judges to prohibit marriage of girls unless they have reached their full

intellectual and mental growth and not rely on their physical appearance.

- Officials should check the authenticity of all legal papers that shows the girl's age before marriage.
- All men of law should be fully aware of the dangers of early marriage.
- All organizations should work together for the designation of marriage age and not rely on physical appearance of girls.
- Enforcing the role of legal institutions through capacity building and advocacy.
- The enactment of laws that ensure marriage is made by free and full agreement of both sides. There should be designation of the minimum age of marriage and agreement, and raising the minimum age of marriage when needed; these laws should be implemented precisely.
- There should be a punishment for the father who is responsible of marrying his daughter early and a law should be enacted that criminalizes guardians of fathers.

Needs at the social level:

According to focus groups and interviews, raising societal and family awareness is considered an effective intervention tool if the whole family was targeted. House visits are important, especially for young people who are planning to get married. Head of families are should also be targeted as they playing a role in paving the way for this practice. Furthermore, media in its various forms are also responsible of delivering the right message about the concept of early marriage and its physical, psychological and social risks. This can be done through various tools such as: Educational and outreach brochures; house visits should be made through a crew of specialists (from both genders). Schools also should be targeted, especially middle schools, by the preparation of a course about women's rights for the girls, and have a space for parents to participate.

Outlines of most of what have been said:

- Head of families, effective figures and societal leaders must have a greater role in societal changes especially by raising awareness and educating members in the society.
- It is important for the locals to participate and give them a more effective role in putting pressure on decision makers to end the phenomenon of early marriage.
- Widening the network of awareness and education to reach the whole society so that customs and traditions can have a lesser role in making decisions by members of the society.
- Social support should be made available through free, facilitated educational opportunities for girls.
- The termination of all kinds of negative, cultural practices against girls.
- Outreach programs should target mosques, imams and workers in sharia courts in order to have a common ground regarding ending this phenomenon and decrease the number of child brides.

Even though organizations have been working in the field of educating and raising awareness for a long time, its effects didn't see the light.

Ideas and suggestions for organizational interventions for early marriage:

The following ideas were emerged by various study tools, and the opinions of tens of child brides. Many recommendations and suggestions were emerged for organizational intervention to change the reality of early marriage, as follow:

- Beyond media, awareness should reach remote area especially near borders and marginalized area so that organizations can work closely and in the field.
- All sectors of the society, including: government, individuals, religious sector and civil society, should be united and work together on the same goal,
- Women organization should target every component of the society through educational workshops, media and various forms of tools.
- There are laws but, unfortunately, there isn't implementation of those laws and that's the real problem. As women organizations, we must make our voice be heard by decision makers to make those laws available to protect women and girls.
- Women societies should keep up the work and continue putting pressure on sharia courts to prohibit the marriage of young girls. In fact, the family committee of courts should be monitored over the cases of divorce or marriage which it oversees.
- Women societies should work with head of families and interested figures in raising awareness in the society.
- Continue the outreach and lobbying campaigns; marking a week for educating about early marriage.
- All women organizations should be united and work together to introduce a strict law regarding this issue.
- Supporting initiatives that tries to put end for early marriage.
- Showing documentaries to the public that address the problem of early marriage. Women and health organizations can film those documentaries.
- Writing plays and show them in school throughout Gaza Strip.
- All women organizations should cooperate to enact laws and legislations through advocacy and lobbying; all should follow these efforts of raising awareness and educating. There is an important role of media in this field too.
- Empowering child brides socially, educationally, psychologically and economically; they should also have a role in educating others and raising their awareness, as they have lived the experience.
- The Preparation of more studies and research that address this phenomenon and use it locally to positively affect the society.
- Activating "consulting prior to marriage" program and cooperating with sharia courts and the ministry of health to implement it.
- Couples should go through educational programs and trainings before marriage about all aspects of social, marriage and economic life.
- Mothers should be educated about health implications of early marriage at health centers; also sessions about the reproductive health of men and women should be given.

- Organizations of psychological and social interventions should broaden its covering of education and awareness.
- Creating curriculum that increase the value of women and address the issue of early marriage.
- Focusing more on female and male students in middle and secondary schools.
- Organizations should help girls who are among many sisters to find professional and training opportunities especially those with weak educational attainment.

Organizational interventions:

- It is important that interested organizations prepare studies periodically; so that they could define the scope of the problem and its latest progress. There should be continuous work of educating and awareness raising focusing on the quality not the quantity of the work. This work should reach out to marginalized areas especially in eastern villages where early marriage at age 15 is common. Using proper tools, campaigns in those areas should show the risks of this social problem and rely mainly on drama and sketches which target all groups of the society.
- Intensive networks of organizations in this field should be established and connect it with the international organizations.
- The progress of the problem of early marriage should be closely monitored and update interventions tools periodically.
- Focus more on the role of media it plays in solving this problem; this can be made through drama, documentaries, theatre, seminars and mosque sermons; not forgetting the role of social media in this area through advocacy and lobbying.
- There should be a serious, effective legal intervention to put an end for this phenomenon and control its consequences. A controlling, modern law can comply with the privacy of Palestinian society, at the same time; it can be deterrent for any violations.

Section Seven



Conclusions and Recommendations
Study Conclusion:

Conclusions

There are many conclusions that the study offers, including:

- Early marriage is considered a crime; however, Palestinian society still accepts this practice in the midst of complete silence by legislations and laws. It is misunderstood by young girls; as a result, it is not fair for their families to pretend that they are seeking the daughters' approval. The families are responsible for this decision, as the girls are unaware of the consequences of their action.

Consensus on Early Marriage:

- The majority of respondents--95.6%,--believe that girls should not get married disagree about marrying girls before the age of 18 by 95.6%, whereas 4.4% said they don't mind marrying girls before this age.
- 78% of the respondents refused the notion that the impact of wars and aggressions push girls to marry early, whereas 22% accepted. They argued that early marriage is at least in part an attempt to protect the girls from the unknown.
- 85.6% of the respondents rejected the idea that war would change the notion of forcing their daughters to marry early. 14.4% said they would accept this notion to protect their daughters from rape, abuse, and violence.
- The study shows that 30.7% of the respondents had received a psychological support during the Israeli aggression, while 69% did not receive any kind of support.
- Of the 30.7% who had received support during Israeli aggression most received such help from family, followed by NGOs, then health organizations. A small percentage received support from friends, neighbors or private psychiatrists.
- The vast majority of respondents who were married early--94.6%--stayed as house wives, as they did not get the opportunity to continue their education or have a chance to work. 2.2% of respondents work in the private sector and 2% have their own projects. There is a correlation between the educational level of the respondents and who didn't have a chance to work and thus stayed as house wives.
- The study asserts that intermarriage within an extended family was a reason for early marriage, with 27.5% of respondents married to a first degree relative, while 27.3% married to a second degree relative.

Getting married isn't in their hands:

- The study shows that the father was the main decision maker in the dependents' marriage decision; 44% of respondents said that their father was the main decision maker for the question of their marriage, while 25.2% said that their decision was in their family hands and the girls agreed upon. 15.4% said that they personally decided upon their marriage and shared this decision with their family; most of them emphasized their misunderstanding of what marriage entails. 13.3% of the respondents said that their mother was the main decision maker in their marriage, whereas 5% said their uncle made the decision and 3.4% said that their brother was the decision maker.

Reasons behind early marriage:

- 35.1% of the respondents in this study attributed their early marriage to the culture of Palestinian society, followed by 15.3% who attributed early marriage to intermarriage within the extended family, 14.1% who attributed early marriage to the pressures of being one among many sisters and the related desire of the family to ease their burdens. 13.8% said that poverty is the reason, and finally 12.9% think that they misunderstood the reality of marriage and thought it is only about shopping, fun and makeup.

Violence and early marriage:

- This study shows that 36% of the respondents were subjected to a substantial degree of violence during their marriage, whereas 30% were subjected to a moderate degree, and 21.1% were subjected to a small degree. According to such data, out of 3 respondents 1.89 were subjected to violence during their marriage; this adds up to 63%.
- 63% of the respondents think that violence has increased after the latest Israeli incursion on Gaza Strip, while 36.9% said that violence didn't increase during the same period.
- The research shows that verbal and psychological violence are at the most common forms of violence that child brides had faced. 37.2% had faced verbal violence, 29.5% had faced psychological violence, followed by 24.3% had faced physical violence, 9.4% had faced economic violence, and 4.5% faced sexual violence.
- The research in this study shows that respondents were subjected to violence in different ways and from different people:
 - 40.3% of the respondents were subjected to physical violence from the husband to a substantial degree.
 - 30.6% of the respondents asserted that they had experienced different kinds of physical violence in the presence of their husband's family or neighbors.
 - 20.6% asserted that they were subjected to physical violence by their husbands' family.
- The study shows that violence against child brides starts from the first day of marriage. 15% said they were subjected to physical violence during the first wedding night; they also had faced psychological violence as a result of their misunderstanding of marriage life.
- The research in this study made it clear that most of the respondents, 63.3%, asserted that they had issues with their husband, 48.6% had issues with their mother-in-law, 29.6% had issues with their sisters-in-law, 25.6% had issues with their father-in-law, 25.3% had issues with their brothers-in-law, finally, 19.6% had issues with their own families.
- Study results shows that 27.9% of the respondents think that money and family expenses are the issues where they have the greatest disagreement with their husbands, followed by 14.4% who had disagreements with their husbands on issues related to raising their children. 8.7% said that they had issues related to responsibility, roles in the family and house chores. 12.2% see that intervention by others in their marriage life was an issue, and finally, 10.4% see that they had issues with their husband related to having their own independent identity and autonomy; this is related to the respondents feeling that they do not have their own privacy.

Implications of early marriage:

There are psychological, health and social consequences for the young girls who were married before the age of 18. These implications are summarized here.

- The harsh psychological implications that the respondents suffered:

- 82.6% of the respondents had experienced frequent crying episodes without any reason during their marriage.
- 79.6% asserted that they felt depressed and hopeless.
- 77.3% felt distress and regret because of being married early, especially, after feeling oppressed because they had not had a choice. This is related to feeling isolated and secluded and having the desire to stay away from everyone, especially their husbands; this includes 69.6% of the respondents.
- 69% of the respondents felt unfocused and not able to concentrate. 54.3% of the respondents said they live in fear and insecurity and have nightmares, insomnia and sleep deprivation, and 50.6% said they did not trust their husbands, especially during sex. The respondents also didn't feel any joyful moments with their husbands during sex.
- 44% of the respondents asserted directly that they don't have any kind of trust between them and their husbands; this in turn increases their dissatisfaction with marriage life.
- The majority of respondents, 60%, had not turned to anyone to receive psychological support for the violence they faced during their marriage; in contrast, 40% of them did turn to specialists for psychological support.

Implications on the health level:

On the level of health, the respondents who married before the age of 18 had faced a difficult life; this study has shown that the respondents have suffered extreme physical consequences:

- 22.7% went through frequent miscarriages because of being so young and not receiving any health education related to pregnancy.
- 22.1% of the respondents were inflicted with frequent infections; whereas 17.4% had delayed pregnancy, which was considered a major problem for them.
- 10.6% were inflicted with malnutrition, underweight, and fatigue. High-risk pregnancies and repeated deliveries are present with 7% and 7.9%, respectively. 5.9% had high blood pressure and diabetes, 4.2% had problems in the genitalia, and 3.5% had respiratory diseases.
- The results of this research illuminate the causes of health problems that inflict the respondents. 21.3% said that malnutrition is one of the causes; this reason is directly related to the bad economic situation of the respondents. 17.3% said that lack of awareness of the importance of medical follow ups is one of the reasons. 15.3% of them said that the burdens of domestic chores had to do is a cause. 13.6% of the respondents mentioned frequent pregnancies and deliveries. 10.2% of the respondents did caesarian sections, which has many implications on health. 9.7% said that living in an unhealthy

environment is one of the factors, while 8.4% mentioned the use contraceptives.

Mechanisms of intervention:

- This research collects the voices of the participants and points to the mechanisms of intervention necessary to put an end to early marriage. The majority of participants agreed about the importance of raising awareness of the risks of this practice. 43% believe that more awareness and education are needed for youth of both genders about violence against women, especially young men. This can be done through intensive workshops. The respondents also demanded education and guidance for girls during adolescence about the dangers of early marriage and its negative impact on all aspects of life.
- 33% of the respondents emphasized the importance of improving family laws related to marriage and the development of clear and strict legal text regarding early marriage which deters decision makers from forcing girls to marry at a young age.
- 30.7% demanded more education and awareness for the social counselors and teachers, for their work deals with adolescent girls closely and they have the potential to make a positive impact.

Recommendations:

There are many recommendations that grow from this study, including:

Legal change (Legislative authority in Gaza Strip)

- The need for the enactment of a law that sets the marriage age for both fiancé and fiancée and prohibits marriage before the age of 18 for both genders.
- The need for the judges of Sharia courts to take into consideration the interest of the girl as a first priority, and to be knowledgeable about the negative implications of early marriage. They also have to be aware that girls must reach their full maturity before marriage and focus on her mental abilities, not only on their physical looks.

The ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs

- There should be a familiarity with the social implications of early marriage; furthermore, belief in the importance of protecting the girls should be present. Giving a chance for dialogue and allowing a space for thinking and reflecting, will be for the good of the family and for society as a whole.
- There is a need for religious scholars to take a stand to stop violence against women and against forced marriages. This will empower broader participation from all levels of society to stand against early marriage.

The Ministry of Education:

- Teachers, counselors, and social workers should be educated and informed about this issue as their work deal with adolescent girls closely and has the potential to make a positive impact.

- There must be initiatives to improve the level of education of struggling students through special, modern educational programs that prevent families from marrying their girls off early.
- There must be initiatives to raise awareness among female students in middle and secondary school through cooperation and coordination of programs with women's organizations. These programs can help to promote ideas of healthy family and marriage, explaining the obligations of both the husband and wife, describing the social roles in marriage and the nature of marital relationship. This can prepare the students for the future and to be more in control of their fate.
- There must be initiatives to provide struggling female students with opportunities for occupational training under educational supervision; this will give them more choices in the job market and improve their income.
- Women's NGOs and civil NGOs must campaign to raise the awareness of school boys and girls about the foundations of a successful marriage relationship, how to raise children, what are partners' rights, what are the components of a healthy and flourishing family.

Civil society institutions:

- Young mothers should be included in educational programs and activities in order to be learn about their physical, psychological wellbeing and about child bearing and care.
- It's important to raise awareness of mothers and families of the dangers of early marriage and of depriving girls of their childhoods.
- It's important to create psychological and social programs for child brides to enable them to integrate in the society and have a chance to learn. This will enable them to be more active in their family and play their role in society much effectively.
- It's important to provide free health services in different areas for child brides in order to ease the burdens of raising children alone, and to prevent the deterioration of their health because of poverty or ignorance.
- It is important to raising awareness among youth about the dangers of early marriage, and focus on the ways to prevent family violence.
- It is important to raise awareness and educate female adolescents about early marriage and its impact on all of the aspects of life .
- It is important to put pressure to improve family laws related to marriage, and to enact clear and strict laws that prohibit the marriage of children.
- It is important to specify a day (during the 16 days campaign of ending violence against women) for dealing with the problem of early marriage--to mark a day for the wellbeing of family and society.

Families and households:

- It is important for families to engage their daughters in understanding what family is and what the sexual relationship with the husband is; and to not consider such subjects as taboos.
- It is important in households in areas where early marriage is common to raise awareness about the dangers of early marriage, and the importance of education in the lives of girls.

**Media outlets:**

It is necessary to use different media outlets, including social media, to reach to all kinds of groups, to teach the dangers of early marriage and to disseminate stories about the suffrage of child brides.

Donors:

- It is critical to support intensive research about cultural and social trends related to this pressing issue.
- It is critical to document early marriages visually and in writing to show the psychological, health, social and educational consequences for child brides.
- It is critical to support projects and programs that aim to end violence in the family, especially against the girls living through early marriage.
- It is critical to initiate and support civil dialogues among members of the society to explore this practice and work together for effective, proper solutions.

References:

List of focus groups' locations and number of participants:

governorate	Location	Date	Number of Participants
Khan Younes	Bonyan for training, evaluation and social studies	15/10/2014	12
Gaza	Female University Graduates Society	16/10/2014	17
North	Family Development Charity	19/10/2014	12
Middle	Women Health Center -Burij	21/10/2014	11
Gaza	Aysha Society for Women and Child Protection	23/10/2014	15

List of people who were interviewed:

Name of Respondent	Occupation	Date of Interview	Location of Interview
Wafaa Eid	Social Worker	18/9/2014	Al Haya Center
Eslah Hasnia	Legal	18/9/2014	Her Office
Nehad Egilan	Psychological Councilor	18/9/2014	Aysha Society
Wafaa Abdullah Eid	Arabic Language Teacher	22/9/2014	Public Place
Seif Abu Ramadan	Tribal Chief	22/9/2014	Makhateer Society
Hanan Mattar	Legal	24/9/2014	The Palestinian Center for Human Rights
Sawsan El Helu	Reproductive Health Worker	24/9/2014	El Lihdan Medical Center
Mona Mousa	Mental Health Counselor	28/9/2014	Modern Cultural center
Mariam Shaqoura	Director of Women Health Center - Jabalya	28/9/2014	Women Health Center
Najah Shaban	A nurse at Women Health Center	28/9/2014	Women Health Center
Said Abu Jebeen	Sharia Judge	29/9/2014	Sharia Judges Office
Hanan Abu Daher	Specialist at the Palestinian Center for Conflict Resolution	29/9/2014	The Palestinian Center for Conflict Resolution
Fatna Arbeed	School Principle	2/11/2014	Mosab Bin Omair Elementary School for Girls
Hanan Geshta	Educational Counselor	2/11/2014	Salah Khalaf Elementary School for Girls
Fatma Abu Amara	Former School Counselor	2/11/2014	Public Place

List of Organizations that assisted in filling out the Questionnaires:

Name of Organization	Governorate	Date of Questionnaires filling out	Number of Forms
Family Development Charity	North	28/9/2014	36
Society of Palestinian Women's Committees	North	2/10/2014	36
Women Health Center - Jabalya	North	1/10/2014	46
Women Activity Center - Daraj	Gaza	30/9/2014	40
Afag Society	Gaza	1/10/2014	42
Ro'ya Society	Gaza	1/10/2014	42
Women Activity Center - Shate'	Gaza	28/9/2014	42
Rural Women Farmers Development Society	Gaza	30/9/2014	40
Burij Cultural Forum	Middle	1/10/2014	30
Women Activity Center - Maghazy	Middle	30/9/2014	27
El Noor Society for Societal and Child Development	Middle	1/10/2014	29
Al Fajr Society	Khan Younes	1/10/2014	38
The Society for the development of Ga Graen Rural area	Khan Younes	1/10/2014	38
Al Haya Society for Family Development	Khan Younes	30/9/2014	36
Southern Society for Women Health	Rafah	1/10/2014	20
Southern Women in media Forum	Rafah	30/9/2014	29
Women Activity Center - Rafah	Rafah	1/10/2014	25

