

**VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN
IN THE GAZA STRIP
AFTER THE ISRAELI MILITARY
OPERATION PROTECTIVE EDGE
2014**

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Commissioned by Alianza por la Solidaridad (ApS) and ActionAid (AA)
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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|--|
| AHLC | Ad Hoc Liaison Committee |
| CBO | Community-based organisation |
| CFTA | Culture and Free Thought Association |
| CSO | Civil society organisation |
| DAIP | Domestic Abuse Intervention Project |
| DV | Domestic violence |
| FGD | Focus group discussions |
| FGM/C | Female genital mutilation/cutting |
| GBV | Gender-based violence |
| GBVIMS | Gender-based Violence International Management System |
| IDP | Internally displaced person |
| IPV | Intimate partner violence |
| MIRA | Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Assessment |
| MoWA | Ministry of Women's Affairs |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| oPt | Occupied Palestinian territory |
| PCBS | Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics |
| PNA | Palestinian National Authority |
| PTSD | Post-traumatic stress disorder |
| SGBV | Sexual and other forms of gender-based violence |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNFPA | United Nations Population Fund |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNITAR | United Nations Institute for Training and Research |
| UNOCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| UNHRC | United Nations Human Rights Council |
| UNWRA | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees |
| VAW | Violence against women |
| VAWG | Violence against women and girls |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Following the Israeli military Operation Protective Edge in summer 2014, this reports presents the findings of a study initiated by ActionAid and Alianza por la Solidaridad (Alianza) on violence against women (VAW) in the Gaza Strip, defined as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’.

This study had two aims: First, to paint a wider picture of violence against women across Gaza after the last Israeli military operation, complementing existing qualitative work on subsets of the population. Second, to draw conclusions about what services could be offered to better protect and support survivors of VAW in Gaza, and what interventions can be planned that tackle attitudes and trigger behavioural changes in order to decrease its incidence and prevalence. A survey with a representative sample of women in the Gaza Strip and qualitative interviews, focus groups and roundtable discussions were carried out to learn more about the types of VAW in public and private spaces in Gaza; incidence and prevalence of VAW in public and private spheres; perception of the nature, causes and consequences of VAW; existing avenues of support to survivors of VAW; and to understand its link to military violence in Gaza.

The fieldwork for this study took place between April and July 2015; 37 social workers spoke to 440 women who responded to a quantitative questionnaire, and 332 women, 130 men, 7 key community informants and 28 members of civil society organizations in focus group discussions, roundtables and individual interviews to help us gain a wider picture about the types, prevalence and frequency of violence that women aged 17 and above experience across the Gaza Strip.

These are our main findings:

Types and forms of violence

- Most of the violence experienced by women is perpetrated by husbands or other family members inside their homes.
- Psychological abuse, particularly in the form of curses, insults, yelling and screaming is the type of violence most prevalent across Gaza.

Prevalence and incidence

- 39.6 per cent of women interviewed in our survey experienced at least one type of domestic violence since the end of the Israeli military operation in summer 2014.
- Most women experience acts of violence as non-singular events.
- More than 63 per cent of women who experience domestic violence report being subject to different types of abuse.

Avenues of support

- The most frequent coping strategies of women are to try to solve the problem by themselves, e.g. by ignoring the perpetrators or asking them to stop, and by asking family for help. Around 28 per cent of abused women do not speak to anyone about it.
- Compared to information from previous years, the use of formal and informal support mechanisms has slightly increased.

Perceptions of causes

- Reasons for the perpetration of violence against women were perceived to depend on the sex of the perpetrator: men are perceived to perpetrate violence against women in order to exert control and power, and women are perceived to perpetrate violence against other women mainly out of jealousy and envy.

Military violence and VAW

- Study participants distinguish a clear link between political violence and violence against women.
- In focus group discussions, a clear link was also made between the economic situation as a result of the Israeli political violence and violence against women.
- Our survey data shows that husbands' feelings of stress or depression in connection with the economic situation are related to women's exposure to physical domestic violence.
- We find a significantly larger share of women reporting physical and verbal abuse in private and public spheres, and a small increase in prevalence rates of domestic violence between the 12 months before and 11 months after the Israeli military operation.¹
- We find that displacement during the hostilities is significantly correlated with higher likelihoods of experiencing domestic violence, particularly of an emotional, physical and controlling nature.

Based on the findings of our study and what we know about what works against VAW, we recommend multidimensional responses that aim at changing gender norms and attitudes at individual, household and community level as well as unequal institutional structures. Particularly important are:

- Awareness-raising activities should be aimed at different groups, and involve both men and women. Activities that could reach a wider audience, such as through TV or dedicated radio shows, could be particularly effective in engaging women and men in talking about VAW, its causes and consequences and ways to resolve conflicts.
- Including traditional and religious leaders to correct wrong concepts and interpretations of women's rights and VAW was frequently mentioned by many study participants.
- Awareness alone cannot lead to behavioural changes. Psychological, financial and legal support and economic empowerment need to complement activities in order to provide women with real choices to reduce dependence and learn and practise mechanisms to minimise violence against them.
- Early marriage was perceived by study participants as one of the reasons for conflict between spouses and domestic abuse. The legal marriage age should to be raised, and awareness raising and advocacy against early marriage should be strengthened.
- Some populations, particularly in more remote areas that are hard to access, do not yet benefit from the same level of programmes as others. However, these are often also more traditional and poor, making it difficult for women to participate. Efforts should be undertaken to reach these populations as well.
- Civil society organisations need to better understand the situation and needs of women in particular and the society in general. This will enable them to better tailor programmes and to monitor any progress made and focus and reinforce what works.
- Better coordination among governmental, non-governmental and international actors would allow organisations to become more specialised and thus effective. It would also facilitate the creation of a system where relief and development programmes could work together, without the need to discontinue one at the expense of the other in times of emergency.
- Finally, an end to the ongoing siege and access restrictions would contribute to the economic recovery of Gaza and thus relieve individuals, families and communities from some of the daily stresses that are associated with higher levels of domestic violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that 35.6 per cent of women across the world have experienced physical and/or sexual violence at some point in their lives. Most of this violence comes from intimate partners in the domestic sphere (García-Moreno, Pallitto, Devries, Stock, Watts and Abrahams 2013), and large cross-country studies such as García-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise and Watts (2005) or Hindin, Kishor and Ansara (2008) emphasise both the similarities of domestic violence and wide variations between different settings. Furthermore, many women worldwide experience emotional violence and controlling behaviours by their partners (García-Moreno et al. 2005). Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is not only a threat to basic human rights but it also threatens the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Furthermore, evidence has shown that intimate partner violence is associated with poor physical and mental health, higher risks of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, restricted livelihood options and choices, and lower accumulation of human capital (García-Moreno et al. 2005; Moosa 2012). For example, women who have experienced physical or sexual abuse by their partners are 16 per cent more likely to give birth to low birth-weight babies, almost twice as likely to experience depression, up to 1.5 times more likely to contract HIV, and more than twice as likely to have an abortion than women who have not experienced intimate partner violence (García-Moreno et al. 2013).

Violence against women and girls in conflict-affected populations is related to multifarious levels of vulnerability of conflict and displacement. The consequences on physical, sexual and reproductive health as well as psychosocial and mental health effects of VAWG are typically exacerbated in conflict settings by a lack of access to or improper medical care, concurrent infectious disease, malnutrition, stress, and other psychosocial problems. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to violence during outbursts of armed conflict as a result of the separation of families, disruption of community and institutional protection and service structures, and increased obstacles to access to justice for survivors, among others. Furthermore, for a number of other reasons, including shame, stigma, low awareness of or access to services, lack of protection and security, malfunctioning justice system and impunity, VAWG is often under-reported and available services under-utilised. Gaza has been marked by decades of conflict. The most recent war on Gaza took place in July–August 2014; and the 51-day-long bombardment killed 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians, of whom 299 were women and 551 children, injured 11,231 Palestinians, including 3,540 women and 3,436 children (UNHRC 2015), and resulted in wide-scale damage to private and public infrastructure and properties. About 28 per cent of the population were internally displaced as a direct consequence of the military operation (UNOCHA 2014b). Directly following this Israeli military operation, UNFPA (2014) investigated the living realities of internally displaced women and girls aged 14 and above in Gaza. The study found that many women and girls were subject to various types and degrees of VAWG in emergency shelters and host families' homes. They experienced discrimination in receiving aid and services in shelters; some women were

dismissed due to overcrowding or maltreated by administration and workers in shelters; and a lack of privacy and security mechanisms increased women's and girls' psychological pressures, anxieties and fears. Women in shelters and in host families also experienced verbal, physical and sexual violence, often by their husbands.

BOX 1 TYPES OF GBV IN THE GBVIMS

The Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) defines six core types of GBV:

- 1. Rape:** non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object.
- 2. Sexual assault:** any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. Examples include: attempted rape, as well as unwanted kissing, fondling, or touching of genitalia and buttocks. Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) is an act of violence that impacts sexual organs, and as such should be classified as sexual assault. *This incident type does not include rape, i.e. where penetration has occurred.*
- 3. Physical assault:** an act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. Examples include: hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort or injury. *This incident type does not include FGM/C.*
- 4. Forced marriage:** the marriage of an individual against her or his will.
- 5. Denial of resources, opportunities or services:** denial of rightful access to economic resources/assets or livelihood opportunities, education, health or other social services. Examples include a widow prevented from receiving an inheritance, earnings forcibly taken by an intimate partner or family member, a woman prevented from using contraceptives, a girl prevented from attending school, etc. Reports of general poverty should not be recorded.
- 6. Psychological/emotional abuse:** infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include: threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, verbal harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc.

Our quantitative survey attempted to capture information on the prevalence of all of these types of abuse, with the exception of forced marriage. However, forced, particularly early marriage was frequently brought up by study participants in focus groups discussions as one of the main reasons for spousal conflict and violence against women.

Find more information on the GBVIMS on <http://www.gbvims.com>

This study aims to paint a wider picture of the types, prevalence and frequency of violence that women across Gaza experienced after the last military operation, including the experiences of women who remained in or have since returned to their homes. This report presents findings from a study that took place between 20 April and 7 July 2015, initiated and funded by ActionAid and Alianza por la Solidaridad (Alianza). The study focuses on violence against women, defined as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’²

The study aims to contribute to our knowledge of VAW incidence and prevalence, as well as responses, coping strategies and mechanisms of support in the five governorates in Gaza 2015, in order to inform the design of better and effective programmatic interventions aimed at preventing and protecting from VAW.

In particular, the research tried to answer the following questions:

- ❖ What types of violence are commonly experienced by women in public and private spheres of life in Gaza?
- ❖ What are the incidence and prevalence of VAW in public and private spheres in Gaza?
- ❖ What are the existing avenues of support to survivors of VAW, and what challenges do women face when trying to reach out for help at the different levels (civil society, non-government and government institutions, informal conflict resolution means)?
- ❖ What are women’s and young men’s perceptions of the nature, causes and consequences of VAW, and how does this influence the level of acceptance of VAW and existing avenues of support?
- ❖ To what extent are the nature, causes and consequences of VAW linked to military violence in Gaza?
- ❖ How can service provision be designed to better protect and support survivors of VAW in Gaza, and what interventions can be planned that tackle attitudes and trigger behavioural changes in order to decrease its incidence and prevalence?

2. METHODOLOGY

The target populations of the study were women above the age of 17 in all five governorates of Gaza, including both rural and urban areas and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and non-IDPs.³ Furthermore, we were interested in the attitudes of a smaller sample of young men aged 15–30 in order to inform the design of interventions aimed at changing attitudes and behaviours related to VAW.

The study employed a mixed methods approach, consisting of a short desk-based review and both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. This approach yields the advantage of providing a richer pool of data than would be achieved if the study rested on qualitative or quantitative approaches alone. Furthermore, a sequencing of methods allowed us to design instruments targeted at the specific context. We sequenced the data collection in four steps:

- ❖ Desk-based research
- ❖ Round 1 of qualitative data collection
- ❖ Round 2 of qualitative data collection and quantitative data collection
- ❖ Round 3 of qualitative data collection

After each round of data collection, the instruments for the following round were prepared to focus on specific aims for each round and build on and complement the knowledge gained during previous rounds. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments and implementation are described in sections 2.1 and 2.2 below.

The desk-based research was focused on studies that could provide information on VAWG in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), particularly in Gaza, and on the design of qualitative and quantitative instruments. The purpose was to discover existing and missing knowledge of the study context, as well as to learn about methodological issues that previous research might have encountered in order to inform our research design.

2.1 QUALITATIVE INSTRUMENTS AND IMPLEMENTATION

For our enquiry, we used semi-structured interviews, separate focus group discussions (FGDs) with women and men, and roundtable discussions as qualitative tools. All qualitative FGDs, interviews and roundtables were organised by a team of 37 research-experienced social workers and overseen by Laila Barhoum. The process took place between May and July 2015 with the help of local organisations, who contacted potential participants for the FGDs and interviews, and helped to identify working civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-

based organisations (CBOs)¹ for the roundtables through their networks. The different rounds of the qualitative collection took place throughout May–July. The training was conducted by Ghassan Abu Hatab, trainer and coordinator at the Development Studies Center, Gaza Office.

We aimed to speak with women, men and key informants such as members of civil society organisations and community leaders in rural and urban areas, and camps across all governorates. Overall, we conducted 43 FGDs, 8 roundtable discussions, and 23 single interviews.

Ten individual interviews with women survivors of violence focused on their personal situation, the types of problems and violence they encountered, the impact of such violence and the way they respond or responded to the situation. Interviews with four men were aimed at learning more about their experiences and perceptions of VAW, perceptions of how VAW affects women and children, its perceived causes, and how it could and should be handled.

Eight roundtable discussions with members of 28 civil society organisations helped us understand from their perspective what support and programmes are currently implemented in the Gaza Strip, and which of these they believe are most effective. Interviews were also conducted with nine key community informants such as *mukhtars* (2), *mukhtaras* (2) and members of social reforms or neighbourhood committees (5),⁵ all chosen by families or communities for their wisdom and position in their families. Their opinions are valued in case of any problem that occurs that needs intervention. Most families have a *mukhtar* – someone who helps solve problems between family members – of their own, and recently the role of female *mukhtara* has been introduced to assist in solving conflicts especially when it is related to women. Members of social reforms committees are usually not members from the same families but take similar roles to those of the *mukhtars* and *mukhtaras*. Most of our key community informants are religious figures who work at mosques. However, social reform committees are addressing issues rather on the societal level, for example between individuals or families. However, it should be noted that *mukhtars* can be part of social reform committees.

While each of the three rounds of qualitative data collection aimed at learning about types and acts of VAW, where it happens, perpetrators, and avenues of and challenges to accessing existing support; each of the rounds also had a distinct ‘sub-aim’.

The first round of eight qualitative focus groups with 67 women and 16 men, and two roundtables with members from nine civil organisations was focused on learning about social definitions of violence against women and spaces where such violence would commonly happen. Together

with information from the desk-based review, the information gathered during this round of data collection fed into the design of the quantitative questionnaire. For example, women in FGDs mentioned that they were sometimes threatened with having their children taken away; this was one of the acts of violence that was then included in the quantitative questionnaire. This first and smaller round of qualitative data collection also served the data collection team as a 'piloting exercise', which was then used to improve parts of the qualitative instruments for the second and third round.

The second round of qualitative data collection included 25 focus groups with 91 men and 183 women, four roundtables and a small sample of six individual interviews with women who experienced violence and three individual interviews with men.⁶ This round, while still collecting information on women's and men's understanding of VAW and spaces where it happens, aimed at learning about people, institutions and organisations that could offer support in a more detailed fashion. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on gathering more information about challenges in access to support and about the support provided. From men, we aimed to learn more about their perceptions of gender roles, and their attitudes towards how society should deal with violence against women. Because women younger than 17 years of age could not be included directly in our research, we asked questions about females of younger age groups in all focus groups.

Given what we had learned during the first two rounds of data collection, the final third round focused on learning more about how the war in summer 2014 had changed the situation for women and girls; about women that perpetrate violence against women and girls; and about how VAW could be addressed from the perspective of the participants (ideas for programmes or activities). The third round then included ten FGDs with 66 women and 23 men, two interviews with representatives from three organisations and 14 interviews with one man, four women and nine *mukhtars* and *mukhtaras* and reform community or neighbourhood committee members.

2.2 QUANTITATIVE INSTRUMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The quantitative questionnaire served the main aim of learning about different types of VAW perpetrated by different actors in different spaces, and their prevalence and frequencies. Given the large proportion of domestic violence within the spectrum of VAW, we included two modules, where the first captured violence irrespective of by whom it is perpetrated – domestic and non-domestic violence in public and/or private spaces; and the second module focused on domestic violence perpetrated by members of the same household. This would capture intimate partner violence (IPV) by husbands for married women, and violence by parents, siblings or other people living in the same household for unmarried women. In the case of the latter, we asked the respondent to rank which family members abuse them. At the beginning of both modules, the enumerators cued the respondents about the general or domestic context of the questions in order to avoid reporting bias.

BOX 2 DEFINITIONS OF VAW AND CATEGORIES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN USED IN THE REPORT

Women experience violence by different actors in different places. For the sake of clarity, when talking about violence against women, we make a distinction here by different perpetrators:

Domestic violence against women is defined as acts of physical, sexual, emotional, or other forms of abuse perpetrated against a married or non-married woman by a husband or other family members she lives with. These acts can be perpetrated both at home and in public spaces, such as in the street.

Non-domestic violence against women is then defined as acts of physical, sexual, emotional or other forms of abuse perpetrated by (extended) family members not living with the woman, and non-relatives, e.g. colleagues, or strangers to the woman.

In order to produce reliable and valid measurement of women's experiences of violence, respondents were asked multiple behaviourally based questions about specific acts of violence. The choice of these acts was informed largely by the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2011 by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS 2011), and complemented by findings from the first round of qualitative FGDs. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, the violence modules were preceded by questions on household and personal characteristics, and household's experiences during the military operation in July–August 2014. This allowed the interviewers to approach the more sensitive topics gradually, after they had been able to develop a degree of trust with respondents.

Furthermore, the interviews were conducted by a team of all female social workers, who (1)

had experience handling difficult cases and would be able to refer respondents if needed; (2) were all very interested in working on this topic, which affects the way interviews are handled, which in turn is instrumental in building trust and encouraging high response rates and disclosure rates; and (3) have conducted research on gender-based violence (GBV) with Dr Ali (Al Azhar University Gaza) successfully in the past. Dr Ali trained the social workers and designed and chose the sample for the quantitative data collection. In order to provide for the required confidentiality and safety of respondents on a sensitive issue such as domestic violence, only one woman per household was interviewed in privacy as far as possible.⁷ A pre-test, conducted on 13–14 May 2015, showed that the ordering and nature of questions worked very well, and that women were happy to answer all questions. In general there was a feeling among the data collectors – also expressed in key informant interviews – that after summer 2014 women’s willingness to speak about VAW had increased. A short interrogation of the pre-test data also showed that responses seemed not to be unexpected and reasonable in relation to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) survey in 2011. After the field training, the quantitative data collection took place between 28 and 31 May in all five governorates across the Gaza Strip. An overview of selected communities is given in Annex B.

2.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

There are some limitations to this research:

- First, we could only investigate women aged 17 and above. Acquiring consent from minors in the presence of their parents or guardians would have jeopardised the confidentiality and potentially even the safety of the respondent in question.
- Second, we focused on types of VAW that are relatively ‘easy’ to measure in a statistical sample survey; for example, investigating honour killings would have not been appropriate for the quantitative survey.
- Third, the sample – although representative of the female population aged 17 and over in the Gaza Strip – is still very small. Therefore, some differences in prevalence rates before and after the military operation, or between subgroups of women, which might be statistically significant, would not test as significant if they were small. However, this does not mean that a difference is non-existent or practically irrelevant.
- Fourth, the quantitative study is of a descriptive nature; we cannot measure causal effects, for example, of the military operation, on the prevalence and incidence of VAW. We can, however, speak about correlations between variables, and investigate through our qualitative enquiries what women and men perceived to be causes and consequences.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 EXISTING KNOWLEDGE ON VAW IN GAZA

The role of women in Palestine is central to Palestinian society and within the household; however, this role is mostly limited to the private sphere of the family and evolves around the woman's 'duty' as a childbearer and caregiver to the members of the household. Over the years, women in Gaza suffered from different sorts of violence from different parties and on different levels. Living in an occupied country, women are subjected to conflict-related violence with on-going violations of human rights. Along with all the Palestinians living there, they are subject to collective punishments and increased constraints on social, cultural and economic rights.

When tracking the source and causes of violence against women in Palestine, several studies had identified three interrelated factors that cause violence against women. These factors are of socioeconomic, political and cultural nature, where the emphasis is often placed on social factors, culture, and norms and traditions, which position the women in a limited role in a male-dominant society and take away from them their power to choose and decide their own fate (MoWA 2011). Due to social constraints women are inhibited from economic and political decision-making and participation. The interaction of socioeconomic, political and cultural factors supports the dominant patriarchal system, and '[m]embers of a man's family are obliged to abide by the social values as the man is responsible for his family's behavior and will be blamed when the behavior of one of his family members does not fit with the established social values' (UN Women and Institute of Women's Studies 2014: 114).

The *Violence Survey* by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS 2011) identified three categories of violence: (1) violence by the Israeli Occupation (of physical and psychological nature); (2) violence within the public sphere (mainly in streets, educational institutes, workplaces and public service locations; and of physical, psychological and sexual nature); and (3) domestic violence (of psychological, physical, economic, social and sexual nature).

Occupational violence as external violence affects women both directly, with the exposure to the direct attacks, and displacement especially in times of escalation; and indirectly, through the impact of the occupation and blockade on the socioeconomic situation in Gaza Strip, which was considered by focus group participants as one of the main factors for violence against women. Internally, as in most countries, women are more affected by domestic violence than by violence from non-family members and in the public sphere (UN Women 2009; PCBS 2011). Moreover, PCBS (2011) found that the most common form of domestic violence was verbal, rather than physical and sexual. Divorced, widowed or childless women are particularly vulnerable in the absence of a male spouse or a son of legal age, as that will subject the women to lack of protection in accessing rights of child custody and guardianship. According

to Palestinian law, in the case of divorce, child custody usually goes to the wife until the child reaches the age of seven for boys and nine for girls, with the ability to extend the age of custody by two years if needed; afterwards the custody will be the right of fathers. In the case of widows, the law gives the wife an open custody over her children.⁸

The *Violence Survey* (PCBS 2011) indicates that 51 per cent of ever-married women in the Gaza Strip were exposed to one form of violence by their husbands during the 12 months preceding the survey.⁹ Among those women, the rate of those who were exposed to psychological violence at least once was 76.4 per cent, 88.3 per cent were exposed to economic abuse violence, 78.9 per cent were exposed to social violence, 34.8 per cent were exposed to physical violence, and 14.9 per cent were exposed to sexual violence. Other surveys have shown a high rate of acceptance of violence against women: 47 per cent of men and 35 per cent of women see wife beating as justified if a wife disobeys her husband, and 49 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women feel that women must be responsible for their husbands' violence by doing something wrong (UN Women and Institute of Women's Studies 2014). Al-Masri's (2000) findings, cited in UN Women and Institute of Women's Studies (2014), indicate that men and women alike justify VAW. Furthermore, women experiencing domestic violence often blame themselves.

Several studies showed that women who face violence turn to family members, especially female members, for support. Palestinian society views violence against women as a private problem that must be addressed within the family. If women make the matter public they often face 'familial and social retribution'. However, with the growth of the civil society and governmental effort, other options to deal with such situations were created in past years. Most programmes by civil society organizations are designed around economic empowerment and support, capacity and skill development, awareness raising and counselling. The underlying assumptions of these models are that economic disadvantage, lack of education and engagement in society, and lack of awareness about women's rights and choices as the results of unequal power relations are the main 'facilitating factors' of violence against women, i.e. factors that impede women from challenging male power and abusive relationships. Economic empowerment programmes in Gaza often take the forms of small business and cash-for-work programmes; development programmes are often conducted in workshop form; awareness-raising workshops, newsletters, advertisement, petitions and printouts; and counselling is offered through free hotlines and online consultations.

With the existence of a legal and 'representative' entity of Palestine, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and under the umbrella of the Basic Law, Palestinian women are theoretically protected by the Palestinian laws from any sort of discrimination they face. The Palestinian Basic Law states that:

'All Palestinians are equal under the law and judiciary, without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, political views, or disability' (MoWA 2011). While this article guarantees equal rights for all members of society, the Palestinian penal code and the combination of British, Jordanian and Egyptian penal codes, which it is influenced by, have many contradictions that do not provide women and girls with protection against violence. Moreover, the penal codes encompass articles offering mitigating circumstances to perpetrators of violent acts against women. For example, perpetrators can be granted reduced sentences for murders happening under the name of 'honour'. Also, the law allows rapists to escape punishment if they agree to marry their victims for at least a period of three years if the crime was considered a misdemeanour or five years if the crime was considered a felony. The applicable penal codes allow women to be punished more severely than men for the same offences; for example, women are sentenced from six months to two years in prison for adultery while men are sentenced to between one month and one year in prison. In addition, under the law women are not granted confidentiality of trials and investigations involving cases of domestic violence. In the absence of the resources and infrastructure needed to implement national strategies, laws still lack the ability to give the abused women the necessary protection against all types of violence, hence forcing women to go back to the same environment they were trying to change or escape. Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Daher-Nashef (2014) show the lack of ability to help women exposed to violence; and PCBS (2011) finds that one-third of women exposed to violence prefer to stay silent.

3.2 POLITICAL VIOLENCE, CONFLICT AND VAWG IN GAZA IN THE PAST

In general, stress related to conflict has been found to be a potential trigger for gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence, or it may exacerbate ongoing violence (Wirtz, Glass, Pham, Aberra, Rubenstein, Singh and Vu 2013; Annan and Brier 2010; Horn 2010). Evidence suggests that prolonged exposure to violence increases the risk of accumulation of daily stressors such as an insecure economic environment, where the resulting stress may also aggravate violence within the family structure (Stark and Ager 2011; Wirtz *et al.* 2013; HSRP 2012; Llosa, Casas, Thomas, Mairai, Grais and Moro 2012). Refugees and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence due to forced displacement of populations, separation of families, disruption of community and institutional protection structures and challenged access to justice for survivors (UNHCR 2003). Furthermore, adverse health outcomes may be exacerbated in conflict situations by a lack of access to or improper medical care, concurrent infectious disease, malnutrition, stress, and other health problems (*ibid.*). One such example is the provision of reproductive health services. During the military operation in summer 2014, access to antenatal and prenatal care was severely hampered, maternity wards had to make space for conflict-related injuries and obstetricians were involved

in general surgeries. As a result, maternal and neonatal mortality rates increased, e.g. Shifa hospital reported an increase in neonatal deaths from 7 to 14 per cent, and Nasser hospital from 2.7 to 12 per cent of admitted cases (Health Cluster 2014).

The situation in Gaza is a particularly difficult environment in which VAWG or any other challenges could be tackled. In a context of ongoing humanitarian crisis with ongoing blockade on land, air and sea, and repeated outbreaks of hostilities, both violent outbreaks and continuing socioeconomic pressures on families and individuals have negative impacts on well-being and social relations. For example, Ebeid and Al-Belbeisi (2009) investigated the impact of internal political separation coming with and following from the fierce military conflict between Fatah and Hamas in 2007 on social relations, families and gender roles in Gaza. Politics is a very sensitive topic, and usually women will not be able to express their political opinion if it differs from their husband's. Only if both have the same opinion is a woman encouraged to express it. Related to this is that marriage of two people from different political parties is usually not allowed. Ebeid and Al-Belbeisi (2009) found that in many cases fratricidal conflict within families became a feature that created tensions and in some cases verbal or physical violence between spouses, parents and children, and siblings. Debates on factions also created rifts between neighbours, colleagues and other relatives outside the immediate household; many community-based, private and governmental organisations were closed adding to the economic pressures of families and individuals, which in turn at times contributed to tensions and violence within the family.

Several studies have found high numbers of accumulated traumatic life events, economic pressure, and elevated prevalence of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among adults and children in the Gaza Strip (De Jong, Komproe, Van Ommeren, El Masri, Araya, Khaled, van der Put and Somasundaram 2001; Khamis 2012; Canetti, Galea, Hall, Johnson, Palmieri and Hobfoll 2010. In their study of short- and long-term effects of the Israeli Operation Cast lead 2008–09,¹⁰ Llosa *et al.* (2012) found significant negative effects on mental health. Children aged 15 and younger were particularly affected by an increase in anxiety disorders, and people aged 16 and above more so by depressions. Following the military Operation Cast Lead, another assessment by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) cited in UNICEF 2011, showed high levels of psychosocial distress among communities and families in Gaza: 20 per cent of women suffered from psychological disorders; 98 per cent of interviewed youth reported to have problems with aggression and difficulties sleeping, leading 40 per cent of them to take Tramadol in the hope of sleeping better and reducing anxieties.

Not many data are available on domestic violence and VAW within the family and in the workplace as a result of the Israeli occupation. An investigation by the World Bank (2010)

remains inconclusive about whether women in households where men have lost employment because of occupation measures are at higher risk of domestic violence. However, the study does suggest that men’s restrictions to fulfil their role as primary provider and a subsequent need for women to get more involved in work in the public sphere has led to frustrations and tensions in households. Qualitative work by Abu Bakr *et al.* (2004), cited in UN Women and Institute of Women’s Studies (2014), shows that 35 per cent of women believed that the second Intifada increased psychological and emotional violence against women; about one in every four women believed that sexual harassment and physical violence against women increased; and every fifth woman believed that the number of rapes increased. Finally, Johnson (2011), cited in UN Women and Institute of Women’s Studies (2014), analysed the relationship between domestic violence and job loss in Palestinian households. Her findings indicate women whose husbands have lost their jobs are at higher risk of physical abuse than women whose husbands did not lose employment.

3.3 OPERATION PROTECTIVE EDGE

During the July–August hostilities in 2014, 1.8 million Palestinians in Gaza witnessed the worst escalation of hostilities and highest civilian death toll since 1967. A total of 2,251 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians, were killed. Of the Palestinian fatalities, 551 were children and 299 women. More than 1,500 Palestinian children were orphaned and 142 families mourned the loss of at least three family members. Figure 3.1 shows the geographic spread of fatalities



Figure 3.1 Fatalities by governorate

Source: UNOCHA (2015b)

during July and August 2014; and Figure 3.2 shows the Palestinian fatalities in Gaza over the years since 2000.

The high numbers and the geographical spread of civilian casualties give testament to the fact that virtually the whole population was exposed to the conflict and affected by its destruction of hospitals, residential buildings and schools designated as shelters; security and communication networks; and electricity and water infrastructure.

Communities in all geographical areas of Gaza witnessed aerial bombardment, naval shelling or artillery fire. About 43 per cent of Gaza was designated by the Israeli military as a ‘buffer zone’.¹¹ Residents in these areas also experienced ground operations and fighting. According to UNITAR (2014), a significantly wider distribution and level of damage to buildings was observed in 2014 compared to the military operation in 2008–09: 18 health and 31 educational facilities were found destroyed or

damaged; and a total of 1,855 ha of agricultural fields razed or damaged and 1,263 greenhouses destroyed, severely or moderately damaged.



Figure 3.2 Yearly fatalities in Gaza

Source: UNOCHA (2015b)

Due to the hostilities and the enormous number of totally destroyed and severely damaged housing units,¹² Gaza observed a record number of internal displacements – the highest since 1967. Around 485,000 people, 28 per cent of the population, are estimated to have been internally displaced at the height of hostilities. At its peak, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) sheltered almost six times more people than they were prepared for based on their previous experiences during hostilities (UNOCHA 2015b).¹³ As of January 2015, more than 100,000 persons whose homes were severely damaged or destroyed were still displaced throughout Gaza (UNOCHA 2015a), staying with host families, in makeshift shelters, rented apartments and prefabricated housing units.

Longstanding Israeli restrictions on external trade and transfers to and from the West Bank, restrictions on access to agricultural land and fishing waters, and a chronic shortage of electricity have had tremendous negative effects on the Gaza Strip's economic development over the years by discouraging investments and perpetuating high levels of unemployment, food insecurity and aid dependency and preventing sustainable growth (UNOCHA 2014b). The most recent episode of conflict added to this situation. Two-thirds of the Gaza population was receiving food aid already before the crisis, with 72 per cent of households being food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. Due to the hostilities, thousands of people lost their source of income and livelihoods due to the damage to agricultural lands, death or loss of animals, restricted access to agricultural lands and fishing zones, and loss of employment. According to the estimation by UNOCHA (2014b), at least 40,000 people employed in agriculture or fishing were directly affected by the crisis, and thousands of people were left without income either

as civil servants who were denied their salaries or as former employees of destroyed industrial establishments. A recent report by the World Bank (2015), presented to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) estimates that without recurring conflicts and multiple restrictions, Gaza's gross domestic product (GDP) could be four times what it is today, with the blockade since 2007 alone estimated to have taken around half its GDP. Gaza's unemployment rate reached 43 per cent towards the end of 2014, 'probably the highest in the world' (World Bank 2015: 5), with the youth unemployment rate at about 60 per cent.¹⁴

Psychological distress levels that were high across Gaza because of the prolonged challenges to everyday life in Gaza worsened significantly during the conflict. Already in August 2014 more than 370,000 children were reported in need of psychological support (UNOCHA 2014a), and in early September 2014, UNOCHA (2014b) reported high numbers of acute stress-related diseases, such as bed-wetting, eating and sleeping disorders, fear and violent behaviour in children, problems that often only appear months after exposure to trauma. UNOCHA (2014b) also identified an increase in adult stress-related symptoms in men and women in all governorates and municipalities. These symptoms include excessive nervousness, difficulty in concentrating, sleep disturbances, eating problems, fear, withdrawal, problems with parenting and violent behaviour.

The conflict affected the social fabric of all Palestinian households in many ways. Forced displacement, dispersion, destruction of homes and institutions, the destruction of infrastructure and the political situation all contribute to an exacerbation of Gaza's isolation from the rest of the country and the world in general. As in other conflict or humanitarian situations, traditional roles of women and men are often challenged, particularly in cases where men are unable to protect and support their families. Girls and women as key caregivers in their households are particularly affected, as they have to deal with the long-term consequences of the destruction of infrastructure and lack of services (UNFPA 2014). One example of these consequences is the unprecedented increase in infant mortality rates in Gaza, after decades of slow decrease reported on 8 August 2015 by UNWRA¹⁵ (see also van den Berg et al. 2015). This survey was conducted before the Israeli military operation; however, the concern is that this could be part of a trend imposed by the long-term blockade and its effects on health facilities, supplies of medicines and bringing equipment into Gaza. A follow-up study is planned to take place this year.

4. STUDY FINDINGS

4.1 TYPES AND FORMS OF VIOLENCE COMMONLY EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPACES

In their everyday lives, women and men across Gaza are faced with several types of political and gendered violence. In our study, we aimed to understand VAW in the context of an environment where political violence is present in different forms. For example, different direct types of VAW are perpetrated by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian women, such as beating, cursing, forcing women to deliver babies at checkpoints, sexual or verbal assault at checkpoints, etc. Indirectly the occupation contributes to VAW through the obstruction of the Palestinian legal system and the disabling of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which in turn hinders the provision of legal protection and the ability of institutions to amend laws and legislation related to women's rights (MoWA 2011).¹⁶ We therefore asked women and men in our study how they would define political violence as well as what they would perceive to constitute VAW. This first findings section gives account of the findings of our qualitative FGDs and interviews with women and men.

4.1.1 Political violence

Wars with Israel, internal conflicts between Hamas and Fatah, the closing of borders and ongoing siege were identified as forms or acts of political violence that led to high poverty and unemployment and psychological pressures on families. In many focus groups a link was made between political violence and VAW. The link was made through the pressures and stresses incurred by war and the economic situation. Men also mentioned the denial of marriage because of political background or orientation of the man, and the negative consequences of male family members' arrests for women. In fact, it seemed as if the denial of marriage due to political orientation or background was not only perceived as a form of violence against women, but also against men. Similarly, key community informants identified corruption, lack of political dialogue between the people and the different political parties in Gaza, internal political division, Israeli attacks on the Strip, and jailing based on political background either internally or externally as the most common types of the political violence that men and women are exposed to.

***'The more there is political violence,
the more there is violence against women.'***

[FGD with women, ages 30+, housewives]

Men, women, *mukhtars*, *mukhtaras* and members of social reform committees agreed that physical political violence is mostly carried out against men. This is due to men being more active and connected to the society and governmental and political parties. However, women and men also identified the lack of chances for women to take active part in politics and their restrictions on taking part in elections as one form of political violence, directed at women specifically. Study participants agreed that acts of political violence are not restricted to any particular public or private spaces, but could happen anywhere, in streets, public places, workplaces, prisons, homes and high-density areas, such as camps.

4.1.2 Violence against women

With respect to violence experienced by women, our focus group discussions and interviews with community informants revealed that irrespective of where women live, the types of violence they experience were described as physical, sexual, emotional, economic, social and political. The most frequently experienced type of abuse mentioned in focus groups and in the quantitative data collection is emotional or psychological abuse.¹⁷ Acts describing this type of abuse include not letting women express their opinions, economic deprivations, cursing, threat of divorce, marrying a second wife and cheating on ones wife. Early marriages, considered as a form of sexual violence by many organisations, and depriving women from participating in community activities were also mentioned at acts of social violence by the focus group participants. Another form of violence – the denial of using family planning methods – was not mentioned in focus group discussions, but is nevertheless practised. In our quantitative survey, 4.4 per cent of interviewed women reported that their husband or partner had at least once since summer 2014 not used birth control, even if asked. Early marriage was mentioned very often as one of the ground causes of other types of violence against women, including sexual violence. In fact, early marriage is considered as one of the risk factors for intimate partner violence and sexual abuse. This is particularly true when the age gap between girl and spouse is large.¹⁸ As a result of displacement and as a preventive measure against sexual assaults, increases in early marriage have been observed, particularly in connection to displacement, when families have to live with extended families in overcrowded and unsuitable conditions (Protection Cluster n.d.).

‘According to our environment, just mentioning the word “sexual” is very hard. Our families are not open to this issue, and they put blame on the women and girls. Women and girls are always guilty; even if they are not, they blame them.’

[FGD with women, ages 20–30]

During our focus group discussions, younger women seemed to be particularly concerned about emotional and verbal acts of violence, and made fewer references to beatings and sexual acts of violence. However, the fact that many women mentioned the need to fight early marriage hints that sexual violence does take place; it is, however, something that is not often or openly talked about due to stigma, shame and social pressures. Women in focus groups with older women also mentioned violations of inheritance rights as well as emotional, physical and economic abuse by husbands. According to Islamic inheritance law, widows only receive a small share of property, which leaves them lacking control and security over assets or residence. In-laws then often pressure them to choose between the custody of their children and their inheritance.

Violence against women occurs more often in private than in public spheres. Public spaces where VAW could happen were identified as markets, schools, parks, streets, workplace, taxis, farming lands and beaches, and police stations and hospitals. Some male focus groups discussants also identified elevators in tall buildings as places where violence, specifically of sexual nature, could happen. The most common types of violence in public spaces are of a verbal nature, such as curses and insults and verbal sexual harassment, and inappropriate touching of women. Cases of rape in public places were considered to happen only very rarely, but more commonly within the private sphere by family members. Working women reported that verbal violence exists in the workplace, and women often work long hours under high pressure without motivation. According to MoWA (2011: 6) a study published in 2009 by the Women's Information and Media Centre on *Violations Suffered by Women in Gaza Strip* indicated that 32.5 per cent of working women in the Gaza Strip are subjected to exploitation, discrimination, very long working hours and poor working conditions. Also, 68 per cent of working women reported not having complete discretion in using their wages. Requests for higher wages are met by threats of replacement; and special opportunities such as travel are given to male colleagues. Preferential behaviour based on relationships to families, sympathies and attractiveness were mentioned in our focus groups as unique acts of violence in schools and hospitals. However, preferential treatment also came up in connection with the treatment of siblings by parents and multiple wives by husbands in the private sphere.

In line with most violence against women happening in the domestic/private sphere, most perpetrators are male family members: husbands, brothers, fathers and male in-laws. But focus group participants and participants in individual interviews also told us about mothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, sisters, co-wives and female colleagues practising violence against women. Furthermore, mothers-in-law were seen to encourage their sons to punish or discipline their wives. Jealousy was mentioned as one of the main reasons for women-to-women violence,

caused by differences in economic situation, and interfering in each other's business. The main differences between VAW perpetrated by men and VAW perpetrated by women are seen in its causes and how it materialises. Men's violence is perceived as being based on their position in society and on family and traditional values, women's weakness, and the hard economic situation. Most of the violence by women is verbal with few cases of physical violence. However, this does not mean that it is negligible. In fact, some women told us that verbal violence – perpetrated by men and women – affects women more than other types.

There was general agreement that type and frequency of violence against women and girls differ with age. However, there is no common agreement on whether girls and young women between 15 and 18 years of age would be exposed to more or less violence than women aged 18 and above. But study participants did agree that types, places and perpetrators of violence change over time. With respect to types of violence before marriage, women mentioned cruelty of parents, deprivation of education and forced/early marriages.¹⁹ Younger women and the male participants also mentioned girls being confined to stay at home, which was often identified as a form of violence in itself. They also noted that girls and young women were most often exposed to violence from their fathers and brothers at home, or on the way to and at school. Many women felt that girls and young women were exposed to less violence at their family's home, and that violence generally increases with marriage when 'the girl moves to her husband's house and can't seek help from anyone in case she's subject to any violence' [FGD with women aged 30 +, most of whom are married].

Men were similarly divided over which age groups are more vulnerable. On the one hand, they described women above the age of 18 as having to be more responsible and being more likely to be punished for their mistakes as well as more exposed to violence because of issues related to family honour; on the other hand, some men felt that younger women and girls were more vulnerable to violence 'due to poor life capabilities and more vulnerability to making mistakes'. Community informants such as *mukhtars*, *mukhtar*as and social reform committee members explained that most girls aged 18 and below live dependent on the elder of their family and are given limited choices in their life, which was also considered as one type of violence. In cases where the girls in this age range are already married, most participants explained that at such a young age, girls lack awareness and understanding of married life and needs and behaviours of men and women, which could lead to violence against them. This is similar to the argument of some men that it is the girl's or woman's behaviour that causes violence against them. Indeed, in some focus group discussions with men, men suggested that women 'behave' and 'obey men' in order to reduce the likelihood of experiencing violence. Another perceived reason for violence against women and girls in this younger age category is the fear of her family regarding her safety, and the measures taken to prevent any harm. Regarding women aged

18 and above, community informants argued – similarly to men – that they are more exposed to VAW because of the increased responsibilities they hold, particularly if they are married; or that at that age and when they are married their needs are increasing and under the hard economic situation that will lead to an increase of VAW.²⁰ At the same time, however, others explained that they are less likely to be exposed to violence from their husbands as they are more mature and know how to deal with them and their marriage life. It is interesting to note that in most of these explanations, the women’s behaviour and role in violence is being discussed, not the role of the men.

There were also different opinions regarding older women. One view is that older women are less exposed to violence as their needs decline with age. The other view is that older women are exposed to violence in two ways: deprivation of marriage because of inheritance issues or, if unmarried, more insults and verbal violence especially after the death of the mother and father.

The following section will relate these findings to the quantitative survey, representative of the female population aged 17 and above across Gaza.

4.2 INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF VAW IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

4.2.1 Prevalence of violence against women in public and private spaces

Amal, 24 years old, is divorced with three children under the age of 5. Amal was divorced during the last war on Gaza Strip, and since then lives with her family and takes care of her nephew, whose mother died in the last war.

During her marriage, Amal was subject to many types of violence, including verbal, physical and economic violence. She relates most of the conflict between herself and her husband to the lack of money. Her husband would hit her if she asked for money for her children; he wouldn't even give her money when he had some, and would rather spend it on cigarettes and going out with his friends. Moreover, Amal's mother-in-law used to incite her son over his wife. Also, the husband took another wife who lived with them in the same house and was treated better than Amal. Before the war, Amal was already divorced twice, and every time she would choose to go back to her husband so she could stay with her children. In one of the divorces, Amal wanted to go back to her husband but her family was against it. During that period she filed a lawsuit at the court against her husband so he would pay for her expenses, but he wasn't paying regularly. After mukhtars and reforms committees interfered, Amal went back to her husband.

During the last war, Amal and her family and in-laws moved to live in a school shelter, where she had a big fight with her mother-in-law and the second wife, in which she was physically assaulted. After she physically fought back, her husband divorced her for the third time. After the divorce Amal went to stay with her family in another shelter. Amal's father did not allow her to bring her children to live with her, as he could not financially support them. The only time she sees her children is secretly in their kindergarten or when they are at one of her relatives' house. Amal wishes to go back to her husband so she can stay with her children, but she can't according to Islamic Sharia. 'I live in psychological torment; I wish to go back to my children.... I don't want my ex-husband but it is unfair for my children to be raised away from me.'

According to Islamic Sharia, a man and woman cannot get married to each other again after they have been divorced three times from each other; the woman would have to get married and divorced from another man three times before she could marry her former husband again.

To open the 'discussion', we asked women about their experiences with verbal, physical and sexual violence irrespective of whether they were perpetrated by husbands or other family members they lived with ('domestic violence') or by extended family members, neighbours, colleagues, friends or strangers ('non-domestic violence'). This opening section speaks about these findings; Section 4.2.2 will then elaborate on domestic violence.

Similarly to the findings in the qualitative interviews and focus groups, the survey showed that women in Gaza experience several types of violence and that the most commonly reported type of violence is of a verbal nature. Of all the women in our survey 36.4 per cent have experienced at least one of the two types of verbal violence – humiliation, abuse or cursing, and verbal harassment – since the end of the military operation in summer 2014. Almost 11 per cent of women reported that they had been physically assaulted, e.g. had been punched, hit, pushed or had their hair or clothes pulled; and another 3.9 per cent of women reported attempted sexual assaults or harassments; 3.4 per cent of women reported serious physical assault, e.g. attempts to suffocate or burn them, threats and attacks with weapons and other harmful objects. In this survey, we also included the threat of having one’s children taken away – something that we have encountered as a common threat of a psychological nature and challenge in previous work as well as in response to what we learned during the first round of our qualitative enquiries. This threat is indeed very serious and has been shown to greatly affect women’s choices when having to cope with repeated abuse by their husbands. One of our focus group participants told us, for example:

‘I’ve had lots of situations where my husband violated me and beat me. Once, my brother knew that my husband beat me so he called my other brother and wanted to beat my husband together, but I stopped them. I don’t want to make a bigger conflict that would go to the police or risk my children.’

[FGD with women, ages 23–52, all housewives].

We found that younger women in particular are vulnerable to verbal harassment and threats of having their children taken away.

Some 37.3 per cent of women reported having experienced at least one incident of any of the types of violence – domestic or non-domestic. Of these 164 women, more than 40 per cent experienced more than two different types. Table 4.1 presents types of violence, prevalence rates, and the most common spaces and perpetrators.

Table 4.1 Types of VAW in public and private spaces

| Types of violence since military operation ²¹ | Prevalence rate in % | Spaces | Perpetrators |
|--|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Verbal humiliation, cursing and abuse | 28.2 | Almost exclusively at home | 64.3 % Husband/partner 18.4 % Other family member |
| Verbal harassment | 15.9 | In the street Shopping places | 69.8 % Male strangers 5.8 % Other family member |
| Physical abuse ²² | 10.9 | At home | 65.4 Husband/partner 21.2 Other family member |
| Serious physical abuse ²³ | 3.4 | At home | 52.9 % Husband/partner 17.6 % Other family member |
| Sexual harassment or attempted abuse | 3.9 | Mostly at home | 66.7 % Husband/partner 16.7 % Stranger |
| Threat to take children away | 3.9 | Mostly at home | 50.0 % Husband/partner 18.8 % Other family member 18.8 % Stranger |

Source: own data, 440 observations

It is striking – though not ‘unusual’ – that violence is mostly perpetrated at home by husbands. In fact, intimate partner violence (IPV)²⁴ has been recognised as the most common form of VAWG (WHO 2012, 2013). Most surveys do not measure which other perpetrators, particularly other family members, perpetrate violence against women. We find that the second largest group of perpetrators comes from the immediate family environment. Strangers are mainly responsible for verbal harassment in public places, such as shopping areas and streets, and are the second largest group of perpetrators of sexual harassment or attempted sexual abuse.

Given the trend of most VAW taking place inside the home, Section 4.2.2 covers a more detailed investigation into different types and acts of *domestic* violence that could have been perpetrated against our respondents since the military operation in summer 2014, during the 51 days of the military operation and through the year before it started.

4.2.2 Prevalence of domestic violence

BOX 3 DEFINITIONS OF TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The following describes by which acts different types of domestic violence are defined in our questionnaire for the study. The questions are displayed in Annex D.

Psychological abuse – acts of yelling, screaming, cursing, insulting, teasing, making a woman angry or telling her that she's ugly, stupid, worthless or fat; threats of hurt; destroying a woman's property; hurting or threat of hurting her children; and threat to take her child or children away.

Economic abuse – asking a woman to give account of how she spent her money in detail; refusing to provide enough means for household expenses even if there is enough money available; the threat of withdrawing financial support; and the act or attempt of taking money without permission or exploiting a woman's inheritance.

Physical abuse – pushing, twisting a woman's arm, pulling her hair, slapping her in the face and holding her tight while attacking her; throwing objects at a woman that could be harmful; hitting with belts, sticks or other tools; attacks that result in bruises, scratches or any other light injuries even if no medical attention was needed; attempts or acts of suffocation and burning; physical assault that resulted in broken bones, fainting.

Sexual abuse – refusal of using birth control; the practice of sexual intercourse or forms of intercourse not consented in by physically force or the threat of force.*

Controlling behaviour – attempts at prohibiting meetings with friends and neighbours, and restrictions in connections with first-degree relatives; control of belongings; preventing from working with political parties; preventing from taking a job or forcing to quit job.

* We have not included other acts of sexual abuse, such as early marriage or sexual assault, in this questionnaire; however, we are aware that they exist.

We asked women about their experiences with different acts that represent psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence, and controlling behaviour that would affect work life, social life and participation in the political sphere. Our focus here was on violence perpetrated by intimate partners (husbands) for married women, and by any other family members that women live with if they are not married (never have been married, or are divorced or widowed). The question items were in large part informed by the 2011 PCBS, and partially by

our first round of qualitative fieldwork.

Similarly to when we asked about violence experienced irrespective of by whom, 39.6 per cent of women reported to have experienced at least one of the types of domestic violence at least once since summer 2014 (see Table 4.2). The most common form of violence again was of psychological nature, mostly in the form of cursing, insults, yelling and screaming. The second most prevalent form of abuse during the 11 months since the military operation was economic abuse. Women reported being refused sufficient funds for daily expenses, the threat of withdrawal of financial support and control of their expenses, i.e. checking in detail what a woman had spent her money on. An overview of the questions regarding different types and acts of violence are given in Annex D.

Table 4.2 Types of domestic violence since the military operation in 2014

| Types of domestic violence | Prevalence rate |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Psychological abuse | 34.1 |
| Economic abuse | 18.9 |
| Physical abuse | 14.3 |
| Controlling behaviour | 13.9 |
| Sexual abuse | 7.5 |
| Any type of violence | 39.6 |

Source: own data, 440 observations

Of those women who have experienced any violence – 174 women in total, 86.2 per cent reported emotional, 36.2 per cent physical, 19 per cent sexual, 47.7 per cent economic violence and 35.1 per cent controlling behaviour (see Fig. 4.1). Reported prevalence rates of acts of physical and sexual violence are not significantly different, but emotional violence rates are significantly higher than those reported in PCBS (2011), and economic and controlling behaviour lower. Differences in PCBS and our prevalence can be due to different definitions of the different types in the questionnaires. Though we stayed close to the questionnaire by PCBS, we did not replicate the module for time reasons.

Of the 39.6 per cent of women who experienced domestic violence, more than 60 per cent experienced at least two different types of violence, and 6.3 per cent all types. Emotional violence is highly correlated with other types of violence; only a quarter of women who experienced violence, experienced emotional violence alone. In particular, economic and physical violence often occurred together with psychological abuse.

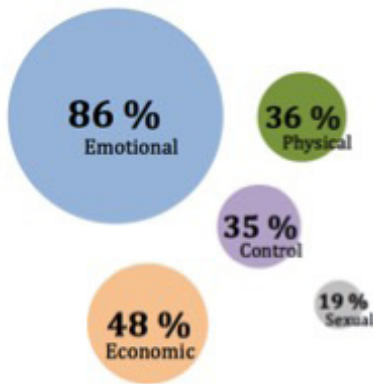


Figure 4.1 Type of violence experienced by women who are affected by domestic violence

Source: own data; based on 174 observations.

We have mentioned that younger women are particularly vulnerable to verbal harassment and threats of having their children taken away. The average age of women reporting having been harassed verbally is 29, compared to 36 as the average age of those not reporting to have been verbally harassed). The average ages of those that were threatened with having their children taken away and those that were not are 30 and 38, respectively. Both differences are highly significant.²⁵ This picture is also reflected with respect to violence inside the home. Younger women are more likely to have experienced any kind of domestic violence since summer 2014. Women of younger ages, and never-married women are particularly vulnerable to controlling behaviour,

such as working against one’s will, being forced to quit work, and in meeting friends, family or neighbours. Table 4.3 gives an overview of the prevalence of different types of domestic violence experienced by ever-married and never-married women.

Table 4.3 Differences in prevalence rates between ever-married and never-married women

| Types of violence | Ever-married women | Never-married and engaged women | Never-married women |
|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Emotional | 33.0 | 38.2 | 39.2 |
| Physical | 12.8 | 20.2 | 20.3 |
| Sexual | 8.0 | 5.6 | 2.7 |
| Economic | 17.7 | 23.6 | 20.3 |
| Controlling behaviour | 11.7 | 22.5 | 18.9 |
| Any types of violence | 38.2 | 44.9 | 44.6 |
| <i>N</i> | 351 | 89 | 74 |

Source: own data; based on 351 ever-married and 89 never-married women

Never-married women, on average 7.5 years younger than ever-married women, more often experience emotional, physical and economic violence; 33 of the 74 never-married women reported experiencing this (44.6 per cent). Ten of the affected women did not specify who perpetrated violence against them. Of those who did tell us who perpetrated the violence, eight mentioned only one perpetrator, six women reported two, six more reported three, and three women experienced violence by four, five and seven different perpetrators respectively.

Similarly to what we had heard in focus group discussions about younger girls and women, most of the never-married women experienced violence at the hands of their fathers and brothers, followed by mothers and sisters.

In order to learn more about younger women, we restricted our analysis to respondents aged 20 and below (never-married and ever-married). We found that 39 per cent of them were exposed to emotional violence, 23.7 per cent to economic violence, 16.9 per cent felt controlled, 13.6 per cent reported physical violence, and 3.4 per cent sexual abuse. We also tried to get more information on the experiences of younger girls who could not participate in the survey. For that purpose, we asked respondents to our questionnaire to tell us their perceptions about experiences of girls under the age of 17 in their household; 72.3 per cent of respondents could respond to the question. Girls under the age of 17 were reported to experience physical violence as the most common form of violence against them, followed by psychological, economic, social and sexual violence (see Table 4.4). The large difference between the perceptions of experiences of emotional and physical violence and experiences reported by 17–20-year-olds themselves could point to the fact that psychological violence is often not recognised as such by perpetrators or ‘bystanders’ and much more by the affected women themselves, and that physical violence could be under-reported because of shame and stigma. However, in the case of physical violence it could also be that younger girls below the age of 16 fight more often with their siblings or experience more often corporal punishments than 17–20-year-olds. The difference might well be a combination of both factors.

Table 4.4 Share of women who report violence against girls aged 16 and below in their households

| Types of violence | Households |
|-------------------|------------|
| Physical | 25.2 % |
| Psychological | 17.9 % |
| Economic | 14.5 % |
| Social | 12.9 % |
| Sexual | 1.9 % |

Source: own data; based on 318 observations

This relates to what focus group correspondents told us about different types of violence, places and perpetrators of violence.

4.2.3 Incidents (frequency) of VAW in public and private spaces

Most women experience acts of violence multiple times. Verbal humiliation, cursing and abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse and threats of taking children – all types of violence women identified as happening most frequently at home – are rarely ‘only’ experienced once. This is true for domestic and non-domestic violence in public and private spaces across the Gaza Strip (Table 4.5) as well as for domestic violence specifically.

Table 4.5 Frequency of domestic and non-domestic violence in the Gaza Strip since summer 2014

| Types of violence | Once | Twice | 3–5 times | 6–20 times | >20 times | N |
|---------------------------------------|------|-------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----|
| Verbal humiliation, cursing and abuse | 12.1 | 21.0 | 29.8 | 18.5 | 18.6 | 124 |
| Verbal harassment | 34.3 | 22.9 | 21.4 | 15.7 | 5.7 | 70 |
| Physical abuse | 32.6 | 19.6 | 26.1 | 13.0 | 8.7 | 46 |
| Serious physical abuse | 20.0 | 20.0 | 40.0 | 13.3 | 6.7 | 15 |
| Sexual harassment or attempted abuse | 11.8 | 35.3 | 23.5 | 17.6 | 11.8 | 17 |
| Threat to take children away | 15.4 | 38.5 | 7.7 | 38.5 | - | 13 |

Source: own data

Table 4.6 gives an overview of the minimum number of times a certain type of domestic violence was reported to have happened since the Israeli military Operation Protective Edge. ‘Minimum number’ here means that for each act of, for example, emotional violence we registered the reported numbers of times that had happened to a woman, and then looked across all acts that would constitute emotional violence and noted the smallest number of times. Essentially this means that the displayed frequencies are lower-bound estimates. More than 40 per cent of women that experience emotional violence or controlling behaviour, experience more than one act of emotional violence or control; a little over 30 per cent of women reporting physical violence ‘only’ experience one of the possible acts; about 55 per cent of women who mention economic violence feel economically abused in different ways (see the questionnaire in Annex D for an overview on acts asked about).

Table 4.6 Minimum frequency of domestic violence types (percentage)

| Types of domestic violence | Once | Twice | 3–5 times | 6–10 times | 11–20 times | > 20 times | N |
|----------------------------|------|-------|-----------|------------|-------------|------------|-----|
| Emotional | 30.0 | 26.7 | 24.0 | 5.3 | 4.7 | 9.3 | 150 |
| Physical | 54.0 | 22.2 | 14.3 | 4.8 | 1.6 | 3.2 | 63 |
| Sexual | 45.5 | 18.2 | 18.2 | 0.0 | 3.0 | 15.2 | 33 |

| | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|----|
| Economic | 34.9 | 26.5 | 19.3 | 7.2 | 4.8 | 7.2 | 83 |
| Controlling | 32.8 | 29.5 | 13.1 | 6.6 | 1.6 | 16.4 | 61 |

Source: own data

These frequency numbers on how often women are subject to violence indicate that women usually do not experience violence as single events. Several theories describe how domestic violence is often not a one-time event and how perpetrators use and keep control in their relationships. Often, different types of abuse are employed together, e.g. the Power and Control Wheel, developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP).²⁶ In our sample, we found that out of the 174 women who reported experiencing domestic violence since the end of the Israeli military operation, more than 63 per cent reported experiencing different types; only 63 women experienced only one type of violence (of those the vast majority – 48 in total – reported emotional violence).

4.3 EXISTING AVENUES OF SUPPORT

In response to violence, women’s reactions differ from one case to another. For example, some women respond to violence by staying silent about it or by crying but not talking about it. Other women abused by their husbands would leave and go back to their family home until the issue is solved. However, mostly women remain patient in the face of violence and try to solve the issue peacefully; only if this does not work will a woman go to her family or her husband’s family and finally to the police – although this option is very rarely taken. Community informants explained that the responses of women surviving violence differs according to their level of education, as educated women are more aware of their rights than less-educated women. Furthermore, they could be economically more independent, thus having fewer constraints on leaving abusive partnerships. Community informants are asked to solve the issues with the common traditional laws, but they only interfere and respond when they are asked by the affected individuals or by their family members. Usually, society assumes women to hold ‘the bigger heart’, and to accept conciliation, whereas men will be advised to respect and treat their women better. If a problem occurs between a husband and a wife, the wife would seek help from the elders and *mukhtars* before turning to any legal institutions; the common solution would be talking to the husband and wife for short counselling and promises from both sides that the incident would not happen again. However, mostly no real guarantees are given, especially for women.

‘Mukhtars live by the old mentalities. They believe that men are the source of good to women. Also, they believe that eventually girls will be married. While associations and government actors can’t interfere and offer solutions.’

[FGD with mostly young men, ages 19–51]

There are some actions available post-violence, starting with legal consultation provided by lawyers from the same community, especially female lawyers. Awareness sessions are provided to women to educate them on different topics including how to deal with their husbands. Religion was also suggested as a way through providing awareness sessions in the mosque for women, men, boys and girls. Lessons and awareness about different kinds of issues are provided in mosques already; encouragement to talk about marriage and women's rights could be one suggestion to take this issue forward. Also, some solutions were provided to improve the economic situation of the family through providing employment and job opportunity.

With respect to formal ways of helping survivors of VAW, husbands are required to pay for their wives' hospital treatment and to pay them their allowances; this is enforced by the police. Moreover, men are forced – by a respected family member, *mukhtars*, or police officials – to sign a witnessed commitment that they will not practise violence against the women again. These commitments are mostly signed at a police station, and in a case of repeated violence the husband will be required to pay a fine. However, no follow-up systems are in place to monitor repeated offences. Other actions can be taken to improve the situation of women within the family, either by economic empowerment or by awareness sessions aiming to strengthen the woman's knowledge about her rights. Reform committees work directly between conflicted parties and try to find a solution that both parties feel satisfied with. Only in cases where the committee is not successful would the problem be taken to court, although judicial cases in Gaza related to VAW are extremely low.

In our survey, we asked women whether they had taken a range of measures in response to any of the acts of domestic violence they had experienced. If a woman reported not to have used any response mechanism, we distinguished whether certain services could not be used because of a lack of availability or applicability, or because a woman *chose* not use it. Figure 4.2 gives an overview of *chosen* responses by the 174 women interviewed who had experienced domestic violence since the end of the hostilities in August 2014.

Share of women using different coping strategies in response to DV

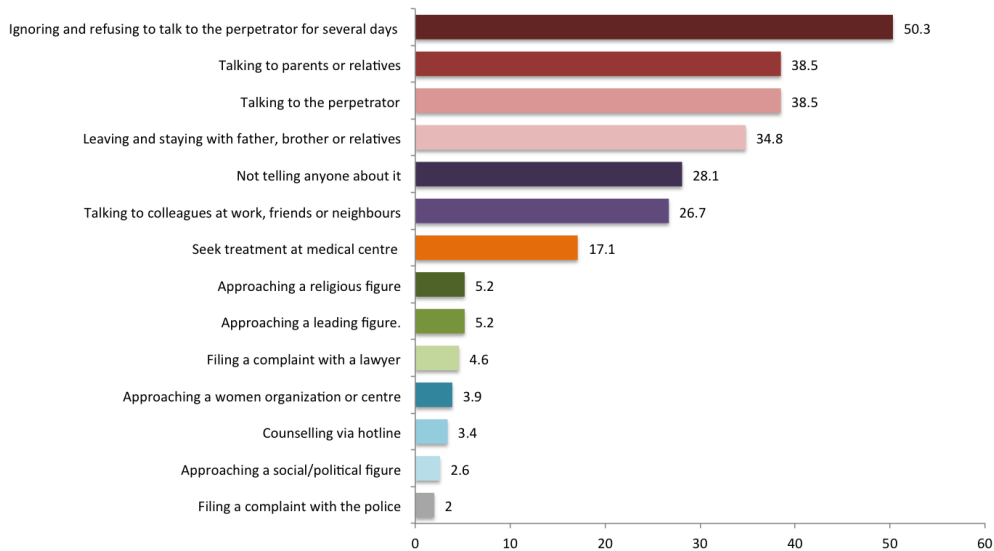


Figure 4.2 Share of women using different coping strategies in response to domestic violence

Source: own data; choice of strategy if applicable and available.

As can be seen in Figure 4.2, the differences in the use of help from within the family and from outside are enormous, with one exception: trusted people close to the woman, such as colleagues at work, friends and neighbours are also sometimes consulted and confided in. However, even leading religious, political or social figures are barely sought out in order to receive help. In several focus group discussions, participants agreed on the idea that women might seek help from outside if the family did not help. *Mukhtars* were mentioned as acceptable in some of the focus groups during the scoping exercise; however, being almost exclusively men (even though women can act as *mukhtar*s this is still rarely practised in Gaza), they are also guided by traditions and norms, and fulfil their role from the position of men being responsible for women, and with the expectation that women obey men. Given the lack of guarantees that are given to women through the traditional way of solving VAW, most women ignore the husband or perpetrators of violence against them, try to talk to them, talk to relatives or parents, or at times leave the home to stay with relatives.

‘Our real problem is that conflicts are directed to the mukhtars, and they always favour men over women.’

[FGD with young women, ages 17–20]

Unfortunately, we could not ask for each act of domestic violence what kind of help was sought. However, we looked into the numbers and types of domestic violence women experience if they chose avenues rarely taken. It seems as if those cases where women experience four or all of the different types of violence are the ones where outside help is sought most often. For example, whereas only 6.7 per cent of the women who talked to the perpetrator and asked him (or her) to stop had experienced all types of domestic violence; 25 per cent of those who had experienced four or all types spoke to a religious figure; and 50 per cent of those who decided to talk to a leading local figure; while 42.9 and 28.4 per cent of women who went to see a lawyer had experienced four and five types of violence, respectively. This indicates how great social pressures and expectations are to not talk about abusive relationships with anyone outside the family.

During focus group discussions, women told us that even though solutions offered from different actors might not differ, the response from the family differs very much depending on whom the woman reaches out to. For example, the police, social reforms committees, *mukhtars* or family members would usually all have the same solution for the woman: to go back home to her husband. However, a woman who went to the police would not be easily ‘forgiven’ for taking this step. Looking at our quantitative data, filing a complaint with the police is the least frequently mentioned response. In fact, the only three women in our sample to report having filed a complaint against the perpetrator were not married (either engaged or separated). Many of the challenges women face tie in with the perception that violence at home is a private matter that should be kept inside the family in order to avoid scandals and divorce and keep the family reputation intact. In our survey, we asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements that family problems should not be discussed outside the home, and that a woman should tolerate violence from her husband/in-laws in order to keep her family together; 78.9 per cent of women agreed with the former, and 36.8 per cent with the latter. Women often fear that their situation will be worse after seeking for help. This is a particular threat for women that depend on their husbands or families for economic reasons. But even within families, women often feel ashamed and try to hide their experience: One in four women (28.1 per cent) who experience violence do not tell anyone about it.

***‘Here, when the conflict is raised
with the police, there’s only one
solution: divorce.’***

[FGD with young women, ages 17–20]

At the same time, the vast majority (74.8 per cent) of women disagree with the idea that a man can beat his wife if she refuses to serve him, and almost 80 per cent would define even an occasional slap by the husband as domestic violence. Yet women are required to obey and surrender. It seems as if 'women are caught in a struggle between their desires and the options available to them... [and] in the end they choose the behavior which fits the social culture and play the role defined for them to preserve the family and provide satisfaction and means of comfort for it' (Omar and Owaida 2012 cited in UN Women and Institute of Women's Studies 2014).

However, the numbers of married women who turn to outside help is higher in our sample than in the PCBS (2011) sample; similarly, the share of married women not telling anyone about their experience is about half of the share in PCBS (2011). This could indicate that women are more aware of their rights and options now than they were four years ago, and/or that more options exist. Some qualitative evidence exists that suggests that this might be – at least partially – the case:

'When she was visiting her family's house she had to cover her face, as she was scared of what her family would think. She was afraid that she would be blamed for the incident as the culture always assumes that the husband is right.'

[FGD with women 30+]

'I had a conflict with my husband. I tried with mukhtars and neighbourhood committees but the husband refused to divorce me. However, I was attending sessions and I knew that I have legal rights, so I brought my mother to attend too.'

[FGD with young women, ages 17–20]

Typical challenges for women, as described in focus group discussions and interviews, are that organizations are often restricted to conducting awareness workshops and providing consultancy sessions for beneficiaries.

Khitam from Rafah is a 24-year-old married university student with three children. Khitam faces many types of violence from her husband, such as verbal violence, especially in front of her children and in-laws, and physical assaults. Furthermore, Khitam's husband does not provide financially for their children and her school needs, and she completely depends on her father's help. Khitam believes that most of their problems are due to the changing moods of her husband, and her mother-in-law's interfering because she thinks that she will take her son away from her. The fact that Khitam is not employed and does not bring income to the family adds another factor to the problems, and currently the husband is thinking about taking a second wife who is employed.

Khitam refuses to give up and tries to live her life and improve herself. At some point, she reached for psychological help from one of the organisations, who wanted to help her through talking with her husband and in-laws, but Khitam was scared, so she refused and stopped seeking their help. Indeed, when her husband found out about it, it caused more problems.

Khitam believes that most of her problems would be solved if she lived independently away from her husband's family. She advises every girl of marriageable age to think carefully about her decision and invest in herself and her education. Also, she believes that organisations need to provide psychological and financial support for the women.

The need for more economic, legal and cultural empowerment to go hand in hand with awareness raising was also noted in roundtables with civil society organisations and interviews with international organisations. At the same time, women are often not allowed to visit and attend sessions held by local CSOs in the area. The reason behind this is that men will think that these CSOs will allow the women to rebel against their society. Women also noted that they do not know where to go and who to seek for help.

4.4 WOMEN AND MEN'S PERCEPTIONS AND ACCEPTANCE OF VAW

4.4.1 Causes and triggering factors

We discussed with participants why they think violence against women happens in their homes and public places. The reasons mentioned broadly fit three categories: (1) *Personal characteristics*, such as young age, lack of maturity and general knowledge of life, having bad friends, being addicted, psychological pressure, lack of responsibility, bad upbringing, psychological 'troubles' of the husband, women's behaviour, over-use of modern technology; (2) *Interpersonal relationships*, such as lack of mutual understanding, lack of trust, the tendency to control opinions, intergenerational transmission of violence, bad communication with each other, jealousy and rushed marriages; and (3) *Structural reasons*, which could also cause some of the personal and inter-relational issues at (1) and (2) above. These are, for example, scarce job opportunities, unemployment, the bad economy in general, bad traditions, culture, lack of respect towards women, societal judgement and fear of it, early/forced marriage, the occupation, the siege, the government, marriages between relatives and living in the family house, illiteracy and lack of education, women's roles and their expected behaviour, corruption, inheritance rights, and lack of awareness.

‘Violence creates violence. If I violate my son, he will violate his sister or brother. And if I ask my son why he violates his brother, he replies: I’m just playing with him.’

[FGD with men, ages 22–52]

Men often spoke about women’s responsibilities and punishments, particularly when discussing age differences in experiences of VAW. Men more often assign the underlying reasons to the women. They described girls and younger women as immature and inexperienced, and married women are seen as responsible for their actions and mistakes. As such, violence against girls and women at home is explained by parents and other family members being protective, demanding respect and obedience, and trying to avoid gossip and possible shame. While it was obvious during FGDs, that men recognised the roles of both husband and wife and their responsibilities for their marriage, there was a tendency by some to shift the responsibility towards the wife especially with respect to reducing VAW. Obeying and listening to the husband without repeating mistakes was one of the suggestions to reduce VAW, along with the need to ensure a stress-free environment at home for the husband. When it came to awareness, men explained that a woman needed to be taught how to deal with her husband and tolerate him in all circumstances.

Asking direct questions about perpetrators and the perceived reasons these perpetrators exert VAWG, women and girls perceived men as perpetrating violence mainly for personal reasons: to exert control and power, because of lack of confidence and weak character, and the influence of bad friends. The bad economic situation and unemployment and poverty were also mentioned. On the other hand, female perpetrators of violence were almost exclusively considered as acting out of jealousy and envy. Some young women also mentioned violence by mothers from fear of their husbands, or to make their daughters loyal and to protect them from outside danger.

‘It doesn’t make sense that the husband will hit his wife for no reason, she must have done something wrong’

[FGD with men, ages 19–30]

4.4.1.1 Economic situation

During focus group discussions and qualitative interviews, the political and economic situation (often described as highly entangled) was frequently mentioned by focus groups discussants as a root cause of violence against women and girls. Similarly, in our survey, when we asked women their opinions on several statements related to gender roles and violence against

women, the political situation was a clearly ‘mitigating circumstance’ that made violence against women more acceptable. Whereas almost three-quarters of women disagreed with the idea that men could beat their wives for refusing to serve them, and almost four out of five women rejected the notion that an occasional slap was not to be considered domestic violence, only 57.5 per cent rejected the idea that domestic violence out of anger with the political situation was forgivable.

Given the frequent mentioning of violence occurring because of the economic circumstance (which is itself as a result of the political situation) during the first set of focus group discussions, we included a small set of questions to give us indications of the prevalence of stress on men because of the economic situation. Indeed – and unsurprisingly given the situation in the Gaza Strip – we found that only 53 per cent of women described the work or employment situation of their husbands (or other men in the household if they are unmarried) as ‘mostly stable’.²⁷ What is worrisome is that between 44 and 61.5 per cent of women reported their husbands to be frequently stressed or depressed because of a lack of sufficient income, the burden of responsibility as provider for the family and/or the mismatch between the nature of the husband’s job and his skills and experiences. Women who report these kinds of stresses are also more likely to report having experienced physical domestic violence, as well as experiencing several types of domestic violence, since summer 2014.

The socioeconomic standing (measured as average monthly income or based on food consumption index) or educational levels of the household head or the respondent yield any significant correlations with the likelihood of women to report experiencing types of domestic violence. This suggests that it is not the socioeconomic situation per se that effects violence levels, but rather the stress related to uncertainty and insecurity. However, food consumption, income and education levels are – expectedly – inversely related to stress. More and better economic opportunities could thus contribute (indirectly) to decreasing the occurrence of violence against women.

4.4.1.2 Gender roles within households

Given the emphasis on cultural explanations for violence against women, we investigated some additional attitudes and behaviour linked with gender roles within households, such as decision-making within households and the need to tolerate violence from spouses or in-laws in order to hold the family together.

We found that only 33 per cent of women are included in all decision-making, 31.6 per cent if we restrict the analysis to households headed by men, and 10.5 per cent of respondents reported having no say at all in any of the decisions made about their health care, daily household needs, major household purchases, visits to families or relatives and on the number of children. In correspondence to this finding, only 33.9 per cent of women disagreed with the idea that men should have the final say in decision-making in the home, and 17 per cent remained neutral. Looking at individual matters of decision-making in Table 4.7, we see that more than half of the interviewed women do not have any say regarding the daily needs of the household and almost one-third are not included in decisions about the number of children they have; 44.3 per cent of women agreed with the statement that a woman’s most important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family.

Table 4.7 Percentage of women having no part in decision-making, by subject of decision

| Decisions about | No voice |
|--------------------------------|----------|
| Respondent’s health care | 30.7 % |
| Major household purchases | 55.0 % |
| Daily household needs | 53.2 % |
| Visits to family and relatives | 37.5 % |
| Number of children | 28.9 % |

As mentioned above and as came out in focus group discussions, women in Gaza are very aware of gendered role divisions and their contributions to violence against women and 77.7 per cent believe that rights for women do not reduce men’s roles and status; however, some of the division is still very dominant in many homes, and continues to be an example when raising their children. One such example is the stigma, shame and fear surrounding VAW and the pressure to suffer it in order to keep families together. We asked women their thoughts on this matter, and 36.8 per cent agreed that a woman should tolerate violence from her husband or in-laws in order to keep the family together, and only 45.5 per cent disagreed. This situation is aggravated because, as mentioned earlier, almost 80 per cent of women believe that family matters should not be discussed outside the home – 48.4 per cent of them strongly. This often also leads to situations where women feel that they cannot even ask their families for help.

Samera from Jabalia is married with four daughters. Samera is a housewife and likes to spend most of her time outside the house; as she said, if she stays at home her daughter will keep asking for things she can't provide. Samera's problems with her husband started early in her marriage because her husband would stay at home all day and did not go out to look for work, hence they would fight about their financial situation, especially after she got pregnant. Her husband physically assaulted her during her pregnancy. Moreover, Samera's sisters-in-law caused her many problems starting with the fact that they require her to do all the household duties without their help even when she was pregnant. When she got tired because of the pregnancy, and took some time for rest, her sisters-in-law would complain to her husband and say that she was asleep all day long and didn't do anything. Another reason for Samera's husband's treatment was the fact that all their children are girls. She says: 'When I gave birth to my last baby girl, he was very angry and didn't talk to me... I was so shocked I didn't eat or drink anything.' Now Samera's husband wants to have another child but she doesn't because she fears that she will have another girl and this would cause more problems. Samera's only wish is for her husband to work and all her financial problems to be solved.

Samera's advice for married women is to be patient and to bear with their situation, as she believes even when they seek the help of their families, they will not find the full support they wish for, because their families after all want to contain the problem.

She also would like organizations working in the field to conduct awareness sessions on where abused women should turn to, along with awareness session for men on how to treat women.

4.4.2 Link to acceptance

From our focus group discussions and the roundtables with community informants and CSOs it seems that there is a widespread awareness of the issue of VAW and women's rights, together with an overall sense of VAW being unacceptable. However, at the same time, culture and traditions do not fully support this non-acceptance and provide unfair and unsustainable answers to VAW. Acts of VAW are hidden under the general acceptance of the fact that the traditions give men more privileges.

'When someone curses you, it means that you did something to provoke them.

Then you should not do that to yourself.'

'Sometimes the way women dress provokes violence against them.'

[FGD with young women, ages 17–24, students]

When asked about what advice they would give to women experiencing violence, women tended to talk about the importance of being patient and tolerant. To start with, women were advised to avoid men when they are angry so as not to provoke them, and when receiving verbal violence to act as if they didn't hear it. Furthermore, women were advised to be satisfied with what they have and keep their mouth shut. Some participants specifically mentioned the need to solve conflicts between husband and wife without taking the matter outside of the house, even keeping it secret. However, other women argued the need for women to be stronger without fully obeying the husband, to manage their life and seek help from associations when needed. The need to raise children equally and to be tolerant and respectful was mentioned in several group discussions at this point. Male focus group participants were similarly 'divided' over advice they gave. Whereas some argued for the right of women to go and seek help (only rarely from outsiders though) some also suggested they should 'stay away from trouble' [FGD with young men, ages 18–29, mostly students and graduates], to 'be patient towards her husband's behaviours and never make mistakes' [FGD with young men, ages 18–30, mostly students and graduates], to 'tolerate men's behaviour' or 'women should be patient when their husbands are angry, and after they calm down they can talk to them and blame them' [FGD with men, ages 24–40, farmers]. Also many male participants emphasised the importance of creating mutual understanding and communication channels between the husband and wife, to be the best ways to improve the relationship between them.

Share of respondents feeling hopeless and depressed most of or all of the time during the last 30 days prior to the survey

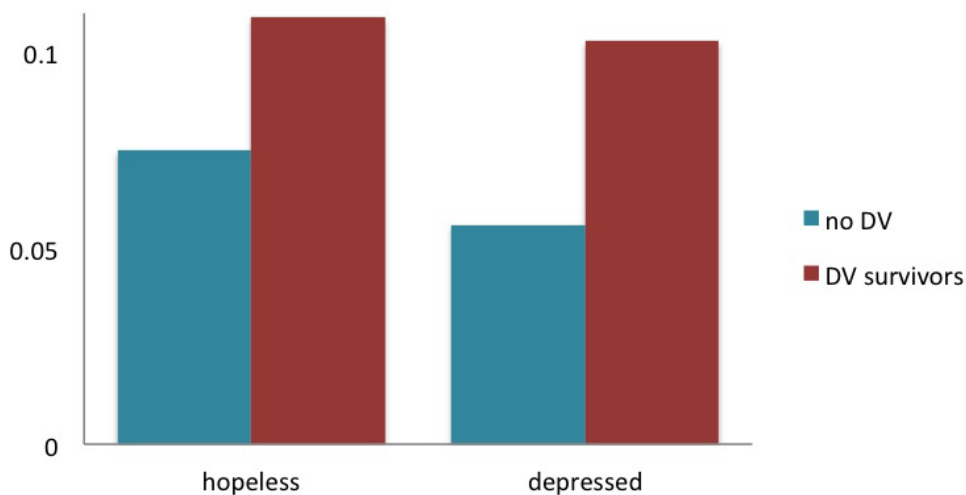


Figure 4.3 Indicators of mental well-being by exposure to domestic violence since summer 2014

4.4.3 Consequences

In order to learn more about the consequences of VAW in Gaza, we included several questions on women's trust, mental well-being and time spent with their children.

None of the different types of domestic violence seem to correlate with how much time mothers can and do spend with their school-aged children each day, how much time they spend with them doing homework or how much time other family members spend with the children. However, controlling behaviour by husbands or other family members is negatively correlated with the frequency with which women attend parent-teacher association (PTA) meetings (if they exist). PTA meetings give parents an opportunity to discuss with teachers and headteachers, and take an active role in their children's education.

All types of violence are significantly correlated with the frequency with which women report feeling nervous, hopeless, restless, depressed and worthless. Physical and verbal abuse, both inside and outside the home, is particularly detrimental to women's mental well-being; and the share of women feeling hopeless and depressed during the month before the survey is significantly higher if the woman experienced domestic violence (see Figure 4.3). Some focus group participants also mentioned the bad effects of psychological violence.

Furthermore, respondents who have experienced domestic violence since summer 2014 are less trusting in general, and display significantly lower trust levels towards community leaders, local political groups, immediate and, even more so, extended family members, community members, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers.

4.5 THE LINK BETWEEN MILITARY VIOLENCE AND VAW

Looking into differences in prevalence rates of violence against women before, during and after summer 2014, more women reported having experienced violence (not restricted to domestic violence) since the military operation compared to the time during and the 12 months before it; 33 per cent of women reported having experienced violence during the year before, and 22.3 per cent during the operation (see Table 4.8). Particularly stark is the significant increase in women reporting physical abuse, followed by the increase in verbal abuse. This increase in violence is statistically observed as significant in all domains except that of serious physical abuse.

Table 4.8 Types of VAWG before, during and since the end of the military operation in summer 2014

| Types of violence | Before | During | Since |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Verbal humiliation, cursing and abuse | 23.6 | 18.9 | 28.2 |
| Verbal harassment | 13.2 | 4.8 | 15.9 |
| Physical abuse | 7.5 | 4.8 | 10.9 |
| Serious physical abuse | 2.5 | 1.1 | 3.4 |
| Sexual harassment or attempted abuse | 3.0 | 1.4 | 3.9 |
| Threat to take children away | 2.5 | 1.8 | 3.9 |
| Any type of violence | 33.0 | 22.3 | 37.3 |

In addition, the prevalence of domestic violence has slightly shifted from 37.5 per cent of women reporting having experienced it before, 32.5 per cent during and 39.6 since the military operation (see Table 4.9). Sexual, economic and controlling abuse was reportedly slightly higher before the operation, and psychological and physical violence was slightly higher since than before. However, none of these rates are significantly different from one another, leading to the conclusion that domestic violence prevalence rates have not changed. The ‘dip’ during the operation might be due to measurement (usually, prevalence rates for shorter time-spans are lower than for longer periods such as ‘ever’). But it could also indicate that VAW during the war did decrease on average, driven by people focusing on finding shelter, food and water. Some of the focus group discussions did indicate that they believed that violence levels against women decreased during that time, with the exception of shelters where much violence, particularly rapes, were witnessed.

Table 4.9 Domestic violence before, during and after the operation

| Types of domestic violence | Before | During | Since |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Psychological abuse | 32.7 | 26.1 | 34.1 |
| Physical abuse | 13.6 | 8.6 | 14.3 |
| Sexual abuse | 7.7 | 4.5 | 7.5 |
| Economic abuse | 19.1 | 15.2 | 18.9 |
| Controlling behaviour | 14.1 | 11.1 | 13.9 |
| Any type of violence | 37.5 | 32.5 | 39.6 |

In our data set, having been temporarily displaced (42% of respondents; only just over 10 per cent reported that at least one person from their household was still displaced) is significantly correlated with larger percentages of women reporting having experienced emotional domestic violence, controlling behaviour by husbands or other family members and non-domestic violence during summer 2014; and with the number of different types of these. Furthermore, displacement in 2014 is significantly correlated with the likelihood of experiencing domestic

violence, particularly emotional and physical violence, and controlling behaviour since the military operation. However, women living in households that hosted displaced persons (32.7 per cent of households in our sample) during that crisis did not report significantly more or less occurrences of general or domestic violence. We also found that women whose homes had suffered at least partial damage more often reported experiencing domestic violence during and since the military operation.

‘During the war, my brothers used to encourage us to have faith and be patient and they supported us.’

‘After the war it’s different. My brothers became very angry.’

[FGD with young women, ages 17–21, all students]

Both observations – a general decrease of VAW during the war except for displaced women, and an increase of violence after that war, particularly for women whose families were displaced – fit the narratives we have heard from women and men in our qualitative work with them. All study participants spoke about the enormous stresses that fear, lack of food and water, overcrowding of shelters, being away from their homes, the destruction of homes and the loss of livelihoods and income exerted on them and the people they know incur. Many divorces were witnessed, particularly when families were temporarily displaced, fights between and among men and women over food and water, and a general increase of cursing and shouting. In three focus groups, respondents told us that they had witnessed rape (one respondent reported having witnessed rape) and sexual harassment in shelters (two respondents witnessed harassment). Women often told us about the anger husbands and brothers felt and expressed during and after the war, but they also told us about families or family members sticking together supporting each other during the military operation.

Military attacks and operations by Israel, such as Protective Edge in 2014, are, however, not the only mechanism through which violence against Palestinian women and girls is affected. In addition to military operations such as the one in summer 2014, Israel’s long-standing policies of creating a state of systematic non-development and fragmentation has enormous effects on the economic situation and related stresses. As described in Section 4.4.1, husband’s stresses from to feelings of potential inadequacy and of not being able to fulfil one’s full potential are related to higher incidents of physical domestic violence.

Related to the general political situation, we also asked participants about their experiences and perceived relationships between political violence and VAW in general. Their responses mirror some of the perceived underlying causes of violence against women and what they told us about the last war and its effect on violence: political violence reduces economic opportunities

and increases stress, challenges and psychological pressure that reflect negatively on family lives.

However, many study participants also felt that levels or types of violence against women have not changed, and that the underlying causes are still the same. Indeed, our data shows a significant and very high correlation between experiencing violence by husbands or other perpetrators before and after the military operation, which means that most of the women who experience domestic violence did so before and after. However, 7.6 per cent of women who had ever experienced domestic violence in our sample had experienced it only since the outbreak of the war in summer 2014, and 2.7 per cent experienced it exclusively (i.e. temporarily) during the war. Generalising the findings in our sample to the whole population in Gaza would mean that out of 100,000 women in Gaza aged 17 and above, 3,181 women have experienced domestic violence since summer 2014²⁸ and another 1,136 women experienced it temporarily during the war. This has direct implications for the provision of services.

‘Political violence affects heavily the life of the community and the family is part of the community so, surely, women who are the basis of this family will be affected significantly and this is reflected in the violence on women directly or indirectly.’

[FGD with married men, ages 29–48, mixed jobs]

In roundtable discussions with CSOs, we found that political violence affects the work of the organisations on many levels. The last war destroyed some of the organisations, preventing them from serving their communities. Furthermore, during the last war many of the ongoing programmes stopped, and some of the organisations turned to relief programmes and psychological interventions. Operating organisations faced difficulties accessing the affected communities. At times, organisations could not even access their programme participants due to overcrowding in the shelters, so in order to communicate they had to ask the women to leave school for a couple of hours so they could work with them.

4.6 BETTER SERVICES TO PROTECT AND SUPPORT

In our study, we spoke to a number of civil society organisations that provided services and programmes aimed at supporting and preventing VAW in Gaza. Most of the work related to VAW is awareness sessions. Although the aims of these sessions differ, they mostly aim to educate women about VAW, and how to deal with such cases. Legal awareness sessions are also conducted for women. Another tool used to support women is the referral system, where women with different psychological, health and legal needs will be referred to more specialised organisations depending on the type of need. After the conflict escalations in the Gaza Strip in summer 2014, more specialised projects have also been giving psychological support. In addition, some projects are related to better access to health care and reproductive health.

The organisations usually work closely with partners and alliances in all governorates in the Gaza Strip, and reach targeted communities: through communication with existing CSOs and CBOs in the communities, and society informants such as *mukhtars* and reforms committees; directly with existing communities, or by establishing local groups in communities; with schools and ministry of education; and through field visits and data collections for needs assessments.

When targeting family members in VAW-related projects there would be a level of inclusion for male members of the family: husbands, fathers and brothers. One CSO explained that they always aim to target 10 per cent male participants. To do so, these organisations implement home visits so they can meet the whole family, and female and male members. Those visits allow the organisations to attract men to be involved in these programmes.

However, organisations face many different types of challenges during their work, at donor, organisational, beneficiary and implementation level. At donor level, the many challenges start with the fact that some VAW projects come with policies and limitations that can be different from the characteristics of the targeted areas. However, the CSO will still implement the projects, despite the fact that it does not fully believe in them because they feel that it is better than doing nothing and/or do not want to lose valuable funds. Furthermore, budget limitation is a challenge as the numbers of people who need the service provided by the organisations are far larger than the budget of the project can provide for. Also, most of the participants explained that the implemented projects are not sustainable because of the frequently changing political situation in Gaza Strip and the irregular funds. In many of the roundtable discussions, participants explained that too many aid-based programmes focus on workshops and training without any development activities that could complement awareness in reducing VAW. Another concern presented in the data is the fact that even when studies are implemented with recommendations for more sustainable programmes, donors still do not take these recommendations into consideration.

Several challenges were identified within the organisation itself, such as the lack of specialisation in the organisation's work. Many organisations work in several fields in order to attract funding. Additionally, there is a need for training and capacity building in VAW for the staff of the organisations. Finally, the absence of a national database, with information on what organisations do and reliable data on VAW itself, causes duplication in the services provided, especially under the referral system.²⁷ In the referral system, an organisation directs women seeking help to a more specialised organisation if needed, but only very few cases are referred to the police, as this could lead to worsening the situation. However, there is no formal or national referral system in place in Gaza; it depends mainly on networking. The 'normal' chain of referral in Gaza is family then friends then organisation... and finally, but not always, the police; however, if it reaches this stage the chances that the situation will get worse are perceived as very high by both men and women.

One of the challenges in the implementation process is a lack of the infrastructure needed to implement the project activities, e.g. transportation and better facilities; this challenge was presented particularly strongly in marginalised areas. Moreover, the poor legal infrastructure and the inability of the legal institutions to protect women prevented many CBOs and CSOs from providing the necessary protection/intervention for women. Additionally, local political conflict was one of challenges for some organisations in implementing their programmes. Furthermore, the media was presented as being indifferent and thus of no help to the implementation: organisations – and also men and women – mentioned on multiple occasions the role the media could play as a tool to increase awareness about VAW especially for women who do not leave their homes.

With respect to the beneficiaries themselves, one of the main hurdles for the organisations is the lack of education and awareness in the targeted areas. Organisations expressed the feeling that people do not usually accept the work of the organisations, especially the awareness sessions as they see it as a waste of time with no practical results. Also, this group of respondents felt that people would use VAW as an opening in order to receive services from some programmes. This is in line with findings in the qualitative work, which indicates that men are more inclined to allow women to leave their houses to reach these organisations because they, as females, have a better chance at receiving help.

When discussing the challenges that women face when accessing services aimed at preventing and protecting from VAW, traditions, norms and culture were repeatedly presented as main factors in preventing women from benefiting from VAW-related programmes.

Families prevent their female members from taking part out of fear that they will use the knowledge they will gain to pursue their rights. Also, families fear that institutions providing such programmes would be a source of sexual harassment for women and girls. This correlates with one of the findings in the data regarding what can be done to reduce VAW, in which it was emphasised that having a bridge of trust between the families and the organisations would allow the families to feel safe when sending their girls to the organisations to receive their services. When discussing challenges coming from women themselves, organisations were aware that women always think twice before contacting CSOs and legal protection out of fear of what will happen in the future. One such fear is that they would not provide the protection needed. This is connected to women's fear of society and the associated stigma of reaching out to such institutions. This is particularly prevalent if the service they sought out is psychological support. Therefore, as described by one participant, 'women tend to adjust/adapt to the situation'.

On a different level, economic hardship was one of the burdens facing women who are willing to participate in such programmes, which means that some women cannot participate due to lack of transportation funds. This is a particular challenge for women in marginalized areas where organisations are less present and transportation costs to reach institutions are higher.

We also discussed with the organisations which programmes against VAW appear to work particularly well. There was an agreement that the programmes and interventions most useful and needed are related to the economic empowerment of women. Through these interventions the woman gains a stronger position within male-headed households. In female-headed households, economically empowering women gives her and the family more independence. Both outcomes take away one of the main triggers of VAW: economic hardship. Some participants also felt that economic empowerment interventions result in reducing other issues such as psychological problems. Others identified the psychological support as the most important, even more than the economic intervention, particularly in light of the generally weak economic situation in Gaza. Other programmes that were identified as important were programmes for sexual and reproductive health. One key informant told us that women's visits to health centres are a good opportunity to screen and talk to them about their issues, including violence against women.

Following our findings from the survey and qualitative work with women, community informants and civil society organisations, thoughts on who to protect and support as well as how to change attitudes that could result in behavioural changes touched on three main themes: awareness and education; the improvement of the economic situation and opportunities; and more sustainable and specialised service provision. Section 5 will elaborate on these points in more detail.

'After the last war the organisations found that people in general and women in particular, were more open to cooperating, and they found that women were encouraged by the families to seek those organisations as they are more likely to receive help and support'

'Men allow women to go outside the house, as long they can come back with basket of help. While in principle this might sound as a bad thing but in another sense, it allows the organisation to reach for those women more than before.'

[Roundtable discussion with CSO]

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence found in our study, there are multiple recommendations that can be drawn for formal and informal institutions and organisations aiming to protect and prevent violence against women. Probably the ultimate aim of every opponent of any form of violence and VAW in particular would be to bring about transformative change that changes values, beliefs and attitudes underlying behaviour and practices. However, values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and practices influence each other through non-linear relationships (see, e.g. Heise 2011); and gender norms that relate to how men and women, and girls and boys are supposed to act and behave are deeply institutionalised and generally do not change quickly or easily. Focusing on attitudes alone neglects underlying structural violence and inequalities that should be addressed in order to achieve sustainable change (Shahkroh and Edstrom 2015).

Recent research has identified that approaches aiming to change social norms that support or tolerate VAWG, and include both women and men, are promising (What Works 2014; Ellsberg, Arango, Morton, Gennari, Kiplesund, Contreras and Watts 2015; Jewkes, Flood and Lang 2015); and there is also some evidence on the value of intergenerational interventions in households, including parenting programmes and group education programmes alongside community mobilisation (Solotaroff and Pande 2014; What Works 2014). Even if rigorous evaluations are still rare because of measurement issues or because programmes have not been running long enough to gather evidence on long-term changes, evidence on working with men and boys suggests that it is possible for interventions to be effective at shifting attitudes, and in some cases also shifting behaviours, at least in the short term. Shahkroh and Edstrom (2015), in a review of evidence on the role of men and boys in enabling interventions aimed at sexual and other forms of gender-based violence (SGBV), highlight the need for multi-sectoral and multidimensional responses that include life-cycle perspectives, gender-equitable development strategies for girls and boys and women and men, participatory education and community mobilisation activities that address gender norms and attitudes at household and community levels, and political strategies to challenge unequal systems. Successful programmes then not only engage men and boys and women and girls, but also strive to make institutions and community interactions more gender equal. For that purpose, partnerships with institutions and governmental support are making these interactions even more effective.

The first five of the recommendations below should be seen in this light, as suggestions for activities that should not be implemented disconnected from each other, but together in a coordinated approach where single pieces complete one larger 'puzzle'.

1. Awareness raising

Women and men across the study felt that more awareness-raising was needed about women's rights, inheritance rights, problem or conflict solving, the effects of violence on women, and how to bring up children to be respectful towards women and less violent. *Awareness sessions for both men and women* was the most common advice given by social figures to reduce VAW, along with special workshops for women and men who are getting married. The need for men to be included in awareness workshops was expressed both in order to educate men, but also to get them 'on board' and make it easier for women to participate. Often, men 'don't trust what women are told at the sessions' and some fear that 'women should never be made aware of her rights because she will be rude and arrogant!' [FGD with men, ages 18–30] Some women also felt that *guidance on how to raise children equally and respectfully* would be beneficial. Awareness-raising activities also need to *target young ages*, for example, in schools. This could be done particularly for boys who can be educated regarding women's position in the family and in society; however, girls should also be targeted by such activities in order to eliminate the transmission of negative traditions and cultures between the generations.

'Before I got married, I used to think of women inhumanly as objects, but after I attended an awareness session, and after I got married, I'm now 7 months through marriage and I'm great with my wife and we have never had any conflict.'

[FGD with men, ages 22–34]

Awareness-raising activities should not only be implemented in the confinements of organisations' premises. Awareness-raising activities could also include brochures or books distributed in universities, schools and places where violence frequently happens, or be channelled through *use of the media in the form of TV or dedicated radio shows*. In various FGDs it was felt that the media was a good way to 'spread the word', to educate about women's rights, roles and violence against them. Using the media was also seen as a way to engage people and overcome social taboos and fears.

Finally, in several FGDs, the suggestion was made to *combine education with leisure* and an opportunity to escape stresses, e.g. 'fun workshops for women and men who experienced violence', 'conducting fun meetings for both to clear their minds', 'summer clubs for girls and summer camps for women for fun and for learning about rights and freedom' [FGD with young women, ages 15–28], and 'road trips to have fun' [FGD with women ages 32–60].

‘There should be a TV channel for family conflict resolution. People will participate and engage in order to find solutions and consult. That’s because people usually are afraid to address legal associations.’

[FGD with men, ages 22–34]

2. Including traditions and religion to reduce VAW

The role religion could play in correcting wrong concepts and interpretations of women’s rights was mentioned by CSOs, community informants and focus groups participants. Participants felt that some of the good and strong concepts of tradition could be used to improve women’s position in their families. It was felt that more ‘solid’ coordination with religious leaders was needed to better use this ‘angle’ of addressing attitudes to VAW. One way to include or use religion as an entry point to educate about VAW and its effects could be the use of *awareness sessions for men in mosques or at religious gatherings*. At times, these sessions already talk about women’s rights and women’s protection from an Islamic point view, but they could be used to talk more directly about VAW and its causes and consequences, married life and so on. Some concerns were raised in roundtables with CSOs and some FGs by women who thought that the role of *mukhtars* and religious figures, did not always protect women and forced them to accept the situation they were living in, with no real guaranties for change and protection. *Educating religious and social figures on women’s rights and VAW* in the Gaza Strip through several workshops could thus be another step towards better integration of religion into addressing VAW. Such workshops could introduce meetings with survivors of VAW and different male members of the family to create mutual ground for what might be considered as proper and concrete intervention solutions.

3. Economic empowerment programmes

Among the participants – in FGDs but also in roundtables with CSOs – there was a strong sense that awareness raising alone would not be enough to sustainably tackle VAW. Psychological, financial and legal support as well as advocacy for more women’s political participation was mentioned as supporting activities that should run alongside awareness raising. Economic empowerment programmes for women in particular were mentioned again and again in focus groups, roundtables and interviews. It is perceived as something that is working well by CSOs, and as something that is needed to run parallel to awareness raising about VAW and women’s rights. Without economic empowerment and the ability to make real choices, women will not be able to act on their rights because of economic dependencies. Also, our quantitative data

suggests that economically active women experience less domestic violence than non-working women, particularly if married. *Particularly vulnerable groups, such as widows* after the war, would benefit because they only receive a small share of property, which leaves them without control and security over assets or residence. Training for and opportunities for economic livelihoods would then make a particularly large difference. Also, putting in place controls in order to ensure that only those who are eligible receive assistance for house restructuring and food or cash assistance would be particularly beneficial for widows, as immediate and extended families often take charge of financial aid or force the women to choose between economic assistance or access to housing in exchange for custody of their children. CSOs and CBOs felt that *small enterprise programmes for women* were most promising, as they provided a more suitable means for economic empowerment. *Accompanying workshops on topics such as project management, bookkeeping and marketing* would contribute to increasing the chances of projects being successful. Coaching sessions and follow-up visits could monitor progress and offer advice if there are difficulties.

4. Combating early marriage

The need to stop early marriages was repeatedly mentioned by research participants in focus group discussions as a way to counter VAW. Particularly where age gaps between men and women are large, women have been shown as at greater risk of physical and sexual abuse by their spouses. Even though the share of women that got married before the age of 15 has decreased in the last years, still 0.5 per cent of married women between the ages of 15 and 19 in 2014 were reported to have married for the first time before the age of 15 (PCBS 2014). An important aspect of this particular aspect, and approaches against VAW in general, is to find ways to *integrate and work with the government in reducing VAW*. New legislation should introduce laws that *increase the minimum marriage age*. Moreover, and relating to point 2, religious figures could play a significant role in introducing and explaining the disadvantages of early marriages.

5. Geographical outreach

In some discussions, participants felt that more remote areas are not well-enough covered, and that high transportation costs at times impede women from participating in programmes and activities. One suggestion, made several times, was to implement field visits to identify the needs of the targeted areas and to 'reach violated women who can't reach the associations'. Hard-to-reach areas are often the most conservative, which makes including them in programmes to try to change gender norms, attitudes and behaviour even more important.

In order to overcome this obstacle either transportation or money for transportation could be provided, or these sessions and activities could be implemented through *local organizations*, where women could attend without the need to travel. Moreover, informative campaigns tools such as *billboards, flyers and posters* should be distributed *in common, easily accessible places* in the community, e.g. in mosques, schools and markets, instead of limiting them to main roads and working organisations, which women might not be able or allowed to visit.

6. Information, understanding and monitoring

CSOs stressed the necessity for better understanding of the situation and the needs of women and society, and of how to educate women in identifying their own needs. Also women and girls felt that implementing organisations should observe how people live and monitor any progress and opportunities programmes and interventions bring about. Furthermore, in connection to the need for better understanding the situation of women and society, a need for more adequate information on VAW in Gaza Strip and the situation of women was also expressed by organisations, both smaller CSOs and international agencies. While some would argue that many studies on VAW have been implemented, *a more comprehensive study*, which could be carried out *at national level as a joint effort and with coordination between different organizations* working in the field, would create mutual understanding of the aim of the study, its methodology and the coordination and methods needed to implement the study. This in turn could establish and foster networks that facilitate coordination between organizations and agencies.

7. Coordination

Starting with work at the grass roots, CSOs felt that better coordination between CSOs, and having an umbrella to *create an information database* with all the CSOs working in the field was needed. Under such an umbrella, relevant organisations should act more on approaches that are built on rights, not just needs. These approaches can be within a national strategic plan that includes all the working organisations, with a unified and comprehensive database, and a strong national referral system. This would *allow organisations to become more effective and specialised*, and facilitate the training and specialisation of CSO staff with respect to VAW. Targeting women, especially those exposed to violence, with a specialised multidimensional help package would increase the benefit gained. For example, a service that contained economic, physiological and health support would allow women not just to benefit the most

but also to have approval from the family to attend and participate in the services' activities. Economic and health support activities can also be used as a tool for access to psychological support and awareness sessions. Coordination between specialised organisations in every component would ensure better and more efficient services, and prevent duplication of efforts and thus a possibly more effective allocation of funding.

The last war exposed the need to *create a system where both relief and development programmes work together*, without the need to stop one at the expense of the other. Organisations mentioned in a number of roundtable discussions the need for all local non-governmental, governmental and international actors to get together and better engage in planning, communicating and networking. Such cooperation could help to establish a coordinated emergency plan that facilitates access to crisis areas and service provision, during and after escalations. Under such a plan, a geographically spread safety network would help reduce the severity of escalation impacts. Such planning would also require strengthening the governmental sector in order to better manage such crises.

8. Lift movements and access restrictions

An end to the ongoing siege and access restrictions would contribute to the economic recovery of Gaza and thus relieve individuals, families and communities from some of the daily stresses that are associated with higher levels of domestic violence. Furthermore, actions taken to prevent conflict escalation would prevent internal displacement, which is related to higher numbers of VAW, e.g. in shelters. A political resolution of the conflict might not end VAW but it would allow the families to live in a more 'normal', stable environment, which does not exacerbate existing power relations and systems that are root causes of VAW.



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ANNEX A - OVERVIEW OF QUALITATIVE TOOLS

OVERVIEW FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1st round (pilot)

| ID | Place | Organiser | Men/ Women | Number of partic. | Age group/ range |
|----|--------------------------------|---|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat camp | Rural Women’s Development | Women | 16 | 30+ |
| 2 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat camp | Rural Women’s Development | Women | 18 | 18–30 |
| 3 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat camp | Livestock Association | Women | 23 | 30+ |
| 4 | Rafah | Wefaq association for women and child development | Women | 11 | 20–30 |
| 5 | Rafah – Al Shouka | Wefaq association for women and child development | Women | 5 | 30+ |
| 6 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat camp | Livestock Association | Women | 5 | 20–30 |
| 7 | North – Jabalia | Development Association for Development and Empowerment | Men | 5 | 25+ |
| 8 | Khan Younis Abassan Al Kabeera | Future Builders Association | Men | 11 | 29+ |

2nd round

| | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---|-------|----|-------|
| 1 | Rafah – Al Shouka | Wefaq association for women and child development | Women | 11 | 20–40 |
| 2 | Rafah – Al Shaboora | Tadamon charity association | Women | 10 | 30–40 |
| 3 | Gaza – Al Zaytoon | East Gaza Association for family development | Women | 14 | 17–20 |
| 4 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat | Charity Agriculture and Livestock Association | Women | 12 | 21–30 |
| 5 | Middle Area – Al Zawaida | Rural women development | Women | 12 | 30+ |
| 6 | Middle Area – Al Zawaida | Rural women development | Women | 12 | 17–21 |
| 7 | Khan Younis – Center | If we stopped dreaming centre | Women | 11 | 17–25 |
| 8 | Rafah – Al Shaboora | Tadamon charity association | Women | 9 | 17–20 |
| 9 | North – Jabalia | Benea Association for Development and Empowerment | Women | 14 | 20–40 |

| | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|---|-------|----|-------|
| 10 | North – Jabalia | Benea Association for Development and Empowerment | Women | 14 | 15–28 |
| 11 | North – Bait Hanuon | Al-Quds health centre | Women | 10 | 18–30 |
| 12 | North – Bait Hanuon | Al-Quds cultural centre | Women | 8 | 17–20 |
| 13 | Khan Younis – Khuzaa | Youth development association | Women | 10 | 20–40 |
| 14 | Rafah – Al Shaboora camp | Agricultural harvest association | Women | 11 | 18–30 |
| 15 | North – Jabalia City Centre | Benea Association for Development and Empowerment | Women | 10 | 21+ |
| 16 | Khan Younis – Khuzaa | Youth development | Women | 15 | 17–32 |
| 17 | Khan Younis – Center | If we stopped dreaming centre | Men | 12 | 18–30 |
| 18 | Gaza – Al Zaytoon | East Gaza association for family development | Men | 10 | 18–30 |
| 19 | Middle Area – Al Nussirat | Charity Agriculture and Livestock Association | Men | 8 | 18–30 |
| 20 | Khan Younis – Abassan | Rowwad Association | Men | 7 | 18–32 |
| 21 | Rafah | Palestinian people party centre | Men | 12 | 18+ |
| 22 | North – Beit Lahia | Tatweer Beit Lahia association | Men | 9 | 18–30 |
| 23 | North – Jabalia | Benea Association for Development and Empowerment | Men | 13 | 18–33 |
| 24 | Khan Younis – Khuzaa | Youth development | Men | 9 | 18+ |
| 25 | Rafah – Al Shaboora | Tadamon charity association | Men | 11 | 18–30 |

3rd round

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|-------|----|-------|
| 1 | North – Jabalia | Benea Association for Development and Empowerment | Women | 11 | 19–28 |
| 2 | Khan Younis – Khuzaa | Youth Development Association | Women | 10 | 20–40 |
| 3 | Gaza – Al Shaty' Camp | Women's activity centre | Women | 11 | 20–60 |
| 4 | Rafah – Al Mawasi | Mawasi Agricultural Cooperative Association | Women | 12 | 20–40 |
| 5 | Gaza City – Al Shaty' Camp | Women's activity centre | Women | 9 | 17–21 |
| 6 | Gaza | YMCA | Women | 8 | 20+ |
| 7 | Rafah – Al Shaboora | Tadamon charity association | Women | 5 | 17–24 |
| 8 | Khan Younis – Khuzaa | Youth Development Association | Men | 9 | 18–33 |

| | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|---|-----|---|-----|
| 9 | Gaza – Al Shaty' Camp | Women's activity centre | Men | 7 | 20+ |
| 10 | Rafah – Al Mawasi | Mawasi Agricultural Cooperative Association | Men | 7 | 18+ |

OVERVIEW ROUNDTABLES

| ID | Place | Name of participants | Organisations |
|----|--|----------------------|---|
| 1 | Women's Affairs Technical Committees – Gaza City | Sahar Gouda | ActionAid |
| | | Rola Jouda | Union of Health Work Committees |
| | | Hala Rizq | Women's Affairs Technical Committees |
| | | Firyal Thabet | Culture of Free Thought Association |
| 2 | Yaboos charity association – Rafah | Awatef Ehlayyel | Child Friends' association |
| | | Rahma Abu Leila | MAAN development center |
| | | Khaled Abu-Ermana | Yaboos charity association |
| | | Ibrahim Younis | Al Mottahedin associations |
| | | Nedal Al-Akhras | Al Tadamon charity association |
| 3 | Educational Development Association – Gaza | Akram | Save Youth Future Society |
| | | Heba | PalThink association |
| | | Mohannad | Educational Development association |
| | | Shaima | Palestinian Youth Association |
| | | Ashjan | Ajyal association |
| 4 | Educational Development Association – Gaza | Ramadan Hejji | East Gaza for family development |
| | | Jehad Al Tokhli | Volunteer |
| | | Ahmed Murtaja | Yanabee' Al Khair association |
| | | Mahmoud Al-Ayoobi | Farah emergency and development association |

| | | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| 5 | Palestinian Young Entrepreneurs Association – Khanyounes (East) | Ihab Qudaeih | Peace land association |
| | | Ibrahim Abu-Khater | Palestinian young rowwad |
| | | Sulaiman Qudeih | Palestinian centre for development |
| | | Osama Al-Ta’ban | Qotoof Al-Khair |
| | | Ahmad Abu-Rjaila | Future House |
| | | Mohammad Assi | Qotoof Al-Khair |
| | | Nisreen Qudeih | Future House |
| 6 | Bena’ Association for Empowerment and Development – North | Ammar Masnour | Bena’ association for empowerment and development |
| | | Adel Rezeq | Youth house association |
| | | Mazen Al-Barsh | Bena’ association for empowerment and development |
| | | Iyad Abd Rabbu | Takween for empowerment and development association |
| 7 | Wefaq association for women and child development | Bothayna Sobah | Executive Director, Wefaq association for women and child development |
| 8 | CWLRC – Center for Women’s Legal Research and Consultations | Zeinab El Ghunaimi | Director, Center for Women’s Legal Research and Consultations |
| | | Abd-Elmone’ m Al Tahrawy | Palestinian Center For Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR) |

OVERVIEW INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

2nd round

| ID | Place | Man/ woman | Age |
|----|---------------------|------------|-----|
| 1 | Gaza – Al Zaytoon | Woman | 21 |
| 2 | North – Beit Hanoon | Woman | 24 |
| 3 | Middle – Al-Zawayda | Woman | 55 |

| | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------|----|
| 4 | North – Jabalia | Woman | 34 |
| 5 | Rafah | Woman | 24 |
| 6 | North – Jabalia | Woman | - |
| 7 | Gaza – Al Zaytoon | Man | 30 |
| 8 | Rafah – Mosabih | Man | 68 |
| 9 | North – Bait Lahia | Man | 22 |

3rd round

| | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Khan Younis | Woman | 25 |
| 2 | Gaza | Woman | 34 |
| 3 | Rafah – Almawasi | Woman | 33 |
| 4 | Gaza | Woman | 24 |
| 5 | North – Jabalia | Man | - |
| 6 | Khan Younis | Woman – Mukhtara | 50 |
| 7 | Middle – DairAlbalah | Woman – Mukhtara | 42 |
| 8 | Rafah | Man – Mukhtar | 73 |
| 9 | Middle – Al Nussairat | Man – Mukhtar | 53 |
| 10 | Rafah – Al Shaboora | Man – Neighbourhood committee member | 35 |
| 11 | Khan Younis | Man – Neighbourhood committee member | 32 |
| 12 | Middle – Al Nussairat | Man – Neighbourhood committee member | 40 |
| 13 | Rafah | Man – Reform community member | 64 |
| 14 | Gaza | Man – Reform community member | 65 |

ANNEX B SAMPLING

Sampling frame

The sampling frame for the research consists of all Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip, aged 17 years or over. The frame is based on data from the census in 2007, which was implemented by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS); and consists of a list of clusters organised into 33 localities (strata) covering the whole Gaza Strip area.

Sample size

The number of households randomly selected from all localities in the Gaza Strip is estimated based on a 95 per cent confidence level, an estimated prevalence rate of 0.77 (based on PCBS (2011) and Okasha & Abu-Saada (2014)), and a margin of error of ± 0.05 .

The standard formula for sample size calculation was used to primary estimate the sample size

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \delta(1 - \delta)}{e^2}, \text{ the estimated samples size is } n = \frac{(1.96)^2 0.77(0.33)}{(0.05)^2} \approx 391 \text{ households.}$$

All household surveys conducted by the PCBS had relatively low non-response rates. According to the Violence Survey 2011, the response rate in the Gaza Strip was 94.9 per cent. We therefore assumed a non-response rate of 1 per cent. The total calculated sample size would then be 431 households. Finally, for the purpose of easier proportional distribution of the sample size over the 33 selected localities, the sample size is extended to be 448 Palestinian women.

Sampling

According to the PCBS census in 2007, 219,316 households resided in the Gaza strip in 2007. This number was estimated to rise to about 241,248 households in 2014, distributed over 33 localities in the five governorates, North, Gaza, Deir Al Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah.

Several sampling methods are practically used to assess the prevalence of certain exposure. The multi-stages sample (cluster) design has been widely recognised as an effective tool prevalence studies. In the first stage the required number of clusters (i.e. communities) within each of the 33 localities are selected using simple random sampling (SRS) with probability proportional to estimated size (PPS). At the second stage, a list of all sampling units (i.e. households) in each cluster is made and equal numbers of units are randomly selected from each list using systematic random sampling. Kish tables were then used to select one eligible

woman randomly in each of the selected households.

For practical and analytical reasons, we decided to interview eight women in eight different households per cluster (community). First, the interview time for the questionnaire was between 50 and 60 minutes including travel time within each community. Therefore, every data collector could be expected to complete surveying one cluster a day, which saved time and costs. Moreover, assigning eight households for each cluster increases the probability of sampling smaller localities; as well as reduces the design effect. Due to the sampling methods employed, the localities are self-weighting and the obtained results can be generalised to the population.

Table B1 represents the distribution of the number of clusters for each of the 33 localities in the five governorates at the Gaza Strip, where every cluster consists of 8 households.

Table B1 Distribution of clusters

| Locality name | Number of clusters in locality |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Um Al-Nnaser (Al Qaraya al Badawiya al Maslakh) | 0 |
| Beit Lahiya | 2 |
| Beit Hanun | 1 |
| Jabalya Camp | 2 |
| Jabalya | 5 |
| Total North Gaza Governorate | 10 |
| Ash Shati' Camp | 2 |
| Gaza | 17 |
| Madinat Ezahra | 0 |
| Al Mughraqa (Abu Middein) | 1 |
| Juhor ad Dik | 0 |
| Total Gaza Governorate | 20 |
| An Nuseirat Camp | 1 |
| An Nuseirat | 2 |
| Al Bureij Camp | 1 |
| Al Bureij | 0 |
| Az Zawayda | 1 |

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Deir al Balah Camp | 0 |
| Al Maghazi Camp | 1 |
| Al Maghazi | 0 |
| Deir al Balah | 2 |
| Al Musaddar | 0 |
| Wadi as Salqa | 0 |
| Total Dier al Balah Governorate | 8 |
| Al Qarara | 1 |
| Khany Younis Camp | 1 |
| Khan Younis | 6 |
| Bani Suheila | 1 |
| «Abasan al Jadida (as Saghira) | 0 |
| «Abasan al Kabira | 1 |
| Khuza»a | 1 |
| Al Fukhkhari | 0 |
| Total Khan Younis Governorate | 11 |
| Rafah | 5 |
| Rafah Camp | 1 |
| Al-Nnaser (Al Bayuk) | 0 |
| Shokat as Sufi | 1 |
| Total Rafah Governorate | 7 |
| Total Gaza Strip | 56 |

The sample

A total of 440 women completed the interview, a completion rate of 97.8 per cent. Women respondents were between 17 and 90 years of age, with an average of 35.2 years; 73 per cent of respondents were married, 16.8 per cent never married, 3.4 engaged, 2.3 per cent divorced, 3.6 widowed and just under 1 per cent separated.

Table B2 Sample description

| Governorate | Number of respondents | Percent of respondents |
|-------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| North Gaza | 70 | 15.9 |
| Gaza | 160 | 36.4 |
| Middle Gaza | 64 | 14.6 |
| Khan Younis | 88 | 20.0 |
| Rafah | 58 | 13.2 |
| Total | 440 | 100.00 |

The vast majority of women live in households with between 3 and 8 household members in total, and in just over three-quarters of households children up to the age of 16 are living.

Most women (63 per cent) work mainly as housewives, only 6 per cent work outside the house for up to 35 or more hours per week, and 13.6 per cent are studying or in training. 30 per cent of the interviewed women had at least finished secondary education; only 3.41 per cent reported being illiterate – largely the older generation (15 illiterate – average age 55; literate and above age 34).

Women headed only 32 out of the 440 households that completed the interview (7.3 per cent). According to PCBS (2014), this share was 7.7 per cent in 2014, very similar to our sample. Overall, and given that some samples were drawn differently or at different points in time, e.g. PCBS's (2014) overview on marital status of women includes women from the age of 15 onwards and relates to the year 2013, we find that our sample characteristics are similar to what we would expect to find.

ANNEX C QUESTIONS ON VAW IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

Introduction to the question:

Many women face situations and abuse practised by either males or other females in their lives. These abusers could be relatives and/or others. If it doesn't annoy you, I would like to ask you some questions on different situations.

Since the military operation, has anyone...

- ❖ Humiliated you, cursed you or abused you verbally?
- ❖ Harassed you verbally?
- ❖ Threatened to take your children?
- ❖ Punched you, hit you, pushed you or pulled your hair or your clothes?
- ❖ Tried to suffocate you, burned you on purpose, threatened you, used a gun or knife or any other weapon or attacked you with a harmful object, i.e. chair, stick, belt, etc.?
- ❖ Tried to force you to practice sexual intercourse, or touch you for sexual purposes or try any other unacceptable sexual behaviour against your will?

Each of the questions was then followed by the questions

- ❖ Who did this?
- ❖ How often did this happen since the military operation ended?
- ❖ Where does this usually happen?

ANNEX D QUESTIONS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PREVALENCE RATES

Introduction to the question:

MARRIED ONLY:

Every marriage has problems, which usually cause tense situations between spouses for many reasons. They may disagree on different issues and become angry and upset. Each spouse has his/her own practices to solve these problems.

I will read for you some husband practices that husbands use against their wife. Please specify if your husband has used this practice on you.

Since the military operation, has your husband ever...

IF UNMARRIED:

When people live together, they sometimes live through tense situations, for example they disagree on something and get angry and upset. Each person has his or her own practice to solve these problems.

I will read for you some practices that men and women use against other people they live with. Please specify if anyone you live with has used this practice on you.

Since the military operation, has anyone in your household ever...

| Question Item | Prevalence rate* |
|---|------------------|
| Cursed or insulted you, uttered expressions to tease or make you angry, or yelled or screamed at you? | 31.8 |
| Told you that you are ugly, stupid, worthless, or fat? | 13.9 |
| Threatened to hurt you? | 6.4 |
| Ruined your belongings? | 4.8 |
| Hurt or threatened to hurt your children? | 4.6 |
| Threatened to take your children? | 3.2 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Pushed you hard, twisted your arm, pulled your hair, slapped you in your face or held you tight while attacking you? | 10.7 |
| Threw something towards you that could be harmful, or hit you with less dangerous tools, i.e. belt, stick, etc.? | 10.0 |
| Attacked you, which resulted in bruises, scratches, light injuries and joints pain that you thought don't need medical care? | 7.3 |
| Suffocated/strangled you or tried to suffocate you? | 3.4 |
| Broke one of your bones, burned you, tried to attack you with a dangerous tool or hit you so hard you fainted? | 1.6 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Refused to use birth control tools even though you asked for that? | 4.4 |
| Forced you physically or threatened to force you to practice sexual intercourse or to have intercourse in ways you are not satisfied with? | 3.4 |
| Used different forms of violence with you (hitting and using dangerous tools) to force you practice different forms of sexual intercourse against your will? | 2.7 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Asked about how you spend money in detail? | 13.4 |
| Refused to give you enough money for house expenses even though he has enough money to spend on other things? | 12.1 |
| Threatened to withdraw financial support? | 9.8 |
| Taken money from your account or credit card or purse or tried to exploit your legacy without your permission? | 2.2 |

| | |
|---|------|
| Tried to prohibit you from meeting your friends, (female) neighbors, or restricted your connections with your first-degree relatives? | 11.5 |
| Controlled your own belongings? | 5.4 |
| Prevented you or tried to prevent you from working with political parties? | 5.0 |
| Prohibited you from working against your will? | 3.0 |
| Forced you to quit your work? | 2.1 |

* Since the military operation 2014

ANNEX E

INDIVIDUAL STORIES 30

Heba, 21

Heba is 21 years old, divorced and uneducated. Heba was married at the age of 19. During her engagement she didn't see her fiancé often and after their marriage she discovered he had a mental illness. After their wedding, problems between them started immediately. On a daily basis, Heba's husband would verbally and physical assault her. 'He would beat me in the day and sleep with me in the night, as if nothing happened.' Moreover, these assaults would also come from both her mother and father in-law.

At her young age, Heba was completely responsible for the household duties without receiving any help from her mother-in-law. Heba's husband had problems and wasn't able to have children, something that added to the stress. It even went to the extent that one of his friends offered to sleep with her so she can get pregnant. At that point Heba and her family insisted on divorce. Heba needed police help to retrieve her belongings. Nowadays Heba lives with her family and occasionally experiences some conflict with her brother and her father who hit her. Heba believes that if she had been living in an independent house with her husband without her in-laws, they might have had a chance to work it out.

With no desire to get married again at the moment, Heba stays at home and occasionally visits a nearby organisation to learn needlework. Recently she had a marriage proposal from a disabled (deaf) man, and pressure is exerted on her by her family to accept, as it is considered a good offer for a divorced woman as he is single and young. Heba wished she was never married in the first place, and explained that after her divorce she lost the desire to do anything. Heba's advice to women is to complete their education and find a job that can help them to be independent.

Zainb, 34

Zainb is 34 years old, and married with five children. Zainb spends her days in doing household duties and socialising. In addition she goes to a local NGO to attend awareness sessions about inheritance issues, marriage and divorce. Zainb believes that most of the problems between her and her husband stem from the hard financial situation of the family, as her husband can't provide all the needs of the family, because he does not have a stable source of income.

Zainb explains how she generally doesn't have problem with her husband that would make him hit her or cause divorce. But she also remembers one incident where he refused to let her to go to on a trip to the beach and he went there with his friends. When they argued, she yelled at him and his friends encouraged him to take action against her as that was unacceptable behaviour. Her husband went home and hit her, and he called his friends and told them what he did. Zainb explained that she was very surprised by her husband's behaviour. Zainb's husband called her family and asked them to come and take her. Zainb brother came to take her, but before reaching her family house, she decided to go back to her house.

Economic hardship is one of the main problems facing the couple. Zainb advises other women to deal with the problems facing them and their husbands, without leaving the house. Furthermore, she suggests to avoid the husband when he is angry.

Alia, 25

Alia is 25 years old and has been married for 5 months. She lives at her husband's family home. Alia's husband is 12 years older than her and sick, and lives off allowances for his illness. On the rare occasions when he does work, his mother takes all the money he earns. Alia is subject to psychological and economic violence from her in-laws and husband, as well as physical violence by her husband. Her mother-in-law judges her clothes and tries to confine her to the home. She told us: 'I feel like everyone in the house hates me and want to kick me out because I'm different than them in terms of lifestyle.' Having received a job offer, which her mother-in-law forced her to decline, she is helping the family with farming activities. She is insulted and cursed frequently, and her husband beats her and leaves scars on her body. Alia already spent two weeks in a coma in hospital after his beatings. Furthermore, her in-laws prevent her from visiting her parents, relatives or friends.

Alia feels that the situation is worsening each day and fears that her life will be even worse if she ever has children with her husband. Her cousin, who helps her financially and supports her emotionally, tells her repeatedly to talk to her parents, but as Alia says: 'My parents could help me but I don't want to make a bigger problem.'

After having already tried once to take her own life with a knife and being very depressed, Alia thinks that psychological support for women who experience violence and small business programmes that would get them a better standing in the family would help. 'The best two days were when my parents gave me money and I gave it to my in-laws. They were good to me. But other than that, they're mean to me.'

Suad, 33

Suad has been married for 14 years. At the age of 33, she now has six children and lives independently with her children and husband.

Like other women we spoke to, Suad experiences a multitude of abuses against her. She has little access to independent financial resources, and her husband does not support her and threatens to get married to another wife. He prevents her from visiting her parents and sister, insults her and curses her. He also abuses her sexually: 'Whenever he feels like having sex he does that with me even when I don't want. And now we're in Ramadan and we can't have sex because it is prohibited, but he still demands it and I don't know what to do.'

Similarly to many other accounts, the experience has left Suad feel worthless and neglected. She also notices that her children have 'started to hate their father and fear him'. She tries to adapt to the situation in that she borrows money and things from her neighbours or her husband's family. The only person she ever told about her experiences was a UNWRA consultant who worked at the family health care centre. She feels that help for her husband to be more understanding, and to guide and advise his behaviour better, would be the only things that could make a change for the better. Personally, she feels she would benefit from financial help and job opportunities as well as workshops.

Fatima, 34

Fatima got married when she was 19 years of age, 15 years ago. Her husband rarely talked to her when they were living with his parents, and didn't treat her well. Her negative experiences with him started right at the beginning of their marriage, when he took her gold jewellery and sold it, threatening her if she told her or his parents about it.

Fatima experienced different types of violence from her husband, including psychological abuse, deprivation of economic means, forced sex and physical violence. She told us that he used to beat her everywhere. 'Once on my eye and it got blue. He always hit me in a way that leaves scars on my body. He bites me and hits me with anything he can grab.' She was also abused if she refused sex. The last time he beat her, he used a stick and broke one of her arms.

While Fatima has been living at her parent's house for one year now, her husband has taken another wife and turned her children against him. He used to beat and insult her in front of them, which she feels has affected them emotionally very badly. However, they are also one of the reasons – as for so many other women – that Fatima stayed with her husband: 'I always cared for my children so I put up with him.'

The relationship with her husband also spoiled other relationships. He prevented her from talking to her sister-in-law and prevented her from seeing her parents. He used to curse and insult her in front of her sister-in-law, and got angry every time he found her parents or sisters visiting. Because of her husband controlling the money, she could rarely visit her relatives, especially her sisters.

Fatima's years of suffering have left her with little self-confidence and depressed. She's tired of not seeing her children and misses them very much. She told us that her husband told them lies about her in order to prevent her from seeing them. For example, after he was imprisoned for fraud, he convinced the elder daughter that Fatima was responsible for his imprisonment. Fatima feels hurt because her husband doesn't try to solve the conflict and doesn't care to ask about her. Her husband's brothers and uncles knew about the situation and never offered any help. However, her parents have now taken her side, after he stole their money too. Her father sent people to negotiate on getting her children back or letting her divorce him. Fatima even talked to a lawyer to help and was awarded a monthly allowance; however, she has not received custody of her children. Fatima doesn't think that anyone can help her. Her own sister is angry with her for having let her husband pressurise her to ask their parents for money which was then lost.

Fatima's advice for other women in her situation is focused around patience, negotiation between both sides and the building of understanding between husband and wife. 'Whatever happens, women should stay together with her husband and children.' She also believes that early marriages are one reason for many of the conflicts.

Huda, 34

Huda never told her story to anyone and spoke to us only because we are outside her social circle, and because she felt encouraged when she participated in one of the study focus groups and believes the study will help other women. She was 24 years old when she moved to live with her maternal uncles for two months and was engaged to her mother's cousin, who is not a member of her paternal family tribe.

Her paternal uncles, her father's brothers, were against the engagement, but her father and her whole family supported her in her choice against the families' wishes. After completing the engagement procedures with her father, her uncles sent people to talk to her father to break off the engagement and threatened her and her fiancé's family. The conflict escalated at a time of aggression by the Israeli forces, when the whole city was under attack. Her cousins ambushed the neighbourhood and assaulted and kidnapped her. Injured, she was kept for three days at her cousin's house, 'afraid and shivering. I didn't expect them to do this to me.' Her family and the fiancé's family tried their best to release her. At some point, military men from political parties and a member of the Palestinian parliament who was Hamas interfered. Her uncle forced her to talk to her father on the phone and promise him to go to the court next day and break the engagement in front of a judge who was friends with her uncle. Being scared for everyone, including herself, she agreed. After the engagement was broken off, her fiancé waited for four years to get another opportunity to marry her, but finally got married to another woman. Huda herself refuses the idea of getting engaged or married as at her age, 34, the only offers she is getting are from older men, and she prefers her life now than going to live in a miserable marriage: 'I lost the chance of being happy with someone for the first time in my life.... I lost the happy moment of getting married happily that every women desires.'

Huda feels lucky to have such parents and brothers that stood by her side; however, she also feels very unlucky 'on the personal level'. 'It's true that I'm stronger now but I feel very violated in an indescribable way. I paid the price of old traditions and stupid behaviour of the tribe.' 'The main reason behind this problem is that my uncles and cousins believe in the tradition that girls of a tribe cannot get married to a man from outside the tribe. I mean we don't have big real estate that we hold or inherit money to fight over. It was just about traditions!'

As a result of this incident, the relationship with the extended family is completely broken. Huda only talks to one of them, and not very often. One of her brothers to this day swears revenge. Furthermore, people in the neighbourhood or those who know the story scare off potential suitable candidates for marriage as they still believe that her father's family would react violently to anyone outside their tribe. However, the incident has also brought about change. After what happened, her uncles and cousins have changed and now accept marrying their girls to people from outside the tribe. Huda's older sister divorced her husband from the same tribe and started leading her own independent life. Also her younger sister got married to a man from her ex-fiancé's family.

Maryam, 55

Maryam is 55 years old, married and a mother of five children. Maryam is originally from Rafah and moved to Al Zawaida in the middle area in Gaza Strip after she got married.

After her marriage Maryam faced many difficulties as the traditions and her new lifestyle was hugely different from the old one. Living without electricity and running water, Maryam had two difficult years until she adapted to the situation. In her early marriage life she faced much physical and verbal violence. 'He would hit me and tell me who do you think you are? And why are you so arrogant?' Maryam explained that living with her in-laws added to the violence and problems with her husband, who would find himself in a situation where he didn't know whom to satisfy – his father, mother or wife.

As a child, Maryam was one of the best students in school and hoped to continue her education. However, her father refused and pushed her toward marriage. During her early married life, Maryam received training by one of the local NGOs that targets women in rural areas. The NGO helped to establish a local CBO, where she was a very active member. During the first Intifada, Maryam could not work and had to stay at home. She felt very bad and thought about divorce but things got better when she went back to work in the CBO. Back then, when Maryam and her friends would leave for the training, other people would judge them and wonder where they were going and what they were doing. One man didn't even allow his wife to join them and talked about them with bad words.

Currently Maryam is in a senior position in the organisation and helps many women through her work. She explained how her life is very different and better now. Maryam advises against early marriage, and encourages women to follow their ambitions, no matter whether it is just a dream or if it could create a source of income.

ENDNOTES

1. The change in domestic violence rates is not statistically significant. However, this could be due to the fact that even though the sample of women interviewed is representative of the population of women across the Gaza strip aged 17 and above, the sample size is too small to determine whether a small difference is systematic or due to chance.
2. Article 1, UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, 1993.
3. The initial intended target sample age was 15 years of age plus. However, to acquire consent from a minor in the presence of her parents or guardians would jeopardise the confidentiality and possibly the safety of the respondent in question, as her parents or guardians, who might also be her abusers, would know the topic of the survey. In order to minimise any risk to our survey respondents, we thus raised the lower age range of our sample to the age of 17. We also applied this minimum age to our qualitative data collection methods.
4. In their everyday work, CSOs and CBOs did not display any significant differences.
5. Usually these reform committees are formed by community members through the nomination of well-known community members with good reputation.
6. These men did not experience violence, but were invited in order to learn a little more about men's perceptions of VAW in private interviews.
7. Where privacy was interrupted and could not be restored, a note was made by the interviewer in order to later control for potential biases.
8. <http://legalclinic.iugaza.edu.ps/?view=post&cat=10&id=653> (in Arabic) (accessed 26 August 2015).
9. The data collection in the Gaza Strip took place 10–30 July 2011.
10. Up to 1,417 people were estimated to have died, and many more injured by the shelling during the military offensive Operation Cast Lead from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009. Similarly to the Operation Protective Edge in 2014, this intense, prolonged bombardment resulted in the destruction of homes and infrastructure, massive displacement and financial losses in the Gaza Strip.
11. <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/emergency-reports/gaza-situation-report-15> (accessed 26 August 2015).
12. 12,620 housing units were reported as completely destroyed and 12,740 occurred severe or major damage and 143,680 home were partially damaged or received minor damages dur-

ing this last operation (UNOCHA 2015c). In comparison, in 2008–09, 3,425 were completely destroyed and 2,843 and 54,800 were damaged severely or partially, respectively.

13. UNRWA had anticipated sheltering a maximum of 50,000 IDPs.

14. The youth unemployment rate is calculated for young people between the ages of 15 and 29.

15. <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/infant-mortality-rate-rises-gaza-first-time-fifty-years>

16. We understand political violence to be violence used to achieve political goals, or inaction on the part of a government.

17. We use the terms psychological and emotional abuse interchangeably.

18. http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2013/child_marriage_20130307/en/ (accessed 26 August 2015).

19. Different definitions of forced and early marriage exist. However, most definitions agree that forced marriage is a marriage that takes place without the free or valid consent of one or both of the partners. Early marriage – where one or both of the partners is under-age – is considered to be forced marriage because minors are deemed incapable of giving informed consent (WLUML 2013).

20. The type of needs was not further specified; there was an implicit assumption that married women have more needs and demands than unmarried women and girls.

21. The military operation began on 8 July, and on 26 August 2014 a ceasefire was announced. With data collection taking place between 28 and 31 June 2015, we are talking about a time span of roughly 11 months.

22. Defined here as punching, hitting, pushing and pulling hair or clothes.

23. Defined as attempts to or acts of suffocation, burning, threaten to harm, using harmful objects and weapons.

24. Intimate partner violence can comprise all acts of physical, sexual, emotional or other nature perpetrated by current or former intimate partners.

25. However, never-married women with children are rare in Gaza; only 2 out of 13 women

who reported having been faced with this specific threat are never-married.

26. <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/training/wheels.html>

27. Specifically, we asked, “Would you say that your husband’s work or employment situation is mostly stable?”

28. In our sample of 440 women, 184 women (41.8 per cent) had ever experienced domestic violence over the time-span we asked for – 174 since the military operation ended, 10 only until or temporarily during the operation. Of those 184 women, 7.6 per cent (14 women) only experienced domestic violence since the start or end of the military operation (i.e. 3.18 per cent of the sample of 440). Assuming that our sample is truly representative of the female population aged 17 and above in the Gaza Strip, and extrapolating the numbers on a population of 100,000, this would amount to 3,181 women. As mentioned earlier, this increase is not statistically significant; however, this could be due to low numbers of observations.

29. There is no formal referral system in place in Gaza.

30. We changed the names of our study participants in all individual stories in order to protect their privacy.

Alianza por la Solidaridad came into being in 2013 as a result of the merger of Solidaridad Internacional, Habitafrica, and IPADE. Together, the three NGOs have more than 70 years' experience in development cooperation, communication and advocacy campaigns. Violence against women threatens their lives, dignity and autonomy and represents a major barrier to their full participation in society. We work to achieve a life free of violence for all women. We advocate ensuring that public authorities and states guarantee this right and establish suitable judicial systems and treatment protocols. We take action helping to empower women to become aware of and demand their rights, and to share that knowledge with other women. We get involved, forging alliances to build a society that condemns violence against women.

ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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