

# YOUTH WELLBEING IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

An in-depth, multi-level, and interdisciplinary study into wellbeing and gender equality among Palestinian youth



This study presents an important opportunity to fill a gap in knowledge by offering a critical understanding of the state of youth wellbeing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through a comprehensive interdisciplinary and multi-level approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, we can explore the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion from the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth agency.

The study analyses wellbeing and gender relations for their importance, particularly in the context of the OPT, where youth are especially vulnerable and where wellbeing is threatened.

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This paper was written by The Institute of Community and Public Health-Birzeit University.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email [advocacy@oxfaminternational.org](mailto:advocacy@oxfaminternational.org)

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# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Youth, a group which are often defined as young women and young men between the ages of 15 and 29, account for nearly one-sixth of the world's population, and this proportion is expected to increase over the coming decades. This population is important, not only because it constitutes a significant and growing proportion of the global population but also because youth represent the future of society, and can play an important role in social, political, and economic development both nationally and globally.<sup>1</sup> Importantly, many youth are currently facing significant internal and external challenges and stressors, often as a result of broader structural factors.<sup>2</sup>

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), young women and men aged 15–29 constitute roughly one-third of the population. Despite the importance of this group in influencing the future direction of society, Palestinian youth face significant difficulties and obstacles, including high rates of unemployment, poor living conditions, and heightened insecurity stemming from the Israeli military occupation.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, within Palestinian society, youth are marginalized and excluded from full participation in public and political life.<sup>4</sup> They also face growing social pressures caused by conservatism, patriarchy, gender discrimination, and unequal distribution of social and political power.<sup>5</sup> These dimensions, including the occupation, shape the environment in which Palestinian youth live and through which they must navigate, and are likely to have adverse impacts on their wellbeing.

Women in the OPT, just like in other societies, face gender inequality and marginalization. Many changes need to be made in the spheres of education, the labour force, wages, and decision making to increase the inclusion of women. Palestinian women have double the disadvantages compared with men, as they have to deal both with gender inequality within their society and with the Israeli occupation, which affects their physical and mental wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Despite improvements in education for women, more progress is needed to increase their participation in leadership roles and in the labour force. Only 19.6% of women were engaged in the formal labour force in 2017, in contrast with their heavy burden of domestic and care work.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, gender dynamics are important to understanding how young women and men experience equality and equity, which are influenced by a complex web of cultural and social factors.

Although more attention has been paid recently to youth as a sector in research in the OPT, the data available remain limited.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the majority of research done on youth exclusion has utilized uni-dimensional and uni-level analytical approaches. Much of the existing literature focuses on the economic dimension of exclusion (particularly

unemployment), while a limited number of studies have, for example, highlighted how exclusion from the labour market leads to or is influenced by other forms of exclusion which operate at different levels, from the state and society to the family (macro, meso, micro).

Existing literature on Palestinian youth and unemployment utilizes mainly the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) Labour Force and other such surveys, including the Palestinian Family Health Survey, the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), and the Socio-Economic and Food Security Survey (SEFSec). Several other reports have been published by local organizations that compile information from other reports. An example is a 2013 report by the Sharek Youth Forum,<sup>9</sup> which is based on a literature review that combines information from various sources. Such reports present a general picture of the conditions faced by youth, which is necessary but not sufficient: the qualitative work on which they mainly depend can provide important insights, but these cannot be generalized to the larger population of youth. Additionally, such reports often rely on descriptive statistics and cannot be used for comparisons between groups. Therefore, there is a need to conduct more in-depth statistical analysis of rich data sets, such as the nationally representative Power2Youth study.<sup>10</sup>

This study presents an important opportunity to fill this knowledge gap by offering a critical understanding of the current state of youth in the OPT through a comprehensive interdisciplinary and multi-level approach. By combining the economic, political, and socio-cultural spheres, and conducting analysis at the macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational), and micro (individual) levels, it looks to explore the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes involved in youth exclusion from (and inclusion in) the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth agency.

The processes of exclusion/inclusion take place at the intersection of different axes of power stemming from privileges and disadvantages, structured not only on a generational divide but also on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, and other social divides that create differences and inequalities among youth themselves. It is important to explore the intersectionality of various factors in creating different subgroups of young women and men, and to look into interventions and policies that meet the interests and needs that emerge from this intersectionality. Although some of the existing literature looks at gender as a defining factor, a data analysis needs not only to have a specific focus on gender but also requires focus on the interlinked factors that contribute to oppression and discrimination.

The Institute of Community and Public Health (ICPH) at Birzeit University is a research and teaching institution that is also a partner of Power2Youth (P2Y) in the OPT. P2Y is a consortium of research and academic institutions in different disciplines based in EU member states, Switzerland, Norway, and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries; it was formed to explore the dynamics of youth exclusion and prospects for the transformative agency of youth in the SEM region.<sup>11</sup> As part of the project, a survey was conducted in the West Bank<sup>12</sup> and the Gaza Strip

among a representative sample of Palestinian youth, focusing on the narrower age range of 18–29 rather than the broader 15–29 range used by the PCBS. The total sample size was 1,353, and about 53% of these were young women. ICPH conducted further in-depth statistical analysis and additional qualitative fieldwork to inform the analysis and elucidate the findings. By analysing the data, the ICPH team was able to identify the main factors associated with young people’s wellbeing, or lack thereof, with the aim of providing policy makers and practitioners with an understanding of the conditions faced by Palestinian youth, as well as the evidence needed for policy making and interventions.

This study focuses on two important aspects—wellbeing and gender relations. These two aspects were chosen for their importance, particularly in the context of the OPT, where youth are especially vulnerable and where wellbeing is threatened. Understanding the needs of youth and the factors that determine their wellbeing<sup>13</sup> is important in formulating policies that invest in youth. The study draws on the World Health Organization (WHO)’s definition of wellbeing, which views wellbeing as positive mental health whereby each individual realizes their potential, can cope with the stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, gender dynamics are important to understanding how young women and men experience inclusion and exclusion. They also inform how young people navigate a complex web of cultural, social, political, and economic factors and dynamics in their lives and how they overcome these challenges.

Generally, there is a dearth of research on gender equality and equity issues from the perspective of youth. As for wellbeing, other than generalities, in a review of the literature the research team was unable to locate any analysis related to the wellbeing of young Palestinians or the factors associated with wellbeing. In other words, the analyses included in this study will contribute to the identification of actual priority area needs for Palestinian youth that require action by stakeholders, and will identify particular groups of youth who may be particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, the qualitative part of the study draws on young people’s own words and experiences. As part of the validation and dissemination process, the research team conducted participatory dissemination workshops in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip in order to present the findings of the study, share and discuss these findings directly with youth and other stakeholders, and generate policy recommendations based on the priorities identified by youth themselves.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The ultimate aim was to gain a better understanding of the state of young women and men between the ages of 18 and 29 in the OPT, in order to influence stakeholders to direct appropriate programming and interventions towards youth needs and interests, and specifically towards gender justice.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research project focused on two central research questions:

1. What is the status of the wellbeing of Palestinian youth in the OPT, and what are the factors that influence the wellbeing of youth?
2. How do Palestinian youth perceive gender equality issues, and what factors play an important role in determining attitudes towards gender equality?

# METHODOLOGY

For the quantitative portion of the study, the analysis was conducted in multiple stages. First, we examined key variables separately; then looked at bivariate associations and developed scales for various dimensions; and finally we ran different multivariate analyses to arrive at the most informative and statistically sound model. We included two measures that serve as proxy measures for trust and social relations, as well as a third measure focusing on perceived personal freedom. The first of these is the perceived importance of a young person's opinion within her/his family. We created a trust measure based on responses to five questions, which included the degree of trust that young women and men had in their nuclear families, extended families, neighbours, people they knew personally, and people they met for the first time. A higher score on the scale indicates a higher degree of trust. Additionally, we ran various iterations of the multivariate model, initially including all variables deemed statistically significant in the bivariate analysis and other important control variables, irrespective of statistical significance (including age, gender, and wealth/socioeconomic status).

The sample for the analysis conducted in this study consisted of 1,353 young people (18–29 years old), with approximately 53% of the sample consisting of young women. Approximately 40% of the respondents lived in the Gaza Strip, with the remaining 60% residing in the West Bank. About 69% of the participants lived in urban areas, 15.5% in rural areas and 15.2% in refugee camps. About 21% of the sample had completed a post-secondary degree, while about 42% had completed secondary education.

For the qualitative portion of the study, we began by developing an interview guide based on the findings of the quantitative portion as well as on pertinent literature. We then conducted a pilot focus group discussion (FGD) with Birzeit University students to test the questions. Once the guide was finalized, the ICPH team conducted 11 FGDs with youth across the OPT, including in Hebron, Halhoul, Bethlehem, Ramallah, the Northwest Jerusalem villages, Nablus city, Northern West Bank villages (the FGD took place in Nablus city), Jerusalem city, Gaza City, Deir Al-Balah, and Rafah. A consultant living and working in Gaza City implemented the FGDs conducted in the Gaza Strip, after discussion and feedback from the ICPH team. The focus groups ranged in size from about eight participants to a maximum of about 20, and included young

women and men from different backgrounds and different areas. Most of the groups were mixed, with the exception of one all-women group in the Northern West Bank<sup>15</sup> and another all-women group in Rafah, where the young men who were invited refused to join the discussion because young women were also attending.<sup>16</sup>

The ICPH team conducted the remainder of the FGDs. For each one, at least two researchers from ICPH<sup>17</sup> were present to facilitate. All the FGDs were audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. We analysed the data through multiple readings and then coding of each FGD by at least two researchers working independently, and then the findings were organized into main themes based on the research objectives. We then presented the initial findings from the study in participatory workshops to which we invited young women and men, as well as representatives of institutions working on issues relevant to youth and/or gender equality. The workshops provided a platform for participants to engage with and respond to the findings we presented, and then to put forward policy recommendations. The recommendations presented at the end of this report are those put forward by participants in the workshops. The workshops were conducted simultaneously in Birzeit and Gaza, and another workshop was organized in East Jerusalem.

## FINDINGS

### QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS: STATUS OF WELLBEING AND ITS DETERMINANTS AMONG PALESTINIAN YOUTH

This section presents the findings from the quantitative portion of the study. The mean wellbeing score for the sample of 1,353 young people was 58.74 out of a maximum possible score of 100 on the WHO-5 Well-Being Index; this was a little higher than the cut-off point for illbeing of 50. This number indicates that the wellbeing of youth, based on the WHO-5 scale, is moderately good. It is important to note that about 36% of respondents had scores of below 50, which means that they have poor wellbeing according to the WHO measure. Young men had slightly higher levels of illbeing compared with young women, with about 37.5% of young men having scores of below 50 compared with 34.1% of young women. Overall, the young people who participated in the qualitative part of this study felt that their wellbeing was at a lower level than that of youth globally, but that it was better than that of youth in some Arab countries, especially those experiencing conflicts (e.g. Syria and Iraq) and political strife (e.g. Egypt).

# MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS: THE DETERMINANTS OF WELLBEING

This section examines the factors that affect youth wellbeing, based on the results of the multivariate analysis. The analysis considered regression results for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip separately, due to some notable variations in how these variables affect wellbeing. Furthermore, given the variations in the political and institutional contexts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it was thought important to examine wellbeing separately in each context. The overall results are informative of general trends and provide comparative insights. The people of the Gaza Strip have been suffering under Israeli occupation for over 50 years and a severe illegal blockade for over a decade, and three wars have taken place in the last decade. In addition, the ongoing political division between Fatah and Hamas means that the main Palestinian political body ruling in each territory is different – the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. While both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are occupied territory and inevitably affected by the Israeli occupation, conditions in the Gaza Strip are much worse, with the government's ability to provide basic services being severely constrained. These structural differences and the differences in absolute conditions are likely to result in variations in the effects of determinants of wellbeing. As described below, the determinants of wellbeing do vary between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For example, while in the West Bank satisfaction with government efforts to secure employment opportunities for youth was a significant determinant of wellbeing, in the Gaza Strip this determinant was not significant; rather, the perceived importance of youth in decision making was more important. The 'perceived importance of youth' variable is based on questions related to how important respondents believed young people were in society in terms of their actual participation and inclusion.

Table 2.1 summarizes the results from the multivariate linear regression analysis, with wellbeing as the outcome variable. In general, a unit change in any of the independent variables is associated with B coefficient, indicating resultant unit change in the wellbeing score (out of a maximum total of 100). The key variables that are associated with wellbeing are gender, age, satisfaction with housing, satisfaction with one's neighbourhood, perceived influence/importance of youth in society, perceived importance of youth's opinion within the family, satisfaction with government efforts to guarantee employment opportunities for youth, score on a scale of personal freedom, confidence in political/government institutions, and trust. Education and wealth scores are also included in the model. However, statistically, these variables are not significantly associated with wellbeing. While this finding may be surprising, it is consistent with past studies conducted in the OPT. It is important to note that while 'objective' measures of wealth based on amenities and living conditions were not found to be statistically significant, scores for satisfaction with housing and neighbourhood were. These measures serve as proxy measures for subjective living conditions/socioeconomic status.

## Explanation of associations

### Sociodemographic characteristics:

The results indicate that male youth have lower wellbeing scores compared with females: on average, men have scores that are about three points lower than those of women ( $B=-2.917$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Furthermore, age appears to be inversely associated with wellbeing, with every one-year increase in age being associated with a decrease of about 0.7 points in the wellbeing score ( $B=-0.682$ ,  $P<0.01$ ). Objective measures for wealth and socioeconomic characteristics were not found to be significantly associated with wellbeing; however, subjective measures were. Youth who indicated that they were satisfied with the condition of their homes had on average, and with all else being equal, scores that were 3.5 points ( $B=3.516$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) higher compared with youth who indicated that they were dissatisfied with their housing. Similarly, youth who indicated that they were satisfied with their neighbourhoods scored almost five points higher than youth who were dissatisfied with their neighbourhoods ( $B=4.83$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

### Trust and social relations:

The study found that youth who indicated that their opinion was very important to their families had scores about three points higher compared with those who did not consider their opinions to be very important within their families ( $B=2.929$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It also found that every point change in the trust scale score was associated with an increase of about 1.6 points in the wellbeing score ( $B=1.559$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The personal freedom scale consisted of positive responses to six items: the freedom to express one's thoughts and ideas at home; the freedom to express one's thoughts and ideas among close friends; the freedom to express one's thoughts and ideas in the community; the freedom to express one's thoughts and ideas at the national level; the freedom to dress and groom yourself as you wish; and the freedom to visit places you like. Questions about freedom to leave the country and travel abroad (which many people would like to do) were not included because youth in the Gaza Strip are unable to leave the territory due to the illegal blockade that has lasted over a decade and the extreme restrictions on mobility that severely limit movement in and out of the region. Responses to this item were highly correlated with region: in other words, almost all respondents from the Gaza Strip reported that they did not have this freedom at all, which meant that this variable could not be separated from region. The findings from the regression analysis indicate that every positive response to the freedom items was associated with an increase of approximately 1.6 points in the wellbeing score ( $B=1.585$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

## Linking social capital/trust and confidence in political institutions and perceived importance of youth:

To capture young people's perceptions of government institutions and the role and importance of youth, three separate measures were included. The first was whether youth were satisfied with government efforts to create employment opportunities for young people. The survey did not specify which government but, based on qualitative work and other insights, it appears that youth in the West Bank understood this to be the PA government, while in Gaza young people's responses reflected their level of satisfaction with the de facto Hamas government. The second measure was a confidence scale where we counted the number of institutions that youth indicated they had at least some confidence in. These institutions included security forces, police, courts, government, local councils/municipalities, political parties, parliament, and public civil services. The final measure pertained to youth perceptions of the importance/significance of youth in various institutions. These included voluntary organizations, political parties, and local communities, and whether political leaders took youth into consideration. We counted how many times young people indicated that youth were at least somewhat important. Here importance was subjective and was measured on a Likert scale (not important at all, somewhat important, important, and very important). The results indicate that all of these measures are significantly positively associated with wellbeing, albeit to varying degrees. Youth who indicated that they were satisfied with government efforts to provide employment opportunities for young people scored about 3.4 points higher than those who were dissatisfied with government efforts ( $B=3.367$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For every institution that young people indicated they had confidence in, the average wellbeing score increased by 0.67 points ( $B=0.674$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). For each item where youth were perceived to be important or influential, the average wellbeing score increased by about 1.16 points ( $B=1.155$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

When the analysis is separated for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the results change in some ways.

## WEST BANK

### Sociodemographic

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the key variables associated with wellbeing are: gender, satisfaction with one's neighbourhood, the importance of youth's opinion within the family, personal freedom, trust, and satisfaction with government efforts to secure employment opportunities for youth.

Male respondents had, on average, scores about four points lower than females ( $B=-3.988$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Age was no longer statistically significant in this analysis, but this may in part be due to the smaller sample size when

the sample was separated. The sample size is still large enough for robust results, but it might result in a reduced statistical ability to detect small differences between groups. Youth who indicated that they were satisfied with their neighbourhoods had scores about 10 points higher compared with youth who were dissatisfied with their neighbourhoods (B=9.989,  $p<0.001$ ).

## **Trust and social relations:**

Youth who reported that their opinions were very important within their families had scores that were on average about three points higher compared with youth who did not feel that their opinions were very important (B=3.219,  $p<0.05$ ). Higher scores on the personal freedom and trust scales were also associated with higher scores for wellbeing. Each point change on the personal freedom scale was associated with a 1.3-point increase in the wellbeing score (B=1.317,  $p<0.05$ ). Each point increase on the trust scale resulted in an increase of approximately 1.5 points in the wellbeing score (B=1.475,  $p<0.001$ ).

## **Linking social capital/trust and confidence in political institutions and perceived importance of youth**

The only measure in this category that was significant in the analysis for the West Bank was satisfaction with government efforts to provide employment opportunities for youth. Youth participants who were satisfied with government efforts had scores that were about five points higher (B=5.316,  $p<0.01$ ) than those of youth who were dissatisfied.

## **GAZA STRIP**

### **Sociodemographic:**

The results of the regression analysis indicate that the key variables associated with wellbeing are: age, satisfaction with housing, personal freedom, trust, and the perceived influence of youth. Age was statistically significant in this analysis, whereas gender was no longer significant. Each additional year of age was associated with approximately a one-point decrease in wellbeing (B=-0.993,  $p<0.01$ ). Youth who indicated they were satisfied with their housing had scores about 5.5 points higher than youth who were dissatisfied with their housing (B= 5.493,  $p<0.01$ ). Here, satisfaction with government efforts to secure employment was not significant, whereas in the West Bank it was. One possible explanation for this is that conditions in the Gaza Strip are much worse economically, with an unemployment rate of over 45%, and youth are likely to view broader constraints and the Israeli occupation as being mainly responsible for the lack of work opportunities. Conditions in the Gaza Strip may also partially explain why youth there appear to be more

concerned with their home conditions and less so with broader neighbourhood conditions.

## **Trust and social relations:**

Higher scores on the personal freedom and trust scales were also associated with higher wellbeing scores. Each point change on the personal freedom scale was associated with an increase of approximately 2.1 points in the wellbeing score ( $B=2.118$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Each point increase on the trust scale resulted in an increase of approximately 1.8 points in the wellbeing score ( $B=1.838$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

## **Linking social capital/trust and confidence in political institutions and perceived importance of youth:**

The only measure in this category that was significant in the analysis for the Gaza Strip was young people's perceptions of the importance of youth; for every item where youth were considered to be important (or taken into consideration by leaders), the wellbeing score increased by about 2.6 points ( $B=2.608$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These items included appreciation for the importance of youth in voluntary organizations, political parties, and the local community, and whether politicians paid attention to issues of concern to youth.

## **Qualitative findings: wellbeing, its definition, and its determinants among Palestinian youth**

The findings from the qualitative portion of the research indicate that wellbeing itself is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects and dimensions of life and is influenced by a multitude of determinants. For young women and men, wellbeing largely includes both physical and psychosocial understandings of health.

The findings from youth themselves highlight the particularly vulnerable state that Palestinian youth are in, especially given the presence of political, economic, and social structures that limit their participation and render their futures all the more uncertain. Specifically, as Palestinians living in the OPT (West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), youth are suffering the consequences of prolonged occupation, which includes limitations on their basic freedoms, chronic uncertainty, and difficult economic conditions. Furthermore, as is explained in more detail below, youth are feeling the repercussions of an increasingly repressive Palestinian political system that, more and more, is limiting their freedom of expression and other freedoms, as well as their participation in political life.

Economic concerns, and more specifically high levels of unemployment, are considered a key determinant of illbeing among Palestinian youth. The issue of unemployment was considered to be one of the most important that youth have to deal with, and one that limits their future

prospects. It also increased their pessimism about the future, and for some increased their desire to migrate in search of a better future. The social aspects of life could either be a source of support, such as social support and trust, or represent further restrictions for youth, such as limitations on freedom and social pressures. Family support was considered key to the wellbeing of young women and men and was commonly viewed positively. Young people's experiences and interactions with the broader community/society, however, were mixed. Many participants felt that there was a lot of negativity and discouragement from people around them, which also stifled their freedoms. For young women, restrictions imposed by traditions and social norms were more pronounced and put greater pressure on them. Young people's personal characteristics moderated the effects of social, economic, and political conditions, with personality traits, including determination and perseverance, having the potential to help youth overcome negative influences.

In the sections that follow, the findings are presented in more detail, drawing on young people's own words.

## DEFINING WELLBEING

As stated earlier, wellbeing is a comprehensive concept that includes both physical and psychosocial wellbeing. In large part, physical and psychosocial wellbeing were seen by youth as being complementary to one another. Initially many of the participants focused on the physical elements of wellbeing, where having wellbeing meant to 'be free of disease' or to have physical strength. One young woman from a village north of Nablus defined it as: '... Meaning that [the person] is free of any disease that they may suffer from, his wellbeing is health, meaning that there is strength; the presence of wellbeing means that he doesn't suffer from any diseases or anything that would cause his wellbeing to deteriorate.'

A young man from Halhoul noted that wellbeing also includes psychosocial wellbeing: 'I think that peace of mind feeds into wellbeing, because if you don't have it you don't have wellbeing.' Another young man said: '[Wellbeing is] peace of mind, being psychologically at ease, social and material comfort.' A young man from Rafah described it as 'the absence of disease and mental and social health, a comprehensive state of physical, mental, and social health and not [just] a body absent of disease.'

A young woman from Rafah elaborated on wellbeing and on a person's ability to deal with their environment: '[Wellbeing] is similar to mental health, a person needs to be at peace with themselves and with the environment around them, and how the individual manages themselves is what gives them good mental health or wellbeing.'

Another young woman connected her definition of wellbeing with society's treatment of women: 'For me as a girl, it is a safe place to live in and that family and others around me have a changed perspective on girls. I'm asked why do I want to go out and do things outside the family. Okay, we're supposed to resolve this social problem between males and females, we're trying. Give me an opportunity – I suffer from gender [discrimination], but then there will be psychological ease/comfort [once there is greater gender equality].'

As can be seen from the quotes above, wellbeing as understood by Palestinian youth is a holistic concept that encompasses both psychological and physical dimensions, and is linked more broadly to understandings of good health. Physical and psychological health were also seen to be connected, often complementing each other or affecting and being affected by one another. As one young man from Bethlehem noted: 'The wellbeing of a person is physical and psychological, like the psychological sometimes might hit the body and the bodily might also impact the psychological.' Having wellbeing was seen as being key by the youth participating in the study; as one young woman from the Southern West Bank stated: 'The one who has wellbeing is fortified, protected and resistant.' The following sections focus on the determinants of wellbeing, which we have divided into social, economic, political, and personal determinants. While the importance of each dimension varied among youth, they largely believed that these dimensions influenced wellbeing through their interactions with each other, rather than having an independent impact on wellbeing.

## DETERMINANTS

### Social

Social dimensions of life were particularly important for young women and men as determinants of wellbeing. These domains were also among the more complex in terms of their scope and the magnitude of their impact on youth. On a broader level, young people often differentiated between family-level factors and the broader social environment, which is linked to community and socio-cultural norms. The family represented the most basic and foundational level of impact on wellbeing and in young people's experiences of social life, and familial harmony was considered essential to their sense of security and peace of mind. Conversely, the absence of harmony or the presence of problems within the family was considered detrimental to wellbeing and a great source of stress for youth. One young man from Gaza City noted: 'When you live in a house where the family supports you and the relationship between you and them is not a relationship of father or mother or a dominating/controlling person but a relationship of friendship, then the output from this house is a productive individual, not just at the level of the family – they might benefit the family and society more generally.'

Another young man from a village northwest of Jerusalem elaborated: 'Perhaps the family, the person's family supports him or pulls him down

or creates barriers; now this is the starting point and the [youth] begins from this point to external society depending on this foundational column.<sup>18</sup> A person's future is determined [by the family]; maybe the person will be embarrassed or is consistently down or is too shy to speak or express his opinion or say anything, so if the central family is supportive of the individual, he will enter society from a position of strength.'

Similarly, a young woman in Hebron noted: 'Wellbeing is something you derive from your environment and family. If the child goes through phases of his/her childhood with a sound upbringing and life skills, this child will grow up with wellbeing if the atmosphere of the house is sound.' She went on to link the political environment to wellbeing: '[Conversely], for example, come to the old city [in Hebron] and look at the problems between families and the occupation, and the clashes with settlers and Israelis at the checkpoints. In the first example [the child's] mindset is one thing and in the other it is something else entirely, including his priorities and ambitions.' In other words, according to this young woman, children living in insecure and politically vulnerable spaces, like the old city of Hebron, were likely to have a more precarious future. Here we see an example of the interaction between the social and political environments, which will be elaborated on later in the report.

The way in which children and youth<sup>19</sup> are brought up was seen as essential to how young people dealt with various aspects of their lives in future years and also shaped the space in which they were allowed to navigate or, conversely, the types of restriction imposed on them. One young woman from a village in the northern West Bank noted: '[The family] has to be in sync on the basis that you can [independently] go out and walk your first steps in your life or enter society, so you have to first have a connected family that is lenient also, so that you can have discussions with them, not 'Be quiet, don't speak'. Thank God there is interconnectedness and understanding... family is the foundation.'

As can be seen from these quotes, family is considered to be essential in either fostering or inhibiting self-esteem and self-confidence. Often for girls and young women, there is a gendered layer to this influence. As one young woman in Rafah noted: 'With respect to self-confidence from the family we have at the level of Rafah, there are a lot of young women with a lack of confidence in themselves that has led them to get married early and not finish their education and not do the work that they like.' Some participants believed that if these young women had more confidence and encouragement to apply themselves, they would not give in to the pressure to get married early. Others elaborated on the specifics of young women's relationships with their families, which further revealed the gendered layer in family relations and in society more broadly. One young woman from a village in the northern West Bank said: 'Of course I'm going to be quiet and be depressed. I'm going to remain quiet, that's it, they [her family] didn't get me used to speaking... If someone tells me something, I'm going to say okay and remain quiet even if I wasn't satisfied.' Another young woman in the same focus group added: 'If you don't want to listen to my opinion, then I don't have a personality and this

will lead to feeling low and crushed inside, and this might then lead to fatigue.'

Another young woman from Gaza City explained: 'The source of the gap between me and my father is that he always has objections to a girl going out, so when I want to go out... when I tell him I want to go out, he tells me that everything you do is for nothing, at the end of the day you're a girl, and even if you reach Mars, in the end you're going to go to the kitchen.' In the same focus group, however, another young woman shared a very different experience: 'My father studied in Britain so he's very open... I often go out after work until about 12 at night with foreigners, so how is it that this family accepts this as normal... This has an outstanding impact on my mental wellbeing; even when I was a student, I used to work and had my freedom, meaning that I had high status.'

These experiences of young women highlight the gendered experience of restrictions that also connect to the broader community, which is the focus of the following section. Many girls noted that, even if their families were open and understanding, they still had to conform to societal expectations and understandings of propriety, and that society monitored the behaviour of young women more closely than that of young men. Therefore, while a positive and healthy environment at home was considered important, this did not always protect young women from judgment and the imposition of social norms and expectations. As is discussed below, among both young women and young men, the family was still considered to be a safe haven compared with the broader community, which was seen to be more judgmental and discouraging. While some of the quotations above exemplify more negative or restrictive relationships between youth and their families, these did not represent a majority of the youth who participated in the study; they highlight more generally the importance of family relationships for youth wellbeing. As the family was considered to be an important haven for youth, any problems within the family were seen to have more detrimental impacts. Participants believed that one of these impacts was a lack of a sense of security and stability, which is likely to shape the way that youth live their lives.

## **Broader community**

On a more general level, having social relationships was considered by youth to be important for wellbeing. One young woman from Rafah remarked on the importance of social relationships: 'Through my social relationships I am able to find myself; humans are social beings by nature.' Similarly, a young woman from Halhoul noted: 'Whoever doesn't have relationships doesn't have wellbeing.' Although youth agreed generally that social relationships were important, these also had their limits, and what was more important was having relationships with people who were a positive influence. Others noted that at times having too many relationships was not good because it could increase social responsibilities and expectations.

As noted above, although many young people felt that they had a supportive family environment, their assessments of the broader community were more negative, particularly in terms of a lack of encouragement and lack of space for youth participation. One young man from Ramallah stated: 'Each person has their energy threshold [taqa]... It's possible that there are people among us who have ideas and have a way, but how do you get them to the right way? We have [capabilities], but we don't have anyone who understands them, and there's no one to motivate you.'

Another young man from Halhoul added: '...And maybe it's feeling down, there isn't anyone to support you with a specific idea. There are a lot of youth who don't find employment or work, and if we turn to [this] issue, you will find that some youth try to escape [unemployment] by investing in themselves. [A young man] might think of an idea or project to work with and you find that the people closest to him bring him down, tell him it won't succeed... Maybe if he moved forward with it and put all of his energy into it he would produce, but it's the bringing down by all the people around him, and they're reducing his sense of worth or the value of the thing he is thinking of.'

This lack of encouragement and support for youth, and more generally the limited space for their participation in community life, especially in positions of leadership, had a significant demoralizing force and negatively influenced the wellbeing of young people. Youth consistently emphasized that they had the energy and drive to improve themselves and their conditions, but that often their enthusiasm was met with discouragement from the people around them.

In addition to the lack of encouragement felt by youth, many participants discussed the negative consequences of gossip or criticism from people around them. For some youth, this was a source of added pressure, and for others it further restricted their freedom, especially when they had to adjust their plans and behaviours to avoid gossip. As with the restrictions imposed by families discussed above, young people's experiences were also gendered and young women appeared to be affected to a greater degree. One young woman from Gaza City said: 'Tell anybody that you work evenings, a big attack, you're a girl, how do you go by yourself, how... I don't allow anyone to lower my standing... I don't, okay I am confident in myself, but it still affects me a lot.' Another young woman in Ramallah noted: 'What we're living in is a society [that is] very judgmental of individuals, and the nature of a person is that you don't like to be judged, so this has an effect in that we are living in a closed society.'

For some youth, in addition to being demoralizing, comments and judgments from other people influenced their decisions. For example, a young man from Halhoul explained: 'You don't find the support you need and you don't find people around you, either within the family or in society. [For example], your average is good [in school], we all see this a lot and there's one [young woman] who studied in Abu Dis, physics with a scholarship, and people criticized her... The girl had grades in the 90s and people kept telling her you have a high average... and you chose this subject to specialize in. This force from your family and society

affects your spirits, and keeps us away from the things we want; I think that the characteristic [of society], and I get upset, it robs us of our energies...<sup>20</sup> The impact of society on me is that it dictates what you work at or what you do and it affects your spirits.' A young woman in the same focus group added: 'I see that people have this negativity about them: any action on your part they have to comment about, and even at the level of the family, you come up with an idea and you're excited to do something, they tell you no and they give you a thousand reasons not to do it, they depress you. This [happens] a lot. There is something, a negative atmosphere in general.'

## **Societal restrictions and curtailed freedoms**

In their discussions about community, youth highlighted what they felt were restrictive social norms and traditions that curtailed their freedoms. Many felt that people around them held on to traditions that were out of step with the demands of the modern world and often limited the freedoms of young people. Often, these traditions were reinforced directly by their parents/family, even if their parents/family did not fully agree with them. Ultimately, these restrictions were a source of pressure and stress for youth.

One young woman from a village northeast of Jerusalem told us: 'Norms and traditions that are exaggerated affect a person's psychological wellbeing'; in particular, she was referring to the unnecessarily restrictive norms that limit women's participation. Another young woman in the same group explained: 'Traditions might limit/constrain young men and women: for example, for a person with ambition this affects their psychological wellbeing and it might make them go backwards and not progress.' A young woman from Ramallah stated emphatically: 'These norms and traditions that restrict [youth] are not just norms and traditions, but backwardness... All of these things are old, how do we allow people who lived centuries before us to control our lives now? Let's say it is not backwardness, it is insanity.'

A young man in the same group added: 'It's official insanity... what is happening is officially insane... Because, for example, it is insane when I tell a girl you can't go out and take part in an activity where girls were drawing a mural on a wall because the wall was by the street, but when it comes to an awards ceremony and all the whole world attends and there are cameras, they tell girls come get your award... Or when a girl completes the Tawjihi exams<sup>21</sup> and wants to go to university, her father comes and tells her I don't have daughters that go to university or you can't study at a mixed university, what do you call this?!

Here again, participants pointed out how these traditional views tended to be more restrictive for young women and girls, and they prevented them from participating in the activities that do exist for youth. For example, one young man mentioned that there was a youth centre in his village but that few local girls and young women went there because they were afraid of gossip.

While traditions and cultural norms were considered to be more restrictive for girls and young women, especially in terms of their mobility, they were also a source of pressure for young men. A young woman from a village near Bethlehem noted: 'For example, in the same office I see K. and A. having to save for the household, and they have to save for dowry and gold; I am more carefree than they are. I feel like there is a specific kind of pressure on young men from the traditions and that we don't even understand why they have been put in place. So we can make a lunch for a thousand people we don't like and we feed them and they come and talk about us and go home and we have to spend money on them, work for five years for a wedding... These norms and traditions are a pressure on the wellbeing of youth, both men and women.'

These burdens and pressures placed on young men posed a significant challenge to their wellbeing. This point was emphasized by young men themselves, especially in the focus group in Nablus, where some explained how these societal demands on men, especially when they were looking to get married, created a great burden. One young man noted: 'It's suffocating, and so many young men go into debt to get married and meet the demands imposed by tradition.' So while young men had greater mobility compared with young women, traditions still restricted their freedom and increased the financial burdens on them, especially when it came to marriage.

A young woman from Hebron explained that traditions can be restrictive, but that the core problem is that people do not respect differences: 'Now norms and traditions at times cause problems, and control us and restrict us. For example, [...] the way a young man deals with a girl or the way you're treated at work by your supervisor, or treated by your teacher, I feel like there is always this authority over you. Of course, we shouldn't cross any red lines, but of course my norms are not like those of my father 60 years ago, so I have to behave in a way that is natural and in line with my personality, and not restrict myself to [my father's norms]. Maybe he has ideas and I respect that, but I also want someone to respect the ideas that I have. No one respects the other, between men and women, black and white, or a girl who wears a headscarf and one who doesn't... And honestly when a young man wears shorts you find a thousand people commenting on him and when a sheikh passes by wearing a dishdasha [which some might think signifies extreme piety or even radicalization] a thousand people comment... We don't respect each other.'

The need to respect differences was reiterated by youth in various discussions, and relates back to what they see as a very judgmental society. Some remarked that this was a more recent trend and, based on old photographs they have seen or stories they have heard from their relatives, there seemed to be more openness and more acceptance of difference in the past. When youth referred to traditions or social norms, they were largely referring to these conservative norms that have come to be thought of as traditions.

This closed-mindedness, and what some described as selective and blind attachment to certain traditions, has a negative impact on the

wellbeing of young people, especially when they are not allowed the possibility to change and adapt societal norms. Some youth noted that, if we examine traditions, some of these are positive, such as when people helped and supported each other during tough times. However, the selective clinging on to more restrictive traditions is what they generally viewed as a problem. Others also said that, while they thought more freedoms should be offered to youth, they would not want things to become chaotic, with no order at all; they explained that they did not want to forgo social values completely. Frequently, respondents were vague about what they meant here, but occasionally they mentioned that they did not think that too much openness in relationships between women and men should become the norm, and that certain boundaries should be maintained. Some values and traditions are important, especially those that do not restrict youth from progressing and participating actively in social and public life. A young woman from a village northeast of Jerusalem noted: 'Openness within limits, we are talking about freedom from its correct understanding.' This participant believed that these limits should be in line with religious values (which some believe help to protect women), rather than what she viewed as even more restrictive and conservative norms and traditions. Another young woman from a village near Hebron noted: 'Of course we want free[dom], the person who has freedoms and who has opportunities open to them will have better wellbeing.'

## **Economic**

Economic conditions are another key dimension affecting wellbeing, and these include both personal/household and broader economic conditions. Participants frequently noted that economic conditions were bad, with high rates of unemployment and rising costs of living. In the OPT the overall unemployment rate is 27%, and above 45% among youth. However, in the Gaza Strip it reaches about 60%.<sup>22</sup> Youth in Gaza emphasized the extent of the crippling poverty resulting from the ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip. This emphasis on economic conditions may seem to be inconsistent with the statistical findings; however, if we consider it closely, it is not necessarily inconsistent. In the quantitative findings, household wealth was not found to be a significant determinant of wellbeing. The economic characteristics that youth mentioned were not measured in the survey, and have more to do with relative economic conditions and capabilities. In the quantitative analysis, satisfaction with one's neighbourhood was a statistically significant determinant of wellbeing, and this measure might actually be closer to what youth had in mind. Additionally, measures of economic conditions like wealth and even income may at times not be sensitive enough to measure differences between individuals or families. It would be inaccurate to conclude that, because the wealth index was not found to be statistically significant in the analysis, economic factors are not important. The young women and men who participated in the FGDs believed that there was a link between economic conditions and personal wellbeing, and that being able to meet their needs was important to their wellbeing. Income on its own, however, did not have a decisive effect on wellbeing; in other words, it was necessary, but insufficient on its own to assure wellbeing.

Broader (poor) economic conditions, and especially unemployment, were considered to have a negative impact on wellbeing, even if youth were economically well off on an individual level.

## Poor economic conditions and increasing demands

One young woman from Rafah stated: 'The economic situation has an impact: now the father, if he doesn't have money, how will he provide for his children, and it will also impact me, for example, in my studies? How will I buy books? All of this will have an impact.' A young man from Rafah added: 'A house, a car, that I live a free life – where is the problem? The people who have money are the ones who are living their lives, whereas a graduate without work or a [good] economic situation [will not be living their lives].'

A young woman from Bethlehem said: 'For sure, for example, someone who is financially comfortable and doesn't have debts [...] will be psychologically at ease, that is healthy. But it is something else when someone has loans and debt and *hamm* (agony), meaning for sure that his psyche will be strained/fatigued and he will keep thinking, how will I cover this loan, how will I cover this, how will I pay for that, so he will be emotionally exhausted.'

Others noted that economic conditions were very difficult, and even if you had a job it was still very difficult to provide for your basic needs. Incomes were not commensurate with increasing prices and demands. Furthermore, while many in society were facing big challenges in meeting their basic needs, young women and men also pointed to increasing social inequalities. A young man from Bethlehem noted: 'Especially now, you feel like we are living in a world that is all about image. It is not like before, life used to be simpler. I remember, for example, when I was in school none of my classmates had a phone or a laptop, and that made life demands or issues easier on us and our families. But now the burdens of life have increased, meaning that a phone that costs 3,000 shekels is considered an essential life demand, and as these demands increase it makes economic conditions more difficult, and this affects us.'

A young woman from Ramallah elaborated on the issue of debt and growing inequalities: 'The idea of debt causes many problems and affects financial conditions. Actually, it's a means by which people can be dominant in society sometimes: if you are a person with strong financial capital, you can buy whatever you want, this has become the policy that we deal with.' Here, wealth and financial means are becoming increasingly important markers of status. The last point this young woman made was echoed in different ways by young people in other groups, who noted that social inequalities were increasing and that people with money were seen to be treated differently by people around them; they also had greater access to what they needed and had greater control over their lives. At the same time, it is important to note that many participants pointed out that money on its own was not enough for wellbeing, and that the most important thing was to be content with your

life. If you are wealthy but do not have good relationships or have other problems, you may not have good wellbeing.

## **Unemployment and poor economic prospects**

While economic conditions are important in that they determine living conditions, which are essential to a person's wellbeing, employment and employment prospects, or the lack thereof, were key determinants of wellbeing for youth. One young woman in Rafah declared: 'For us, as soon-to-be graduates, what really affects us is obtaining employment.' A young woman from a village near Nablus said: 'There's no work, there's no place that you go to that tells you, yes I can help you, I can stand with you so you can build this project. Finding someone to help is difficult; it's difficult to find that, and this affects your psyche; when you find someone who's completed a doctorate or master's or bachelor's and you find them working in Israel, a doctor working in construction or an engineer working in something else, no one [is employed in the subject area they studied]. It is rare to find someone educated who works in their own profession.'

Similarly, a young man from Hebron asked: 'We want to talk about youth, why is it that youth finish university and there are no jobs? It's known that in Hebron there are about 3,000<sup>23</sup> people and they employ about 40, so that leaves 2,960 people unemployed—where will they go? Either to work in Israel, they'll go get married so they can get a permit and they go to Israel and find themselves in debt for 10 years into the future. This is not fair on individuals, and we see the consequences for society as a whole.'

These quotes from participants demonstrate the negative impact that the lack of employment opportunities is having on their wellbeing and morale. The lack of economic opportunity also further restricts the space for youth to participate actively. Some participants said that they tried to make the most of volunteer opportunities so that they have something to do or so that they gain experience. However, many participants who had experience with volunteering or internships were disappointed that these opportunities did not lead to paid employment, and some said that they felt that they were being taken advantage of by institutions who relied on voluntary labour. So, on the one hand, it was important for them to gain experience and have something to keep them busy, but this was only feasible for short periods of time, and many felt that it was only fair that they were eventually compensated. Economic opportunities were also tied to the political context, as will be discussed in the following section, both in terms of the strains on the economy caused by the occupation and also, importantly, as reported by young people, due to corruption, ageism, and a lack of proper planning by national organizations.

## **Political**

The political dimension is an important determinant of wellbeing for youth, and includes both internal political conditions and conditions related to the Israeli military occupation. The prolonged occupation and restrictions are having a negative impact on wellbeing, especially where

they limit young people's mobility and opportunities, including restrictions on travel for education and work, closures of universities and roads, and restrictions on imports and exports, which limit business opportunities. For some youth, resisting the occupation has provided them with hope and a source of motivation to work towards a better future. Young people's discussions of the internal political context highlight the ever-shrinking space for youth in the public and political spheres, as well as their lack of trust in Palestinian political institutions. Corruption, *wasta* (nepotism or cronyism), autocracy, and ageism within these institutions further exclude and demoralize youth. This section first discusses the internal Palestinian political environment, and then the political conditions resulting from the Israeli occupation, in relation to youth wellbeing.

## **Political: internal Palestinian situation**

One of the most important issues for youth in relation to the Palestinian political context was the issue of *wasta* (nepotism, cronyism, or connections) and corruption. The widespread existence of *wasta* is significant for various reasons. First, it limits opportunities for young people and reinforces inequalities that exist within society, which are often family-based. Youth considered this to be unfair, and it was another cause of pessimism about the future. According to one young man from Rafah, for example: 'Jobs for us have become hereditary like a monarchy. Everything has become like this... Continuously, *wasta* also has a big role – the son of someone will be employed with a recommendation.' A young woman from a village in the northern West Bank elaborated on this point: 'People now are going along with not putting the right person in the right place [based on their merit and qualifications]; no, now they go by if you have *wasta* I will go along with you [you will get the appointment]. Now, us youth, why do we study, is it not to find a job so we can work and find ourselves? To do something for our future!'

This point was echoed repeatedly by young people, and was the source of much frustration. Youth who had connections were seen to be at an advantage, and ultimately this system, which depends on connections, means that the government is not operating as it should, especially when people without proper qualifications are given positions simply because they have connections. This was a source of stress for youth and it reduced their trust in the political system. In the statistical analysis, we found that youth who thought that *wasta* had a role in society generally had poorer wellbeing. This point was reinforced in the FGDs, where it was stated that the presence of *wasta* or a system that depended on nepotism reinforced inequalities, reduced opportunities for youth, and also meant that institutions were not run appropriately, because people with qualifications were not necessarily given the opportunities or positions they were qualified for. However, although they disagreed with this dependence on connections, many of the youth participating in the study also noted that such connections had become necessary. The perceived dominance or reliance on *wasta* was not restricted to any one sector, as a young woman from the north West Bank noted: 'We have a

problem here, whether in health, education or anything, there is something called *wasta*.'

While nepotism was considered to be one of the most significant types of corruption, youth also generally had very little trust or confidence in public institutions. Again, this finding is consistent with the statistical analysis and, similar to *wasta*, it was a source of frustration for many participants. They also felt that public institutions did not provide people with adequate services, and that this reduced the quality of their lives and their prospects for the future. One young woman from a village near Nablus posed the question: 'Why is it that, for example, the government has shortcomings in a lot of things, [even] in health?' Another young woman in Hebron stated that, although funding comes in for projects people rarely see the benefits of this, because of corruption: 'I want to discuss two things other than 'Here there is no work for you'... It's possible that in the projects run by the ministries, there is a lot of corruption in the funding that comes in; there is a lot of funding that comes in and we should see factories and other [development] projects that provide opportunities for youth, but we don't see anything. Everything that we see is consumerist, nothing productive. And the second thing, in schools, they don't teach life skills like problem solving or self-confidence; they teach you to read, which is good, but there is a lot missing.'

This point was echoed by participants in different groups, who noted that there is no proper investment or development of sustainable programming that offers opportunities for youth, and that this is a reflection of the government's inefficiency. Some participants noted that such projects were also partially limited by funding policies that focused on specific areas pre-set by donors, and which were not priorities in the Palestinian context. The second point above made by this young woman, about education, was also brought up by other participants, in particular by young men in Jerusalem, who also found themselves ill-equipped to navigate the Israeli system with the education they had received. Many participants felt that the political system was not designed to train them to think critically, or to acquire the skills they needed in order to work towards a better future. Ultimately, this was further evidence that the political system did not have the interests of the people in mind, and especially those of youth.

As well as neglecting the needs and interests of youth, many participants felt that the government – both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza – actively restricted the space for them to participate politically, to express their ideas, and to create political alternatives. Increasingly, youth were facing greater restrictions on political freedoms and more political repression, especially since the political divisions between Fatah and Hamas had worsened. One young man in Bethlehem said: 'More than once my grandfather, may God bless his soul, told me to be careful not to use Facebook to talk about anything to do with Fatah or Hamas, and from 2007 until now, I haven't said anything that has to do with politics. There have been examples, like relatives who are caught and taken by the secret service and asked, 'Why did you say this? What are you doing?''

A young woman in the same group added: 'It has become evident to everyone that we are not at ease, politically.' A young man from a village northwest of Jerusalem noted: 'The reality we live in is one where politics can lead you to be imprisoned, meaning it can cause problems, for example, if you are in a [political] party or say anything that is different from the others [the mainstream]. This might expose you to problems even if you do not participate actively in the party; even expressing a political opinion in public or on social media can cause problems. For example, I'm a caricature artist but because I was arrested, I don't draw any political caricatures [anymore].'

Another young woman said: 'We suffer from political repression that prevents us from getting involved in politics.' A young man from Rafah added: 'Here the Hamas government speaks in the name of the people, and [in the West Bank] Fatah in the name of the people, but where is our freedom [to speak for ourselves]?'

## **Political: related to the occupation**

It is evident that the internal Palestinian political situation is a source of stress for youth and an area about which participants in the study were largely pessimistic, especially as they felt that they were consistently being excluded and that the space available for the political participation of young women and men has been consistently shrinking. The ongoing Israeli occupation is an important political determinant of wellbeing, as it influences the overall conditions under which youth live. One of the key consequences of the occupation is the chronic state of instability and insecurity that affects Palestinians, and especially Palestinian youth. As one young man in Jerusalem put it: 'Our lives are not stable, and we can't plan for the future [due to the political situation].' This state of instability and uncertainty affects most aspects of people's lives.

Furthermore, direct experience of the occupation has very negative psychological effects. One young woman living in Bethlehem explained: 'It's the killing. I live near the Wall and, every little bit, I heard the bombs during the war on Gaza. I was studying at the university, and I couldn't study but it was normal for the professors that we come in and take our exams... What I want to get to is that this situation naturally affects our psyche.' Another young woman in the same group said that she felt that her freedom as a Palestinian within the OPT was more limited than it was for foreigners who came to work in the country: 'But like those who come from outside... I am now in the *balad* [hometown]. I feel that the foreigners who come here have more freedom in the country than I do with respect to mobility and with respect to everything else. And also there is something else: I don't know [how to put it], but we are also humiliated... Some people say it's the occupation, and then others say that you can't blame everything on the occupation, but it's true it has a big effect... With respect to the occupation, it has a huge effect and affects everything for real.'

Mobility restrictions and closures are key dimensions of how the occupation affects daily life for young people. For youth in Gaza, closures and the illegal blockade have been a part of their daily reality for over a

decade, during a key phase of their lives. Needless to say, this severely inhibits their daily lives and their prospects for the future. Feeling suffocated in various aspects of life was a common theme in the experience of many of the participants. For youth in Gaza, this sense of suffocation is felt even more keenly than by people living in the West Bank, with youth talking about feeling stuck and imprisoned. The blockade, in particular, not only confines youth but also further reduces their opportunities and prospects.

## **Gender relations, equity, and equality**

This section presents findings relating to gender relations, equity, and equality from both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. It begins with the quantitative results and then presents the qualitative findings, based on the perspectives of young women and men.

### **Attitudes towards gender equality and their determinants: a quantitative analysis**

For ideas on gender, the research team developed a scale that counted positive responses to questions about young people's opinions on items that were inclusive of women or assured gender equality, such as women's ability to work, divorce laws, and inheritance rights. It also counted the number of discriminatory items/statements that youth agreed or disagreed with; for example: 'Men make better leaders than women'; 'Education is more important for men than women'; and 'When employment opportunities are scarce, men have more of a right to employment compared with women.' A higher score on the scale indicated that youth were more supportive of equality or women's rights. We called this scale ProWomen, and it is the outcome variable in this part of the analysis. The team also conducted a descriptive analysis by gender, and when each item is examined, the discrepancies between young women and men become evident.

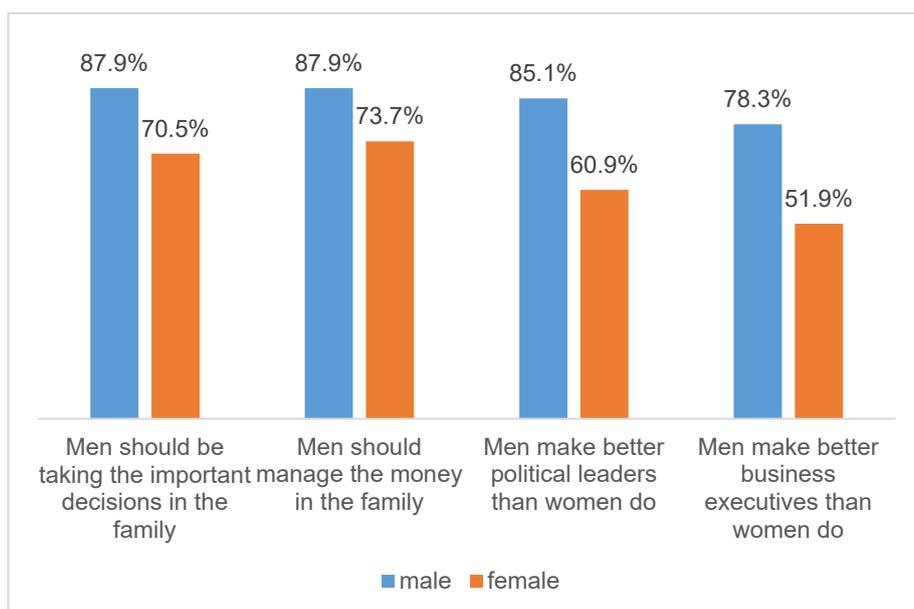
There was a marked difference between men and women on the ProWomen scale, with women scoring 8.4 compared with 6.1 for men; this means that, on average, young women agreed with a little over eight items while young men supported six items. This discrepancy in attitudes between males and females can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, which show gender attitudes towards specific items. As can be seen in Figure 1, respondents in general had favourable attitudes towards women's rights in employment and education, though women's views were more favourable in this regard. However, in contrast to education and employment, there was relatively little support from either young men or women for equality in rights relating to personal status, such as divorce and inheritance.

**Figure 1: Attitudes of Palestinian youth towards gender equality and rights**



Furthermore, the majority of men and more than half of women believed that men are better suited for leadership positions, as seen in Figure 2. There appears to be an issue regarding men’s perceptions of women’s capacities as leaders and decision makers in the family and public spheres. This might be due to the absence of women role models in the political and business spheres, a lack of confidence in women’s ability to manage family finances, and existing social norms around gendered leadership roles and capacities, which reinforce the idea that men make better leaders.

**Figure 2: Attitudes among Palestinian youth towards gender roles and leadership capacity**



In the multivariate analysis, the research team analysed the data for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip combined, as well as separately. There were no major differences in the separate analyses, and separating them resulted in a heavily reduced cell size for the key variables of mother's employment and education, so it was decided to present the combined results and account for regional differences in the analysis. The key variables associated with the extent to which a youth participant was in favour of women's rights or gender equality were gender, age, location of residence, education, mother's education and employment, and to what extent they perceived women to be influential in society.

## **Sociodemographic characteristics**

The results indicate that gender and age are inversely related to support for gender equality, with men, on average, agreeing with 2.3 items fewer than women ( $B=-2.334$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). In addition, taking into consideration the t-statistic, gender had the largest weight in determining the number of items that respondents supported. Each year of age was associated with decreased support of 0.05 items on average ( $B=-0.05$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). On the other hand, residing in the West Bank was associated with support for almost one additional item ( $B=0.843$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ), and this was similar for residence in camps compared with urban residence, irrespective of whether the camp was in the West Bank or in Gaza ( $B=0.783$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ). In other words, youth in camps had higher wellbeing scores than youth living in urban areas. Education was also positively associated with the ProWomen score: respondents who had a secondary education supported on average 0.4 items more than those with less than a secondary education ( $B=0.366$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), whereas those with a post-secondary education on average supported one additional item ( $B=0.979$ ,  $p<0.0001$ ).

The last set of variables that were found to be significantly associated with respondents' support for gender equality were their mothers' education and employment, and to what extent they perceived women to be influential in society. These indicators are important proxies for how youth are socialized to perceive gender roles. The study found that young men or women with mothers who had completed secondary education supported about 0.4 items more than those whose mothers had not ( $0.417$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Meanwhile, youth whose mothers had completed a post-secondary education supported about one additional item compared with youth whose mothers had a below secondary education ( $B=0.837$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). The team ran various models that included fathers' education and employment, but these variables were not statistically significant in the bivariate and multivariate analysis. It is likely that mothers' education and employment have a greater impact on youth because, if they have an educated and employed female role model, they are more likely to think that this is the norm. Furthermore, they may be more likely to see women as being capable of holding employment and of having a life outside the home. Respondents whose mothers were employed also supported about one additional item on the scale ( $B=0.923$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Included in the analysis of the scale of women's influence was the extent to which women believed that females had influence over four key aspects in their lives: family decisions, decisions about their education, decisions related to employment, and decisions related to choosing a marriage partner. For each of these areas where respondents believed that women had influence, they supported on average about 0.3 additional items on the ProWomen scale ( $B=0.269$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). In other words, if a young person believed that women had influence in three of these aspects, and with all else being equal, they supported roughly one additional item on the ProWomen scale compared with a respondent who did not believe that women had influence in any of these dimensions. Essentially, this indicates that the more influence that both young women and young men think women have in society, the more supportive they are of gender equity.

## **Understandings and experiences of gender (in)equality: qualitative findings**

Throughout the fieldwork for this study, discussions around gender equality and the impact of gender on the lives of young women and men were perhaps the most contentious, and were often marked by deep tensions and contradictions. In its approach, the research team gauged the perspectives of youth both through questions about what gender equality and equity meant in the abstract and questions that focused on areas in their lives where they felt that gender equality or inequality were present. The findings from the quantitative analysis pointed to marked differences between the attitudes of young women and young men towards gender equality, and this trend was also evident in the qualitative investigation. Importantly, there also appeared to be a gap between young men's perceptions of the lives of young women and young women's actual experiences.

As the facilitators were preparing for an FGD in the old city of Nablus and were introducing the main topics for discussion, one young man commented to another: 'Once you hear what young men do, you'd want to kill yourself.' He was referring to the harassment that young women face, and was expressing his shock at its prevalence. The comment was spontaneous and, although the reaction seems extreme, it does highlight this important information gap, where much of what women experience is normalized, unheard, or intentionally silenced. Another important experience in the field was the unexpected challenge of getting some youth, especially young men, to discuss gender inequality beyond abstract notions of what should be, rather than what is. This was especially the case in groups that had more male participants than female. In groups that had more participation from young women, this part of the discussion focused a lot more on real-life experiences of inequality or gender discrimination, rather than on abstract notions of what gender roles and gender equality should look like.

In fact, the research team found that there was a lack of clarity about what 'gender equality' meant to young men and women. Even though all youth agreed that equality meant having the same rights, responsibilities,

abilities, and opportunities and sharing roles, agreement was not absolute and was conditioned by social norms and the religious context. This was reflected in the experience of a young woman from Bethlehem, who said: 'When I travel, my attire is completely different from what I would wear here. I wouldn't go out in shorts here, but I would over there. I wouldn't do it here because I know that they would judge me.'

Findings from the qualitative component supported findings from the quantitative analysis in terms of young people's agreement about women's rights in education and employment, as long as they did not interfere with religious or cultural beliefs. A young woman in the rural Nablus FGD said: 'We remain in an Arab society. We have the customs and traditions of the East that don't allow me to come home late, regardless of how open it is.'

Many participants showed some resistance to the term 'gender equality'. For some, this resistance had to do with the idea that full equality would take away from their manhood. One young man in his mid-twenties from the south of the West Bank stated: 'Look, if they [men] see their male neighbour handwashing clothes, doing laundry with his wife, or sweeping the floor, then he is considered submissive and controlled... And then his wife, herself, despite the fact that he is helpful and they understand each other, she goes and says around to other women... 'He never says no to me'. She takes pride knowing that she is in control. Why can't she take pride in the fact that they are on good terms while keeping that to herself?'

However, for many young women and men, resistance to this term was related to their experiences with NGO programming, which they felt was condescending and approached their cultural and social norms as if they were backward. One participant noted: 'They have problems in their countries too, but they come here [to fix us].' Both young men and young women complained about the discourse often used by NGOs in the OPT, one that they believe holds a stereotypical view of Arab society and introduces foreign values and understanding of empowerment, rather than providing solutions that fit the local culture.

In addition, a young woman from the south of the West Bank noted that there were problems that needed to be addressed, but she criticized the depiction of women as 'victims' rather than as agents, and noted that many programs and workshops used discourses that in essence deprived women of their agency and treated them as passive victims. She explained: 'I notice that all gender studies or gender in general, not just here in Palestine but everywhere else, tend to portray the woman as a victim. This is not how I see it. I see that there are differences and greater pressures on women. Even men do not have the freedom that we think they do. They see freedom as going out [...] having relationships and drinking, [but] this is not what freedom is. Freedom means that you have choices, whether a man or a woman. For example, they always direct us as if we are victims and what not... that a girl has to rebel and what not... instead of seeing that I have been through problems and I have persevered... I think we should stay away from the idea that a woman is always the victim. It puts us in a corner... Even a man can be a

victim: you think a 20-year-old man can have his own house, save to buy his bride gold and think about a wedding; all to show off to society. This is pressure on the man: the man will in turn put pressure on the woman; and the woman will take it out on the children – it is a circle.’

Some young men felt that an emphasis on women’s rights and gender equality put them in a position where they were viewed as transgressors or as an enemy of sorts, even though they felt that they were trying to be respectful towards women, and even when they believed in equity or equality themselves. Others insisted that any discussion of gender equality should take into account religious and cultural values, and that part of the problem was what they considered to be an incorrect interpretation of religious values and an emphasis on outdated ‘traditions’.

Societal norms and expectations imposed more restrictions on young women’s mobility and personal freedom, and put a lot of pressure on men to fulfil their roles as providers. There was also noticeable social pressure on men caused by expectations in regards to work, education, marriage, and other aspects of life. Therefore, while young men generally had more personal freedom, they faced greater economic responsibilities as they grew older; and when it came to marriage, young men noted that they faced a lot of pressure and limitations on their ability to choose a spouse. A woman from Hebron argued: ‘The guy is also repressed and has to marry his cousin. If he does not marry according to his mother’s wishes, she becomes angry with him... This also happens but no one talks about it when gender is brought up.’ What this and similar comments show is that often gender roles are reinforced by women within the family, because they have internalized patriarchal values.

The stress of living in a patriarchal society affects men and women differently, but the disadvantages are greater for women. Still, many young men noted that they faced a great deal of pressure to perform their traditional gender roles. One said: ‘If she [a married working woman] wants to stay home, no one will force her to provide for her family. But if she goes to court, I am forced to provide for her. If she is divorced and has the kids, I am forced to support her.’ It should be noted, however, that many young women who participated in the FGDs said that women’s ability to divorce their husbands and claim their rights was typically constrained by the application of laws as well as by social pressures. A few women who were divorced or separated described having to give up their financial rights in order to maintain custody of their children, or they were severely restricted in terms of their movement through increased societal surveillance.

## **Children of educated, working mothers are more supportive of gender equality**

When investigating factors that might predict attitudes towards gender equality, the research team found that mothers’ education and employment, and the perceived influence of women in society, were important predictors of positive attitudes.<sup>24</sup> The perceived role of women

within the household and the community confirms the statistical findings. One young man from a village northwest of Jerusalem highlighted the role of mothers' education in positively influencing attitudes towards gender equality: 'Of course if the mother is educated, the first thing she will do is transfer her education and intellect to her children. She will transfer her own experience and will improve it. If, for example, the mother used to suffer from her brothers making trouble for her when she went to school, she will give more freedom to her daughters to go in and out of the house and she will be able to teach them to value trust, so she'll know they are going to school and coming back.'

A young woman from Halhoul said: 'I will raise my son with this mentality that a woman is free to wear what she wants. I will raise my son and raise my daughter with the same mentality. I will tell my son not to learn from his friends and that they are wrong, as they learn from one another.'

## **Experiences of gender inequality: constricting the lives of young women**

Throughout the FGDs participants, and especially young women, pointed out the existence of gender inequality in the spheres of education, the workplace, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and rights, and in the form of social restrictions. Young women talked about the lack of freedom to live their lives as they wanted, to go out at night, to travel, and to study in the field or university of their choice. These restrictions were enforced by a fear of being watched and of 'what people would say', thus affecting their reputation and that of their family. Additionally, young women complained about unequal pay and discrimination in the workplace, with employers and managers often expecting unmarried women to work longer hours or take less time off, without any legal basis. There were also complaints that religion did not give women the protection it should, though here perceptions – and attitudes – vary widely. For example, some people believe that families should allow their daughters to complete their education so that they are able to support themselves economically, while others believe that this should not be allowed and that young women should stay at home, get married and have children. Ultimately, these restrictions constricted women's lives in very tangible ways. One young woman in the south of the West Bank noted: 'Now it has become a dream for me to ride a bicycle!' She explained that, though riding a bicycle was such a simple thing, because of social norms that considered it inappropriate for women to ride bicycles in her village, this simple thing had become a life dream for her.

It is important to consider that, while some of these restrictions seem relatively benign, what they ultimately do is to limit the space for participation by women and girls, and this can have negative effects on their self-esteem and wellbeing. Furthermore, while a patriarchal society imposes greater restrictions on women's lives, especially in terms of mobility and appearance, it also puts pressure on young men to conform to expected societal norms and limits their freedom in other ways. Many participants noted that the current socio-cultural context had negative impacts on all youth, both men and women. However, they also pointed

out that addressing the inequalities would only happen by working within society and increasing awareness, while being culturally sensitive at the same time.

## CONCLUSION

This investigation into wellbeing and gender relations among young Palestinian women and men yields some important findings. The part of the study focused on wellbeing indicates that Palestinian youth generally have low levels of wellbeing, especially when it is considered that about 36% of youth have poor wellbeing based on the WHO criteria. The quantitative findings reveal that social determinants of wellbeing are especially important. However, it should be noted that the quantitative portion of the study did not include any variables related to the Israeli occupation. The analysis also reveals that the exclusion of youth, whether in the internal political sphere or in the social sphere, including within the family, has negative impacts on wellbeing. Through the qualitative portion of the study, the research team was able to dig deeper and understand how youth define wellbeing and what they think are its most important determinants.

The findings reveal that youth have a holistic understanding of wellbeing that takes into account both physical and psychological dimensions. Furthermore, this definition is closely interlinked with broader social, political, economic, and environmental contexts. Similarly, determinants of youth wellbeing are related to these contexts and interact with one another to affect it, often mediated through young people's personal characteristics. In terms of determinants, the political context, especially that pertaining to the Israeli occupation, plays a key role in affecting the wellbeing of Palestinian youth, both directly by creating uncertain conditions and exposing youth to violence, humiliation, and restrictions that limit their freedom and prospects and also through its impact on other domains, including economic conditions. In fact, one of the key economic determinants of wellbeing, according to the young people surveyed, is the prospect of unemployment.

One key aspect of the impact of the social domain on the wellbeing of youth is through social restrictions, and this is manifested in various forms. It is important to bear in mind that, while these restrictions and a general lack of encouragement are perceived to affect all youth, they have a significant gendered dimension and often impact young women more than young men. This finding connects with the second part of the study, which focuses on gender relations and attitudes to gender among Palestinian youth.

In general, the findings indicate that support for gender equality is limited. Furthermore, there are discrepancies between the views of young women and young men and, in general, young men are less supportive of gender equality than young women. This finding was consistent in both

the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. What is perhaps more important is that there appears to be a gap between young women and young men in terms of their perceptions and their experiences of gender relations. Within this domain, culture appears to have a significant impact on the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of youth. The findings of the qualitative part of the study highlight the sharp differences between young men and women in terms of the restrictions imposed upon them, with young women generally facing greater restrictions than their male counterparts. Another key finding is that while young women are more negatively affected by social restrictions, social expectations also put incredible pressures on young men, who are less able to meet these expectations due to broader contextual factors, including unemployment and insecurity. The findings confirm that patriarchy has negative impacts on youth in general, albeit in different ways for men and women. Education and awareness are considered to be key to improving perceptions and actual experiences of gender equality, according to the young people who participated in the study.

Below, we summarize the key recommendations put forward by participants in our dissemination activities, including by young women and men who participated in the FGDs.

## **Recommendations**

As part of this project, the research team conducted a series of workshops where they presented the findings of the study. During these workshops, they put together lists of recommendations that participants, who mainly consisted of youth, thought were necessary for improving wellbeing in general and, in particular, attitudes towards gender equality and more equitable gender relations.

## **Wellbeing**

Based on discussions with participants about wellbeing, four major contexts or levels of action to improve wellbeing were identified, relating to neighbourhood and community, family, institutions, and personal factors. The recommendations in these spheres of action are intended for all policy makers and civic leaders, and are based on the findings of the study.

## **Neighbourhood and community**

- Policy makers in all sectors, including universities, should collaborate to raise awareness and secure resources to educate people and decision makers about wellbeing and its importance, and also its socio-political determinants, through workshops, public events, and media and social media campaigns.
- The government should create more safe and well-managed spaces for youth, such as parks, sport clubs, museums, theatres, cultural centres, and so on, to practise recreational, physical, and cultural activities. Such spaces encourage productive leisure time and positive emotions and an active and engaged lifestyle, and provide

opportunities for young people to improve their talents and learn new skills, to interact and make friends, and to release negative energy.

- Youth should be included in the policy-making agendas of local authorities, and the social and political participation of young women and men should be encouraged to ensure that they are better represented and therefore able to advocate for their own strategic interests and practical needs.
- Civil society and media organizations should facilitate social platforms for young women and men that target social problems and misconceptions that adversely affect their wellbeing, and also contest entrenched patriarchal norms, social control, restrictions, and inequitable gender relations by promoting openness, acceptance, freedom, and respect.
- Awareness campaigns should also work to target parents and the community more broadly in order to create a more supportive and encouraging environment for youth.

## **Family**

- Governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should establish programs, policies, and subsidies for disadvantaged families that increase awareness of and support for appropriate, effective, open, and supportive home environments and upbringing, because of their importance in producing emotionally and cognitively healthy individuals.
- Awareness-raising campaigns should also work to target parents and the community more broadly in order to create a more supportive and encouraging environment for youth.

## **Institutions**

- The education system should be reformed and developed to include the teaching of life skills, such as problem solving, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and critical thinking.
- Social and emotional programs that enhance personal attributes and skills, which are important for wellbeing, should be incorporated into the curricula of schools and universities and into religious and cultural platforms in order to enhance personal resources, emotional intelligence, and capacity to endure and resist.
- Training activities should be conducted for school teachers and counsellors focusing on extracurricular activities for students and on how to provide a more innovative and supportive environment for youth.
- Efforts should be made to strengthen collaboration and the exchange of information between the educational system and other sectors such as the labour market and the agricultural and industrial sectors. These should include joint programs to communicate the needs, resources, and opportunities that exist between all sectors to better manage and reduce unemployment and to create more economic opportunities.

- Extracurricular programming in schools should be expanded in order to help develop young people's skills.
- The government – specifically the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education – should expand vocational training programs and work to increase the acceptability of these programs as an alternative to traditional education for some youth.
- There is a need for increased collaboration between educational institutions and the public and private sectors in order to train youth for the labour market.
- Psychosocial services within the Ministry of Health should be expanded to better address psychosocial health needs.
- The government should introduce programs that strengthen young people's social and financial capital, such as employment and social security and welfare policies, in particular policies to reduce inequality and ensure fair and equal access to resources and opportunities for youth and their families. The government should also fight *wasta* and corruption and make jobs available based on qualifications and competition.
- Opportunities and political positions should be opened up specifically for youth, with a strong mentorship component so that young women and men are supported in their careers.
- The government should constantly track national levels of subjective wellbeing, using surveys and polls for consistent feedback from youth about all past and future policies that affect their wellbeing.
- Programs for youth with disabilities should be expanded, focusing on the integration of young people with disabilities into schools and universities, public and private workplaces, CSOs and other organizations.
- Local and international advocacy organizations should be created and supported to defend youth from the violations of the Israeli military occupation, to ensure that their voices and needs are translated into actions against these violations, and eventually to help end the occupation. Advocacy activities should highlight the negative consequences of the occupation on the health and wellbeing of the Palestinian population.

## Personal

- The education system, as well as all other sectors, should introduce individually oriented programs such as skills building/development and life skills to support youth to develop strong and positive personal characteristics that will enable them to improve both their wellbeing and their resilience to contextual factors that reduce wellbeing.
- Social, psychological, and legal services nationwide should be strengthened for all marginalized individuals and families in need of support and advocacy (for example, youth in extreme poverty, sexually abused youth, those facing problems with drug addiction, etc.).

## Gender

In terms of gender, the main levels for intervention are government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs). Like the recommendations above, these recommendations are based on the participatory working sessions held at the dissemination workshops and reflect the opinions and recommendations of participants.

### Recommendations for government

- Integrate concepts of gender equality into education curricula and activities, especially at the early stages of schooling (e.g. to change the typical image of women as being mothers and housewives only), into workplaces through labour laws, and into social spaces while promoting gender equity as part of the local culture, in addition to highlighting past and current female role models in Palestinian society.
- Encourage religious leaders to stress the importance of women's rights in the sacred texts: for example, speaking about women's issues during Friday prayers in mosques and at Sunday masses in churches.
- Improve current Palestinian labour law to ensure that there is no discrimination against women on the basis of their marital status or childbearing, and draft new laws that grant longer periods of maternity and paternity leave.
- Ensure gender-responsive budgeting and maintain the quota for women in governmental organizations, appropriately implemented and practised without male coercion, to ensure that the capacity of women is built and their voices are heard in decision-making processes.
- Improve Palestinian labour law in terms of minimum wages and to protect women from harassment and discrimination.
- Enshrine in law equal and equitable employment opportunities and ensure the enforcement of such laws.
- Introduce policies to prevent discrimination against women in terms of wages, and demand that wages are paid through banks to provide formal proof of payment and prevent employers making cash payments that are below the legal minimum wage. This can be done under the control of the Ministry of Labour.

### Recommendations for NGOs

- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on women's rights that target disadvantaged women in their villages, and engage in social media forums that support gender equality.
- Target both young men and young women in awareness-raising activities in order to reduce the gender gap by presenting young men as partners.

- Provide legal protection and support for organizations representing marginalized women to defend their rights in the areas of inheritance, divorce, education, and choosing a partner.
- Support small projects to empower women financially to ensure their financial independence.
- Conduct activities that target children at young ages to support gender equality.
- Focus on long-term projects that involve both genders and take into account the specific characteristics of each community.
- Develop programs targeting parents that focus on concepts of gender equality to ensure that these concepts are transferred to future generations.
- Support media campaigns that stress women's roles in society and gender equality.
- Work on developing the skills and talents of women at all levels and conduct motivational and inspiring workshops to present examples of success stories.
- Support educational programs within schools and universities that focus on concepts of gender equality.

## **Recommendations for CBOs**

- Support programs that stress the importance of gender equality in terms of legal protection and education and that provide legal services for women to help protect their rights in areas such as GBV, divorce and inheritance.
- Create new programs that stress the importance of gender equality in terms of legal protection and education, and amplify the voices of women who legal systems have failed in the past, by using social media platforms.
- Break with the stereotypical depictions of gender roles by Palestinian media and replace these with healthier values that promote a more equitable division of labour within couples.
- Support leadership programs that focus on women's leadership and participation in order to rebalance the power dynamics of public and political spheres dominated by men.
- Showcase role models and inspiring success stories to construct images for young women to look up to and follow, and to help young men to see women in this light.
- Showcase positive male role models for young men in order to promote positive masculinity.
- Create forums for the exchange of experiences to increase awareness of the problems that Palestinian women face in their societies.
- Conduct awareness campaigns for parents on different issues related to gender equality.

- Educate women about their rights through seminars that cover the theoretical and practical aspects of rights for all groups of society, especially for the younger generation.
- Include young men in activities and programs related to gender equity, including awareness-building activities and other activities that highlight the negative impacts of gender inequity for both women and men.
- Establish partnerships with the Ministry of Education regarding gender identity and roles.
- Hold empowerment sessions for men and women.
- Encourage unions to take a more active role, especially on women's rights and issues.
- Separate gender equality from religious values.
- Increase the awareness of staff on issues of gender equality by holding gender workshops and sessions.
- Campaign to change existing conditions and laws.
- Organize awareness campaigns on the consequences of early marriage for health and target girls in school.
- Organize awareness campaigns on the consequences of gender-based violence (GBV) and gender inequity.
- Support women as independent individuals and motivate them to be positive role models, to help make men more aware of the importance of women's independence.
- Encourage religious leaders to discuss the concepts of gender equality and equity in religion during Friday prayers at mosques and Sunday services at churches.
- Create videos and awareness bulletins about issues of gender equality and target media, mosques, and clinics (via waiting rooms) to disseminate information on the concepts and values of gender equality.
- Target media to put more emphasis on topics relating to gender equality through national television and radio.
- Target women through associations, such as rural development associations, to help those without education to learn skills that are useful for income generation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> N. Goldin. (2014). *The Global Youth Wellbeing Index*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.

<https://www.iyfnet.org/sites/default/files/library/globalyouthwellbeingindex.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> J.J. Arnett, R. Žukauskienė, and K. Sugimura. (2014). *The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18–29 years: implications for mental health*. *The Lancet Psychiatry* 1(7), 569-576.

<http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/AZK.LANCET.2014.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> W. Abu Fasheh. (2013). *The Status of Youth in Palestine*. Sharek Youth Forum.

<http://sharek.ps/en/1/33/172/The-Status-of-Youth-in-Palestine-2013.htm>; R. Giacaman, Y. Rabaia, V. Nguyen-Gillham, R. Batniji, R.-L. Punamäki, and D. Summerfield. (2011). *Mental health, social distress and political oppression: The case of the occupied Palestinian territory*. *Global Public Health*, 6(5), 547-559. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233036627> Mental health social distress and political oppression The case of the occupied Palestinian territory; and R. Giacaman, H.S. Shannon, H. Saab, N. Arya, and W. Boyce. (2007). *Individual and collective exposure to political violence: Palestinian adolescents coping with conflict*. *The European Journal of Public Health* 17(4), 361-368. <https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/17/4/361/502592>

<sup>4</sup> Transparency International. (2015). *Asset Declarations in Palestine: Illicit Enrichment and Conflicts of Interest of Public Officials*.

[https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2016\\_AssetDeclarationsInPalestine\\_EN.pdf](https://images.transparencycdn.org/images/2016_AssetDeclarationsInPalestine_EN.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> W. Abu Fasheh. (2013). *The Status of Youth in Palestine*, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> N. Kabeer. (2005). *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Critical Analysis of the Third Millennium Development Goal*. *Gender and Development*, 13(1): pp.13-24; and C. Rubenberg. (2001). *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank*. USA: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> Social and Economic Policies Monitor. (2017). *Women in the Palestinian labour market*. <http://www.almarsad.ps/archives/791>

<sup>8</sup> Various definitions of youth exist. The PCBS defines this group as young people between the ages of 15 and 29, but for the purposes of this study we refer to youth as being young women and men between the ages of 18 and 29, and the research for it was conducted among this age group.

<sup>9</sup> W. Abu Fasheh. (2013). *The Status of Youth in Palestine*, op. cit. <http://www.youth.ps/new/userfiles/file/publications/Research%20and%20Studies/SharekYouthForum-Promise-or-Peril-The-Status-of-Youth-in-Palestine.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Power2Youth. (2017). *Freedom, Dignity and Justice*. Power2Youth: Rome. <http://power2youth.iai.it/>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, Jerusalem was not included in the survey.

<sup>13</sup> Wellbeing is a multifaceted and culturally and contextually sensitive concept, and has different definitions and connotations. In general, it means feeling and

functioning well. The WHO-5 Well-Being Index for mental wellbeing was used in the quantitative survey. This establishes a person's wellbeing by asking questions about various domains of their life, and covers the constructs of positive mood, vitality, and general interests.

<sup>14</sup> C. Winther Topp, S.D. Ostergaard, S. Sondergaard, and P. Bech. (2005). *The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: A systematic review of the literature. Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 2015;84:167-176.

<https://www.karger.com/Article/Fulltext/376585>

<sup>15</sup> The young men invited to participate did not show up.

<sup>16</sup> This was despite the researcher clarifying what the aims of the focus group were.

<sup>17</sup> For most FGDs the facilitators were a two-person team of one woman and one man, but some were led by a team of two women and one man. The exception was the Gaza Strip, where the researcher was a woman.

<sup>18</sup> Meaning that this is the foundational point or starting point in one's life.

<sup>19</sup> In the study, the age group included for youth was 18–29. When discussing upbringing, many participants believed that the way that children are brought up has an important impact on their outlook and personalities later on. So while childhood was not a key phase of interest for the study, it was brought up by youth as a formative phase that affected them as they got older.

<sup>20</sup> The translation from the Arabic might be unclear, but the participant was articulating the point that these unnecessary restrictions and the lack of support and encouragement from society put youth in a situation where they have to expend their energy on dealing with these negative influences, rather than directing it towards something more productive.

<sup>21</sup> The General Secondary Education Certificate Examination, the final stage of secondary schooling.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank. (2020). *The World Bank in West Bank and Gaza*.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/westbankandgaza/overview>

<sup>23</sup> This number was used by the participant to illustrate his point.

<sup>24</sup> Other factors included age, gender, place of residence, and education.

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