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Gender-Based Violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

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1. Reducing gender-based violence and all forms of violence against women and the girl child;

2. Increasing the representation of women and women's issues in decision making bodies; and

3. Advancing equal opportunities for women's economic participation, especially for women survivors of gender-based violence.

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List of Acronyms

Al-Muntada	NGO Forum for Combating Violence against Women
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CFTA	Culture and Free Thought Association
GBV	gender-based violence
GUPW	General Union of Palestinian Women
IWS	Institute of Women's Studies (at Birzeit University)
MIFTAH	Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy
MoEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoL	Ministry of Labor
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NGO	non-governmental organization
oPt	occupied Palestinian territory
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PCHR	Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
PA	Palestinian Authority
PICCR	Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights
PCDCR	Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PWWSD	Palestinian Working Women Society for Development
SAWA	All the Women Together Today and Tomorrow

UN	United Nations
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women (now UN Women)
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
VAW	violence against women
WCLAC	Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling

Executive Summary

One of the gender impacts of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is the wider prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) as a phenomenon in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), which is expressed in different forms and structurally entrenched to become a way of life.

Almost half of the Palestinian population has lived in conflict and crisis for most of their lives. The effects of this have led to personal and public insecurity, as well as the collapse of moral, social and public order in the oPt, resulting in "falatan amni," or the absence of rule of law. It has also caused the lack of institutionalization of preventive and protective measures towards violence, especially for marginalized groups and particularly women (World Bank, 2010). As in other militarized contexts, both men and women in the oPt are subjected to violence from the Israeli occupation. However, the style of occupation experienced in the oPt is different than in many other contexts; it is colonial-settler in nature and has resulted in displacement, deprivation, continuous Israeli state violence, and total control over the occupied population's social and economic livelihoods.

Within this context, women's experience of violence often takes a different angle. Violence against women (VAW) has become deeply and structurally engraved in the oPt through the linking of militarization and the political violence of the occupation, with patriarchal social, economic and political violence that hinders women's advancement and creates structural constraints that impede their achievement of self-realization and self-determination. In addition, women in the oPt are subjected to a range of domestic violence, including physical, psychological and sexual violence.. Such violence often takes place either within or outside the family, such as femicide, caused mainly by honor killings, incest, rape, and forced prostitution. All together, such violence against women threatens their personal security and safety in the oPt and prohibits them from realizing their individual identity and future aspirations.

Through this report, we are breaking Palestinian women's silence in the oPt. The report exposes different forms of violence as revealed in women's own narratives. It explores the conditions of their abuse as well as the coping strategies they use in their efforts to maintain their families' well being, but which also compromises them due to the absence of realistic alternative options. Although women's voices reflect the intensity and complexity of the multiple oppressions they experience, at the same time, they also reveal the power of their agency. Interviews with different stakeholders in the struggle to combat violence against women, including the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the police, family

protection units, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's organizations and shelters, have exposed the concerns, worries, problems and future strategies that, on the whole, illustrate stakeholder commitment to eradicating VAW, yet also point to structural and organizational weaknesses in efforts to do so.

Findings and Recommendations

Methodological and Statistical Issues: Data Collection

Data collection is one of the largest challenges in addressing gender-based violence in the oPt. There is a lack of reliable and up-to-date data on GBV in the oPt, which can affect and distort analysis. For instance, the absence of recent data subsequent to the results of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' (PCBS) 2005-2006 study on Domestic Violence in the Palestinian Territory leaves us uninformed about the new impacts of GBV in the context of subsequent realities, such as the 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza or the 2008-2009 brutal Israeli aggression on Gaza, both of which have surely impacted women's well-being. It has been widely studied and accepted that political instability and deteriorating economic conditions directly impact gender relations within the family, which is most often directly expressed in more violence. Hence, a new survey should be conducted in order to update information on GBV in the oPt, taking into consideration the different theoretical and methodological problems encountered in PCBS' first survey on domestic violence conducted in 2005.

In addition, discrepancies in data on GBV in the oPt can be traced to the use of different methodological approaches and statistical tools by different researchers and women's organizations, which should be standardized in terms of definitions and methodologies to facilitate comparisons. Qualitative data should inform quantitative data on GBV, as it can enrich analyses on the intensity and impact of GBV on everyday life. Among the major problems exposed in data on GBV have been the use of different definitions and interpretations of violence; weaknesses in the process of documenting VAW cases due to the absence of expertise and the lack of a standardized documentation system, which has affected the reading of the phenomenon and its prevalence; failure to document the coping strategies of women; absence of a centralized referral system not only for documenting VAW cases, but also following up with them; and absence of an adequate system for coordination among stakeholders, without which data remains decentralized, ineffective and fragmented.

Political Violence Leading to the Marginalization of Women

Political violence as a concept describes the type of violence that directly and/or indirectly results from the Israeli occupation of the oPt. This form of violence controls many Palestinians' lives and denies them the right to live in dignity. It has curbed Palestinian development and limited Palestinians' freedom of choice and mobility, which has left different kinds of women suffering on multiple levels and to varying degrees. The context of gendered, colonial militarization present in the oPt today has had a deep impact on women and has created multi-dimensional oppression because of its link to patriarchy and class. Women in the oPt have not been excluded from the continuous violation of Palestinians' "right to life" and their children have often been the first victims

of killings, massacres, wars and regular military aggression. According to PCBS figures, females have accounted for about six percent of all deaths caused by Israeli violence in the oPt since 2008. Furthermore, Palestinian political prisoners held in Israeli prisons or detention camps are currently estimated to be approximately 11,000. Out of these, around 9,000 are formally identified as political prisoners, including 326 minors and 94 women. However, more burdens are also placed on the wives of male political prisoners, as women often provide emotional care and support for their male partners in prison, whose emotional survival depends on the visits of their relatives (when permitted).

Economic Violence against Women

Due to restrictions on mobility and as a result of checkpoints and barriers, Israel has total effective control over material and human resources in the oPt. This includes control over labor, land, borders, raw materials, and capital, which has deepened the economic dependency of the oPt on Israel, as indicated by the growing rates of unemployment and poverty, and added more social and economic pressures on women. However, economic violence in the oPt is not only caused by the Israeli occupation; women workers are also subjected to exploitation within the Palestinian economy. Increasingly more women in the oPt are unemployed or resorting to work in the informal sector, while the absence of social protection policies also affect their survival and deprive them from decent work.

Domestic Violence and Violence against Women

The main characteristic of GBV is that it occurs against women precisely because of their womanhood. While women are usually the immediate victims of GBV, the consequences extend beyond the victim herself and threaten family structures, as children are emotionally hurt when they watch their mothers and sisters being abused. Statistical and qualitative data have exposed the prevalence of VAW in all its forms, ranging from physical to psychological to sexual. Although sexual violence is not statistically significant when compared to psychological violence in the oPt, the culture of shame and the importance of separating the private sphere from the public sphere, which is deeply rooted within the Palestinian family, does not permit real reflection on this issue.

However, other forms of VAW exist in the oPt, exemplified by increasing femicide, which predominately occurs through honor killings or the killing of Palestinian women by other Palestinians. This was especially true in 2007 when internal fighting between the two factions of Fateh and Hamas started. Women were victims in about one in ten of the killings that occurred between the two factions at this time (Johnson, 2010). Thus, when we analyze the leading causes of femicide in the oPt, we can conclude that honor killings were the leading cause before 2007, while the security chaos, misuse of arms and internal fighting were the main cause of femicide after that (Johnson, 2010). Honor killings, or the practice of killing women for an actual or suspected act of sexual practice before or outside of marriage, have also increased in the last decade. Honor killing is linked to perceived sexual behavioral norms that society defines. In the oPt, male relatives, especially fathers and brothers, maintain the right to discipline their female family members through controlling their lives and reinstating their honor as an important dimension of the family's honor.

In this context, one can also talk about incest or rape within the family as a problem in the oPt that mainly happens to children or girls in their early stages of life. Because the consequences of these acts go beyond physical violence, more attention should be invested in dealing with them. Most sexual assaults against girls and women fall within the context of the family, perpetrated by males of the closest kinship degree. Rape both inside and outside of the family is increasing in its different forms in the oPt. Street harassment as reported by women is also on the rise, caused by the apathy and emptiness of young adults' lives in the oPt. However, only a limited number of people have been accused and convicted of these kinds of "immoral" offenses, which should be an issue of concern and a reason to pressure for legal reform.

Lastly, trafficking and forced prostitution are another set of issues that should be of concern to officials and women's organizations in the oPt. Although information on this issue in the oPt is limited and such a phenomenon is a social taboo, it has become clear that it exists in Palestinian society and that it is not new. Thus, it is important to advocate for the protection of women and girls who are victims of trafficking and forced prostitution. However, as this phenomenon goes hand-in-hand with the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the oPt, more reflection on causes and solutions should be stressed.

State-building and Representations of Violence

Due to the context of state-building in the oPt since the Oslo Accords, there has been greater involvement from donors, civil society organizations, women's movements and research centers in bringing the issue of VAW to the forefront. This has become a catalyst on different levels: some women have broken their silence and exposed their private lives and experiences with violence; more research and investigation on GBV has been initiated; civil society organizations and particularly women's organizations have begun taking a wider focus on GBV through promoting specialized services; the PA has developed a "National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women", which has started the process of promoting expertise within different ministries and police departments; and lastly, shelters have been introduced as a means to protect women, delegitimize violence and promote societal responsibility through governmental and non-governmental institutions within the prevailing patriarchal, traditional culture. Although the process of establishing quality services for protection and violence prevention is in its early stages, the commitment and the initiative to further develop them in the future exists.

Institutional Policies: Formal and Informal Strategies and Responses

Although both non-governmental and governmental organizations are concerned and have been active in protecting women and preventing violence against them, they still face many political, social, cultural and economic challenges. These challenges interrupt and delay the effectiveness and success of existing policies as well as efforts to promote new policies for combating VAW. Moreover, there is a general lack of political will in the oPt to make the necessary policy changes for combating VAW, as it is not considered a priority issue or a real risk to Palestinian social cohesion. This same lack of will has prevented calls for legal reform that would ensure the punishment of VAW perpetrators,

instead leaving many perpetrators to evade the formal legal system through cultural acquittal for their violent crimes, which occurs through informal negotiations based on customary laws, especially in cases involving social pressures like family honor. Laws and policies must improve their effectiveness in the oPt to ensure their success in protecting women from violence. The level of coordination amongst stakeholders working to combat VAW should be enhanced and the legal and institutional environment should be more gender-sensitive and woman-friendly. The procedures and referral system for dealing with VAW victims should have a human face and emphasis should be put on delegitimizing violence in order to increase societal recognition of the seriousness of the crime. Lastly, the support services needed to adequately address the various levels of the phenomenon should be developed. All of these steps could encourage women to voice their cases of abuse and ask for assistance.

Recommendations

In light of the prolonged colonial occupation of the oPt and as a consequence of hegemonic patriarchal institutions and relations at the social and political levels, VAW has become a more complex phenomenon in the oPt over time. Political violence has both directly and indirectly affected the escalation of VAW and violence within the family, as has the honor system and normative patriarchal values that have controlled women's lives in the oPt. Hence, when dealing with VAW in the Palestinian context, it is important to look at it in a comprehensive, structural way in order to address all of the levels, causes and sources of violence, including occupation, militarization and a patriarchal social and political order that discriminates against women. Deconstructing the overall reality in the oPt in a way that can enable the process of linking different forms of violence is both necessary and important. Yet, one must also address each form of violence as an independent violation linked to overall violations, in order to successfully promote preventive and protective measures and appropriate recommendations for combating VAW.

In this context, the following recommendations are suggested:

1- End the Israeli Occupation and call for the implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and other international agreements to protect all civilians, including women until Occupation withdraws.
This report and other published data have linked the Israeli occupation and colonial militarization with the increase of violence in the oPt in general, and VAW in particular. This requires immediate action from international organizations to end the Israeli occupation; enforce the implementation of international agreements and conventions to protect civilians, who are living targets for all military actions; and decrease the economic and social pressures on the oPt in order to enable Palestinians to determine their futures and build their independent state.

2- Exert more pressure on the Palestinian government to address VAW as a violation of human rights and a serious national risk to the internal harmony of Palestinian society and the Palestinian family. This should be addressed through enhancing legal reform to delegitimize violence and punish perpetrators,

as well as through encouraging the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women, which has been developed in a participatory approach by different governmental and non-governmental actors.

3 - Promote primary prevention infrastructure to enhance the role of health care and other social sectors in preventing VAW and addressing the moral, psychological and social traumas and risks to which women are subjected. This can be done by raising awareness through national media campaigns, formal and informal education, aimed at changing social attitudes towards women and delegitimizing VAW. It can also be accomplished through improving services for addressing the needs of women victims of violence, building the capacity of practitioners who are directly involved with this area of work, and holding perpetrators of VAW accountable for their crimes.

4 - Promote an efficient referral system for women victims of violence that is not fragmented and disjointed. This system should be centralized, with clearly defined roles and mandates for different stakeholders, including government ministries, police departments, family protection units, and non-governmental institutions. Such a system should decrease the frustration of women victims of violence and encourage more of them to use the services available.

5 - Support research that targets causes, but focuses on the consequences and costs of VAW. Although there are different motives for undertaking research on GBV, one should not only gain more understanding of the sources and causes of the problem, but also put priority focus on its consequences due to its prevalence. This should be further investigated so that appropriate responses and services can be developed.

6 - Strengthen coordination and collaboration among all concerned stakeholders, as it is one of the most important keys to success in serving women victims of violence. Coordination among all concerned organizations is required, including the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, police departments, family protection units and civil society organizations, as this can enhance the responsiveness of the referral system for VAW victims, improve the services available to them, and address their practical and strategic needs with sensitivity.

7 - Integrate prevention policies into social and educational policies in order to ensure the strategic impact of GBV policies for prevention and protection. The government's formal education system and NGOs offering informal education and extra curricular activities should integrate appropriate educational policies that promote gender equality and create a social environment that asserts women's rights as part of human rights.

8 - Build capacity for combating VAW at different levels. Training personnel and promoting better qualifications and skills amongst the different actors working in areas of support services for women victims of violence is necessary to develop the quality of their professional performance and service provision in order to ensure women's adequate protection and the prevention of violence.

9 - Involve men in preventing and combating VAW. Efforts aimed at ending VAW and attaining gender equality greatly involve and must address men, as constructions of masculinity often play a crucial role in shaping manifestations of VAW at the individual, family and societal levels. As the issue of VAW is important for men and women alike, especially as it disrupts the normal life of a family, then men also have a stake in ending VAW.

10- Empower women victims of violence, as it is an important component of sustainable protection and the prevention of GBV. Ensuring women's protection and prevention from GBV should be linked to women's empowerment as GBV is a tool for disempowering women. It destroys their self-confidence and self-worth, thus diminishing their ability to resist abuse and live to their full potential. Hence, it is only through the empowerment of women that their ability and potential to face and challenge violence can be realized.

I. Introduction: Conceptual Framework

It was believed that after the implementation of the Oslo peace agreement, signed in 1993 by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, that Palestinian women would consolidate the gains of the national struggle. However, the peace process and agreement have failed to live up to these expectations, especially within the context of escalating violence in different forms, particularly women's exposure to gender-based violence (GBV). When analyzing GBV in the Palestinian context, the systematic subjection of women to GBV in the context of Israeli occupation, militarization, and victimization, including the violence of exclusion, persecution, political atrocities and constant trauma, cannot be excluded (Holt, 2003; Kevorkian, 2010). Within the context of patriarchal social and political hierarchies and severe social, political and economic conditions existing in the oPt, the complexities of Israeli colonization and militarization, which have included ethnic cleansing, continuous displacement and military violence, have promoted violence in all forms. In Kevorkian's (2009) analysis, she realizes that "refusing to acknowledge women's voices and their hidden transcripts of power and powerlessness, and their roles, deeply affects our understanding of women's ways of survival and the way they deal with victimization, resistance and activism." Additionally, Kevorkian states that the only way to understand GBV in the oPt is through "understanding and deconstructing the colonial impact of militarization in the Palestinian context as a conflict zone and analyzing its relation to GBV and domestic violence" (Ibid, 2009).

The prevalence of violence committed against women in the oPt is also linked to the culture of silence that the prevailing patriarchal system, in both its political and social expressions, does not want to acknowledge. The violence enacted on women's bodies, social spaces and minds, and the attempt to negate the voices and narratives of women who have suffered from political violence and patriarchal oppression from within their own societies, is always provoked in conflict areas. The denial of systematic violence against women in conflict zones has caused both experiences of victimization and survival strategies of women to be largely missing from existing social and political analysis of the Palestinian context (Kevorkian, 2009).

Kevorkian cautiously refers to the existing attempts to examine the violence of exclusion and militarization committed against Palestinians in general and women in particular as "de-politicizing," "a-historizing," and "de-globalizing." In her opinion, this process removes the violence from its real context and places it within the realm of "security" and "culture," which is both misguiding and dangerous. This kind of decontextualization disrupts and misleads the process of capturing and reflecting the reality of gender oppression across its different levels (Ibid. 2009).

For instance, some studies have exposed Israeli forces' use of the concept of "honor" to recruit Palestinians as collaborators and to create fear of sexual abuse against women. Other studies have exposed the patriarchal family structure, in which the concept of family honor is reflected in women's conduct, as creating the same fear of sexual abuse (Abu Nahleh, 2006; Kevorkian, 2009). At the same time, deteriorating political conditions and increasing humiliation and oppression of both Palestinian men and women, including challenges to Palestinian masculinity at the hands of the occupation forces, have together deepened gender conflicts inside the domestic sphere and within Palestinian society more generally (Kevorkian, 2009). The Israeli use of "isqat," or "downfall," refers to the use of politics of sexuality far from ethical and normative frameworks of purity, honor, integrity and social respectability to solicit security information for the Israeli military. Emphasis on the issue of female sexual abuse by the Israelis through "isqat" has proved the way military powers use patriarchal perceptions of sexuality and honor to put down and defeat individual women and their families personally, socially, and politically (Kevorkian, 2009). At times, wearing the veil has even become a tool used by some women for protection from such abuse rather than Islamic practice. As the need to protect women intensifies in conflict zones and military crisis entails constant control over women, they have become systematically targeted by Israeli soldiers through humiliation and sexual abuse. At the same time, male family members, through their full control over women's daily lives as justified by the pretext of protection and prevention from colonial violence, have also come to systematically target women with violence.
Other frameworks for understanding GBV include the social scientist approach of analyzing facts and causes of violence against women (VAW), particularly in the context of domestic violence and violence within the family. Social science frameworks reflect two general perspectives. One is that violence within marriage or between husbands and wives is part of a pattern of violence occurring among all family members, which denies a gender perspective (Kurz, 1989). The other, which reflects a gender feminist perspective, and is based on wider sources of evidence that emphasize that women are the victims of the majority of all kinds of social violence.

The first perspective, or the family approach, states that all family members carry out and are victims of violence. This includes men, who can also be subjected to violence by women, although it is not considered a norm or common phenomenon. Those that promote this perspective believe that the gendered organization of society and patriarchal family systems are fundamental factors in high levels of wife beating. Hence, they cite the power of men over women, or unequal gender relations, as a main cause of VAW (Kurz, 1989). Such an approach is similar to the sociologist Halim Barakat's analysis of the Arab family, in which he presented the family as a patriarchal and hierarchical institution symbolized by a pyramid, where men have power over women and the eldest have power over younger generations. In this model, both women and children are subject to oppression, as they are at the base of this pyramid (Barakat, 1974).

In addition, the family approach asserts that all family members both carry out and are victims of violence and stress as a result of difficult working conditions, unemployment, financial insecurity and health problems, all of which can cause family members to be violent towards one another. In this aspect, such an analysis can be useful in explaining the situation of the Palestinian family, as Palestinians in the oPt are subjected to different kinds of political and economic pressures resulting from impacts of the Israeli occupation and deprived of the right to develop and use resources to improve their livelihoods. Yet, it cannot reflect the gender power relations that put more burdens on women and subject them to more violence within these situations. Studies within this approach suggest that reducing violence at home requires a change of social norms to delegitimize violence in the family. Such de-legitimization can be accomplished through public awareness and advocacy campaigns carried out by civil society organizations to promote alternative tools for reconciliation within Palestinian families and society, which can make violence an unacceptable mechanism for solving problems.

The second perspective, or the feminist perspective outlined in R. Emerson and Russel Dobash's book Violence against Wives (1979), which is an important source in the literature on violence against women, focuses on substantive issues that challenge the family violence perspective in regards to abuse against men and violence among all family members. Based on police records and criminal justice data, feminist researchers have found that in Scotland, for instance, women were targets in 94% of violence cases and offenders in only three percent. In addition, it has also been found that when women engage in acts of violence against men, they do so primarily in self-defense (Berk et al. 1983; Brown, 1987; Dobash 1979). Hence, many feminist researchers believe that men use violence as a means to control female partners, while females primarily use it for self-defense. Such researchers have also found that violence occurs when husbands try to make their wives comply with their wishes (Dobash, 1979; Kurz, 1989).

While the feminist perspective stresses that violence is used as a tool for controlling women, a gender approach similarly views the causes of violence as a consequence of militarization and social inequality between men and women, thus clearly implying discrimination against women. In such a situation, where patriarchal culture is combined with militarization, there is consensus that abuse of women and girls, regardless of where it occurs, can be best understood within a gender framework, as violence against women reflects a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women that results in the discrimination against women and the prevention of women's full advancement (Beijing Platform of Action, 1995).

Both the feminist and gender perspectives emphasize the importance of women's subordination as a source in the creation of violence. Although the greatest source of violence in the oPt is the Israeli occupation, the researcher Johnson (2008) argues that each form of violence, from child abuse to honor killings, street harassment, family feuds, Israeli assaults and checkpoints, requires specific forms of protection to address the harm done to women, men, children and to Palestinian society as a whole (Johnson, 2008). She analyzes the complicated process of understanding how public violence caused by the occupation, society, insecurity and trauma are dialectically engaged in homes and families in the oPt (Johnson, 2008). Cultural anthropologist Hammami confirms this analysis while also expanding it to say that public violence is not only

translated into households, but that past violence inhabits the present and violence continues to be a structuring element of daily life for most Palestinian women, men and children as the years of insecurity, crisis and Israeli occupation continue (UN Gender Task Force/UNIFEM, 2009). Similarly, many researchers point out that addressing violence, and particularly gender-based violence, through a framework of protection policies must be done holistically and comprehensively, in a way that mobilizes all existing resources, including "traditional" avenues of legal and policing reform. Thus, the moral and social resources of Palestinian communities should also be a focus for bringing issues of violence into public discussion, awareness and action. Hence the paradigm of addressing violence in the oPt should be reversed to emphasize that insecurity is the norm, while peace and security is the exception. Saying this means that violence shapes the individual life trajectories of Palestinians in the oPt. A question raised by Birzeit University Institute of Women's Studies paper, "How can we combat violence when all conditions around us are abnormal?" (Institute of Women's Studies [IWS], 2009). This means that protection and prevention policies should address all of the conditions that surround women and that increase their vulnerabilities and insecurities. In conclusion, this research will employ a conceptual framework that combines different theoretical approaches. It will utilize a macro approach to link the structural political violence caused by colonialism, militarization and victimization in a situation of continuous conflict. It will employ a meso approach in its focus on patriarchal hierarchical social and political orders, including the state, family and legal frameworks, which all contribute in increasing the vulnerability of women and discrimination against them. Lastly, it will use a micro approach to consider how individual women living in a continuous conflict and military situation as well as within a patriarchal social system and structure that discriminates against them, become more targeted and excluded from all forms of protection and personal safety. This approach will explore how women are thus either empowered to challenge their status and these systems, or on the other hand, disempowered by all of these different levels of oppression, as individual agency can only become realistic within a comprehensive legal and social system of protection and prevention.

Furthermore, a combination of the family and gender approaches can capture the multiple forms and causes of violence within a context of militarization and colonial occupation in a conflict zone. This happens through the recognition of militarization and colonial oppression as both a context in which violence occurs as well as a source of violence, both of which structurally impact society at large and the family in particular. The family approach is useful for understanding the general public violence against Palestinian households in the oPt caused by the Israeli occupation, which creates economic hardships and social isolation that can impact gender relations and contribute to the creation of a violent environment within the household that can affect all members of the family. Alternatively, the gender approach exposes the causes and forms of VAW within the household, a context in which we can more readily deconstruct the social patriarchal systems that discriminate against women and subject them to violence. Thus by integrating these approaches at the macro, meso and micro levels, we can more comprehensively uncover the relationships between political violence (direct occupation violence as well as violence within the family caused by the conditions created by the occupation) and domestic violence targeted against women as a result of unequal patriarchal relations in the prevailing social and political order. Such a comprehensive

approach will be used to identify the inter-relatedness between domestic violence and political violence in the oPt. It will also be used to analyze the meaning, types and impact of VAW in the oPt in order to promote alternative analytical approaches for addressing the problems of VAW in the Palestinian context as well as alternative intervention policies for combating violence and creating enabling environments for both genders.

II. Methods of Investigation

This investigation employs two different research methods:

1. Literature Review and Content Analysis

The first phase of research included a comprehensive review of the international, regional and local literature produced on conflict and violence in general, and VAW in particular. The types of literature reviewed included policy reports, human rights reports, research on the impact of the Israeli occupation on gender relations, and analysis of data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' (PCBS) first national survey on domestic violence that was conducted in 2005. Other data analysis in the form of reports and publications based on fieldwork collected through interviews and focus group discussions by other researchers, institutions and women's organizations working in the area of GBV were also reviewed.

2. Qualitative Methodology: Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The second phase of research employed qualitative methods including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with various individuals and groups related to the area of investigation, such as abused women, experts and practitioners in the area. Focus group discussions were conducted with different interest groups and stakeholders throughout the oPt, including abused women in shelters, in order to explore their conditions, adaptability and coping strategies within new environments. We also sought to speak to abused women in communities who had not sought assistance in response to violence, including young girls, who were mainly students, in order to explore their perceptions of VAW. We spoke to staff and practitioners in shelters to understand challenges and gaps in procedures and policies, including referral systems, as well as the directors and staff of women's organizations working in the area of domestic violence. We talked with governmental bodies, namely those ministries directly involved in enhancing women's protection, with an interest in promoting intervention policies for combating and eliminating violence, and those interested in exerting pressure on judiciary and legislative bodies to reform existing laws. Lastly, we interviewed lawyers, family protection units, police departments and officials in the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Social Affairs, Interior, and Labor.

Other kinds of focus group discussions were conducted, especially in Gaza, to better understand the political violence caused by the occupation and its impact on women's lives, particularly after the Israeli military attacks on Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009. We also paid special attention to women residing near borders, the Buffer Zone in Gaza, and in the Seam Zone or near the Barrier in the West Bank, who encounter violence on daily basis. We also interviewed women whose families have been fragmented and who have experienced violence within their families due to the internal conflict between Palestinian political factions in the oPt.

The data collected from these interviews and focus group discussions has helped us to explain and understand the scope, types and rationale governing VAW in the oPt. The data has helped us to better understand women's lives, the rationales and consequences of the violence against them, how they manage to cope with these pressures, and the difficulties they encounter on a daily basis. The women's voices and stories collected through this fieldwork increase the depth with which we can understand the knowledge generated from their situation and validate existing analyses and findings produced by other local and international researchers and organizations.

The data collected from this fieldwork has also contributed to the process of understanding the phenomenon of VAW in its relation to national, political, social and economic factors. The voices of the women interviewed have begun to unpack the relationship between political violence and domestic violence, particularly the link between political violence resulting from the Israeli occupation, domestic violence and violence within the family. Discussions and interviews with different stakeholders have also illuminated potential prevention policies and recommendations for appropriate referral procedures and future strategies to combat violence.

Research activities in the field have enabled us to understand more comprehensively the profile of abused women, the frustrations and aggression they are subjected to, their coping strategies and the policies of intervention that can best assist in decreasing the violence against them. This approach will facilitate the recognition of the gender dynamics of the conflict and the differential impact of violence on men and women in the oPt by both the Israeli occupation and patriarchy. We hope that these new findings can assist in promoting evidence-based policy recommendations towards more successful practices and policies for combating VAW in the oPt.

III. Definitions of Violence against Women in Conflict Situations

From different international and national reports on VAW in the oPt, we can conclude that there is a general consensus on the definition of VAW adopted by different women's organizations, researchers and activists in the oPt. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1993, has defined it within a broad and inclusive framework, particularly in its first and second article outlined in General Assembly Resolution 48/104, which was then adopted by other organizations. This definition states that VAW is:

> [A]ny act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (Article One, UNGA Resolution 48/104)
>
> **The Declaration goes on to clarify that this includes, but is not limited to:**
> Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; or physical,

> sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; or physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or overlooked by the State, wherever it occurs. (Article Two, UNGA Resolution 48/104)

Although this definition includes different dimensions and forms of VAW, it does not directly mention the impact of colonial occupation or political violence caused by wars or occupation, which adds an extra layer of violence in the lives of women in the context of the oPt. Undermining the organic link between political violence and other kinds of domestic and public violence can cause ambiguity.

The United Nations has been at the forefront of addressing VAW and the UN Security Council has adopted a number of resolutions on this matter. In 2008, the UN Secretary General launched the campaign "UNiTE to END Violence against Women" within the timeframe of 2008 to 2015 with the objective of raising public awareness and increasing the political will and resources for preventing and responding to all forms of violence against women and girls in all parts of the world. However, we see an increase in the phenomenon of VAW, as the root causes have yet to be addressed and prevention policies yet to succeed in protecting women from violence.

While the definitions of VAW mentioned above are similar to what Palestinian women encounter, they do not adequately emphasize important factors of VAW in the oPt. A more fitting definition for VAW in the oPt would be based first on colonial militarism that constitutes structural political violence reflected in a continuous conflict situation, which is depriving the whole society from its right to self-determination. Second, it would include VAW because of their womanhood, or rather, violence caused by patriarchal hegemony of the state, family and economy which collectively marginalizes women and fully controls their lives and bodies. Lastly, it would incorporate the sexual, physical and psychological VAW resulting from women's yielding to a culture of shame and exclusion. These three components would expand the Palestinian definition of VAW, making it wider and more responsive to real conditions. All these different levels of violence require different levels of protection to structurally address the links between them and to emphasize the power of individual and collective agency by which women can exercise choice and responsibility, thereby becoming empowered.

1. Gender-based Violence (GBV) in the Context of Conflict

As wars and conflicts have stretched all over the world in the last two decades, the UN Security Council passed a new resolution (No. 1325) on 31 October 2000 to specifically address the impact of war on women and enhance the participation of women in conflict resolution and building sustainable peace. One of the most important points in the UN resolution was the recognition of the importance of increasing women's participation in decision-making at all levels, including the prevention, management and resolution of a conflict. In the Palestinian context in the oPt, the same importance is not recognized; women are not part of these decision-making levels. While making women more visible will be a long and arduous process in the oPt, it is something worth focusing on, especially at the ground level where social interaction takes place between police departments, human rights activists, and ministerial representatives.

Although this resolution can serve as an entry point to better understand GBV in the Palestinian context, it is not a framework comprehensive enough to reflect the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation. Palestinians in the oPt are not subjected to a classical war, but to continuous aggression and consistent violations of human and women's rights under protracted belligerent occupation. The aggressor in this case is an Occupier, which not only violates different international conventions, mainly the Fourth Geneva Convention, but also applies legal, administrative, political and economic procedures which, although not violent in nature, are inherently more dangerous, as they create a condition of deprivation that initiates violence at different scales. The deprivation of the right to national self-determination and the denial of social, political and economic autonomy in a gendered society all constitute violent acts of the occupation. Similarly, restrictions on the mobility of people and commodities, including the policy of siege on the Gaza Strip as well as the fragmentation and cantonization of communities through checkpoints and the Barrier in the West Bank, are all violent acts that impact women within families and within Palestinian society at large. The daily deprivation of social and economic security at the household level; the threat and insecurity of living in continuous crisis; the loss of private spaces such as homes and lands through confiscation or demolition; and the inability to secure a job, shakes the social fabric of the Palestinian household and heightens the loss of self-identity and social space of women, which in turn, leaves them more vulnerable. The inter-relatedness of the forms of violence from the Israeli occupation coupled with the different forms of violence resulting from traditional patriarchal family structures have been exposed through the women's stories gathered in the research for this report. Enriching the analysis of this report, these women's stories elucidate the points of convergence between the domestic and public spheres, while still treating them as separate entities.

2. From Victimization to Empowerment

VAW cannot be separated from the concepts of prevention, protection and empowerment that serve as strategies for eliminating it. Abused women have the right to a better life, meaning it is not enough to analyze VAW in an academic vacuum without connecting it to concrete policies for women's protection, violence prevention and empowerment. Seeing empowerment as both a right and a tool for protection is a key for combating and eliminating VAW and other forms of GBV.

Analyzing VAW in any context should not be a solely intellectual activity or a luxury for investigation disconnected from the promotion of policies for violence prevention and empowerment. VAW in the oPt, unlike other forms of human rights violations, is not merely a problem of victimization. Rather, it is also inherently linked to the historically rooted patriarchal system of gender relations in Palestinian society. Therefore, eliminating VAW cannot be approached within a limited or narrow victim approach. It requires engagement beyond the protection of victims of violence. It requires a type of engagement that both fully recognizes victims of violence as well as the existence of a disempowering force in society that erodes women's self-dignity and their ability to enjoy the full spectrum of human rights (Erturk, 2005). Escaping violence and eventually eradicating it as a systematic tool of patriarchal control requires women's empowered resistance. Hence the mandate to combat VAW is part of the empowerment agenda outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action.

One of the empowering tools for facing VAW is breaking the silence around it and putting it on the public agenda, despite its occurrence often being in the private sphere. Silence allows the status quo to prevail, preserving the taboos present in laws, conventions and everyday practices loaded with gendered interests without significant opposition or challenge. Breaking the silence around VAW not only helps in providing a venue for women's own voices to be heard, but also helps mobilize women from all around the world in linking their individual and collective experiences as well as the local to the transnational and global. Moreover, it reveals existing resistance to oppression and violence (Erturk, 2005).

IV. Trends in Reporting Violence

Most local and international studies link domestic violence to political, cultural and economic factors in society. Some international conferences and reports have been more sensitive towards this interconnection than others, and thus addressing VAW within its particular contexts. For instance, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action highlights specific violations of women in armed conflict, especially the phenomenon of rape. While this is a valuable tool for analysis, the Palestinian experience of VAW exists within a different context. This is important to note and share because the specific structure of violence is one caused by "spatial segregation and isolation" in the context of apartheid, which differs to that of other conflicts (World Bank, 2010).

In its 2002 World Report on Violence and Health, the World Health Organization (WHO) addresses violence in a comprehensive and integrated approach, making an important and applicable contribution towards analyzing gender-based violence in the oPt. In the report, WHO categorizes violence into three types based on who commits the violent act: 'self–inflicted' violence caused by suicidal behavior; 'interpersonal' violence caused by family or community; and 'collective' violence in which social, political and economic objectives serve as possible motives for violence (WHO, 2002).

While WHO conceptually approached the phenomenon of VAW in an interrelated manner, the study Checkpoints and Barriers: Searching for Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza - Gender Dimensions of Economic Collapse, which was produced for the World Bank in 2010 by a research team from the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University, added to this approach by conceptualizing the interrelatedness between the Palestinian national crisis as a source of political violence combined with gender-based violence resulting from the prevailing patriarchal social system in the oPt (World Bank, 2010).

Using all the different conceptual frameworks produced in these reports can help in looking at VAW in an integrated and comprehensive approach and as a structural phenomenon whereby public violence affects personal and domestic violence in a gendered way that adds to the vulnerability of Palestinian women within a patriarchal structure. In addition, the family and gender approaches as related to domestic and family violence define this report's theoretical framework. This report also acknowledges that in colonial settings, one needs to investigate in greater depth the existing context of structured male domination and gender-order, and to consider whether violence might increase or intensify when gender relations are contested or in flux.

1. Comparative Data

The number of known cases of VAW has increased throughout the world. In its November 2009 Fact Sheet on Violence against Women Worldwide, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM, now UN Women) indicated that VAW is a global phenomenon that is on the rise, declaring that more attention and investigation are required to find alternative ways of combating VAW in order to reach internal peace and harmony within societies. For instance, the Fact Sheet reports that in the United States one third of women murdered each year are killed by their intimate partners, while in South Africa, a woman is killed every six hours by an intimate partner. In India, 22 women were killed each day in dowry-related murders in 2007. In Guatemala, the Fact Sheet reports that an average of two women is murdered each day. Women and girls constitute 80 percent of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked annually, with the majority (79%) being trafficked for sexual exploitation. More than 60 million girls worldwide are child brides married before the age of 18, primarily in South Asia (31.1 million) and sub-Saharan Africa (14.1 million). Although this data is striking, one cannot make accurate conclusions about which country has the highest occurrence of VAW. However, from the information presented in the Fact Sheet, we can say that all countries are experiencing a broad incidence of VAW (UNIFEM, 2009).

Another study by WHO in 2005 found that the percentage of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence or both by an intimate partner is wide ranging, varying from 15% to 71%. Thus according to the PCBS 2005 Demographic and Health Survey, the oPt falls into a middle range in terms of the occurrence of VAW. Findings of the 2006 PCBS survey on Domestic Violence in the Palestinian Territory indicated that 23.5% of women reported having experienced at least one act of physical violence, while almost 11% reported having experienced one act of sexual violence, and about a third (34%) reported having experienced one act of general violence before 2005 (PCBS, 2006).

Thus, according to the 2005 WHO report and UNIFEM's 2009 data on VAW, it is clear that data is not comparable across different countries due to differences in the mechanisms and baselines used to measure VAW, rendering the data in many ways useless as a means for addressing VAW. Reasons for these disparities can be manifold, either resulting from the use of dissimilar or incomparable methodological approaches in different countries or the analysis of different meanings and types of violence in different socio-political contexts and how they impact gender relations differently. Hence, the discrepancies in statistical data on VAW among different local research institutions can be can the result of different methodological approaches and statistical tools that result in distorting attempts at an overall analysis of VAW. While such discrepancies signify reasons for difficulty in data comparison, nevertheless, knowing about different cases and experiences at the level of interventions in different contexts, both locally and around the world can still provide useful basic comparisons.

2. Studies on Violence against Women in the oPt

From examining different international and national reports produced on gender-based violence in the oPt, we can see that, firstly, there has been more interest in addressing VAW in the oPt from international researchers, local practitioners and academics within the last five years. This does not mean, however, that attempts to address VAW in the oPt

were not made before this time. Both local organizations like Women's Studies Center and the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC)and Bisan Center for Research and Development have put the issue of VAW on the national agenda in the oPt since the early nineties, when social issues were addressed in the context of the national liberation struggle. Moreover, local interest in the subject expanded and was enhanced by the results of the national PCBS Demographic and Health Survey in 2005, which granted the issue a form of legitimacy at the national level, despite it's being socially taboo. In addition, the escalation of all kinds of violence and the re-invasion of the Israeli military in the oPt after the second "intifada" in 2000 has also impacted gender relations within Palestinian society. Other factors such as internal family and factional feuds, deteriorating economic conditions, political stalemate, restrictions on mobility and freedom of movement, higher rates of unemployment and poverty, and a collapse of social cohesion, have also all contributed to the increase of violence in Palestinian lives, including VAW. It has become clear that the length of the occupation has hindered the conditions for creating and maintaining respectable livelihoods and affected the survival of the Palestinian population in the oPt.

Having said this, it is important to realize that different dimensions of the conflict have been expressed in various international human rights reports with some dimensions taking precedence over others, depending on the authoring organization's mandate. Most of the literature that has dealt with violence has divided it into different categories according to the source of violence, as reflected in the 2002 WHO World Report on Violence and Health, such as political violence, economic violence, domestic violence and pubic violence. This parceling of points of analysis yields different results depending on the focus of the authoring organization, for instance, whether it is political participation, economic analysis or humanitarian relief.

V. Forms of Violence against Women in the oPt

1. Political Violence, Occupation, Militarization and Conflict

Within the context of this study, we refer to 'political violence' as a concept that describes the type of violence that is a direct and/or indirect consequence of the Israeli occupation that has denied Palestinians' right to life and has controlled their lives, curbed their development and limited their freedom of choice and mobility. This type of political violence has left different kinds of women in the oPt suffering on multiple levels and to varying degrees. We argue that most of the severe VAW in the oPt, when not a direct result of occupation policies and practices, is often a reflection of the political and economic violence inherent in the Israeli colonization of Palestinian people and land. Saying this does not mean that we ignore the internal forms of domestic and economic violence that result from social patriarchy, male dominance within the extended and nuclear family, or other social inequalities and political tensions within Palestinian society that contribute to VAW. Rather, our reason for emphasizing this colonial structure is to underline the crucial role of ending the occupation and establishing a democratic Palestinian state in combating gender-based violence against Palestinian women in the oPt (Kuttab, 2009).

Analyzing political VAW in the oPt within the macro socio-political context shows how

the political violence of the current colonization, in particular, has exceeded or amplified and, at the same time, extended and broadened other forms of domestic violence (see for example Jarrar 2003; Abu Nahleh 2004, 2007; Kuttab and Bargouti 2002; Makhool 2007; Johnson 2007; World Bank 2010). Within the bodies of these studies, political VAW in the oPt has been categorized in the forms outlined below.

2. Women Subjected to Killing and Injury by Occupation

The Israeli occupation has not excluded women from its continuous violation of Palestinians' right to life. Palestinian women and children have been victims of killings, massacres, wars and regular aggression as part of the Israeli occupation. Since 2008, females have accounted for about 6% of all deaths caused by Israeli violence in the oPt according to PCBS figures, and 1% of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. On top of this, the impact of male killings and arrests has also taken an undeniable toll on the lives of women in the oPt.

A study prepared by the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) in collaboration with the network coalition Wissal entitled "Palestinian Women in Gaza: Facts and Figures" reported that the Israeli aggression on Gaza in 2008-2009 killed 108 women.

Before that, the count of women killed by Israeli assaults and attacks had reached 163 during the period of September 2000 to May 2008 (PCHR, 2008). According to a report by PCBS on 28 January 2009, the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip had caused the deaths of 13 women as a result of the denial of travel for medical treatment abroad.

Another study conducted by Muhana and Qleibo as part of the World Bank report of 2010, on the impact of Israeli mobility restrictions on women in Gaza revealed that the Israeli destruction of family livelihoods and resources and their inability to cope using traditional networks has created an atmosphere in which male domestic violence has become more justifiable in the eyes of Gazan women. Women's justification of their husbands' violence does not necessarily imply their loss of self-respect, but rather reflects their emotional support for their husbands, many of whom have lost their sense of manhood and power as a result of their inability to provide for the needs of their family.

On the other hand, however, it also emphasizes women's conception and practice of womanhood as subordinate to men, regardless of the actual roles and responsibilities they hold as the primary providers in times of crisis, including family crisis (IWS, 2009).

Although there are no accurate figures on women injured as a result of the Israeli occupation, a 2005 Amnesty International report indicated that women killed and injured as a result of the occupation were either attacked inside or near their homes, and not in active confrontations, with some women even found beneath the wreckage of their homes after they had been demolished by the Israeli army (Amnesty International, 2005). Musleh concludes that the confiscation of land and the fragmentation of people by Israeli occupation policies have left their mark on every aspect of Palestinians, both in general and on women in particular (Musleh, 2008). In a separate study, Jarrar shows how Israeli laws and procedures have led to the fragmentation of families and further impacted women by subjecting them to more political violence (Jarrar, 2003).

[W]omen were killed, and injured at Israeli checkpoints and during the Israeli incursion, whether they were in their homes or nearby. The checkpoints, and the obstruction of ambulances to arrive on time to transport pregnant women who were due to deliver, resulted in either unsafe delivery under unhygienic conditions, or the death of their babies. (Jarrar, 2003)

In their 2002 study entitled The Impact of Armed Conflict on Palestinian Women, Kuttab and Bargouti uncovered a number of categories of women subjected to political violence in the oPt. They discuss policies of displacement of Palestinian families and how such policies operate to fragment the Palestinian family and create a "diaspora" situation similar to a refugee camp, a situation far more wretched than their own original poor housing. In addition, the study found that political violence from the occupation left women with a greater responsibility to become the head of household or family breadwinner, on short notice while ill-equipped and unprepared. The imprisonment or killing of many male heads of households in the oPt has increased the financial and social burdens of women, which in addition to the moral and psychological trauma resulting from the loss of their loved ones, has widened their suffering and shattered their lives. At the same time, the impact of Israeli closures and restrictions on mobility has negatively affected the provision of social services in the oPt, particularly health and education services. This has resulted in women's deprivation from quality services within the context of increasing unemployment and poverty. Limited access to restricted mobility has also resulted in the increased isolation and separation of women from public and social life (IWS, 2008).

All of these examples of political violence related to the occupation have created high-pressure family situations, which according to a number of different studies, have impacted and often increased the occurrence of domestic violence in the oPt, as men have increasingly turned to violence as a coping strategy for the loss of their masculine identity as breadwinners and family protectors.

3. Restrictions on Movement: Social Isolation and Spatial Segregation

According to the World Bank report, the apparatus that restricts access to movement in the oPt has three dimensions: physical, institutional and administrative, all of which are used to impede the Palestinian population's movement while facilitating the movement of settlers and other Israelis in and out of the West Bank (World Bank, 2010). Improvements in the conditions for settlers in the oPt have increased their numbers and sense of entitlement, which has in turn led them to more violence and killing of innocent Palestinians. Economic collapse and mobility restrictions have become a structuring element of everyday life for Palestinians in the oPt, forcing households and communities to negotiate and adapt (World Bank, 2010). This type of structural violence has affected all sectors of Palestinian society, touching women's lives more deeply, especially in rural areas and refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It has also drastically reduced women's access to public spaces, and limited their employment and educational opportunities.

According to an Amnesty International report, there were 600 checkpoints and barriers severely restricting Palestinian movement in the oPt in 2009, including the 700-kilometer "Separation Wall," which the Israeli authorities built for alleged security reasons.

Checkpoints not only divide Palestinian families and communities from each other, but they also separate surrounding villages and towns (Amnesty International, 2005). They cut off Palestinians from various social services, such as medical centers, schools, and work places. Some people are forced to walk long distances in order to work on their own farms, commute to their place of work, or go to school, with these journeys often more dangerous for women. Moreover, there are women who have been forced to give birth at checkpoints or in ambulances waiting to pass through checkpoints, with some of them even suffering the trauma of losing their babies during precarious deliveries at the checkpoints themselves.

In general, restrictions on movement have had catastrophic consequences for the entire Palestinian population in the oPt. There has been a sharp increase in unemployment and loss of income, with more than half of the population now living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2010). Health workers have reported that the fear of not being able to reach the hospital in time to give birth has become a major source of anxiety and fear for Palestinian women, increasing even more as the end of their pregnancy cycle approaches. This problem is particularly acute for women living in villages and refugee camps because of the Israeli army checkpoints that separate many of these towns and camps from the urban areas in which hospitals are located. Those who have relatives in urban areas may try to go stay with them ahead of time, but most women either do not have such relatives or have other children and cannot leave their homes (Amnesty International, 2005).

In their 2006 study on the location of childbirths in the oPt, Giacaman, Abu-Rmeileh and Wick present the risks and dangers that women face due to restrictions on mobility.

They recount pregnant Palestinian women's increased feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction with their options for where to deliver their children. For many Palestinian women in the oPt, the question of whether to deliver at home or in a hospital has become problematic and challenging. Their study demonstrated that Palestinian women's choice of where to give birth is constrained and modified by the availability, affordability, and access to services induced by the continuing closures and siege. When 20.5% of the study sample reported that their childbirth location was not where they preferred it to be, the study concluded that these findings should be taken into consideration when planning for maternity services in the oPt. (Giacaman et.al.2007)

Other studies have also exposed the inhuman conditions and trauma that Palestinian families have lived through due to spatial segregation and social isolation that has impacted both genders. However, many of these studies also point out that these restrictions on access and movement have placed disproportionately more burdens on women, who as the protectors of their families and backbones of their households, have had to bear the consequences of the economic and social situation that these restrictions have created.

4. Prisoners

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Negotiations Affairs Department has presented figures in 2008 regarding the Palestinian political prisoners in the oPt that estimate that approximately 11,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli prisons or detention

camps, out of which around 9,000 have been identified as political prisoners, including 326 minors and 94 women. All of them have been charged with “security offenses” by Israeli authorities. Because of Israel’s broad definition of “security,” Palestinians can be arrested and imprisoned for practically any form of public activity, regardless of whether or not they present any legitimate security threat to Israel.

The Palestine Monitor’s Fact Sheet from December 2008 reported that the Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory had, since 1967, detained 700,000 Palestinians.

The majority of those detained have been males, meaning that the number constitutes approximately 40% of the total male Palestinian population in the oPt (Palestine Monitor, 2008). This has resulted in an increasing number of female-headed households in the oPt, in which women are either temporarily or permanently responsible for the social and economic wellbeing of their families. This, in turn, has confronted women with numerous other problems, including financial, emotional, psychological, and social pressures. Subsequently, many women have suddenly become the sole persons responsible for raising their children and managing household demands. Furthermore, this has also increased the number of women in the labor force, exposing women to very exploitive conditions within the informal labor sector, thus multiplying their suppression and exploitation. On top of these added demands and responsibilities, these women also provide emotional care and support for their male partners in prison, whose emotional survival often depends on the visits from their relatives (when permitted). In this role, women also serve as the conveyors of information from the entire community, as permits are only given to immediate family members. In this way, they exchange information with prisoners regarding their families and engage them with their everyday lives outside of prison. This role, which women have played throughout the Palestinian national crisis, has been recognized as one of the major sources of resistance and steadfastness for isolated male prisoners.

5. Political Violence Leading to the Marginalization of Women

In her article Palestinian Women, Violence and the Peace Process, Maria Holt (2003) argues that the routine and systematic use of violence over a prolonged period of time has had the effect of placing women at a disadvantage when it comes to imagining and constructing the future Palestinian state (Holt, 2003). In her opinion, women have been excluded from effective participation in their own society due to both the violence of the Israeli occupation and the physical and psychological violence faced within their own communities. She adds that violence affects Palestinian women in several ways. Firstly, they are discouraged from engaging in direct violence, although they may sometimes, and in gender-appropriate ways, assist the men who are at the forefront of the fighting. Secondly, women are disadvantaged by violence that is directly aimed at them. Such violence comes from the Israeli occupying forces in the form of beatings, verbal harassment, torture, and imprisonment, as well as also from Palestinian men in the form of domestic abuse. Thirdly, while Palestinian women are victims of violence, they are also active agents, in the sense that they make choices and frequently act on their own behalf (Holt, 2003).

Regarding the context of war and conflict, VAW is often two-pronged. On the one hand, it comes in the form of humiliating individual women with the aim of reasserting

male power in a general sense. On the other hand, it demoralizes women as part of a strategy to hit the enemy's weakest point. Thus, war-related VAW is inextricably linked to domestic violence and to sexually violent crimes against women. Indeed, it has been argued that the question of women and peace and the meaning of peace for women cannot be separated from the broader question of relationships between women and men in all aspects of life and in the family (Enloe, 1988; UN, 1985).

In the oPt, "dozens of Palestinian women and girls have reported that Israeli interrogators have threatened them with rape and subjected them to sexually humiliating practices" (Vickers, 1993). This prompts the question as to why this particular method of violence is routinely employed as a weapon of war. One possible answer, according to Seifert, is that sexual violence against women "is likely to destroy a nation's culture" (Seifert, 1999). It is also the case, however, that male violence against women is so pervasive, across so many historical eras and cultural differences, that it seems only explicable by reference to something intrinsic in men. Perhaps it is the same typical male reactions to fear, insecurity or aggressiveness that also inclines them to sustain formal institutions such as military forces, which embody and legitimize these violent attitudes and behaviors (Seifert, 1999). In this context, in circumstances of militarization and occupation, soldiers use "honor" to disgrace women and humiliate family, further marginalizing and excluding women (Kevorkian, 2009).

In a study by Raija-Leena Punamaki (1990), the level of psychological impact of political violence on Palestinian women is examined, emphasizing that "in war and conflict situations, mental health problems tend to be more common in threatened areas." One of the definitive outcomes of the study is that psychological research cannot ignore the role of the wider historical-political context in influencing psychological responses to political violence. Results of the same study can be understood when the historical-political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is taken as an integral part of the analysis. The same study also shows how collective resistance between Palestinians has helped provide coping mechanisms and reduced mental health problems.

In conclusion, there seems to be a consensus that the deepening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the expansion of the occupation's tools of oppression have weakened the negotiating power of Palestinian women vis à vis the patriarchal gender contract and women's ability to impose their conditions for a better future (Erturk, 2005).

6. Economic Violence against Women

Due to the total control of the Israeli occupation over material and human resources in the oPt, including labor, land, borders, raw material, and capital, the oPt's level of economic dependency can be tracked by the increase in the number of people unemployment and in poverty. The rise in poverty and unemployment caused by the Israeli closing of labor markets and the limited absorption capacity of the Palestinian labor market, have negatively impacted women as well as men.

Within the current economic situation in the oPt, marked by unproductiveness, a rise in poverty and deprivation of basic needs, it is safe to conclude that the quality of life of Palestinian women, who have already endured a history of victimization and marginalization, has further deteriorated. Thus, it would be a logical conclusion that the

existing discrimination against women in the oPt has multiplied.

Samira Haj (1992) has shown in a study entitled Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relations, that in addition to political VAW in the oPt, the exploitation of women in the labor market interacts with the patriarchal structures of a male-dominant society and adds new layers of victimization, discrimination and oppression of women in the work place, including sexual harassment and humiliation.

In practice, mobility restrictions have limited the ability of female workers to take part in trade union activities, which has enabled employers to prolong women's working hours and expand their exploitation. This is apparently a common practice; there are reports of women working up to fourteen hours a day without overtime pay. Working conditions in these situations put women under constant pressure to increase production by increasing the speed of their work, working for longer hours, and working with less or no breaks. Employees are closely supervised and work in complete isolation from one another. A field report conducted by a women's committee in the Ramallah district revealed that the majority of women in the formal labor sector work without a contract, only half of them receive the benefits entitled to them by law (e.g. paid sick leave, paid vacation, maternity leave, and compensation), and very few women have been unionized. Informal methods of recruitment are another mechanism used to exploit and control female workers, depriving them of social protection, yet another form of economic violence against women. Consequently, patriarchal relations both at home and in the workplace mutually reinforce the subjugation of women in the oPt (Esim and Kuttab, 2006; Mass, 2006).

On the other hand, very few other studies have cited economic abuse as a form of VAW. The first and second Palestinian national surveys on VAW, as recorded by Haj-Yahia, revealed that 40% of women respondents had husbands who prevented them from using the family's money as they saw fit. Another kind of economic violence against women occurs in their subjection to pressure from their families and society to concede their inheritance rights (IWS, 1999).

7. Physical and Psychological Violence

Reports by Palestinian women's centers that provide assistance and legal, social, and psychological counseling for victims of violence have focused on another kind of VAW: psychological violence. This kind of violence leaves its impact for a long time. The Society for the Defense of the Family (2009) received 525 cases during the period between 1996 and 1998: 300 cases involved psychological violence, 99 cases involved sexual violence and 126 cases involved physical violence. During the same period, the Gaza Community Mental Health Project treated 129 cases of beating, verbal and psychological humiliation: 29 girls were deprived of education or work and 29 cases involved sexual harassment. Data provided by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) indicates that 546 cases were received in 1999 alone, with 75% of those seeking assistance aged between 16 and 35 years old. These females were victims of sexual, physical and psychological violence, 30% of which involved single women or girls who lived with their parents (Seniora, 2003).

The 2008 Annual Report from the Mehwar Centre for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and Families indicated that out of 86 VAW cases received at the centre that year, 26 cases involved sexual abuse; 16 involved rape by the father, brother, or uncle; and 21 cases involved family disputes such as inter-religious marriages, refusals to marry, lack of permission to live alone, marriage without approval, verbal or economic abuse, husband's addiction problems, etc.

Psychological violence consists of various forms of mocking, criticism, threats and isolation. The most severe form of VAW is a combination of physical, sexual and psychological violence, but psychological violence is inseparable from physical and sexual abuse. Women who live in violent relationships have constant fear of the next assault against them. This fear is usually accompanied by daily degrading treatment, which generates low self-esteem and a lack of self-confidence, thus hindering their power and ability to resist or confront their oppressors and their situation.

VI. Domestic Violence and Violence within the Family

There is no debate concerning the fact that a large number of women in the oPt are subjected to one or more types of violence. However, there is no clear law that either insists on or reinforces women's rights by penalizing the perpetrators of VAW, regardless of whether they are close relatives or public figures. The situation becomes more severe in cases of violence within the family, which is classified as a private matter under the Palestinian legal system and thus not subject to public intervention without the express permission of the family.

In addition to the legal complications, Moghadam discusses social hierarchy and its reproduction of gender relations in the oPt. She examines how historical interactions of biological factors, social consciousness, and economic considerations cause the emergence of a fourth element, that of gender roles, clearly expressed in the familial and tribal organizations of societies and guided by patriarchy. In this context, the role of women is limited to non-economically productive aspects, whereas men manipulate the role of economic productivity in order to control the fate of the family and the fate of the community in general. These are the roots of both the "private patriarchy" that dominated the family in the pre-industrial phase as well as the "public patriarchy" that dominated communities in the industrial era (Moghadam, 2003).

Gender inequalities are not limited merely to household and family relationships. Rather, they are reproduced across a series of institutions, including policymaking apparatuses with stated objectives to address various forms of inequality.

In this regard, Haj-Yahia's research on violence in the oPt proposes that in the public sphere of patriarchal Palestinian society, power is shared by male patriarchs based on whatever other principles of stratification operate. In the private sphere, senior males prevail in extended and nuclear families alike, and use forms of subordination and control over women that transcend cultural and religious boundaries (Haj-Yahia, 2003;Abdo-Zubi, 1992;). In addition, the husband is culturally accepted as the ruler of the family and regarded as the authority to which the wife and children must ultimately respond.

Thus, family roles follow a hierarchy, in which lower status roles are clearly delineated by the husband and must be adhered to by the wife and children (Haj-Yahia, 1996; Barakat:1993). The husband's role is thus authoritarian and he assumes responsibility for maintaining the family structure by any means, including violence, which then becomes justified. Yet, even based on the above findings, a high percentage of women justify wife beating under different circumstances, such as the wife's unfaithfulness, for example. However, even with the high percentage of women holding men responsible for their behavior, there is a concomitant tendency among women to understand the husband's position (Haj-Yahia, 1998). This tendency was clearly born out in some of the interviews and focus group discussions held for this study in different locations throughout the oPt.

All of these studies and others are both relevant and important in explaining the causes of gender discrimination and the added vulnerabilities of women within existing social systems that result in VAW. As such, they present a great challenge to all policies and intervention strategies that marginalize this factor of analysis in addressing and combating VAW.

1. Forms of Domestic Violence in the Palestinian Context: Trends and Obstacles

The main characteristic of VAW is that it occurs against women precisely because of their womanhood. While women are usually the immediate victims of gender-based violence, the consequences extend beyond the victim and threaten family structures, as children are emotionally hurt when they watch their mothers and sisters being abused. Homes might fall apart because of violence, leaving the female heads of household alone to face increased poverty and negative social repercussions.

As has been discussed in the first section, there are various forms of VAW in addition to political and economic violence. Domestic violence is an important form of violence and can be expressed in various types and degrees, including psychological, physical, sexual, economic, and social violence. It can take the shape of verbal or physical abuse and beating, or humiliation and psychological abuse. It can sometimes be expressed by sexual harassment, assault, incest, rape, or even as a murder or femicide threat, including "honor killing" (Haj-Yahia, 2003; Seniora, 2003). The findings of PCBS' national survey in 2005 have clearly shown that all forms of abuse and VAW occur in varying degrees in the oPt against women of different ages, levels of education, levels of income, and religions, as well as against women from different types of localities, different family sizes and at different stages of marriage (PCBS, 2006).

Data from the first national survey on domestic violence in the oPt published in 2006 indicates that about a quarter of Palestinian women (23.3%) reported having experienced at least one act of physical violence by their partner in 2005, while 10.9% reported having experienced one act of sexual violence. About a third (33.9%) reported having experienced at least one act of physical violence at any time before 2005 and 15.5% reported having suffered at least one act of sexual violence before the same time. This puts the oPt in the middle range of global VAW trends, which range from 30% to 60% (World Bank, 2010).

The table below (Table 1) shows some indicators and trends in the occurrence of VAW in the oPt by region, type of locality, and type of violence during 2005.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of ever-married women who reported having been exposed to violence by their husbands, by region, type of locality, frequency of violence and type of violence in the oPt during the year 2005.

Region and Type of Locality/ Frequency of Violence	Sexual Abuse	Physical Abuse	Psychological Abuse
Region			
Occupied Palestinian Territory			
Any Incident	10.9	23.3	61.7
Three Times or More	0.4	9.4	47.0
West Bank			
Any Incident	11.5	23.7	68.8
Three Times or More	0.4	8.8	51.6
Gaza Strip			
Any Incident	9.7	22.6	49.7
Three Times or More	0.4	10.4	39.6
Type of Locality			
Urban			
Any Incident	11.2	23.2	62.8
Three Times or More	0 .4	9.0	48.1
Rural			
Any Incident	10.9	23.0	64.9
Three Times or More	0.5	9.4	48.6
Refugee Camps			
Any Incident	9.8	24.1	52.3
Three Times or More	0.4	11.0	41.0

Source: PCBS Domestic Violence Survey: Main Findings Report, Ramallah, oPt, 2006. Calculations were produced for the 2010 World Bank Report Checkpoints and Barriers: Searching for Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza - Gender Dimensions of Economic Collapse, prepared by IWS.

Table 2: Married women that reported having suffered acts of violence at least once in 2005, by education level, labor force status and household size.

Wife's Background Characteristics	Types of Violence		
	Psychological Abuse	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse
Educational Attainment			
Elementary or Less	62.5	35.8	12.0
Preparatory	64.3	25.1	12.2
Secondary and over	58.4	19.1	8.5
Labor Force Status			
Inside Labor Force	62.8	16.8	7.2
Outside Labor Force	61.5	23.9	11.2
Household Size			
٤ or less	54.1	19.7	10.8
5 or more	64.2	24.5	10.9

Source: PCBS Domestic Violence Survey, Main Findings, 2006; IWS, 2006, 40.

From the national data on VAW displayed in Table 2, it is clear that when women are better educated, the probability of their subjection to some forms of violence is less. The educational level of husbands also has some effect on levels of sexual abuse, as those husbands with secondary level educational attainment or more are less likely to perpetrate sexual abuse. While this correlation is similar for psychological abuse, there is less difference between husbands of different educational attainment levels in terms of perpetrating physical abuse. Though educational attainment level seems to have some correlation with husbands' perpetration of violence, labor force participation seems to have more of an effect. The data reveals less occurrence of physical and sexual abuse from men who are in the labor force than men outside of it, which may be explained by the frustration of men when they are no longer able to be breadwinners. Analogously, women who are employed or engaged in some sort of income-generating project to support their families are relatively protected from violence due to their social and economic value to their families. (World Bank, 2010). According to the data, women who are independent in their nuclear families are less often subjected to violence, especially because there is no system of patriarchal control like in the extended family, in which male family members generally monitor and control women's lives. As interviews with women have reflected, however, violence can also be practiced by male relatives or a

woman's mother-in-law within an extended family context. Lastly, according to PCBS data, household size does not seem to make a great difference on the occurrence of domestic violence.

Other findings from PCBS' national survey on domestic violence (2006) are strategically important to this report, as they indicate the context in which VAW occurs in the oPt. More knowledge of this context can contribute to the development of strategic recommendations and an orientation for programs and activities required to combating VAW.

The data points out that psychological violence towards women tends to stay stable in its impact across different contexts in the oPt. As this kind of violence often leaves a deeper effect on women, sometimes even more so than physical violence, it should be considered a valuable focal point for awareness-raising interventions. The seriousness of its impact on women across contexts should draw the attention of policy makers and practitioners to the importance of promoting a cultural change in women's image in the oPt, a task requiring a long process of education in order to positively change social attitudes.

At another level, and as shown in Table 3, unemployment can also be linked with VAW.

Table (3): Percentage of ever-married women exposed to violence by type of violence when husband lost job because of Israeli occupation, 2005:

Type of violence	Husband lost his job due to measures by the Israeli occupation	
	Yes	No
Physical Abuse	30.5	21.4
Psychological Abuse	70.2	59.6
Sexual Abuse	14.1	10.0

Source: Unpublished PCBS data: Domestic Violence Survey (December 2005 - January 2006). Database: Ramallah, oPt, 2008. Prepared by IWS.

Although World Bank data for the oPt has clearly linked male unemployment with rising conflict and psychological and social tension within the family, unemployment alone does not necessarily induce men to perpetrate severe physical, psychological or sexual violence, as the presence of other factors also contributes to such violent acts. The table above indicates the link between unemployment and VAW. Almost 30.5% of the husbands who reported having lost their jobs due to restrictive measures of the occupation in 2005 practiced physical violence against their wives, as compared to only 21.4% of husbands who did not loose their jobs.

Although VAW is a very sensitive and challenging issue to tackle, figures do not necessarily reflect the volume of the problem in the oPt. This is largely due to the problem's sensitivity and the inherent culture of "shame" and "cover-up" that prevails in Palestinian society, where cultural values hold violence to be an exclusively private and familial affair (Seniora, 2005). In a survey conducted by Haj-Yahia (2003) on violence in the oPt, findings indicate that both Palestinian men and women use many "explanations" for violence that release the husband of responsibility for abusing his wife and instead place the responsibility for such behavior on external forces. Such explanations suggest or assume the inability on the part of the husband to control himself due to particular conditions, such as forced unemployment, illness or disability resulting from the Israeli occupation (Haj-Yahia, 2003).

2. State-building and Representations of Violence

Due to the new culture of state-building in the oPt since the Oslo Accords, there has been greater involvement from donors, government, civil society organizations, women's movements and research centers in bringing the issue of VAW to the forefront. This is exemplified in the legitimization of the issue's importance by the PCBS survey on VAW, which not only found VAW to be a relevant topic of investigation, but through statistically sound data, exposed the existence of VAW as a social phenomenon in the oPt.

Since Oslo, organizations have been more active in addressing VAW in their programs and activities. They have done this through campaigns, workshops, counseling services, hotlines, advocacy for legal reform and other interventions, which, in their view, help to build a culture of prevention and protection for abused women, and contribute to their future individual and collective empowerment. Although serious work has been done by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and other civil society organizations on advocacy strategies and legal reform (largely to penalize perpetrators as a way of protecting women), such work has moved slowly and has yet to yield concrete outcomes.

An aspect of VAW that has not received enough attention in the oPt is the process by which abused women can make complaints and seek assistance (Haj-Yahia et al, 1995).

Haj-Yahia's 1995 study on violence in the oPt showed that very few women actually report violent acts, either formally or informally. Women's unwillingness or inability to formally complain to police departments was found to be connected to more generally negative attitudes towards making formal complaints regarding violence because of social pressures. According to the study, 58% of women in the sample who reported that they had considered formally complaining to the police still saw it as not constituting "wise behavior." Only 18% of the respondents considered it to be "acceptable behavior." Thus, all forms of family violence in the oPt – rape, sexual harassment, honor crimes, wife abuse, etc. – continue to be a social "taboo," making it difficult for women to speak out in public about their experiences of such violence (Haj-Yahia, 1995).

Confirming the above, the 2005 PCBS survey on domestic violence found that only 2% of women who suffered physical violence sought legal assistance or reported the violence to the police or courts. According to the survey results, only 2.1% of women victims of violence reported to the courts and only 1.4% reported to police. Most women

chose other forms of protection or refuge, such as assistance from relatives, friends or neighbors. According to focus group discussions with abused women in Gaza and the West Bank, women expressed a clear distrust in formal institutions, as they do not have the capacity to enforce any legal measures, thus often leading women who attempt to use such formal institutions to be "scandalized" for nothing.

A number of studies also mention the phenomenon of mediation that sometimes occurs in the oPt between female victims of violence, perpetrators of violence, and their respective families. This brings us again to the power relations of a gendered society, or the clan-based social relationships in a traditional society. In the oPt, this type of mediation in relation to VAW resembles other cases of mediation in times of unexpected deaths or severe injury, such as injury resulting from malpractice or even car accidents. This informal mediation process uses customary laws to mitigate situations in which the lives of victims and their dignity have been compromised. Such mediation usually occurs among males and relies on negotiation and financial compensation to resolve conflicts and crimes, such as murders or honor crimes. In this informal traditional justice system, where the main purpose is reconciliation between the families of the victims and perpetrators, unequal power and gender relations mean women often end up as the primary scapegoats, as they are not part of the negotiations themselves.

At the same time, in a place like the oPt that is affected by occupation and political instability, VAW is often viewed as just another form of violence. Because VAW is often treated like any other form of public violence in the oPt, its specific impact on women's health, reproductive rights, sexual and socio-economic well-being is not understood as a separate issue or even an issue of specific concern to the community. Thus, especially if women themselves do not make it an issue, the reality of VAW's effect on women's lives and their various roles is not exposed, nor is the importance of family cohesion within the context of continuous crisis highlighted. One of the only ways in which women victims of violence in the oPt express their frustration is through a trickle-down approach, by abusing other weaker members of their families, like children, or other people around them. Unfortunately, this coping strategy is sometimes accepted as an alternative means of conflict resolution and communication.

3. Femicide: Internal Violations of the Right to Life

In the last decade we have seen an increase in violence and the killing of Palestinians by Palestinian perpetrators. This phenomenon (of internal killing) reached its peak in 2007, when 585 Palestinians were killed in the oPt, but then dropped to 191 incidents in 2008 due to a decline in the internal fighting in Gaza. In a study for the Palestinian Forum for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Abu Nahleh (2007) identified eighteen honor killings in 2006, all of which have been "registered" as honor crimes committed by members of the victim's direct family, with brothers as the largest category of perpetrators, followed by fathers and other paternal relatives. In the month of June 2007 alone, in contrast, eleven women were killed in the internal fighting in Gaza. Since then, the number of female deaths by internal killing decreased from 45 at the end of 2007 to 19 in 2008. However in 2008, women were victims in about one in ten of the killings recorded in the oPt (Johnson, 2010).

In analyzing the leading causes of femicide in the oPt, we can deduct that honor killings were the leading cause prior to 2007, and particularly so in 2005 and 2006, while the security chaos and misuse of arms in the internal fighting was the main cause of femicide in 2007 (Johnson, 2010).

4. Honor Killings

The phenomenon of "honor killings" has become more prevalent in the last decade, during which it was one of the main causes of femicide, or the killing of women, in the oPt. Most often, it involves the killing of women who have engaged in or who are suspected to have engaged in an act of sexual practice before marriage or outside the institution of marriage (Abu Odeh, 2000). In this context, "honor" is principally connected to the perceived sexual behavior of girls and women, and the degree of their perceived compliance with the accepted behavioral norms and values within which society places them. Within this prevailing value system, a woman's father, brother, husband, uncle, etc. has the right to "discipline" and control her in order to maintain or "reinstate" family honor, which is in and of itself defined by the "good" conduct of the women in the family. Sometimes reinstating a family's honor takes the form of an extreme act such as femicide, or in other cases, involves abuse or other types of violence. "Honor crimes" can often be legally registered as "unknown deaths" in the bureaucratic system due to the capacity of perpetrators to cover up their crime. Conversely, and as other researchers have pointed out, when killings are formally registered as "honor crimes" they may actually have happened for other motives, such as economic hardship (Abu Nahleh, 2006).

According to Kevorkian (2001), there are four categories through which to study honor killings: the first is when a woman is, or believes herself to be, under a constant threat of being killed; the second is when a woman has received actual threats through verbal or non-verbal clues; the third is when actual attempts to kill a woman have been made; and the last is when a woman has been killed (Kevorkian, 2001).

Every year, teenage girls and women are killed in the oPt under the slogan of "honor." Police reports between 2000 and 2005 confirm that 46 females were killed in "honor crimes," with 12 of these women killed for "honor" in 2005 alone. Other sources cite even higher figures. For instance, women's rights organizations reported the killing of 27 women in "honor crimes" in 2005: 17 in the West Bank and 10 in the Gaza Strip. In comparison, they reported 29 cases of women killed for "honor" in 2006: 19 in the West Bank and 11 in the Gaza Strip. No police records are available on honor killings in 2006 (Al-Quds Newspaper, 2006; Rafai, 2007).

Different studies on "honor crimes" in the oPt produced by women's organizations provide relevant, in-depth analysis and flag a number of different areas of concern for international, national and local organizations to engage. As such studies on "honor killings" show, although it is very difficult to statistically indicate the scope of this crime, interviews with women reveal that the phenomenon is much greater than is officially recorded anywhere in the world (Shalhoub, 2004).

A clinical study on femicide in the oPt reported that there were 69 cases of murder threats against women between June 1997 and November 1999, with three of the

women respondents in the study actually murdered afterwards. The study indicated that 80% of these cases involved adolescent girls, with 37.9% between the ages of 14 and 20. Available information indicated that many of the women threatened to be killed or actually killed had also been victims of rape or sexual assault within the domestic sphere, constituting incest. In other cases, women had been victims of inaccurate or unconfirmed allegations concerning their behavior (Seniora, 2005).

In a more recent study conducted in 2007 for the Palestinian Forum for the Elimination of Violence against Women, Abu Nahleh identified 18 honor killings in 2006, all of which were formally registered as honor crimes and had been committed by members of the victim's direct biological family. Main perpetrators of the killings were brothers, followed by fathers and then by other male relatives. Both Muslim and Christian families were found to have subjected women to this crime, both to serve as precedence for other women and to reinstate their family honor. The highest occurrences of these crimes took place in villages throughout Gaza and the West Bank, as patriarchal relations, particularly within the extended family, are generally stronger in rural settings in the oPt.

Other studies, like that conducted by the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), identified eighteen honor crimes in the oPt in 2007. It is possible that this rise in numbers could be due to the political instability in 2007 and the absence of public security, or falatan amni, and internal factional aggression within communities as a result of a greater vacuum in law enforcement. In such a context, an atmosphere of "might is right" can further encourage and justify these acts, as the law itself is weak even when it is enforced.

A study by Shalhoub-Kevorkian shows that the criminal justice system in the oPt has failed to safeguard the legal and human rights of the victims in "honor crimes." Her research uncovered a silent masculine conspiracy that upholds sexist and gender-biased legal policies. In her study she expresses concern that the courts and the criminal justice system in the oPt are unwilling to express their opposition to gender discrimination by allowing rumors and gossip to be taken as evidence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2002).

The acts constituting "honor crimes" can best be understood in the absence of adequate laws that prioritize a woman's narrative and within a context of a prevailing traditional culture in which woman are the object of family honor. The crimes committed under this category are among the harshest forms of violence that women face in the oPt, and in the Arab world as a whole. In a 2007 report by the Palestine Monitor, there was evidence that those who committed honor crimes relied on the fact that, if taken to "justice," their sentences would be reduced after all of their nuclear, extended and clan family declared that the act was an "honor crime." Similarly, one of the judges interviewed in a 2006 Human Rights Watch report stated that "if the crime was committed in a fit of fury, the perpetrator gets released right away." It is worth noting in this context that the laws are a reflection of the judicial system in place in the oPt, which is shaped by the prevailing Palestinian culture of male dominance and explains how the concerned legal codes tolerate "honor killings," and consequently encourage them.

Attitudes toward "honor killing" in the oPt, as described by the Jerusalem Women's Group, result from a society that camouflages men's crimes by manipulating the social system, which puts the blame on the female in all cases of sexual violence. They also indicated that the role of maintaining family honor is considered that of the man, thus perpetuating the control and subordination of women. However, some women and girls in the oPt question the legitimacy of the concept and have expressed their anger regarding the hegemony of gender inequality (Al Rifai, 2007).

5. Incest and Rape

The issue of incest is very distressing and problematic, particularly because it happens mostly to children and girls in their early stages of life, and by people who should provide them with love, care and protection. The consequences of sexual abuse go far beyond the physical consequences, as the internalized harm on a psychological level may be long-lasting or permanent.

In a 2000 study on the West Bank compiled for the Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSD), Al Masri (2000) indicates that from 1996 to 1998, 488 women sought assistance for cases related to violence, of which 40 were incest victims, 20 were victims of rape outside the family, 15 were victims of sexual harassment inside the family, and nine were victims of multiple rapes both outside and inside the family. In the same period, the Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling documented 443 cases of VAW in total from 1997 to 1998, of which 40 were cases of incest. In a different study on incest in 1999, personal stories revealed that a young girl had found herself pregnant and given birth to a child fathered by her own brother. She was placed in custody after she stated that she had committed a big sin and that she deserved to be incarcerated (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 1999).

Most sexual assaults against girls and women occur within the context of the family, perpetrated by males of the closest kinship degree. According to data available from PWWSD, 75% of sexual assault cases against women in the oPt involve men closely related to them, such as fathers, brothers, and uncles, while a smaller number of sexual assault cases involve teachers, neighbors, taxi drivers and other perpetrators (Al Masri, 2000). Moreover, this problem is not restricted to a certain sector or one specific social class. However, young girls are more exposed than others to sexual assault within the family, particularly girls within the age group of four to 13 years old (Seniora, 2005).

Mohanna and Qleibo's (2009) study on the effects of mobility restrictions in Gaza indicates that, although there are stories of rape and honor killings in the Gaza Strip, all of the women interviewed (youth, housewives and teachers) for their study did not support this fact. Although they admitted hearing stories of rape and sexual abuse in homes, they considered these to be exceptional cases that occurred amongst families who had been bad in nurturing their daughters. As for other motives, these women expressed that violence, particularly sexual abuse, could occur in small houses where large families live in absolute poverty and where girls are not protected by their mothers. However, the official PCBS records indicate an increase of rape and honor killings within families in 2008. Thus, the lack of institutionalization and effective law enforcement in Gaza make sexual forms of violence almost invisible, despite their increase (Mohanna and Qleibo, 2009).

In regard to rape statistics, it is widely known that such an offence as rape, especially if committed within a family context, would often not be reported. Rather, cases of rape are often settled by informal, customary law, especially when rape victims are married to their violators. The fact that there was only one person in prison for rape in 2006, only two in 2005, and none in either 2002 or 2003, suggests that the police (which barely existed in 2002 and 2003) and courts have yet to offer significant recourse to rape victims in the oPt (IWS, 2009).

According to PCBS, there were a total of 115 cases of rape or attempted rape in the oPt in 1998, 85 of which occurred in the West Bank, with 30 cases in the Gaza Strip. According to Palestinian security sources, the phenomenon of kidnapping and rape has increased amongst Palestinian society, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem. In January 1998 alone, there were nine reported cases of kidnapping in Jerusalem, seven of which included the rape of minor girls between the ages of 14 and 18 years old (Seniora, 2003). According to PCBS' crime data, in 2005, there were only 14 reported cases of rape in the West Bank and only two in the Gaza Strip. In 1999, however, there were 26 reported cases in the West Bank and 12 in the Gaza Strip. As for attempted rape, the number of cases in 2005 was higher in the West Bank, with 58 reported cases, while only 31 cases were reported in Gaza. In 1999, however, there were 48 cases of attempted rape reported in the West Bank and only two in the Gaza Strip. These comparisons indicate that the occurrence of reported rape and attempted rape is lower in Gaza than in the West Bank, though analysis and causes for this have yet to be properly discussed or analyzed.

In a 2007 study on sexual violence against female teenagers in the West Bank, Al Rifai (2007) showed that the primary motive for honor killings was the fear of damaging the family's reputation. However, she also indicated that most groups denied the presence of sexual abuse within the family or minimized its extent. Moreover, addressing early marriage as a form of sexual violence was confusing to most participants in the study, as it was viewed as a protective and supportive measure for girls at a time of a heightened social vulnerability and political insecurity (Al Rifai, 2007).

According to the last PCBS Victimization Survey (2004), there has been a general rise in the rate of street harassment reported by women in the oPt, primarily due to the amount of spare time that young adults spend in the streets. On the other hand, only a limited number of persons accused of these kind of "immoral" offenses have been convicted.

In the category of "threatening and insulting language," records show 2,311 cases reported in 2005 in the West Bank and 605 in the Gaza Strip. It is worth mentioning that these records imply that in the context of "immoral offences," women see themselves as being able to be more assertive and defend their right to public space by seeking formal intervention from either police or other male relatives. Thus, taking an offensive position towards street harassment can be linked to helping prevent rape outside the family, as women become more assertive in defending their public space and formal punitive measures for perpetrators stop or deter other forms of violence.

6. Trafficking and Forced Prostitution of Palestinian Women and Girls

Although information on the issue of trafficking and forced prostitution in the oPt is limited, as such a phenomenon is a social taboo, it has become clear that it does exist and that it is not new. A report produced by the organization SAWA: All the Women Together Today and Tomorrow for UNIFEM (now UN Women), has broken the silence and taken the first step towards exposing the issue amongst women in the oPt. Thus, advocating for the protection of women and girls who are victims of this phenomenon has become even more important.

Such a phenomenon, according to the report, goes hand-in-hand with the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the oPt. Although data on this phenomenon in the oPt is scarce, reality shows that it exists on a small scale. The report outlines how the crime of forced prostitution occurs and analyses the kinds of transnational and domestic trafficking that occurs between the oPt and Israel. It also discusses cases of women who were forced into prostitution and what caused them to become so. Although it is still thought to be a limited phenomenon in the oPt, it is safe to say that due to the political and economic situation, this crime will expand in its scope, and has already become more institutionalized. This requires serious action from both the Palestinian government and civil society organizations in order to protect vulnerable women from this terrible phenomenon. Legislation and law enforcement are essential preventative measures and should be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns to educate other women about the sorts of networks that can trap them into forced prostitution. Increasing awareness of such networks would hopefully help women to avoid contact with such networks without their knowledge (SAWA, 2008).

According to SAWA's experience with sex workers, it is clear that there is a lack of institutional support for sex workers amongst Palestinian civil society, as documented in a SAWA interview (2008):

> *All the time we blame the woman who sells her body, but we do not blame or face men who abuse women. Women are punished and sometimes killed and we never see men punished. These women need deep psychological support and that is what we do not have. We only work with them superficially on a psychological level, and no women's organizations or other organizations work with sex workers.*

Although prostitution is not legal in the oPt, it exists in an organized way according to the report. Although some organizations in the oPt offer rehabilitation for women on issues like self-appreciation and self-esteem, their lack of capacity to actually protect these women means that they are often sent back to the same environment that led them into sex work in the first place, thus returning them to their same circles. Such women can only be truly helped through both rehabilitation and projects that offer them an alternative way to generate income. At present, however, SAWA is the only civil society organization in the oPt working on this issue.

When discussing VAW in the context of sexual politics and sexual abuse in the Middle East, arguments around VAW are conceptualized and tied with women's sexuality as the central problem and source of VAW. (Levine, 1998; Accad, 1990). In this way, the responsibility for VAW is placed on women's sexuality, as it is thought to lead to violence.

In a focus group discussion with 14 women in a shelter, a woman said that:

> *Each time I went to the police to file a complaint, the police reached an agreement with my family [whereby my family agreed not to beat me again, but when I went back home, the same story was repeated. My brother is in the secret service and I told [the police] that he hits me, [but the police] make fun of me, they even scared me from [going to] the shelter and told me that they rape women and give them drugs there.*

These statements indicate that the police do not help women escape abuse or even consider the shelter as a protection space. Rather, police prefer to send women back to the same abusive family context, which reflects their lack of consideration of women's welfare as important. Secondly, they make fun of women as they look at them within the traditional sexual political framework, not as victims, but as perpetrators, making women the accused. As a consequence of the above facts, and due to limited alternative options for referral, the situation encourages women to escape from home which lead them again to the same circle of sex work.

Another relevant question is how to provide shelters for women victims of trafficking and forced prostitution. Even if they are accepted in a shelter, they still have to leave the shelter after a short period of time. This negatively impacts them, as there is no follow-up available for the social and psychological support and other services that they were receiving. The question then becomes, what is the role of the different government ministries with a relevant mandate and portfolio for engaging in such work, like the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Women's Affairs? What is the role of the police in this context? Can the Ministry of Interior push for laws to penalize trafficking organizations and the people in them? It is obvious from SAWA's interviews that many of the women who have worked as prostitutes were sexually abused at home, which negatively affected their concept of the family as a protective unit. In addition, the people who have sold or pushed women into these networks (sometimes male family members), have not been punished due to the social sensitivity of the issue. Of course, given the complexity of this issue, work in this field would require collaboration among different governmental and non-governmental organizations.

An important issue raised in the context of forced prostitution is where these women should go and whom they can turn to for protection. The contradictory nature of a society that acknowledges the existence of phenomena such as incest and the forced prostitution of women by male members of their family, allows these cases to go unaddressed, despite the knowledge of their existence. For instance, in the same SAWA focus group discussion, it was noted that the police try to convince and sometimes force women to go back home. When they refuse, however, they are often then arrested and put in jail for a while before being sent to a shelter. Hence, they are often treated like criminals. Putting them in jail in this context can negatively affect women, as they may find the option of escape from their family into an unknown public space as their only way out from an abusive family context.

As was also noted in the SAWA focus group discussions, divorce is also sometimes a reason behind women's engagement in prostitution. Because divorce can leave women alone in economic crisis, they can be forced to find other alternative ways to generate

income for sustaining their families or their own survival. In this context, the absence of social protection and safety nets can be an actual reason for transforming women into sex workers.

Hence, more professional care is required by specialized organizations to support and protect women victims of trafficking and forced prostitution. At the same time, organizations must ensure prevention and protection for these women through raising public awareness of their conditions and the ways in which they are trapped and forced into this line of work. Furthermore, it is clear from the SAWA report and other discussions with women that alternative options must be developed to keep women from being forced to return to abusive homes, where they receive no respect or protection, but instead live in fear and under threat of continuous abuse.

VII. Data Analysis from the Field

1. Domestic Violence: Breaking the Silence, Voices of Abused Women

Findings from focus group discussions with abused women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip conducted for this study, in addition to personal in-depth interviews with abused women in shelters in the West Bank, reflect the depth and scope of violence that women are subjected to in both locations.

All of the women in the focus group discussions reported that they are subjected to psychological violence all the time, as they are humiliated and verbally abused by their husbands and/or male family members. While this was the case for all of the women interviewed, most of them also reported having experienced physical violence ranging from occasional hitting to severe daily beatings that have sometimes required hospitalization. In a justification often presented by the women respondents themselves, the incidence of VAW seemed to be more concentrated in locations where males tended to be under high levels of pressure from, for example, the siege in Gaza or unemployment and poverty in West Bank.

Although most of the women reported having been physically abused by their husbands, fewer women expressed having been subjected to beatings by their brothers-in-law or mothers-in-law, even though these subjects are talked about in social circles. Women perceived such abuse from in-laws as an expression of jealousy and attempt at control, especially for women who were not relatives to their husband's family. However, a more in-depth sociological analysis reflects the patriarchal gender relation that assumes that the family owns the wives of their sons. This patriarchal assumption leads a wife to be exploited by her husband's family in her housework duties, on one level, and to being disciplined through violence by his family so that she can become a better wife for their son, on another level.

In general, our findings have also confirmed the findings of the 2006 PCBS survey on domestic violence, that the occurrence of sexual violence by husbands is less when compared to physical or psychological violence. Thus it is either truly less common, or the result of women's silence regarding sexual violence by their husbands due to the culture of "shame" around the topic or as a result of their understanding that such a

matter is a "private" issue that should not be shared. Sometimes women also perceived sexual violence as something other than ordinary violence, as an act of male dominance that is not an aberration in the same way as physical and psychological abuse.
In a focus group discussion for this study, eight abused women were asked how they deal with violence. Samar from Nasr in Gaza, who has been physically and sexually abused, said:

> *"I will ask for divorce through the court, because I have the blessing and support of my family. They don't want me to stay in this situation, even if I lose my children."*

As was realized from different interviews, women who have the backing of their families are able to formally report the violence to which they are subject. Some of them can even call for divorce, as the acceptance and agreement of their family to support them provides them with an alternative option that exists for some, but not for all abused women. For women who have no family support, they hesitate to report or ask for assistance, as they have nowhere to go and they are afraid to lose their children.

Another woman, Fatima from Shajaieh, Gaza, who had been consistently physically abused by her husband and his family said:

> *"I accept abuse because I cannot tolerate losing my children especially that I don't want to tell my family from fear of imposing divorce."*

This illustrates that women sometimes tolerate abuse in order to keep their children, as families that accept a woman's divorce do not always accept her children, who are considered to belong to the husband and his family. This also indicates that women sometimes have to bear abuse because they lack alternative options, which severely limits their choices.

When asked if they sought assistance from specialized organizations, most of the abused women participating in the study that had reported to the police said that their only refuge is their own family, as they do not want a social scandal. Reporting their abuse means that they will either be divorced or that there will be an escalation of the violence by the husband's family. They all spoke about "sutra," which in their view is based on the fact that there is no genuine care for their well-being, not even from their closest family members, and especially not in these days of political and economic crisis and unrest, where men are unemployed and women become a burden on their families if divorced. Very few of these women reported their abuse to the police, while only one went to a women's organization to ask for help.

Rasha from a West Bank focus group discussion consisting of 18 women said:

> *What can the police or the organization do for us? If the whole community accepts violence as a fact of life, and the hamula (family) thinks that it is the right of men to maintain the family's honor, and discipline women, how can the police or the organization change these misconceptions?*

Tahani from Gaza in a focus group discussion of eight women also said:

> *"My husband was very kind and he respected me, but after the siege and when he lost his job, he became a different man and started to abuse me."*

In her discussion, Tahani also noted that her aggressive husband had also created violent children, who have lost their respect for her and who verbally and psychologically abuse her. In this context, we are reminded of the family approach that explains how violence within the family is a result of outside economic pressures, and how family members both carry out and are victims of violence.

Although it is a fact that not all men are aggressive, it has also become clearer that the deteriorating economic conditions in the oPt can create a violent man who is unable to cope with the loss of his traditional role as the breadwinner and who chooses to cope with or compensate for these pressures through practices of male-domination and control over women as a reassertion of his masculinity. Although such men's violence is mostly exerted against women, some women have also talked about their husbands abusing their children or about how violence is carried out on other family members.

Amal from Gaza had a unique situation in that she was subjected to violence from all of the male members of her husband's family, in addition to her mother-in-law. She said that she was severely beaten and, due to her husband's weakness, he was unable to confront his family. She was abused because she was working outside of the home and the family did not approve, although her husband did. She thinks that they do not want her to work because of jealousy and so they try to control her through violence. Her continuous abuse from the family has pushed her to leave the house to her own family, and at the same time, she has threatened her husband with divorce if he does not live in an independent home away from the pressures of his family.

The strong impact of extended families in controlling women and their husbands, to prove identity and commitment to the extended family poses an additional pressure for women. This is reflected in families where husbands are part of the family's economic activity, or when they are economically dependent on the family unit for their survival, which was the case of Amal's husband.

While other women in the focus group seemed to be silent and not interested in expressing their views, they explained that they have become used to violence, as it has become a part of life. This sentiment reflects the feeling of defeat, indifference and apathy which women employ as a way to deal with abuse, and as a simpler alternative to employing active resistance.

2. Prevalence of Violence against Women in the oPt

When abused women were asked if they knew of other abused women in their neighborhoods, or other places, their immediate positive responses showed the prevalence of the phenomenon. They said that most of the women are subjected to different forms of violence, but that most of them do not report to police or family members for fear of divorce, as they view domestic violence as a social stigma and a private matter. Fear of losing their children imposes further silence and tolerance of violence

on women. Reasons given for their silence and tolerance express a level of sacrifice which represents the traditional woman's role as the protector of the family, consistent with the Palestinian cultural understanding of motherhood, where the family is still seen as a fundamental unit of organization and a tool for collective survival. Although it can be expressed as a sacrifice of women in this context, it also emphasizes the fact that women are put in a position from which it becomes difficult to exit, as alternatives do not exist. Obviously, any woman would not stay in an abusive relationship if there were a better alternative for protection.

Lastly, when women in the focus group discussions were asked about their recommendations to other women who are subjected to similar kinds of violence as themselves, most of the women in the West Bank and Gaza had similar responses:

- Men should be educated on women's rights and marital duties.
- Women should be protected by the law.
- Abused women should report to the police and go to courts, as this will become a lesson for other men.
- Men need psychological therapy to cope with the pressures of life and find alternative coping strategies other than using violence against women.
- More male spaces like men's clubs should be opened for men to pass their spare time, especially in this period of siege and crisis during which many men are not working. This would help them release the pressure as they exchange their problems with other men and find that they are all in similar situations.

3. Young Girls and Their Perceptions of Violence

In a focus group discussion conducted in Gaza, eight female students ranging from 20 to 24 years of age expressed their view towards the prevalence of violence in society in general and VAW in particular.

They all confirmed that VAW exists in Palestinian society and that many different kinds of violence are prevalent, including economic, political, domestic, physical, social and verbal. Some believe that women as well as men are victims of abuse. While some think that both men and women can be perpetrators of abuse, others think that men are only abusers, never victims, in their roles as husbands, fathers or brothers.

To the women in the focus group, there are two kinds of political violence: internal violence among political factions, mainly between Fateh and Hamas, and external violence caused by the Israeli occupation. They also talked about economic violence resulting from the siege on Gaza, which they cited as a source of poverty, unemployment and exploitation, as employers exploit working women and children. They emphasized the concept of social violence, which they defined as "social isolation, or a form of violence that isolates women and discriminates against them." They mentioned societal preference for males as an indicator of this.

They also mentioned additional social pressures and restrictions on a girl's life, like restrictions on her freedom of choice and movement, early marriage, and the use of social traditions and social practices that enforce a culture of "shame." Accordingly, they have explained VAW in a gender perspective, presenting the gendered patriarchal

society in its different formations as a source of violent practice used by men to control women.

The recommendations of these focus group participants centered on decreasing violence through awareness-raising in schools and universities that would target young people in order to teach them alternative options for conflict resolution and dialogue. Raising awareness amongst women about their legal rights and the services available to them in crisis was also seen as useful, as was the promotion of human rights education in schools, the encouragement of women to confront violence through media strategies and the communication of the long-term dangers of cycles of violence. While these are all important strategies to end violence, few of the focus group participants thought that violence could not be eliminated unless the occupation ends, as it is the source of all kinds of violence. Moreover, it became obvious to the young single women who participated in the focus group that the issue of violence cannot be treated mechanically through protecting women in shelters, but is rather a process of social and economic change based on a new process of socialization involving awareness-raising within the family and schools in order to change the image of women and gender roles within the family and society.

4. Violence against Elderly Women and Children with Special Needs

Interviews with women who work with children with special needs and elderly women indicate that there are different levels of violence to which these women and girls are subjected. The most prevalent form of violence mentioned was psychological violence, as family members often neglect or abuse children with special needs. Because these children do not have any control over their lives, they are more vulnerable and subject to violence of all forms. Educating people in their responsibility to protect listen and respond to the needs of people with special needs, and providing them with a safe, loving environment, can help protect them from violence in the form of isolation and exclusion. Elderly people can often have the same situation, as they too are usually dependent and thus vulnerable to violence. According to interviews with elderly women, they too are mostly subjected to psychological violence. Rather than suffering physical violence, elderly women more often suffer from neglect, absence of medical attention, lack of medication, or a lack of financial support. As some elderly women expressed in their interviews, however, sometimes these forms of violence are also combined with physical violence.

5. Violence on Borders

Analyzing political VAW in the context of militarization and conflict requires a more comprehensive approach; as such violence attacks homes and disrupts family life. For instance, women who live in border towns, near the Separation Wall, in the Seam Zone in the West Bank, or in the Buffer Zone in Gaza, are continuously subjected to violence by the Israeli occupation forces, which use different practices to threaten their lives. Some homes of the women interviewed for this study in Gaza had been demolished, but they decided to live under the wreckage of their homes for fear of loosing their land or fear that what is left of their houses would be occupied by Israeli soldiers. Other women reported staying at home all day to protect the house, while the men stayed awake all night to make sure that soldiers did not break in to their homes while they were sleeping. Women said that because men stay at home after dinner and do not leave the house,

new psychological and social problems have arisen, as men become more aggressive and sometimes even express their will to commit suicide.

Amani, who lives under the wreckage of her home in Gaza, described her life by saying:

> *Our home was destroyed and all our memories were destroyed with it. We had everything. We were envied by our neighbors. Now we have no home, but they all have a better home than us. I am always monitoring the garden around our house for Special Forces who may kill my children, so we are always under stress and threat from them. We experience everyday the razing of farms and agricultural lands near our homes, which they justify by security reasons. I cannot wear my light clothes during the day; I have to bear the hot weather and wear all my clothes for any surprise visit by the forces or if we encounter any risk or danger and need to evacuate the house. We are isolated; no one visits us because they are afraid of the soldiers. We are like Bedouins who are always haunted by instability and all these problems are because we want to safeguard our homes and lands.*

Another woman, Intisar, who is 40 years old and lives in the same area near the border of Gaza, said that in addition to the threats of the occupation forces, she has other worries:

> *My son is a teenager, and he comes late at night, and soldiers always shoot anything that moves at night. So we keep waiting for him until he enters home. This is causing many problems with his father, as he is always waiting for him with anxiety. Sometimes his father breaks the windows, other times he breaks his mobile phone because his son is not responding to his calls. We are thinking of moving to Gaza [City], but the rent is very expensive; owners of houses don't sympathize with us, they are exploiting the situation and we have to cope if we need to protect our family.*

In a focus group discussion with women living in the Zaytoun district of Gaza, which was destroyed in the December 2008 – January 2009 military aggression on Gaza, the women seemed very distressed, pessimistic and sad. They feel that there is no solution to their problems and are worried about their husbands and sons who work in the land near the borders. They said that many men had been shot while working in the Buffer Zone, as soldiers do not want them to resist or be steadfast.

We remain worried and under stress until our men come back home. We don't permit our children to go out with their friends for fear of loosing them. They feel that they are in prison, they don't sleep well, we are always expecting soldiers to break into our homes. The aggression lives within us; we don't buy any furniture or new things we need because we are always afraid that there will be another war and we will loose everything again. We don't move around, we stay at home. Nobody visits us; our families are far and we have no contact with them. We have no privacy; we live all together in one room. We are like the living dead.

This statement indicates the extent and impact of militarization, isolation and displacement on women and men as they continue suffering. Yet, despite risking their lives, these men are still able to move around and look after their land, and some of them continue their role as breadwinners. Women, however, are more isolated and unable to practice their daily routines as their spaces have become too limited and they feel suffocated. For them, there is no way out. The psychological trauma that they experience on a daily basis is not expressed clearly, as it has become a style of life.

The impact of social isolation and marginalization, which has become further rooted due to the limited opportunities for mobility, will have a deep impact on these women in the future. When the situation is better, many of these women may find themselves unable to regain or resume their active life, as their reality has changed so drastically. Hence, extensive political violence further marginalizes and isolates women, sometimes making their return to an active life impossible.

While this was the situation expressed by women in Gaza, the Separation Wall has also impacted women in the West Bank. Some of the nine families near the Separation Wall interviewed for this study has faced bulldozing and destruction of their agricultural lands, ranging from an average of five to seven hectares of arable land. In the case of one family interviewed, the Um Jawdat family, 17 hectares of olives and almond fields were lost. Additionally, Um Jawdat's husband died of a heart attack when he witnessed his land being bulldozed, which has added a new burden on the women of his family as they can no longer rely solely on their farming skills, but now also require alternative means to sustain the family.

As for Abdel-Raouf from the village of Kafr Thulth, he had to borrow 20,000 NIS to reclaim his land that had been bulldozed by the occupation forces. Most of the families interviewed had endured tremendous losses, especially as most of their lost lands were among the most fertile. Land constitutes the main source of revenue for these families, especially as many have lost their former jobs inside settlements and the Green Line.

As for the psychological impacts on children, Fatima from Toura Al-Gharbieh said:

The Separation Wall deprived our children from their childhood; the only playground available to them was confiscated. They also have fears of suffocation by toxic [tear] gas as a result of the soldiers' behavior at the Wall's gates. Our children are deprived of a safe road to school; usually they are searched and denied access to school and when they are allowed to pass, they arrive late. Hence mothers are worried and anxious until their children come home, and this experience is repeated every day.

The Separation Wall has grown to be more than a prison for women; not only has it impacted families' stability, but it has also specifically restricted women's mobility. As it is necessary to obtain permits in order to cross checkpoints, families generally prefer issuing such permits for male members of the family so that they can travel to seek work, thus particularly restraining women's mobility. In some cases, it is difficult to go through the roadblocks and gates because their opening hours are not convenient for women. In an interview for this study, Im Nida expressed her agony by saying:

I bear it all. Everybody leaves the house and comes back, but I stay alone in the house. This made me live in fear and in a bad psychological state, especially when settlers start stoning the house. Most of the time, when they come, I am alone we do not have neighbors; I look west there is a settlement and east there is the Separation Wall. This situation makes me nervous. Before the Separation Wall was constructed, I used to go to the land with Abu Nidal. Today, my role is to look through the windows and wait for my children to come back so that I can open the door for them. The situation is very different. I used to go to the shops and buy family necessities. Whenever I would go out, Abu Nidal would be responsible for taking care of the house. Now, I write everything I want on a piece of paper and he buys it, as it has become more difficult for me to leave the house due to restrictions on mobility. Today, due to the Separation Wall, our economic situation has been impacted. The situation is more difficult and we have to cut down on our expenses, which require drying and freezing food to save money, time and effort.

This quotation not only exposes the psychological pressure that women in the West Bank are living under, but also the informal activities that they employ as a tool for coping with the deteriorating economic conditions that make them valuable to the family. It was also revealed through the interviews with women in the West Bank that in families in which women were active in the informal economy, women are subjected to less violence from their husbands.

VIII. Justice is Too Slow: Institutional Policies, Formal Strategies and Responses

Although all concerned organizations and ministries have been active in working on combating VAW, they face many social, cultural and economic challenges that interrupt and delay their effectiveness and success.

Similar to women in other countries, Palestinian women have always been subjected to all sorts of violence. Yet, neither VAW within the family nor domestic violence were coherently addressed by national institutions and organizations before the nineties. Although Palestinian civil society had been active in promoting human rights and exposing the violations of the occupation before this time, its agenda had not been ready to accommodate taboo social issues, especially within the context of the liberation struggle. To ensure and maintain social cohesion within the community, VAW maintained a low profile as an important social issue in need of address. It was only after the Oslo Accords in 1993 that domestic and public violence have been addressed broadly by women's organizations. This change was largely due to the existence of a national authority that considered this time period to be a state-building stage and which encouraged women to expose and promote these issues on the national agenda. The presence of a Palestinian Authority with its different institutions and legal framework, although with limited powers, has together created an environment of legitimacy and acceptance of the problem of gender-based violence. While this is all true, it has also become clear after two decades that the successes in preventing and protecting women from violence have been limited.

In addition to the policies and interventions that civil society organizations have promoted to address gender-based violence, and in spite of the limited capacity of the Palestinian Authority to undergo legal reforms or even enforce existing laws, it has become clear that eliminating domestic violence as an organic component of structural violence has not been achieved, or is no longer a priority. The complicated official bureaucracy of the government ministries, the limited coordination between civil society organizations and the ministries, and the absence of a clear vision on how to protect women from gender-based violence have made the official response slow and ineffective.

1. Ministry of Women's Affairs

Reports and data from fieldwork show that the response of government ministries in the oPt in regards to gender-based violence still lacks the appropriate vision and coordination, making an effective collective response to the issue difficult. For this study, different ministries were interviewed in both the West Bank and Gaza. Unfortunately, however, due to the current political crisis, the Ministries of Social Affairs and Women's Affairs in Gaza were represented by former staff members, thus reflecting the situation in these ministries before 2006. The following section highlights some of the findings from these interviews that are important to document and flesh out in order to understand the weaknesses, challenges and obstacles of implementing a national plan to combat gender-based violence and promote good practices.

In general, there is no consensus regarding priorities on women's issues, especially in relation to violence against women, among the different government ministries in the oPt, nor amongst their staff, which is particularly true of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (Saadeh, 2009). Formal work on the issue of VAW began in 2008 and the process of preparing a three-year national strategy for combating VAW started in 2009. The objective of the strategy is to initiate the process of defining priorities within the area of gender-based violence, as violence is a multifaceted phenomenon and difficult to deal with in a compartmentalized manner. Hence, the team within MoWA began by prioritizing the issues and preparing the work plan to make the process more useful and successful.

The main objective of the strategy is to combat VAW, while the secondary objective is to provide a legal environment for the protection of women through promoting national policies that can limit VAW; to develop referral systems for services for abused women; to activate ministerial decisions and policies regarding the protection of women; and to gather data on VAW in the oPt. Awareness-raising about women's rights and exposing the scope of existing VAW also constitutes part of the strategy's agenda, as does the promotion of fundraising opportunities for MoWA to run its own projects on the issue (Saadeh, 2009).

In this context, the interview conducted for this study with the undersecretary of MoWA was useful for better understanding the processes and procedures that the ministry envisages for ensuring the protection of women against gender-based violence and for enforcing the law. Although MoWA is committed to combating VAW, its coordination with all of the interested parties, namely the ministries, family units, women's organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has been slow and convoluted, bringing into question the extent of the government's political will and financial and legal commitment to combating VAW.

The interview explored a range of issues, including policies to reach a national strategy for combating VAW that would be binding for all stakeholders and based on a process of participation and coordination between different partners.

According to the undersecretary of MoWA, the first step to be taken was to create a National Committee to Combat Violence against Women. Proposed members of this National Committee were: the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), the Ministry of Interior (MoI), the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Labor (MoL), the Ministry of Information, the Ministry of Islamic Waqf and Religions Affairs, the Office of Chief Judge, the President's Office, Units of Governorates Affairs, the General Secretariat of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) and the NGO Forum for Combating Violence against Women (Al-Muntada).

The undersecretary stressed the importance of such a committee, as it will channel the attention of the PA towards the principle of partnership and integration within its various bodies and with non-governmental institutions. Such attention is key for building a partnership within the government that includes combating VAW as a fundamental component of state-building. Furthermore, the national strategy also defines the roles, relations and linkages among the various stakeholders working to combat VAW and promote women's rights.

As the undersecretary related, the national strategy is to be implemented by different mechanisms, whereby different parties will be working together to reach the overall objective. Legal issues will be coordinated through the civil and family protection units of MoSA and MoI. MoL, MoEHE and the Ministry of Media will also be involved in the process, working to change social attitudes towards women and to delegitimize violence within Palestinian culture. Work within the different departments will be complementary and depend on good coordination between them.

Although this was stated by the MoWA undersecretary, interviews with different stakeholders indicate that some of the partner ministries lacked the infrastructure and/or the understanding of their role in this coordinating process, and thus efforts have been unfruitful so far.

MoWA was to be the major actor in administrating the coordination process, while the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), a representative umbrella of women's organizations, and the Council of Ministries were to be close partners, particularly in the process of gender planning. In addition, MoWA's undersecretary emphasized gender budgeting as an important component in the success of the process, whereby 40% of national budgets would be allocated to gender issues. In her own words, she emphasized the importance of gender budgeting for activating the gender departments within the ministries in general, and as a way to implement the specific activities of the National Committee for Combating VAW in particular. However, although this is theoretically important, the Ministry of Finance and Planning has yet to initiate gender budgeting as a planning concept.

When asked about the nature of women's activities within the National Strategy for Combating VAW, MoWA's undersecretary explained that political empowerment would be a top priority, as legislative and presidential elections are approaching and women should be fully encouraged to participate.

When asked about the representation and participation of abused women in the National Strategy's planning process, with the objective of including their needs, the undersecretary affirmed that these women are already part of the planning process with allotted capacity-building within the medical system and police departments as priorities. MoWA has also been successful in choosing an NGO to prepare the model for a referral system for women victims of violence. In addition, MoWA's undersecretary stressed the issue of training more female police officers to deal with abused women. However, she cautioned that the project needs the approval of the Palestinian Cabinet, especially as Arab countries have shown interest in financing this project. With regard to the undersecretary's views on the family protection unit within the police department, however, she expressed her dissatisfaction with their performance and called upon MoI, MoSA, and UNRWA to better define their roles vis à vis protection in order to promote a clear policy and build an efficient referral system for women victims of violence.

The issue of rehabilitation of abused women, is important as she explained that part of the concept of protection is empowerment, and that support for abused women leaving shelters is a major issue of concern. She believes that women should be integrated in society and that they will need protection in the streets as well as at home to ensure their continuous safety. At the same time, she talked about economic empowerment and how these women need further training and employment opportunities. She proposed the idea of integrating these women into the ministries as volunteers or employees in order for them to play a productive role and regain their self-esteem. One of the ideas that MoWA is working on is promoting the concept of social security within the civil service law, but due to dependency on the donor community for survival as a government, it is difficult to promote a sustainable system that could cover the expenses of social security and health insurance.

On the enforcement of the National Strategy for Combating VAW, MoWA's undersecretary explained that a law was drafted in 2005 for protecting women subjected to violence and that the gender departments within the ministries will ensure the implementation of the Strategy in each ministry. A committee comprised of the Health, Labor and Education Ministries and the police departments will be working to provide additional solutions for women. As MoWA focuses on development, they will be providing work for women instead of giving them financial support. Lastly, in order to successfully implement the National Strategy, MoWA will coordinate meetings amongst all stakeholders every three months, as well as set up a complaints unit to support the women's protection systems (the referral system and the security and legal protection initiatives). Although the undersecretary highlighted the augmented role of the gender units and focused on the coordination between MoWA's departments and other stakeholders, she also cast doubts on the efficiency of the units under the current state of the ministries.

Even though it is clear that there is commitment from MoWA to enforce the National Strategy for Combating VAW, the complications in the coordination process, the level of

stakeholder commitment, and the absence of political will on the part of the government all represent structural obstacles for the timely and effective implementation of the Strategy. In addition, although the undersecretary assumes good coordination among the different PA ministries, there is a structural gap in this process when it comes to involving police departments, family units and shelters. These gaps are partly due to the overlapping of mandates and the ambiguity in the roles of each of these stakeholders, but they are also due to the patriarchal culture of PA institutions, which is reflected in the community as a whole. Thus, the process of mainstreaming gender and enforcing a culture of protection for women's rights and dignity in the oPt is a process that takes time and requires continuous follow-up and most importantly a political will.

In Gaza, the Ministry of Women's Affairs has been dysfunctional for the last three years due to the political coup d'état by the Islamic movement Hamas, which has left Gaza under separate administration from the West Bank and the PA's authority. According to a previous MoWA staff member in Gaza, the work initiated on the National Strategy for Combating VAW in the Gaza Strip has not been finalized due to political issues. She said, however, that MoWA in Gaza is currently trying to develop a strategy with the support of other governmental and non-governmental organizations. So far, they have conducted three focus group discussions in different areas to guarantee the inclusion and participation of grassroots women's organizations, and have met with other government bodies as well as private sector and civil society organizations to follow-up on the opening of the first women's shelter in Gaza. She also revealed that UNIFEM (now UN Women) is working with MoWA in Gaza to follow up on the National Strategy for Combating VAW. Yet, it is obvious that due to the political conditions in Gaza, including the devastation caused by the December 2008 – January 2009 aggression on the Gaza Strip, work by the ministries previously related to the PA has either been stopped or slowed down. For example, MoWA in Gaza had established a complaints mechanism in the police station to document and follow up on VAW cases, but this has now stopped functioning.

It is clear that MoWA in Gaza is not currently active on gender issues due to the hegemony of Hamas and its policy towards gender. However, there still exists a history of a work-in-progress that can be used in future work on gender issues. For instance, that there were plans to establish gender units in all the ministries in Gaza can return once the political situation has settled and the ministries return to policy-development, rather than their current focus on police implementation. Overall, once the ministries in Gaza become more policy-oriented, an improvement on the status of women could be made as laws and policies would be passed at the governmental level, enabling and supporting work at the grassroots level. In the view of the former MoWA employee in Gaza, even if a National Strategy for Combating VAW is made and laws against abusers enforced, political reconciliation in Gaza remains a priority, for without it, VAW will surely continue and any measures or plans made to combat it will remain vulnerable to political instability.

2. Ministry of Social Affairs

It is important to note that MoSA has the responsibility of referring abused women to shelters and also mediates between family units in police departments and the Ministry of Interior. In an interview with the undersecretary of MoSA, different issues were raised,

but his responses were limited due to time constraints, and did not reflect the experience of previous research.

When asked about the right of abused women to decide their own future, MoSA's undersecretary was unclear on this point, but emphasized that the law has the ability to stop violence if it is formulated in a way that adapts to social realities and religious frameworks. He put a lot of weight on the importance of raising social awareness in the promotion of justice for women, using the example of the Palestinian Basic Law, which does not discriminate against women and can therefore be used as a basis to prohibit violence.

MoSA, as he presented it, is against all kinds of oppression of women, particularly those women who are single heads of households. Hence, MoSA is committed to eliminating any discrimination that prevents these women from attaining their full rights. The Ministry's plan is to deal with VAW through coordinating with MoI and MoWA, and jointly construct a plan to combat VAW. He believes that awareness-raising is the key to this plan. Yet he does not think that VAW is a widespread phenomenon. He thinks that it is linked to the current economic and social situation, which means that if the situation improves, then VAW will stop.

Meanwhile, the director of the Family and Child's Network for protection against violence within MoSA in Gaza, had different views concerning causes of violence. Although she admitted to having limited experience in the issue of VAW, she expressed a coherent and elaborate depiction of the situation facing women in Gaza. MoSA in Gaza, as presented by her, deals with abused women, but the absence of data and proper documentation of cases makes measuring the scope or rate of prevalence difficult to ascertain. She thinks that all types of violence exist, but that the most widespread form is psychological violence, because it is a traditional society that accepts aggression towards women. However, she does not feel that physical violence is widely practiced in Gaza. She also views the most oppressed women in Gaza as being divorcées or those whose husbands are drug addicts. Her views perhaps reflect the limited experience and knowledge of MoSA in Gaza on the subject.

Most of the MoSA services offered in Gaza focus on psychological counseling and, when cases are more complicated, the Ministry refers them to the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, which has greater expertise in the context of abuse against women. For legal cases, MoSA in Gaza refers cases to the Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR), especially if a woman needs legal advice on child custody. In cases where women are abused by their husbands who are drug addicts, and the violence is severe, the police interfere and take the women to a secure place before referring them elsewhere and offering them further assistance.

According to the interview, MoSA in Gaza very much supports the idea of a shelter for women victims of violence. Although the place for a shelter in Gaza has already been allocated, it has been difficult for it to start operating due to a lack of finances and limited facilities due to the siege. Moreover, the proper functioning of a women's shelter requires governmental backing, which has become more difficult to obtain under the Hamas government in Gaza. However, the director of the Family and Child's Network

within MoSA in Gaza claims that the Ministry will continue to slowly progress towards opening the shelter, as it will encourage women to leave the violent context they are in and find the space to regain their self-esteem. Conditions in Gaza have led to a lot of violence within the family, which for many women has resulted in the loss of dignity and the will to cope and confront the hardships of daily life.

3. Family Protection Units

The family protection unit was recently created within the police department, after the recognition by the police that in order to address VAW in a professional and healthy setting, they needed a special department within the police station to be gender sensitive, specialized in dealing with abused women and competent in properly documenting cases and dealing with women victims of violence respectfully. Although these units are still new and not well prepared, the concept of creating these units in all central police stations is necessary and useful.

In an interview with the Democracy and Human Rights Unit within the Ministry of Interior, the representatives of the Unit expressed their commitment to protecting and securing all citizens, regardless of gender. However, they also recognized that VAW is a particularly sensitive issue that deserves special attention. They expressed their awareness of the importance in addressing the phenomenon of VAW, stating that it is not only within the household, but also in the streets, that women are being harassed verbally regarding their dress or the way they walk, which puts more social pressure on women to stop using public space. For them, there are different regulations that can be used to protect women and raise awareness about their plight. For instance, the civil service law, the penal code and the personal laws are all laws that the MoI uses to deal with social issues like VAW. However, these laws are undermined by their acceptance of honor killings, which discriminate against women and, in the view of the MoI representatives interviewed, should be resolved.

The MoI representatives interviewed were very open in their assessment towards the performance of the police and admitted that they think all police officers are not necessarily qualified to deal with abused women. In the interview, they called for the capacity building of the police in general and of the family unit officers in particular so that the police service can become more gender sensitive.

While the MoI representatives expressed that they are keen to receive complaints, they also feel that the low number of complaints they do receive from women is due to their limited capacity to follow-up with the issues, which then discourages people from returning and relying on the police service. Their promotion of family protection units expresses their commitment towards protection of women and children and respect for their privacy and confidentiality. Yet, one of the clear problems mentioned is the level of coordination among the concerned parties, which also seemed to be one of the main problems highlighted by the other ministries interviewed. For the MoI, this problem was cited in addition to the limited capacity and qualification of police officers.

In conclusion, it is clear that the different formal parties that work closely with abused women, including government ministries, are well aware of the level of confusion between their roles and mandates, which presents a challenge to the successful accomplishment of their collective objective. At the level of advocacy, it seems that most civil society organizations and ministries have made efforts to raise awareness about gender-based violence. They have largely done so by raising awareness of how GBV disrupts the internal harmony of the community and shakes the cultural standards of unity and cohesion that are still important to people today, and which have historically protected women at the informal level. At the procedural level, MoSA and the family protection units in police departments have a deeply confusing relationship in terms of their roles and mandates. Moreover, their communication channels are not very well institutionalized. However, this does not mean that they are not facing these challenges and trying to cope with them in the best way possible. For instance, in an interview for the study, the head of the protection unit in the Bethlehem police department said that she is aware that the challenges they face are not always procedural, but also conceptual. This was reflected in her definition of protection, which expanded protection against all kinds of violence to include self-harm. However, despite conceptual nuance and a degree of self-critique, the Bethlehem family protection unit sees its role in combating VAW as essentially one of educating and raising awareness among men and women, which it sees as the extent of its contribution to protective measures against VAW.

According to the unit members interviewed, the Bethlehem Family Protection Unit sees women who have suffered abuse for a long time as traumatized and unable to make decisions for themselves, thus often causing them to return to the circle of violence. Some unit members reported that these women do not own the decision for self-determination, because they cannot protect themselves, and thus there should be legal enforcement for their entrance into a treatment program with a psychologist. The unit, they reported, works on two levels: treatment and prevention. A case of an abused woman is first treated by sending her to a shelter, in order to prevent further physical abuse. Then she is treated socially and psychologically through referring her to counseling programs and specialized institutions. Preventive measures, as pointed-out above, are done through raising awareness and informal education through women's organizations, using the media, workshops and other means to change the traditional culture and image of women in the oPt.

According to the experience of the Bethlehem Family Protection Unit director, some women refuse to go to the shelters. When asked how she responds to these cases, the director explained that the role of the unit is to encourage the women to solve the problem at home if they feel her life is not seriously threatened. Otherwise, they should convince her to go to the shelter. She explained the logic of making such a decision on behalf of abused women:

> *"Because there is no law that forces abused women to participate in counseling or any program, they are left to their own will, although in their situation they are unable to take decisions".*

The other issue of importance to the unit is documenting the complaints of abused women. In this regard, the unit director said:

> *[W]e file complaints of women and then the complaints are transferred to the general prosecutors. We use the method of listening to her story with patience, to give her a feeling of trust and security and don't blame her, but hold her responsible, as the feeling of responsibility gives her the kind of support and the feeling that she is human, but she* has the will that should be used.

Although there are currently family protection units in Bethlehem, Ramallah and Hebron, there is a plan to expand them to Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem, which would cover most of the West Bank. There is also an emphasis on the issue of capacity building in terms of staff training in order to promote better service and better documentation.

It is clear that the police, or particularly the family protection unit, is one of the first points of entry into the formal system for women victims of violence seeking justice. As the police receive complaints from abused women, they are responsible for following a certain set of procedures. They first send the women to the family protection unit, where they listen to them and then contact appropriate partner institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, to seek assistance and to refer seriously threatened women to a shelter. Police stations that do not have family protection units consult with general prosecutors. According to the evaluation of the Bethlehem Family Protection Unit director, the documentation process for writing complaints is not very efficient. More training is required for the creation of a complaints database and recording and documentation equipment is a priority. In general, however, women are currently interviewed in the family protection units where they are available and more are being built across the oPt.

In 2006, Human Rights Watch published a report criticizing the law of penal procedures in the oPt for aggravating the problem of VAW by not considering it to be a punishable offence. In addition, the report reflects on the ineffectuality of law enforcement policies and procedures in the oPt, which actually discourage female victims of violence from reporting cases to the police. Due to pressures deriving from societal traditions, women in the oPt are often discouraged from reporting cases of family or sexual abuse to the police (Human Rights Watch, 2006). The findings of the Human Rights Watch report were born out in the interviews conducted for this study, as many of the women interviewed seemed very insecure and skeptical about the ability of these family protection units to process VAW crimes and violations. Many shared a belief that the staff working in these units are not convinced that women victims of violence are actually victims and scapegoats of a prevailing patriarchal system of domination. The women interviewed did not believe that the family protection unit staff members were convinced of their right to be protected by the legal system, or that it was the duty of law enforcement powers to provide such protection.

All of these issues prohibit women from finding alternative coping mechanisms, meaning that most of the time, silence becomes their salvage. In another report by The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), a spokesman of the police confirmed that the number of women who are abused far exceeds the number of cases that are reported. Moreover, many of those women who

do submit complaints often withdraw them within hours of their submission (MIFTAH, 2009). This is because the police play the role of counselor and mediator, while this role should be reserved for qualified and experienced professionals.

4. Shelters: Are They Secure Places?

The director of Bethlehem's Family Protection Unit mentioned that facilities for helping women victims of violence in the oPt are limited and the number of shelters is low. There are two shelters in Bethlehem, one being the House of Girls, which serves girls under 18 years old. The other is the Mehwar Centre, which is a more advanced shelter and deals with cases that require longer protective measures. A third temporary emergency shelter exists in Jericho, which shelters abused women for a short period of time not exceeding one month. These limited facilities do not provide sustainable alternative refuge for abused women. Moreover, even these shelters are not accessible to all those who need them, as they have limited space. Thus the decision to refer a woman to a shelter is sometimes governed by the availability of space rather than the need. This has become an issue of considerable debate among decision-making circles, as ambiguity in whether to send women to shelters is caused by limited facilities, an imprecise referral system and confusion in mandates and roles of the different institutions involved. On top of these challenges, women themselves may reject the idea of going to a shelter despite the severity of their situation.

According to the head of the Family Protection Unit in Bethlehem, the decision to put abused women in a shelter depends on her specific situation; if she is pregnant outside of marriage or in danger of being killed by her family members, the decision is made by MoSA to take her to a shelter. If a woman shows signs of psychological problems and cannot make decisions on her own, a psychologist is brought in to help in recommending the right course of action. This is especially relevant for women who have been sexually abused, as they are often traumatized and their self-perception shaken. Bringing these traumatized women to a shelter and putting them with other women who are also traumatized is not always the wisest or most helpful decision. In these situations, the decision to put her in a shelter depends on the psychologist that treats her, who in some instances might choose to put her in a more relaxed context than a shelter.

The Bethlehem Family Protection Unit director stressed in her interview that the staff of the Mehwar Centre are overworked and that the institution has been extending its services and expanding its mandate more than anticipated or designed in order to cope with the urgent needs of women. She stressed the need for additional shelters, suggesting that some shelters should serve women during transitional periods, either as a pre-requisite space to psychologically prepare them for being sent to a more comprehensive shelter like the Mehwar Centre, or as a follow-up space before being reintegrated into society. Allowing for follow-up in a transitional period and space after leaving a shelter is important, as it would let women experience a greater degree of self-reliance and improve their self-esteem.

It is worth mentioning that the research team for this study attempted to visit the transitional shelter for women in Jericho, but was unable to obtain the necessary permit to do so because of bureaucratic procedures and delays resulting from the inability of the overstretched staff of the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling, which

administers the shelter, to complete the administrative procedures necessary for the permit.

5. Shelters and the Empowerment of Women Victims of Violence

Services for female survivors of gender-based violence in the oPt are limited, as shown through the different interviews conducted for this study. Shelters overseen by the Palestinian Authority are insufficient and inaccessible, as the referral system for such shelters is weak where it exists at all. The Ministry of Health has no medical procedures or protocols to guide medical professionals in their treatment of domestic violence cases (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Because shelters are often unavailable, an additional number of police, especially women police, should be deployed (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Women police can be more sensitive in dealing with abused women, especially in a society with traditional attitudes regarding a woman's role and image in society, which is a serious obstacle facing abused women seeking protection in the oPt. However, major obstacles exist that make it difficult to integrate more female police officers into the police service in the oPt, primarily the male dominated culture of the work place (Nasser, 2009).

An interview conducted with Mehwar Centre staff examined their awareness of the concepts of violence and protection, as well as the kind of strategies they promote to ensure prevention and protection. To them, "protection" meant protecting women from being killed as a priority, and then protecting them from further threats and abuse. They reported that work with women victims of violence in Mehwar's shelter takes two dimensions: physical protection and building self-esteem, with the latter accomplished through training and helping them find work opportunities. This form of empowerment is more sustainable in the practical sense and its impact on self-esteem more deep-rooted. Although the staff is aware that the shelter can change the attitude of women through rehabilitation, they also emphasized the importance of developing a supportive society in the long-term process of protecting abused women. According to their professional opinions, protection requires a period of six months to a year in the right supportive environment.

The experience of some women after leaving the Mehwar Centre proved that if they leave the Centre and are confronted with limited support in their social environment, they may come back in a worse situation than when they left. Although legal recourse can serve as a protective framework for abused women, it is often not enough, especially given that by the time women leave the shelter they may be stigmatized or labeled as "Mehwar women," which can render them vulnerable to further exploitation. If there are law enforcement policies regarding prevention of VAW and the protection of women, including punitive measures for perpetrators, then women's protection becomes more realistic and comprehensive only if these law enforcement measures are actually practiced.

Protection and empowerment, according to the staff, are linked and inseparable. As most women who go to the shelter are not threatened with death, then protection becomes the right objective and approach. Most of the women do not have primary healthcare insurance and lack knowledge of their rights in general. They also tend to have low levels of self-respect and self-appreciation. However, a rights-based approach can enhance

their self-esteem, as claiming rights can be empowering, and educating women about their rights a basic requirement for their protection. This requires a complex level of coordination by all relevant parties and bodies involved in protecting women against gender-based violence.

According to a Mehwar staff member:

> *[P]rotection is a natural right and people are born with it and it should be provided for them automatically, it is not something that we acquire. For this reason, we should work on producing the penal code, putting a stop to honor killing, and a stop to the battering of women and protect them through a national strategy. In this way we can empower and protect women. But without protection, there is no empowerment. This is a problem of society and not the individual.*

Hence, to the staff of Mehwar the protection of women is a basic right that should be granted and enforced by different laws and policies, as this is the only way to guarantee sustainable protection. A controversial issue that needs further exploration is the stigma and image of sheltered women, which can make them more vulnerable. One of the Mehwar Centre staff members reported one of her experiences on the social stigma of the shelter:

> *A judge refused to give me the chance to represent a woman from Mehwar in court. He said 'because I respect you, I refuse to put your name in the file.' He thought in this way he was doing me a favor.*

This represents another way of protecting women, where de-stigmatizing them becomes part of prevention policies. Yet, another important issue in protection as addressed by Mehwar staff is the referral system by which women victims of violence are sent to the shelter. To them, the system is problematic as it is currently undefined, decentralized and unsystematic. In this respect, they said:

> *Women who are not in our target group are sometimes brought to the center. It is not us who reject to deal with them, the point is that we do not have enough capacity and experience to deal with drug addicts or criminals or homeless women. At the end, the problem is that she has no home to go to and this is not the kind of service we offer. Girls under 18 also create a lot of problems because here in Mehwar we deal with older women with different experiences. Some women reject to stay in the shelter and this confronts us with problems that challenge the quality of our work because we have to work a lot to convince them to stay. When women refuse to stay in the shelter, it delays the implementation of our daily routine and plans.*

In this context, there is a clear rationale for developing a referral system to promote a holistic approach to supporting women victims of violence through a range of services, such as physical safety and shelter; hotlines; legal, health and social services; and psycho-social counseling. Linking services to further women's education and economic empowerment is necessary too. While there is currently no formal referral system in the West Bank, where there is a kind of loose infrastructure for referral, developing such a system does not necessarily mean establishing new services. Rather it would mean coordinating information, support and services to women victims through credible

organizations that provide quality services, making documentation a key issue. Hence, an effective referral system would be led by civil society organizations in association with relevant ministries, healthcare providers, social services and police, and linked to a legal framework (UNRWA, 2010).

6. Effectiveness with a Human Face: Procedures and Mandates

Traditional social networks, like the extended family (hamula) or the clan, as well as government ministries, like the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the police, are all uncomfortable dealing with abused women. At the same time, abused women perceive the procedures they go through to reach a shelter (such as the Mehwar Centre) to be painful experiences. In order for women victims of violence to attain their rights and ensure their protection, they must often go through such complicated procedures that it sometimes discourages them from seeking help. In the interview with staff of the Mehwar shelter as well as in the focus group discussion with abused women at the shelter, the problematic interrogation methods, disrespect of women's privacy and feelings, verbal abuse and other insensitive practices that women are subjected to when they approach Family Protection Units for help were emphasized. In the view of some staff members, such procedures complicate women's minds before they arrive at the shelter. These networks do not provide adequate reporting, often use unprofessional methods, and furthermore, give inappropriate unspecialized advice.

Women usually come to the Mehwar Center's shelter through referral from the Ministry of Social Affairs or the police. They seldom come by themselves, as explained by a staff member:

> *When women are accompanied by police or a sheikh, they feel like they are abnormal or outcasts, they tell women that they will take them to a disrespectful place. Sometimes they even give them wrong and distorted information as if they are stupid, so they are deceived, as they are not informed of the duration of the stay. They also tell them that they will be staying with women like them who smoke.*

Due to the social stigma surrounding abused women, it is clear that there is an absence of social responsibility or appreciation of their conditions. There is also a lack of understanding of the concept of a shelter, and no joint work plan that divides roles on a professional basis. One of the assumptions regarding the Mehwar Centre's shelter is that it is a place that has the potential to do everything for women victims of violence, from A to Z. However, the staff sometimes complain that the shelter has no power or capacity to do all of the things it is expected to do.

Mehwar staff have questioned the quality of services in the shelter as they believe that women have free time that should be filled with more productive activities. Although women used to have training courses in the past, they have stopped giving them any training, which in their view is important. According to the staff, abused women in the shelter need technical and other learning skills that can rehabilitate them to enter the labor market after their release from the shelter so that they can be independent. Women also need psychological support to empower them after they are released, and this is not a service that exists at this time.

The staff think that if the shelter is unable to offer these services, it should develop networking relations with other organizations whose services are useful and can be offered to women in the shelters in order to empower them. While this is true in terms of services, more support should also be given by government ministries to enhance the capacities and empowerment of women who need legal support.

Furthermore, in addition to the required reform of the Palestinian penal code to enhance women's protection, the Ministry of Women's Affairs should develop projects for rehabilitation and work, to discourage women from becoming sex workers.

According to the Mehwar staff, women are often obliged to become sex workers because there is no economic alternative for them. Thus, MoSA and MoWA should develop a plan to economically empower women and provide them with alternative options to entering into sex work. At present though, when these Ministries try to help women economically, they treat them as beggars rather than women with dignity. Women should be helped to be independent economically, so they can help themselves and their families. As one Mehwar staff member put it:

> *We Palestinian women are very strong and are ready to do farming on our own roof. Our women can make cheese, bread and yogurt, and our women have the ability to do anything. Some of our women in Mehwar worked in a textile factory and were exploited. We hope to have a productive project in Mehwar for abused women through the coordination of the Labor Ministry and the Ministry of Social Affairs. Abused women should have the opportunity to work or be supported financially when they are unemployed. Early marriage and denying women from education increases their vulnerability and should become part of the campaigns for women's empowerment and rehabilitation.*

The staff of the Mehwar Centre clearly have a critical view on the procedures that govern the relationship between the different stakeholders involved in protecting women victims of violence as well as on the representation and image of abused women in Palestinian society. They also recognize the shelter as an important tool for empowering abused women and see its collaboration with other stakeholders as a necessity for guaranteeing the sustainability of its protection initiatives.

7. Protection of Women: Formal and Informal Policies

Laws and the right procedures for referring abused women to shelters for protection are the most important forms of formal protection frameworks discussed by the Mehwar shelter staff. Yet, they also talked about the relevance of informal cultural approaches in sustainably delegitimizing VAW through tools like education and awareness-raising. These, according to their evaluation, are equally important forms of protection that should be equally stressed. As one staff member explained:

> *Laws are not practiced correctly, and at the same time, those who issue laws and those who listen to abused women should have supportive attitudes, otherwise even good laws will not help. The problem is that there is no accountability and follow-up for these cases. Sometimes the body language of these people stop women from referring to them. When ordinary people don't see a model to follow, then*

their negative practices continue and become legitimate. NGOs and government bodies can play a big role through different activities like advocacy, reforming laws, implementing and enforcing laws, giving economic opportunities for women, and raising awareness at schools.

Sustainability of shelters has been a concern to the Mehwar Centre's staff, especially given that their shelter is mainly funded by external donors, as which can threaten the sustainability of the concept of shelters as a tool for protection. They said:

An important issue regarding shelters is their sustainability in maintaining services and safeguarding their policies and procedures in order to serve the interest of women. Financial stability and sustainability are pillars for women's security. Depending on donor money means that procedures and strategies keep changing according to the wishes of the donor organization.

Shelter governance is another issue they addressed, focusing on the concept of an independent professional board of trustees that can simultaneously protect and develop the service. In addition, they talked about the importance of consistency in administration, as the Mehwar shelter has encountered different administrations over time, which have repeatedly changed their policies and thus threatened the shelter's continuity. While having a shelter as a quasi-governmental institution means financial endorsement of the government for sustainability, an independent board that can maintain the professional character of the shelter is a necessary component for its success and sustainability.

It has become clear from the interviews with Mehwar staff members that the shelter's staff has developed expertise and important experience in how to deal with complex cases in the difficult field of working with victims of VAW. Work with women victims of violence has special characteristics and the accumulation of experience is extremely important. Yet, the inability of staff to decide on the internal policies of the shelter, along with other administrative challenges and obstacles, often make their work harder. In response, the shelter's administration could enhance the shelter staff's ability to evaluate and further develop its own work.

One of the important issues regarding the sustainability and stability of the shelter is nature of governance. The major challenge is outside interference in their work, whereby external stakeholders make decisions that affect their work or impose their own vision on the shelter. According to their evaluation, they think that shelters should not be fully governmental or non-governmental facilities, but rather semi-governmental, in order to minimize the interference in their internal decisions. The success of the work at the Mehwar shelter is based on the capacity of its specialist staff to prepare appropriate work plans commensurate with their professional opinions without being undermined by external actors. Although the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the police are major actors in supporting the work of the Mehwar shelter, the shelter staff think that an official memorandum of understanding between the shelter, the courts and the Prosecutor General could make every party's role and work relations clearer. This also means that the Ministry of Social Affairs, should have a clear mandate that is free from any interference from other directorates.

The Mehwar staff also emphasized the issue of sustainability and security for the shelter and staff at a number of different levels. For instance, they said that sometimes the dangerous nature of their work compounded with receiving their salaries late and requirements for them to reapply for their job at the end of each contract, threatens their professional security. They believe that their many years of acquired experience and specialist knowledge should override certain administrative procedures that compromise their ability to work effectively and furthermore, that the work they do for abused women and the pursuit of women's rights should be better recognized.

IX. Gender Discrimination in the Legal System

The legal structure of the Palestinian Authority and the legal environment in the oPt in general, is now well-equipped to include gender equality as an important component in its laws. The first legal basis for gender equality in oPt can be found in the Declaration of Independence of 1988, which laid the ground for a constitutional framework in the oPt. This Declaration emphasized the democratic parliamentarian system, which ensures the rights of all individuals before the law and without any discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity, and color. This framework sets the legal environment for the Palestinian state and calls for gender equality.

The Basic Law, which came into effect on 7 July 2007, is the substitute constitution for the transitional period as indicated in the Oslo Agreements. The Law No.111 gives the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) the responsibility to reform laws. In this context, the only way that law can be functional and ensure gender equality is through legislation and law enforcement.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority has limits on its jurisdiction and capacity to enforce laws, especially in Area C and to a certain degree in Area B. This exposes large parts of the Palestinian population in the oPt to further vulnerabilities and no legal protection, placing them under continuous threat and harm.

The only tool that can control violence in general as well as specifically protect women and girls from patriarchal violence and ensure their personal security from perpetrators is the law. This is especially true in the context of geographic and social fragmentation, where social networks have collapsed. Theoretically, legal frameworks for addressing the different forms of violence in the oPt exist, but weaknesses in these laws and the failure in enforcing protection compromises the rule of law and jeopardizes the security of women. Hence, this is an important issue that should be addressed in order to ensure the protection of all women in the oPt without any discrimination.

1. Functionality of Existing Legal Frameworks

The legal system in the oPt is not only very complex, but often irrelevant in providing protection to women from violence given its conservative and discriminative nature. In her study People Behind the Walls, Women Behind the Walls, Musleh addresses the nature of the present-day legal system in the oPt as an extension and legacy of different colonial and authoritarian patriarchal systems that has only undergone minor local amendments. For the most part, the current legal system was inherited from the

Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate for Palestine. It was last amended in the 1950s and 1960s by the administrations of Egypt in the Gaza Strip and Jordan in the West Bank. To give an example, the Jordanian Penal Law No.16 (1960) and Egyptian Penal Law No. 58 (1937) are still in effect in the West Bank and Gaza Strip respectfully, in the absence of a unified Palestinian penal code.

Furthermore, the Palestinian Authority cannot legally sign or ratify any international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), creating a gap in the Palestinian criminal justice system when it comes to legislating for the protection of women against violence. Moreover, ratifying international agreements assumes that PA bodies and structures are fully liberated, functional and capable of carrying out their jobs, but at present, this is all but an illusion. Therefore, Palestinians are generally very critical of any view that attempts to divorce the political reality from the facts of colonization, even if in the pursuit of human rights (Johnson, 2006). At the same time, casting Palestinian society strictly as a victim also results in a problematic misreading of the reality in the oPt, as Palestinian civil society organizations have consistently worked on social issues and exposed the neglect and incapacity of the PA since the early nineties. Also worthy of note, the 2006 Human Rights Watch report on VAW in the oPt noted that the weakness in the criminal investigations of the Palestinian police signals a fatal gap in the structures meant to protect women from abuse and violence (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

In addition, previous studies on VAW in the oPt (Human Rights Watch, 2006; Nassar, 2007) have found some provisions in existing (inherited) penal codes applicable in the West Bank and Gaza that also discriminate against women. The complete absence of specific laws that would criminalize domestic or sexual violence is problematic. Too often in the oPt, domestic and sexual violence are treated as private affairs and not as matters of public concern. For instance, Jordanian Law No.16 (1960), which is still applicable in West Bank today, classifies sexual violence (both rape and incest) under crimes “against public morals and ethics,” rather than as crimes against the physical integrity of the individual (Human Rights Watch, 2006). Rape laws enforced in the oPt distinguish between virgin and non-virgin victims of sexual violence, with harsher penalties meted out to victims who are thought to have been virgins. Prevailing law also criminalizes abortion in cases of rape or incest, forcing victims of sexual violence to carry their pregnancy to full term. Even more disturbingly, laws in force in the West Bank and Gaza relieve rapists from any criminal prosecution if they marry their victims.

Another problem is the failure of the Jordanian Penal Law (No.16, 1960) applicable in the West Bank and the Egyptian Penal Law (No. 74, 1936) applicable in the Gaza Strip to recognize sexual violence committed within marriage as a crime. Article 340 of the Jordanian Penal Law (No. 16, 1960), in fact reduces penalties for “honor” crimes. Under Article 340, any man who kills or attacks his wife or any of his female relatives while she is committing adultery is exempt from punishment. Men who kill women whom they find in an “unlawful bed” may receive a reduced sentence. The Egyptian Penal Law applicable in Gaza also imposes discriminatory penalties for women committing adultery; a wife is penalized for two years, whereas a husband is penalized for no more than six months. Such discriminatory policies create an environment in which the public opinion of the region as a whole undermines efforts to combat VAW and discourages

women from seeking official channels of support, particularly legal support. At the same time, shari'a family law is also an issue of concern for women victims of violence that adds to their vulnerability, especially as it is based on a complementary notion of gender, rather than equality. On the whole, this indicates that the existing legal framework in the oPt, as such, is not sufficient in protecting women; the capacity of different legal actors is not enhanced, legal provisions are not enforced, and the judiciary is not gender-sensitive. Furthermore, the judiciary's gender balance is quite low, with only 12% of judges and 11% of prosecutors being female (PCBS, 2008).

2. Failure of Law Enforcement

As the Palestinian laws currently in force are outdated and unrealistic in dealing with domestic violence, and the international community does not enforce Israel's compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, the question then becomes: what is the right legal framework for protecting women from the violence of the occupation and the violence of patriarchal hegemony? What are the legal frameworks that can be both functional and offer the best protection possible at the political and domestic level in the oPt?

At the national level, Israel does not enforce its civil or criminal laws on the settlers who attack local communities in the oPt, including attacks on women and girls. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority lacks the jurisdiction to even follow up on these cases. In addition, the Palestinian Legislative Council is currently suspended, so there is no possibility to reform or lobby for change in the existing laws, despite the fact that some of these laws have not been revised for half a century. Moreover, the absence of a forceful and well-coordinated civil society in the oPt allowed the PA to get away with not reforming its laws prior to the current state of political stalemate. Although there was a window of opportunity for legal reform in the oPt, civil society was not strong or quick enough to seize it due to a limited level of coordination and inadequate public support from the community.

3. Parallel and Contradictory Laws

The West Bank and Gaza have different judicial systems, which hinders the pursuit of justice. At the same time, local customary laws are most commonly used to settle disputes and crimes in the oPt, as is the nature in most patriarchal societies. These local customary laws are based on reconciliation and exclude women from decision-making. They deal with women as victims who have no say. Particularly important in this context is the situation of women who have been raped and are persuaded or forced to marry their rapists as a solution to the crime. This practice in and of itself is very abusive to women, as they are obliged to then live and look after their rapists. Hence, marriage becomes just a procedure for resolving the problem between the two families on the account of women. Although local customary laws are often used as a practical, informal system of justice that can fix a complicated issue in a shorter span of time than the courts, it is always at the expense of women and should not be accepted as a solution or a valid form of negotiation.

X. Shaping the Future Together: A Framework for Developing Good Practices

Primary prevention of violence cannot be effective if there is no minimal government commitment to prevention. Similarly, it cannot be effective without the political will to enforce international human rights, implement existing laws, and provide basic services to address the consequences of violence. Prevention and protection of women subjected to violence requires a holistic approach, without which preventive and protective measures can never materialize. Preventive practices should eradicate all sources of GBV, including violence caused by militarization, conflict and colonial occupation, as well as violence resulting from patriarchal hegemony and discrimination against women through daily practices and laws. Such practices should eliminate the conditions of women's disempowerment that ensure the continuation of an undemocratic environment in which respect for women's rights is not seen as an integral part of human rights, and hence does not enforce protection through international and local legal frameworks. Such preventative practices could be implemented if the following measures are carried out:

a. **Define** VAW in all of its forms and meanings and expose its prevalence in order to delegitimize colonial oppression and male control over female sexuality in the oPt.

b. **Criminalize** rape (including marital rape), honor killings, and sexual abuse and exploitation, as they have already been criminalized in many different countries, in order to safeguard women and ensure their protection.

c. **Emphasize** law enforcement, legal reform, and the development of new legislation to protect women's rights against violence and abuse.

d. **Ensure** support, participation and cooperation of government and civil society organizations in the enforcement of the Palestinian National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women.

e. **Use** all international agreements and instruments that outlaw the practices of occupation to support the work of the government and civil society organizations in combating VAW, especially political violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupation.

f. **Utilize** relevant international frameworks that can be locally adapted to report and assess VAW in the oPt, including the adoption of baseline indicators that can guide the implementation of an assessment within the framework of CEDAW.

g. **Raise** and allocate funds for programs that work on VAW prevention, research and policy reform and development, as effective policies can act as safeguards to both formal and informal national policies, as well as funds for sustaining activities working to change cultural stereotypes surrounding issues of VAW through education and awareness-raising.

h. **Improve** the noticeably limited VAW expertise of all individuals and practitioners within formal and informal organizations, particularly those within the referral system, by upgrading their qualifications and building their capacity to better understand and deal with GBV.

i. **Provide** monitoring and technical assistance for the effective implementation of international instruments and local legal frameworks related to combating VAW.

j. **Create** a transparent mechanism with which civil society organizations can monitor the implementation of the National Strategy to Combat VAW.

k. **Eradicate** stereotypes and gender-based gaps in knowledge about VAW through continuous learning processes and awareness-raising activities in both formal and informal education.

1. Practices at the Local Level

Local councils, institutions, the private sector, the media, civil society organizations and groups within local communities are all key actors in the effort to create an environment in which VAW is intolerable. In order to prevent VAW, women must achieve economic, political and social empowerment, and a critical mass of activists, political parties and women's organizations must mobilize to influence public opinion and make violence unacceptable. In addition, the Palestinian government, civil society and women's organizations should put more pressure on the international community and diplomatic fora to decrease the political and economic pressures facing Palestinian men and women, which are instigating cycles of violence in the current context, and to force Israel to end its occupation. Furthermore, a variety of strategies and approaches should be concurrently implemented so the impact is well-integrated and sustainable, leading to lasting changes in social norms and attitudes about VAW in the oPt. These general suggestions should be promoted at different levels through means such as those outlined below.

1. a Investigating and Prosecuting Complaints

a. Further coordination of efforts, clarification of procedures, emphasis on the ethical codes of conduct for treating VAW victims, and the training of service providers to deal with VAW victims with sensitivity and professionalism are key in preventing VAW and providing holistic protection for those women who have been victims of violence. To achieve these key outcomes, the following suggestions taken from procedures practiced in a number of different settings, could be useful:

b. Link prosecution, protection and services. This is a good practice that can protect women and, at the same time, ensure quality services. For instance, as in other settings in the developing world, specialized domestic courts should incorporate services for victims along with criminal prosecution.

c. Establish referral systems to divide roles and mandates, and link referral centers to hospitals to provide 24-hour help for victims of rape and sexual abuse. In this way, cases can be reported professionally and forensic

examinations completed at the same time, both while the victim is under the supervision of expert medical and psychological support. Increase the number of Family Protection Units within police departments (and in the future, women-only police stations) and improve their reporting of VAW cases so as to increase the level of prosecution of violent crimes and encourage women to report their cases and ask for assistance.

d. Include clauses to combat VAW as a part of legal reform, particularly in criminal and penal codes.

e. Upgrade the documentation skills of the police and Family Protection Units needed to qualify them for recording VAW complaints and undertaking preliminary investigations, as they have the power to intervene and arrest perpetrators. In support of this, evidence should be properly collected. Thus, better technology should be developed for collecting evidence, with an added emphasis placed on documentation processes for the purpose of follow-up.

1.b Maintaining the Rights of Victims

A rights-based approach is the only approach capable of fully protecting women and guaranteeing their ability to claim their rights, which must be guaranteed by the law. The historic attitudes, myths and stereotypes about women's behavior and sexuality are the foundation of the burden of shame and stigma that VAW victims often carry with them in the oPt. Hence, victims' privacy, dignity and autonomy should be enhanced in the legal process. Some good practices for achieving such legal reform and showing greater respect for the conditions of abused women are exemplified in following suggestions:

a. Change some traditional practices in order to protect women's dignity and integrity. More specifically, outlaw virginity tests; give police the power to remove domestic violence perpetrators from the home for a few days, with women able to ask for an extension; replace the practice of detaining women victims of violence in jails for their protection and instead create safe houses or shelters for them; and make punishments and penalties for VAW perpetrators proportional to the severity of the offence or crime, and not according to local customary laws.

b. Combine protection orders with provisions for maintenance, child support, custody and child contact. To respect the privacy and maintain the dignity of women victims of violence, they should not have to repeat their stories to different units, departments, ministries, or people involved in the process of ensuring that they are sheltered.

1. c Implementation of the Law

Ensuring the successful implementation of laws require the resources to build both effective institutions as well as the skills and capacities of personnel. Hence, specialized police units, prosecution departments, courts, qualified staff and sufficient funding, are all factors for success. In this context, the following good practices may help to obtain and leverage the resources needed for successful law implementation:

a. Guarantee the gender-sensitivity of the judiciary and all actors in the legal domain, particularly including gender-sensitive female judges and prosecutors familiar with GBV issues.
b. Give experienced civil society organizations the opportunity to provide relevant training for state bodies on how to deal with GBV and VAW issues.
c. Train police officers about GBV and relevant legal procedures.
d. Encourage research and data gathering on VAW in the oPt in order to define trends and promote protective remedies.
e. Conduct both internal and external evaluations of the legal enforcement process for laws pertaining to GBV and VAW to ensure improvement.
f. Advocate and promote legal reform in the context of domestic violence through joint work by concerned ministries and specialized civil society organizations, particularly the Network for Combating Violence against Women (Al-Muntada).

1. d Provision of Services

All women whose human rights have been violated should have access to justice, healthcare and support services that respond to their short and long-term needs. Most of the time, however, women across the globe suffer the consequences of violence in silence, unable to get the help they need due to limited support services in their countries. Many women also feel ashamed, anxious, unworthy, and guilty about seeking out and using such services, or are either unaware of or do not trust the services that exist (UN, 2005).

In many contexts, the primary support services for women victims of violence are provided by the state, while other secondary support services like advocacy and capacity-building are provided by NGOs. In the oPt, however, government intervention in service provision for victims of GBV has been recent. As a result, NGOs are more advanced in dealing with women's issues in the oPt, as they have been dealing with these issues since long before the PA's arrival in the early nineties. For both the PA and NGOs though, the services they provide for women victims of violence should be accessible through both formal and informal means, as women can sometimes feel ashamed to ask about them. Through experience, women's organizations in the oPt have found ways to announce their services and reach women in need. According to a number of different studies elsewhere, in the aftermath of violence, women and girls often feel more trusting towards other female staff. This highlights the importance of training and placing more women in the front-line of both governmental and non-governmental departments and units that deal with abused women.

In the oPt, in addition to the Mehwar shelter that is the main refuge available for abused women, different women's organizations like WCLAC and SAWA offer other important services, including help hotlines, temporary shelters, legal aid and counseling. These organizations have also produced different studies that not only investigate violence and its various forms, but also define and clarify concepts that are important and functional for the process of women's protection and empowerment. Their research and experience promote new models that continue to improve services.

Among the services that should be offered to women victims of violence in the oPt free of charge are: continuous hotlines that can provide information, advocacy and counseling advice; long-term support for women and their children, such as shelters; capacity-building for communities and informal networks to ensure that support is offered to victims; a simple and efficient referral system that attends to women's immediate medical, legal, psychological, emotional and social needs; job opportunities for women survivors of violence in important roles as facilitators, experienced workers and vital sources of information for women's change and empowerment.

1.e Coordination and Networking

There is a necessity for networking, cooperation and coordination in the field of combating VAW, as the provision of services, support and protection for women victims of violence requires the interlinking of different kinds of organizations, different kinds of expertise and different levels of governmental and non-governmental coordination.

In the oPt, coordination in the field of combating VAW needs strengthening at two levels. The first level is among NGOs themselves. While the **Forum for Combating Violence against Women (Al-Muntada)** already exists, it needs further strengthening and more coordination. One of the problems it faces is that there are two levels of organizations within the forum: more developed and experienced organizations that have been working to combat VAW for decades versus organizations that work on general advocacy programs in various areas that include combating violence against women. This latter group of organizations lacks the focus and expertise to serve within the same capacity as the more experienced organizations. This disparity in focus and capacity weakens the overall level of coordination between the organizations, especially as the expert organizations are often over-burdened with work and only join the less experienced organizations in coordination with international advocacy campaigns.

The second level of coordination in need of improvement in the field of combating VAW in the oPt is between NGOs and formal bodies like PA Ministries, police departments and the legal system. NGOs have much valuable experience to impart to these governmental bodies, but this exchange of information has not been institutionalized in a coherent manner. The evidence-based information within this report has stressed that coordination and networking are essential components for strengthening the services offered for VAW victims. It also points to the importance of developing the processes of prevention and protection and building a model for the empowerment of abused women. Such cooperation and coordination would have a positive impact on women and, at the same time, shorten the period of their suffering.

2. Preventing Violence against Women

As violence is a multifaceted problem with political, biological, psychological, economic and social roots, there is no easy or simple way to create a comprehensive solution. Prevention should be prioritized, not just included in programs and policies, it should address combating VAW at different levels: individual, family, community and societal.

On the ***individual level***, prevention of violence should focus on the socialization of children and young people and delegitimizing violence as a way of dialogue or solving problems. Instead, it should encourage healthy attitudes through alternative means other than violence. This can be achieved through the socialization of individual family members in a way that focuses on making the family a democratic model for positive education, or through educational and social programs that emphasize social and communication skills. Other options might include counseling programs for victims of violence, those at risk of violence, as well as perpetrators of violence. Furthermore, counseling on violence could also work as part of a collective healing process where counselors visit the families at home and the issue is discussed amongst everybody, including the victim and the perpetrator.

On the family level, programs should be promoted that positively influence gender relations and the types of relationships that victims and perpetrators have with the people they interact with on daily basis. For example, to address problems such as conflict between partners, coping with economic pressures and emotional problems between parents and children, group counseling and training programs that target the parents can improve social ties within the family. In general, family therapy programs that include home visitation by counselors can improve communication and interaction between family members, which can safeguard the family in the future.

In a focus group discussion with mothers of abused women, the mothers indicated that they felt a great deal of pain for their daughters suffering from violence. They expressed the opinion that the violence their daughters are facing is not acceptable in religious or cultural terms. They showed much solidarity and support for their daughters, and were ready to make their daughters divorce their abusive husbands and return to live in their parents' homes. One of the obstacles facing abused wives, however, is the fact that getting a divorce may threaten their custody rights to their children, which would not only deprive mothers of their children, but also potentially put the children at risk of violence from their fathers. This circumstance in particular places immense pressure on women to tolerate violence.

In the same focus group discussion, the mothers of abused women also supported the idea of sending their daughters to a shelter, but claimed that the sheltering period was not enough to protect them from future abuse, as they would have to go back to the same abusive environment. All the moral empowerment that the women would gain while in the shelter would collapse the minute they went back to their families and faced their husbands. The mothers emphasized their daughters' need for empowerment, especially economic empowerment, which they defined as finding employment opportunities and becoming independent from their husbands.

On another level, the mothers participating in the focus group reported that the male members of abused women's families often refused to offer them refuge in their homes, as women who have been in shelters retain a stigma that their fathers and brothers refuse to tolerate. The mothers expressed their agony about this and reported that they are trying their best to convince the men in their families to accept their abused daughters.

On the community or societal level, prevention programs should target public awareness through campaigns; initiate public debate within the community and school; stimulate community action; address the real causes of violence; and make known that the system of care and support for VAW victims is important and necessary. These goals can be achieved through different tools related to the government or civil society organizations, particularly women's organizations. For instance, at the political level, political pressure should be exerted on international organizations, especially the UN, to oblige Israel to abide by international human rights conventions and international humanitarian law. At the same time, standards should also be set for basing national legislation in the oPt on international treaties in relation to women's rights, particularly CEDAW. Legally, passing legislation and other judicial remedies to improve the legal mechanisms for protection against GBV and ensuring that there are no exceptions to the enforcement of punitive measures against perpetrators of violence are also key issues for prevention.

On an advocacy level, efforts should be made to change the prevailing cultural and social traditions that influence, encourage or accept VAW through education and media programs that target entire communities and Palestinian society as a whole. Educational campaigns about GBV in schools, workplaces and health institutions are also needed. Extracurricular activities like therapy programs through sports, drama, art and music should also be utilized. In this respect, empowering civil society organizations, particularly the Network for Combating Violence Against Women (Al-Muntada), is necessary for coordinating community interventions. Expanding the level of coordination between NGOs and concerned PA Ministries, along with building the capacity of personnel to more efficiently deal with abused women, could greatly enhance violence prevention strategies.

Policy changes must also be proposed to reduce poverty, unemployment and inequality, and to improve the system of support services for families, such as social assistance, economic schemes, job creation, better education, child-care facilities, etc. As research has shown, capacity building for police and health professionals within the framework of protection from gender-based violence is also much needed. Such training would not only help them identify and respond to incidences of GBV, but also help change the institutional environment by encouraging the development and enforcement of appropriate policies. Building capacity and expanding the concept of shelters for women victims of violence is also important, as opening more shelters, expanding their services and improving staff working conditions can enable current staff to fully utilize their expertise to improve the quality of their care for victims.

XI. Conclusion

Due to the prolonged colonial occupation of the oPt, violence against women has become a more complex phenomenon, as political violence has directly and indirectly affected the escalation of VAW and violence within the family. Hence, to deal with VAW one has to deconstruct the overall reality in a way that can expose and address the linkages between all forms of violence, yet also attend to each form of violence as an independent violation requiring specific preventive measures.

As VAW is preventable and there are concrete ways to protect women, identifying factors leading to violence can provide timely warning to practitioners and decision makers that action is required. Understanding the context of VAW is important for developing and promoting interventions as well as tailoring appropriate measures for protection. The isolation and fragmentation in types of violence then affects the scope and effectiveness of interventions.

Because violence is not a neutral phenomenon, resources should be enhanced to focus on the most marginalized and vulnerable social groups in the oPt. While all social classes experience violence, research has shown that women with the lowest socio-economic status are at greater risk. Hence, in order to prevent violence, the government must ensure that its various protection mechanisms and services reach and adequately serve the poor and socially marginalized. The cornerstone to achieving this is full political commitment to tackling GBV. Although communities and civil society organizations are more developed in addressing VAW issues, commitment at the national level, where policy, legislative and overall funding decisions are made, is vital. Therefore cooperative and coordinated efforts from different stakeholders and sectors of society are absolutely necessary for enhancing political commitment to combat VAW.

XII. Recommended Actions

1. End the Israeli occupation of the oPt.
Research findings clearly show that political violence caused by the Israeli occupation directly and indirectly impacts the prevalence of violence within the family sphere in the oPt. The many pressures resulting from occupation violence add to the tensions within the family, which may expand the occurrence of domestic violence in the oPt.

2. Implement and monitor the National Strategy for Combating Violence against Women.
The National Strategy is an important tool for action that also serves as a guideline and frame of reference for preventing and promoting effective responses to VAW that can be monitored over time. As the plan has been produced through a participatory approach, there is a relative consensus among governmental and non-governmental organizations on the value of its content and structure. It should therefore be quite effective in comprehensively dealing with violence. Financial and human resources should be mobilized to ensure its success.

3. Promote primary VAW prevention responses.
Primary prevention responses were one of the recommendations by the World Health Organization report on VAW in the oPt. Primary prevention responses should enhance the role of health care in preventing the occurrence of VAW through the provision of better health care for mothers, training on good parenting practices, better physical and socio-economic infrastructure for dealing with victims' needs, media campaigns to change prevailing attitudes against abused women and their image, social development programs for children, and so on.

4. Promote an efficient referral system for women victims of violence.
All the information gathered from the field has shown that an effective referral system for women victims of violence is not yet in place in the oPt. Although some components of an adequate referral system do exist, they are not coordinated. Overall, the existing referral system is inefficient and improvements are currently made only on a trial-and-error basis. Thus, it is important that different stakeholders, mainly MoWA, MoSA, Family Protection Units, and UNRWA, develop and promote a new initiative based on past evaluations to implement a framework for a more efficient, effective and victim-sensitive referral system that can better serve women victims of violence in the oPt.

5. Support research that targets consequences and costs of VAW.
There are many reasons to undertake research on VAW, including gaining more understanding of these problems so that appropriate responses can be developed. Research that evaluates and assesses the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating VAW and understands the real structural gaps in its implementation should be conducted to shed light on the gaps in the action plan and its supporting services in order to enable the different partners to promote workable solutions for VAW.

6. Strengthen responses to women victims of violence.
Health institutions and shelters represent permanent or temporary spaces in which VAW victims take refuge. Family protection units in police departments throughout the oPt should aim to provide high quality care to victims of all types of violence, as well as the rehabilitation and support services needed to prevent further consequences from violence. Priorities should include:

- Improving hotlines and emergency help lines for women victims of violence.
- Recognizing signs of VAW incidents and referring victims to appropriate agencies for follow-up and support.
- Integrating modules on the prevention of VAW into the curricula for medical and nursing students.
- Developing the quality of services available at women's shelters, women's organizations and clinics to deal with VAW victims at social, legal and psychological levels.

7. Increase coordination and collaboration among all concerned stakeholders in combating VAW.
One of the keys for success in serving women victims of violence in the oPt is increasing coordination among all concerned organizations, including MoWA, MoSA, police departments, family protection units and civil society organizations. Coordination and cooperation can enhance the quality of services offered, and at the same time ensure that the processes for protection and empowerment are achieved for VAW victims in the oPt. The existing Network for Combating Violence against Women (Al-Muntada), which includes all experienced women's organizations in the oPt that work in the area

of combating VAW, can collectively make a positive contribution to this coordination process.

8. Integrate VAW prevention policies into social and educational policies.
In order to ensure the strategic impact of efforts to prevent VAW, the government's formal educational system and NGOs offering informal education should integrate their educational policies to promote gender equality and create an environment in which GBV is unacceptable.

9. Create a monitoring process for adherence to international treaties, laws and other mechanisms that guarantee and protect human and women's rights.
Both the PA and NGOs have signed different international legal agreements that have direct relevance to violence and its prevention, and which set standards for national legislation. Although different countries in the region have made some progress, Palestinians in the oPt need to make legal reforms and, at the same time, ensure the enforcement of laws so that perpetrators are punished. It is important that all forms of VAW are punished according to the degree of violation committed. In order to achieve this, strong campaigns by civil society organizations are necessary to bring about changes in legislation and law enforcement in the oPt.

10. Build capacity for combating VAW at different levels.
Capacity-building and training of personnel working in the different areas of support services for women victims of violence are necessary to develop the quality of personnel performance and ensure protection and prevention against violence. Promoting better qualifications and skills for different groups, including staff of shelters, police departments, family protection units, health practitioners, researchers, casework interviewers, prosecutors and lawyers, is an important part of the protection and prevention process in combating VAW.

11. Involve men in VAW prevention.
Efforts aimed at ending VAW and attaining gender equality greatly involve and must address men, as constructions of masculinity very often play a crucial role in shaping manifestations of VAW at the individual, family and societal levels. As the issue of VAW is important for men and women alike, then men also have a stake in ending VAW.

12. Empower women victims of violence.
To ensure the sustainability of women's protection from violence, it should be linked to women's empowerment. This linkage of protection to empowerment represents an intricate issue, as VAW is a tool for disempowering women. It destroys their self-confidence and self-worth, thus diminishing their ability to resist violence and live to their full potential. Hence, women can only resist the abuse against them through their empowerment at both individual and collective levels. Because VAW can occur in the private sphere as well as public sphere, as it is a consequence of structural violence caused by militarization and patriarchy as a means of control over women, an approach that empowers women rather than victimizes them is needed to combat it.

The struggle for gender equality is not an individual effort. Women's organizations, including the Palestinian women's movement, should adopt VAW as one of the areas for focused advocacy and campaigning to put pressure on the PA to reform legal frameworks and enforce laws that punish perpetrators of VAW without exceptions. Hence, all efforts should be combined to make ending VAW not only a slogan, but a reality.

Annex I

Guiding Questions for Interviews and Focus Group Discussions Used in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

I. Questions for abused women
Personal information:

Area
Education
Occupation
Nuclear or extended family
Husband's occupation and age
Financial status
Age
Reason for not completing education
Marital status
What age did you get married?
Number of children

What is the reaction of your children when you are abused by your husband?
Do you know any woman who suffers or has suffered from domestic violence?
Focus group: (number of women, place, date)

1. **Procedures of police:**
   a. Did police listen to your story?
   b. How were you treated by police?
   c. Did police put you in custody and for how long?
   d. Were you interrogated?
   e. How did you feel during interrogation?
   f. Did you choose to go to a shelter?

2. **The Ministry of Social Affairs:**
   a. Did you come to the shelter through the Ministry of Social Affairs and how?
   b. How has the Ministry of Social Affairs supported you from the beginning of your problem until now?

3. **Courts and legal issues (in case involving legal issues):**
   a. Do you have a lawyer?
   b. Who provided you with a lawyer?
   c. Was your lawyer present during prosecutor interrogation?
   d. Did you attend the court?

Her recommendations:

   e. What are your recommendations regarding the shelter (how and in what way can it be improved)?
   f. What are your recommendations regarding society, how can it help you?
   g. Did you take any training offered by women's organizations and in what?

II. Suggested questions for interviews with women's organizations, the police and different ministries

Women's organizations:

1. How and when did you start your program on violence against women? What factors have you taken to define the nature of intervention?
2. What is the intervention of your organization in combating violence against women?
3. Based on your experience, how should your process of intervention be developed?
4. What are the successes?
5. What are the challenges?
6. What are your specific recommendations towards the police department, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, general prosecutors and judges?

Police:

1. Who is an abused woman in your opinion?
2. How do you perceive your role in combating violence against women?
3. How do you protect an abused woman in case she refuses to go to a shelter?
4. How do you think the process of interrogation should be conducted?
5. Are there special procedures of interrogation and documentation when an abused woman approaches the police?
6. Who interrogates these women? Do you think the presence of a social counselor specialized in working with abused women is necessary in the process of interrogation?
7. Do you take the wishes of abused women into consideration before sending them to a shelter or their family? Who decides?
8. What do you think a shelter is for?
9. What kind of recommendations do you think are important at the policy level to make your work easier and more sensitive towards women's needs?

Ministry of Social Affairs:

1. Who is an abused woman?
2. What should a shelter be in your opinion?
3. Does an abused woman have the right to decide her own future?
4. What are the challenges in building shelters and supporting abused women?
5. What are the successes on the national level regarding combating violence against women?
6. What is the strategy regarding supporting abused women on the national level?
7. How does the Ministry of Social Affairs support an abused woman who refuses to go back to the same abusive environment?
8. Do you coordinate with the Ministries of Women's Affairs, Labor and Interior in finding ways to solve the problems of abused women in a comprehensive way? Is there a unified vision and system of support that you believe can give quality services to abused women?

Ministry of Women's Affairs:

1. How do you describe your efforts for combating violence against women since you are responsible for drawing a national policy for combating VAW through the national committee for combating VAW?
2. Do you think that there are other things that you would like to include to make your efforts more successful?
3. Have you integrated the voice of abused women in drawing your National Strategy for Combating VAW? Are you sure that you are expressing their needs? Why and how?
4. How do you supervise or measure the implementation of national policy regarding abused women?
5. Do you think that the gender departments in the various ministries are effective in mainstreaming gender interests? How, in the absence of a national policy towards women's rights in general, can change be achieved?
6. Do you coordinate with other ministries?

The Ministry of Interior:

1. Do you think the "family protection unit" is a good addition to the police department, and how sensitive is it towards gender?
2. How do you measure gender sensitivity of the "family protection unit"?
3. Have you ever discussed with abused women their evaluation of police services?
4. How does the police department ensure confidentiality and privacy of abused women who refer to the police department? Are there any procedures that the police department follows to ensure privacy?
5. Are police men or women accountable in case of the mistreatment of an abused woman, such as disrespecting her privacy as well as endangering her?
6. What are the challenges in your opinion?
7. Do you subject the police for training that takes issues of gender-based violence into consideration?

Ministry of Labor:

1. How do you think the Ministry of Labor can support abused women?
2. Are there programs within the ministry that can provide women subjected to violence with skills and work opportunities?
3. Women are exploited in informal labor markets like textiles factories (low salaries and long working hours), so how can the Ministry of Labor limit this phenomenon and not make it as a solution for these abused women?

General prosecutors and judges:

1. Have you reviewed the laws in a gender perspective? How do they perceive laws regarding violence against women?
2. Do you think that there should be some well-defined procedures in laws and courts that can protect women victims of violence?
3. What kind of challenges do you think you face when dealing with women victims of violence?
4. What in your opinion is needed to make the legal environment more receptive towards these sensitive issues?

Questions for the family of a sheltered woman:

1. Why do you think your daughter was abused?
2. Do you think the abuser has the right to abuse her?
3. What could you do to prevent the abusive behavior?
4. How did you feel and what did you think when she was sheltered?
5. How did you support her during the time she was sheltered?
6. How can you support her after she has suffered violence?
7. What difficulties did you face all the way through this experience?

Questions for people who have experience working with people with special needs:

1. Through your experience, how do you see the relation of families with children with special needs?
2. Are they abused in the family?
3. Do they talk about the violence used against them?
4. How do gender differences affect people with special needs?
5. How do you help them?
6. What do you suggest for protecting them from various kinds of violence?

Questions exploring abuse of the elderly:

1. Do you live alone or with your family?
2. Do you get periodical medical checkup?
3. Who takes you for the medical checkup?
4. Who buys you medicine?
5. Who takes care of you when you feel tired?
6. Do you have someone to do your shopping?
7. What do you do when you feel bored or sad?
8. What makes you feel happy?
9. What makes you feel unhappy?

Annex II

List of organizations and focus groups interviewed

Gaza:

1. Focus group of eight lawyers
2. Interview with the Ministry of Women's Affairs
3. Interview with three organizations combating violence against women
4. Interview with eight abused women
5. Interview with eight women living near the buffer zone.
6. Interview with eight students and university graduates chosen randomly to test their knowledge on GBV
7. Interview with the Ministry of Social Affairs
8. Interview with nine activists combating violence against women

West Bank:

1. Focus group of 18 abused women
2. Individual meetings with eight abused women.
3. Meeting with the shelter staff of the Mehwar Centre
4. Interview with the undersecretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs
5. Interview with the undersecretary of the Ministry of Women's Affairs
6. Interview with the family protection unit in the Bethlehem police department (since the head of the Ramallah Family Protection Unit was busy).
7. Interview with the head of the NGO Sawa, and also as a member of Al-Muntada coalition
8. Interview with an expert working with people with special needs
9. Interview with elderly women
10. Interview with families of abused women
11. Interview with the Ministry of Interior

- The Ministry of Labor refused our interview saying the issue is not related to their work.
- Interviews with judges and the general prosecutor were refused under the pretext of being busy.
- Meeting with Al-Muntada (some members), but failed to meet with all of the Forum due to their busy schedule.
- The interview with sheltered women in Jericho did not take place because of administrative obstacles.
- The interview with the Director of Jericho's safe house did not occur due to administrative obstacles.

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