



**Mapping of Institutions Providing Health, Legal,  
Psychological and Economic Services to Women Victims of  
Gender-based Violence in Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya and  
Tubas Governorates**

**The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy  
"MIFTAH"**

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Mapping of Institutions Providing Health, Legal, Psychological and Economic Services to Women  
Victims of Gender-based Violence in Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya and Tubas Governorates

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## **Foreword by MIFTAH**

In line with its strategic orientations, the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (**MIFTAH**) aims to influence public policies and legislations, for the purpose of enhancing the principles of equality, partnership, and social protection in the Palestinian society. The organization also seeks to strengthen the democratic approach and values of social justice in Palestine. In congruence with this vision, the organization conducted a mapping survey that highlights the organizations working in Tulkarem, Tubas, Jenin and Qalqilya (especially in Areas “C”), which provide psychological, social, health, economic and legal services to the victims of gender-based violence (GBV), in addition to examining the nature and availability of these services and women’s accessibility to them. The survey also aims to identify the gaps and obstacles impeding the access of women and girls to different protection services (such as social, legal and supportive services), to enable women to enjoy their citizenship rights inside the society.

This survey is a continuation of MIFTAH’s efforts to follow up women’s issues in marginalized areas, especially the northern West Bank areas facing the risks of land confiscation, settlement expansion, and settler violence. It is worth noting that the latter risks present ever-increasing challenges for Palestinian women and girls in accessing services in these areas, whereas the said areas are characterized by having scarce resources, weak organizational activities, and poor support/funding sources. Furthermore, the Palestinian government is becoming increasingly incapable of funding different service-providing programs for women and girls. For example, the share of protection and integration programs at the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is only 6% of the budget of the Ministry, whose total budget did not exceed 7.7% of the General Budget of 2020.

We present before you the results of a field survey conducted by MIFTAH in the governorates of Tubas, Tulkarem, Jenin and Qalqilya, respectively. Its goal is to “diagnose” the situation of organizations working in these governorates (particularly in the marginalized areas that are constantly subjected to acts of violence by the Israeli occupation), and whose work focuses on directly providing services to women and girls. This work was achieved through a project titled **“Working together as Agents for Change: Towards the Protection and Promotion of Women’s Human Rights”**, which is implemented by MIFTAH in partnership with Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), through support from the European Union. The survey aims to **highlight the reality of women in marginalized areas and places that are constantly undergoing violations perpetrated by the occupation**. It also provides specialized data related to the

condition of these organizations, as well as the challenges obstructing their work and the impediments that undermine women's access to different services. The survey revealed the presence of a financing gap for supporting these organizations, thereby affecting their work and performance in the aforementioned areas and minimizing the services provided to female beneficiaries. Survey results/findings also exposed a lack of awareness among many women vis-à-vis the work of these organizations, thus requiring different interventions and guidance to target women and girls and support their access to protection and justice. Following the important recommendations of this survey, MIFTAH will hold a number of discussions and consultations with official, NGO and international parties to push for the introduction of vital programs, effective measures and public policies. This will enhance women and girls' protection and strengthen their access to social, psychological and legal services in marginalized areas for the achievement of gender justice.

## **Executive Summary**

This mapping survey seeks to analyze the reality of institutions providing health, legal, psychological and economic services to women victims of gender-based violence (GBV) in the governorates of Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya and Tubas. The survey also analyzes the effectiveness and capacity of these institutions in providing protection to women who are subjected to violence, as well as specifying a set of detailed objectives, including: How are services provided by international, governmental and non-governmental organizations in the health, social and economic sectors? What is the view of institutions regarding the protection of battered women? What are the ways of coordination and “role-playing” among the institutions concerned with tackling gender-based violence in the four governorates? Are there sufficient human and financial resources to support the provision of integrated services to women? Also, what is the perspective of female survivors of violence vis-à-vis these institutions and their provided services?

The survey conducted a comprehensive analysis of the condition of services provided to women in the four governorates. This was done in order to provide the necessary information to all relevant parties involved in countering violence, as well as enhancing the protection of women and girls and preventing cases of violence against them. The analysis also helps improve the strategies for protecting women from violence and other violations.

The mapping survey describes the current reality of gender-based violence (GBV) and its political, social and economic context in the Palestinian society. Additionally, it highlights the effects of this situation on women in the targeted governorates located north of the West Bank. For example, the survey analyzes the work of international, local and governmental organizations in these governorates in terms of services provided to women and girls who are subjected to violence, along with describing and analyzing the surrounding factors that undermine or enhance the ability of these organizations to tackle battered women’s issues. This includes highlighting the roles, potentials and capabilities of these organizations, as well as examining the integration of roles (i.e. “role-playing”) between them. Moreover, the survey presents the difficulties and challenges faced by these organizations in tackling women's issues and attending to their needs. Furthermore, it examines women’s benefits from these organizations’ services from the perspective of women themselves. Finally, there is the presentation of specific conclusions and recommendations for improving the quality of services provided to battered women, in order to enhance their protection and strengthen their access to justice.

A descriptive analytical approach was adopted to examine the current condition of services provided in these governorates, by analyzing local and international reports and studies. The survey utilizes qualitative research techniques to address these aspects by conducting personal interviews with subject-matter experts in the field of confronting gender-based violence, whereas these experts are from official, non-governmental and international organizations. Moreover, there was the preparation of individual questionnaires for service-providing institutions and women beneficiaries of the programs and services provided by these institutions. A special questionnaire was designed for these institutions to monitor the situations and challenges facing battered women in the aforementioned areas in terms of access to services and protection from violence. This questionnaire was also formally assessed by two specialists with substantial experience in the field.

A total of 41 questionnaires were filled out, including 20 questionnaires through direct interviews conducted by the researcher with women beneficiaries, and 21 questionnaires were filled out by the women beneficiaries themselves. A separate questionnaire was designed and presented to monitor and examine the condition of institutions providing health, social, legal and economic services. 37 of these questionnaires were completed in the four governorates and were formally assessed by two experts in the field. Four discussion groups were also held, one in each governorate, with male and female representatives from relevant institutions operating in the field, and their total number was 38 (32 female and 6 male).

Survey findings showed that the services provided by these institutions to women and girls who were subjected to violence in these governorates (Tulkarem - Jenin - Tubas - Qalqilya) address only some of women and girls' needs in these areas. Therefore, these services do not meet all the needs of battered women and girls in an integrated manner (i.e. they do not take the various health, social and economic aspects into consideration). Moreover, the current services lack effective protection measures, contrary to what was stipulated in the documents, commitments and official measures adopted by these institutions in dealing with cases of violence in a comprehensive manner to lead women and girls to safety. It is also worth noting that these organizations have a different scope from one governorate to another with regard to the needed integrated interventions to enhance women's access to services and protection. Also, these organizations have different programs and measures in different targeted areas for augmenting women's protection and safety. This is due to the weak financial and human capacities and resources of many institutions in reaching out to different geographic areas within each governorate. This weakness is also attributed to the limited capacity of Palestinian governmental institutions in

light of the complicated political system and Israeli military occupation, which prevents these institutions from implementing the necessary women's protection measures, and especially in Area "C".

The results also showed that women's decision to resort to these institutions and seek protection are based on several factors, including the feeling of safety, trust, and the presence of alternatives through these institutions. International, governmental and non-governmental organizations exert some efforts to combat gender-based violence in the four governorates. Nevertheless, and despite the growing concern about issues related to violence against women and girls at the level of formulated policies, measures, plans and procedures, these efforts are considered insufficient to eliminate violence against women. Also, the absence of guarantees to protect women at the legal level causes women to remain silent and secretive and suffer the consequences of the perpetrated violence. This makes the traditional (family and tribal) customs play a major role in filling the vacuum due to the inability of public institutions to effectively respond to cases of violence and their ramifications on women and their families. The reality of service-providing institutions also shows that the economic factor has the strongest influence on women's ability to counter violence and live in dignity by gaining financial independence and economic empowerment. Therefore, it is not feasible to discuss sectoral programs and interventions to enhance women's safety without the presence of sustainable economic support programs.

The services provided to battered women are affected by a number of factors, including the environment and internal work conditions in service-providing organizations operating in these governorates. It is also important to provide the necessary financial resources for implementing programs for countering violence against women, as well as having well-trained staff to competently work on women's issues. Most assessments have indicated a weaknesses in these institutions' financial resources and their inability to cover several geographic areas in the said governorates. Also, the major institutions many times focus less on these four governorates, thus distributing their resources in an inequitable manner. This neglect often happens during the planning and implementation of programs that target battered women, including women in marginalized areas and those with disabilities, not to mention the lack of sustainability in the programs and services that target battered women's issues. Moreover, integrated roles and responsibilities and effective coordination between different institutions are essential for providing women with the needed services. In this respect, survey findings showed the presence of effective coordination between these organizations. However, some survey participants noted that this coordination should be more systematic, institutionalized and sustainable rather than being limited to intervention cases.

Despite the ongoing efforts of international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to apply the national system for referring battered women to health, social and legal services (i.e. “National Referral System”), work under this system and its protocols is still incomplete, vague and is not being applied by many organizations (especially among the female staff of NGOs in the said areas). The survey indicated that governmental institutions (especially the Ministry of Social Development) operate according to this system, which is primarily based on active coordination between different institutions. However, some of the organizations working on countering violence against women in these governorates do not coordinate and implement their work under this system.

The absence, weakness, and conflict of laws are negatively reflected on the policies and measures related to women's protection from violence. For this reason, many organizations overcome this problem by introducing their own procedures and measures at the local and/or national levels. However, these procedures and measures remain deficient due to the absence of fair laws that enhance women's recovery from violence and support their reparation for damages resulting from perpetrated violence. If such laws were available, women would not hesitate to seek different services and protection from official institutions.

The survey concluded that the state of emergency associated with the COVID-19 crisis showed the weakness and ineffectiveness of the current systems in countering violence. The pandemic also exposed the inability of different organizations and their staff to respond to women’s needs, thereby reducing the practical options presented before women for confronting violence. Several indicators also showed that women face multiple burdens during crises and emergency situations, which in turn doubles their exposure to violence, and especially among women in marginalized areas and women with disabilities.

Following the analysis and conclusions, a number of specific recommendations emerged vis-à-vis the different health, social, economic and legal services provided by governmental, non-governmental and international organizations operating in these governorates, as follows:

1. To consolidate efforts and establish an *esprit de corps* among different institutions to reform the legal system for enhancing women’s protection from violence. This includes the ratification of the Family Protection Bill and addressing deficiencies in conflicting laws between the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, such as the penal codes and personal status laws.

This can improve the level of response to the needs related to women's protection.

2. Activate and enforce the National Referral System for women with regard to health, social and legal services, as well as assessing the effectiveness of this system in the four governorates. Also, it is important to ensure that the referral system includes an active and integrated participation and coordination between governmental and non-governmental institutions targeting battered women in these governorates.
3. Enhance budgetary allocations and economic programs that target battered women in the four governorates, along with adopting an equitable distribution of financial resources. Moreover, there is a need to strengthen human resources quantitatively and qualitatively, in order to deal more competently with battered women in these governorates.
4. Upgrade the quality and efficiency of services provided to women in these governorates, and provide continuous training to relevant female and male staff in these governorates. This should be combined with an assessment of the training impact and its effect on services provided to women.
5. Assessment of battered women's benefits from the services, programs, interventions and strategies that are approved/implemented by international, governmental and non-governmental institutions. Also, it is important to continuously examine the impact of these services, programs, interventions and strategies on women's access and meeting of their needs (including the provision of options for them to protect themselves from violence). This will enable women to benefit in a greater manner from the targeted programs that seek to protect them from violence.
6. Enhance cooperation between organizations on the sectoral level to respond to women's needs and understand their changing circumstances during the emergency period. In other words, these organizations must adopt alternative programs that enhance women's protection from violence in times of emergency, as well as strengthening inter-organizational cooperation to formulate practical plans that target women. These institutions need to create alternatives to enable women to seek help and protection from violence, including sectoral and alternative lines of support for women when they are unable to leave their homes or move freely during emergency periods.
7. Institutions must pay greater attention to empowering women with disabilities and women in marginalized areas in the forementioned governorates, as well as aligning programs and interventions with women's need for protection from violence. This is because most of these institutions have a weak impact on women with disabilities, women in

marginalized areas, women in areas adjacent to the separation wall, as well as Areas “C”.

**Keywords of the survey: Services provided to women who are subjected to violence in the governorates of Tulkarem, Jenin, Tubas, and Qalqilya, women’s protection from violence.**

## Chapter One

### Introduction

This survey was conducted amidst an increasing phenomenon of gender-based violence in the Palestinian society and the emergence of political, social and economic factors that stimulate gender-based violence. These include, *inter alia*, factors related to the Israeli military occupation of Palestine and its restrictive practices that threaten women's security and human development, coupled with factors pertinent to the reality of women in the context of the patriarchal system and its implications on women's access to justice and equality. The survey also comes in light of repeated civil and official calls to eliminate and confront violence and counter recently emerging extremist and traditional movements that make their advocacy for civil peace contingent upon retaining the patriarchal and customary legal system, thereby exacerbating violence and discrimination against women and girls. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the ineffectiveness of current policies and legislations and the poor services provided to women who were affected by violence. The global pandemic also exposed the weakness of adopted interventions to protect women from violence, along with their failure to compensate women for the suffered damages resulting from violence. According to the most recent pilot survey conducted by the Ministry of Women's Affairs to measure the level of violence against women during the COVID-19 period, more than 80% of women respondents were subjected to all forms of violence. The results also showed that psychological violence was the most prevalent, as 55% of women respondents were subjected to it, followed by economic violence (54%). The exploratory study also showed that 88% of women with disabilities underwent different forms of economic, social, physical, psychological and verbal violence.<sup>1</sup>

Our work was based on our firm belief in women's rights and safeguarding their dignity and right to live, as well as enhancing their participation in all aspects of life without discrimination. This survey maps out the institutions that provide health, social, legal and economic services and analyzes the protection system used by institutions to deal with battered women's cases in the Palestinian society. Therefore, this important survey aims to enhance women's access to services, as well as the achievement of justice and reparation for suffered damages. The survey also exposes gaps from a gender perspective, especially those related to the provided services and

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<sup>1</sup> (Arabic source) Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2020. Exploratory Study on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender-based Violence in the State of Palestine (April 14-24, 2020): Main Findings, Summary of Findings, Ramallah - Palestine.

adopted policies at the governmental, civil and international levels in the governorates of Tulkarem, Jenin, Tubas and Qalqilya. Hence, the survey will spell out the needs of different programs and strategic interventions carried out by institutions in these areas (particularly in Areas “C”) to enhance women's access to services in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, the mapping survey provides an opportunity to develop policies, laws and strategic measures and interventions to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in these governorates.

## **Survey Goal and Objectives**

### **Survey Goal:**

The goal of the survey is to monitor and “diagnose” the situation of institutions working in the field of women’s protection, along with examining the health, legal, psychological and economic programs and services provided to women victims of gender-based violence in the four governorates (Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya and tubas). The survey also aims to monitor and examine the effectiveness of these institutions in providing protection to women who undergo violence.

### **Survey Objectives:**

The survey seeks to identify the following:

- Nature and characteristics of services provided by institutions to protect women in the four governorates (Tulkarem, Jenin, Qalqilya and Tubas).
- Institutions' perspective regarding the provision of battered women’s protection, and the factors that facilitate the provision of protection to women.
- Mechanisms of activating, coordinating and implementing the National Referral System for providing social, health and legal services to women.
- Availability of human resources and well-trained staff to sensitively deal with issues related to battered women.
- Viewpoints of service providers and women beneficiaries regarding the provided services and interventions in terms of:
  - A. Availability and proportionality.
  - B. Responsiveness in times of emergency, especially during the COVID-19 period.
  - C. Obstacles in accessing services.
  - D. Services provided to women with disabilities.
  - E. Protection mechanisms and risk assessment.
  - F. Accessibility and acceptability.
  - G. Ethical practices during the provision of services.
  - H. Services provided to women with disabilities.
  - I. Documentation and data collection.

- J. Dissemination and exchange of information.
- K. Lobbying and advocacy.
- L. Financial and human resources.

## **Survey Methodology:**

The descriptive analytical approach was adopted in this survey to gain a better understanding of the reality, context and circumstances surrounding the work of service-providing institutions, as well as analyzing the implications of women's accessibility or inaccessibility to protection. Moreover, there was the utilization of qualitative research techniques that examine these aspects by conducting personal interviews with subject-matter experts in the field of confronting gender-based violence, whereas these experts are from official, non-governmental and international organizations. Additionally, there was the preparation of individual questionnaires for service-providing institutions and women beneficiaries of the programs and services provided by these institutions, as well as establishing focus groups comprised of women beneficiaries. The following methods and tools were used to collect data and statistics for this survey:

- Review of the relevant documents and procedures related to official, non-governmental and international organizations that provide services to battered women in Palestine (especially in the four governorates, Areas "C", and areas adjacent to the wall). This included monitoring the levels of suitability, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of programs on women and girls' ability to access services, along with identifying the relevant policies and procedures for protecting battered women.
- Review of global and local studies, literature, manuals and procedures that shed light on practices, statistics and services provided to battered women, while taking into consideration human rights and gender dimensions along with support and counseling skills.
- A separate questionnaire was designed and presented to monitor and examine the condition of institutions providing health, social, legal and economic services. 37 of these questionnaires were completed in the four governorates and were formally assessed by two experts in the field.
- A special questionnaire was designed for women beneficiaries to monitor the situations and challenges facing battered women in the aforementioned areas in terms of access to services and protection from violence. This questionnaire was also formally assessed by two specialists with substantial experience in the field. A total of 41 questionnaires were filled out, including 20 questionnaires through

direct interviews conducted by the researcher with women beneficiaries, and 21 questionnaires were filled out by the women beneficiaries themselves.

- Four discussion groups were also held, one in each governorate, with male and female representatives from relevant institutions operating in the field, and their total number was 38 (32 female and 6 male).
- A meeting was held with two female specialists from two international organizations working in the field of eliminating gender-based violence and provision of protection, namely the UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Meetings were held with the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) Undersecretary and the Director of Mehwar Center.
- Data compilation was done through questionnaires completed by women beneficiaries and those which were filled out by service-providing institutions. Other data collection sources included the results of discussion groups with institutions and the results of interviews with international organizations and MoSD. It is also worth noting that data analysis was conducted in accordance with survey sections and objectives, and the analysis was incorporated into the survey report and factsheet.

### **Survey Sample and Method of Sampling:**

**Women beneficiaries:** Service providers from the four governorates were asked to request from women beneficiaries (who received health, social, psychological and/or legal services from them) to complete questionnaires designed especially for them, regardless of their educational attainment, social background, economic condition or another variable. Service providers were also asked to ensure that the number of beneficiary women would be about ten in each governorate, i.e. a total of 40 women beneficiaries in the four governorates.

**Service-providing institutions:** Based on MIFTAH's manual about relevant service-providing institutions in Palestinian governorates, these institutions were invited to participate in discussions and complete the questionnaires designed specifically for them. However, the response level was partial, especially in Jenin and Tulkarem, due to the current situation and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the time of conducting these discussions in these two governorates.

**International organizations:** The UN Women and UNFPA were selected to participate in the survey due to their specialization and interventions in the field of eliminating violence and providing protection.

**Ministry of Social Development (MoSD):** A meeting was held with the MoSD Undersecretary and Director of Mehwar Center, given that the MoSD is the main official actor and competent ministry for dealing with issues related to battered women's protection.

## **Literature Review**

In this survey, there was the review of a number of previous documents and literature, which include some recurring terms that will be defined in the next section. Moreover, there was the analysis of the political context and women's socio-economic conditions, along with studying the most prominent demographic characteristics of the population in the four governorates (Qalqilya, Tubas, Tulkarem and Jenin). The issue of gender-based violence was also examined at the global and local levels. Furthermore, there was the review of procedures and measures related to the provision of services to battered women, along with discussing the reasons behind the wide gap between adopted decisions and practices on the ground.

## **Terminology**

There are several meanings and interpretations for the used terms for explaining social phenomena related to women's rights and issues. Despite the common usages of such terms, it is still not possible to decisively arrive at unified descriptions for their definitions and interpretations in terms of their linguistic connotations. For the purposes of this survey, we will rely upon a set of international and local human rights references in an attempt to interpret some recurring terms in this survey.

### **Violence Against Women / Gender-Based Violence (VAW/GBV):**

**This term was defined as follows by the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December, 1993:** (Article 1) *“For the purposes of this Declaration, the term “Violence Against Women” means 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.”*. **According to Article 2 of this Declaration,** Violence Against Women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- A. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- B. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- C. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.<sup>2</sup>

According to the definition of the 11<sup>th</sup> session (1992) of the “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women”, in its General Recommendation No. 19, as well as its commentary on Article (1) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW): “*Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women’s ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men*”. This definition includes “*violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It also includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Gender-based violence may breach specific provisions of the Convention, regardless of whether those provisions expressly mention violence*”.<sup>3</sup>

The Council of Europe (Istanbul) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2011) defines “Violence Against Women” in Article 3 as “*a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women, and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life*”.<sup>4</sup>

In its Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society of 2019, which is the third in a series following the 2005 and 2011 Domestic Violence Surveys, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) provided a list of definitions related to violence.

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<sup>2</sup> (Arabic source) Website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women: <https://www.ohchr.org/AR/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ViolenceAgainstWomen.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Eleventh Session, 1992, General Recommendation No. 19: Violence against Women: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom19>

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe (Istanbul) Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence 2011: <https://rm.coe.int/168046246c> (English version can be found on <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>)

For example, it defined ‘Violence against Women’ 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.<sup>5</sup>

### **Women’s protection from the risk of violence**

Protection is defined as “all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the right of all individuals, without discrimination, in accordance with the relevant bodies of law. This means that protection is an objective central to all humanitarian action”. Also, the state has the primary legal responsibility of ensuring that women within its borders are safe. Protection also means that women are safe from all forms of violence and coercion, and that they would not be deprived of assistance or shelter when they face safety-related risks, as well as enabling them to recover from harm and secure access to their rights.<sup>6</sup>

Also, women should be accorded "special protection" from sexual violence, which includes rape, forced prostitution, and any other form of indecent assault. All of these acts are considered war crimes according to International Humanitarian Law, which applies to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. International Humanitarian Law also prohibits threatening women with sexual violence, and women prisoners should be detained separately from men to avoid sexual assaults.

International Humanitarian Law also requires that pregnant women and mothers of young children, especially breastfeeding mothers, be treated with special care. This applies, for example, to the provision of food, clothing, medical care, evacuation, and transportation.<sup>7</sup>

In occupied Palestine, Article (1) of Cabinet Decision No. (18) defines Protection as "the provision of human security and physical, sexual and psychological safety and well-being to those who suffer harm, by taking all the necessary procedures and measures".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey of the Palestinian Society, 2019: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2480.pdf> (English version is also available on the website).

<sup>6</sup> Oxfam website, “Protection: What is it Anyway?” <https://bit.ly/3aUf78u> (English version can be found on: <https://bit.ly/3tJVP6>)

<sup>7</sup> Website of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): <https://bit.ly/3aSEiIG> (English version available on: <https://bit.ly/36Uo4Ob>)

<sup>8</sup> (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision No. (18) of 2013 regarding the National Referral System to provide services for Battered Women, see: <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=16570>

**Battered Woman:**

Article (1) of Palestinian Cabinet Decision No. (18) of 2013 regarding the national referral system for battered women defines the term “Battered Woman” as "every woman above the age of 18 who was exposed to violence, as well as under 18-year old girls who are married and undergo violence".<sup>9</sup>

**National Referral System for providing health, social and legal services to battered women:**

The Cabinet decision defines the National Referral System for battered women as “a set of rules that constitute a national charter for dealing with battered women”. Based on this definition, the system aims to achieve protection and care for women in the health, social and judicial sectors, along with establishing rules and foundations that govern the binding framework of the professional relationship with beneficiaries. Moreover, it constitutes a reference and stipulation for dealing with moral, ethical and professional issues and sets forth the rights and duties of service providers and battered women.<sup>10</sup>

**Social, Health and Legal Services for Battered Women:** are a set of services that aim to develop basic procedures for social service providers to work more effectively with battered women who seek social assistance to regain control over their lives. This is done through the provision of protection, care and rehabilitation to these women at the social, psychological, health and legal service levels. It also includes personal and economic empowerment services, in cooperation with relevant partners from ministries and civil society organizations. Protection means the provision of human security and physical, sexual and psychological safety to those who suffer harm, by taking all necessary procedures and measures.<sup>11</sup>

The survey relies upon the following international principles and standards in the provision of services to women victims of violence:

- Availability: examines the extent of providing different services in a sufficient manner inside the country.
- Accessibility: examines the attainability of services from a financial perspective and their provision in all areas without any discrimination between different social groups.
- Respect for professional ethics: especially with regard to maintaining privacy and respecting other people’s cultures.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

- Quality of services: In order to provide good-quality services, workers and professionals involved in providing these services should receive training that qualifies them to adequately respond to the needs of women victims of domestic/marital violence.<sup>12</sup>

### **Service Provider**

The Cabinet decision defined the term “Service Provider” as any legal person/entity who deals with the public and provides health, legal, social or Police services to battered women or survivors of violence.

Also, routine surveys/assessments of violence are usually made for women when they seek health or social services in cases where there are indicators of inflicted violence.<sup>13</sup>

### **The political context of women’s socio-economic conditions: Is there potential for women's development and human security under occupation?**

Palestinian women live under very complicated social and political structures founded upon the patriarchal community system and laws that promote inequality (which we will discuss in detail in this survey). On the other hand, the Israeli military occupation system constitutes the main source for multiplying the restrictions and complications in the lives of Palestinian women. For example, the occupation adopts different methods that coercively restrict women’s lives on a daily basis, as well as displacing them and depriving them of effectiveness and development capabilities. In doing so, the occupation aims to sustain its control, influence and domination over all aspects of Palestinian life, for the purpose of uprooting and expelling the Palestinians, taking over their land, and subjugating them politically through sieges, closures, arrests, assassinations, the apartheid wall, and barriers.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, the ESCWA Multi-Sectoral Report on Combating Violence Against Women in the Arab Region: Multi-Sectoral Efforts, United Nations, 2013:

<https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/combating-violence-against-women-multisectoral-efforts-2013-arabic.pdf> (available in English on: <https://bit.ly/2OjJFG9>)

<sup>13</sup> Op. Cit, (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision regarding the National Referral System for Services.

<sup>14</sup> Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, New York. Fact Sheet: The State of Palestine’s Women Under Occupation. <https://palestineun.org/fact-sheet-the-state-of-palestines-women-under-occupation>

The socio-economic conditions of women are largely affected by pressures from these two factors (patriarchal system and the Israeli Occupation), thus undermining women's ability to withstand the complex conditions affecting the various aspects of their lives. A report issued by the United Nations in 2018 (covering two years) regarding the complex living conditions of Palestinian women and girls, shows the aspects of deterioration and improvement in the conditions of Palestinian women in light of the Israeli military occupation. For example, the report sheds light on the volatile political situation and its effect on the well-being and rights of women and girls. The report also examines the devastating impact of the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip, as well as describing the harmful effects of occupation policies, including the increase in settlement activity; threats of forced eviction; and home demolitions. The report also highlights the effect of such policies on women and girls in particular, especially in East Jerusalem and Areas "C" in the West Bank. On the other hand, it discusses the impact of the Palestinian political division on the status and options of Palestinian women. For example, the main indicators show a significant increase in women's unemployment rate (especially among educated young women), which amounted to as high as 78.3% in the second quarter of 2018. Thus, the report shows an increasing unemployment rate among women who have higher levels of educational attainment. Moreover, it highlights the effects of growing violence and the political gap between the Palestinian government and the de facto authorities in Gaza, which led to the deterioration of women and girls' living conditions, exposure to substantial risks, and undermining their health rights.<sup>15</sup>

The ongoing deterioration in human security levels and undermining women's developmental potentials can simply create more violence and a greater decline in protection systems, and especially in the absence of controls for eliminating violence against women. Examples of this decline include women's loss of free movement and their inability to participate in private and public political and social spheres. It also limits women's ability to lead decent lives for them and their children under the immense pressure of the occupation and its hostile practices.

The Israeli occupation's firm control over all Area "C" territories in the West Bank (which constitute more than 60% of the West Bank) is not limited to the political aspect. Rather, the occupation also extends its control over natural resources in these areas, which limits women's developmental capacities. Consequently, Israel's imposed restrictions have contributed to reducing the opportunities of women

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<sup>15</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The Socio-Economic Status of Palestinian Women and Girls, 2016–2018: (Arab Multidimensional Poverty Report) [https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/multidimensional-arab-poverty-report-arabic\\_0.pdf](https://www.unescwa.org/sites/www.unescwa.org/files/publications/files/multidimensional-arab-poverty-report-arabic_0.pdf) (the report is also available in English on: <https://bit.ly/2OqMt7B>)

working in these areas, most of whom depend on agriculture and animal husbandry. This reality contributes to intensifying the burdens of women to provide the simplest available resources to their families. Most of these women are also deprived of accessing services provided by social, health, legal, economic, and care centers.<sup>16</sup>

In October 2014, the Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA) conducted a study on the conditions and rights of displaced girls and women during the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip. The study revealed the harmful effects of this aggression on girls and women, including the absence of security, constant feelings of fear, women's daily suffering, and displacement of approximately 28% of the population, which doubled the suffering of women in the Gaza Strip. This devastating aggression, which was waged by Israel's military occupation forces in 2014, led to a total collapse in women's basic living conditions in an unprecedented manner. Moreover, it affected all aspects of Palestinian family life, including displacement, asylum, and fragmentation of families and households. The belligerent war also contributed to a change in the traditional roles of women and men, especially if the father was unable to perform his traditional role of providing protection and sustenance for the family.<sup>17</sup>

The study exposed the shortcomings in humanitarian support services' responsiveness to the particular needs of displaced girls and women in emergency shelters and host family homes, which doubled women's suffering that existed since the siege had been imposed on Gaza Strip. Also, the elimination of violence against women and broadening their options require the ending of aggressions, sieges and conflicts as a key element for empowerment. Therefore, women's access to their rights, such as the right to education, employment and political participation, is contingent upon the fundamental right of living safety, which is so harshly undermined in times of war.<sup>18</sup>

An analytical report prepared by MIFTAH on the impact of the Palestinian division on the reality of women and girls in the Gaza Strip indicates that the division led to a great suffering by women due to the violation of different rights. The main findings of this report indicate that the political division led to an increase in the incidence and rates of violence against women, especially physical violence, murder and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Culture and Free Thought Association (CFTA), in cooperation with the United Nations Gender-based Violence Working Group, led by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). "Protection in the Windward: Conditions and Rights of Internally Displaced Girls and Women during the Latest Israeli Military Operation on the Gaza Strip", 2014: <https://bit.ly/3pbj5yF> (also available in English on: <https://bit.ly/3jxgRZu>)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

suicide, coupled with an increase in family separations and a decline in rights related to women and justice issues.<sup>19</sup>

The Palestinian women's ongoing subjection to occupation hinders the legislative system and hampers the development of a legal environment that protects women from violence. Moreover, there are contradictions and conflicts between the inherited Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli laws, which many times go in contrast with international women's rights conventions and covenants. There are also complications arising from the fragmentation of Palestinian territories by the Israeli occupation, thereby limiting the ability of the Palestinian National Authority and the institutions providing protection and sheltering services to respond to the needs of battered women. Furthermore, the occupation's policies of land seizure and confiscation and house demolition cause women to assume the greatest burden and responsibility for protecting their families and the risk of slipping into poverty and destitution.<sup>20</sup>

The pressures and restrictions on women in the Palestinian society are greatly exacerbated by the unprecedented poverty and unemployment levels, increasing health problems stemming from the siege, and restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Moreover, there is the domination of the patriarchal authoritarian system, which simultaneously restricts women's free movement and actions and forces them to withstand their male relatives' outright anger and frustration. Many of these men also feel humiliated due to their failure to fulfill their traditional role of providing sustenance to their families.<sup>21</sup>

Amidst a deteriorating situation that includes social pressures and domestic violence against women, the mechanisms of institutional protection of households were further weakened and degraded as a result of Israel's security control and its several prohibitions in the occupied Palestinian territory. For example, due to undermining the Palestinian official institutions' ability to operate in Areas "C" (which are under Israeli military control), the traditional and tribal structures gained a far-reaching

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<sup>19</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH). Analytical Report on the Violations of Palestinian Women and Girls' Social and Security Rights in the Gaza Strip during the Division, 2018. [http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/Violence\\_Against\\_the\\_Palestinian\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_in\\_Gaza\\_Strip.PDF](http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/Violence_Against_the_Palestinian_Women_and_Girls_in_Gaza_Strip.PDF)

<sup>20</sup> Al- Haq, Defending human rights, on international women's day, Palestinian women's rights continue to be denied, 2019. <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/6094.html>

<sup>21</sup> Community Action Center and others, Palestinian Women under Prolonged Israeli Occupation, the Gender Impact of Occupation Violence, 2018.

authority inside the Palestinian society, thus enhancing gender inequality. This also increased women's vulnerability to restrictions imposed by certain traditional or religious interpretations in order to maintain the family "honor" or "reputation."<sup>22</sup>

In light of the already weak and deficient protection mechanisms and the Israeli military siege and restrictions on the freedom of movement (which make it difficult for women and girls to seek a safe refuge or escape when they are at risk of being killed or harmed by family members), the provision of protection became impossible in many areas due to certain circumstances. This situation created a certain impunity for offenders given the shortcomings of laws and regulations and the inability of the Palestinian National Authority to do law enforcement.<sup>23</sup>

Palestinian women are also forced to shoulder the main burdens of caring for tens of thousands of men and children injured in belligerent wars (not to mention the daily attacks and killings), coupled with the efforts of providing care to those who were previously detained by the occupation. This is taking place in the absence of a social security system in Palestine. Consequently, thousands of women whose husbands were killed or imprisoned resort to relatives and charitable organizations for survival. This makes them subjected to different pressures and the domination of male relatives, on whom they completely depend to stay alive alongside their children.<sup>24</sup>

Women are also subjected to serious and far-reaching consequences as a result of being arrested, in which they undergo different types of violence, including acts of torture and ill-treatment in most cases. Such practices are inconsistent with the occupation authorities' obligations towards the International Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Various reports issued by human rights organizations indicate that Palestinian women and girls are subjected to multiple forms of violence and ill-treatment. For example, women and girls experience acts of ill-treatment when being arrested or interrogated by Israeli occupation forces, including sexual harassment, verbal abuse, and physical assaults. The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, stated in a report that former female detainees indicated that beatings, humiliation, threats and sexual harassment were "common practices, along with

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

intrusive body searches, which in many cases occur before and after court sessions or at night as a punitive measure.”<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the Israeli military occupation authorities have been preparing to implement the Annexation Plan for other West Bank territories in July 2020, in defiance of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. This plan, if implemented, constitutes a flagrant violation of the United Nations Charter and Geneva conventions, as well as a contravention of the basic rule reiterated by the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly regarding the inadmissibility of seizing territories by force or by war. This Israeli escalation is likely to threaten the lives of Palestinian women and girls, which are already going through hard times, and whose situation will further deteriorate after the annexation.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the complex situation witnessed by Palestinian women, many reports show that women have a greater ability to cope with, overcome, and assume responsibilities in times of armed conflict, war, and disasters. For example, a report issued by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) titled: "Women Carry the Burden of the Occupation and Conflict", shows that “women usually have a particular vulnerability to risk, but they often demonstrate a marvelous and remarkable capability of facing difficulties despite the public opinion that views them as “victims” and “weak persons”. Nevertheless, women did not succumb to these stereotypes and assumed active roles such as freedoms fighters and activists, as well as struggling to protect and support their families and earning livelihoods in times of war. Throughout the world, women who were affected by conflict proved that they are not only courageous and resilient, but also exceptional and capable of confronting difficulties to the greatest extent possible. Moreover, they demonstrated an excellent ability to perform their daily tasks as heads of households and the main source of family income, as well as providing care to their household members and actively participating in local community life.”<sup>27</sup>

## **Demographic characteristics of the population in the four governorates**

The final results of the population census indicated that more than one-third of the male and female population in the four governorates are less than 15 years old. This

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<sup>25</sup> ESCWA. The Socio-Economic Status of Palestinian Women and Girls, 2016–2018: Op. Cit.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> (Arabic source) Website of Amnesty International, Women carry the burden of the Occupation, Conflict and the Patriarchal System: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/88000/mde150162005ar.pdf>

means that the Palestinian society in these governorates is full of young people. It is worth noting that the labor force participation rate among persons aged 15 years and above in Jenin was 77.9% for males and 20.8% for females. Also, 2% of residents in Jenin governorate have disabilities. The number of unemployed Palestinians aged 15 years and above in Jenin governorate was 11,941, i.e. 13.1% of the total economically active population in Jenin for the same age group. The number of unemployed females aged 15 years and above in Jenin was 3,499, which is equivalent to 25.6% of the total economically active women in Jenin, compared to 8,442 males, which comprises 10.9% of the total economically active male population in Jenin.<sup>28</sup>

In Tulkarem governorate, the labor force participation rate among males was 71.5%, compared to only 18.4% among females. Also, the percentage of disabled persons in Tulkarem governorate was 2.6%. The number of unemployed Palestinians aged 15 years and over in Tulkarem governorate was 8,392 persons, comprising 15% of the total economically active population in this governorate. The number of unemployed women in Tulkarem was 2,667, i.e. 27% of the total economically active females in Tulkarem, compared to 5,725 men, who account for 12.5% of the total economically active males in Tulkarem in the same age group.<sup>29</sup>

In “Tubas and Northern Valleys Governorate”, the male labor participation rate was 78.4%, compared to 23.5% among females. The percentage of disabled persons in this governorate amounted to 1.9% of the Tubas population. 15% of Palestinians in “Tubas and Northern Valleys” Governorate are refugees, and the illiteracy rate among Palestinian females aged 15 years and above was higher among females compared to males. For example, the number of illiterate females was 1,497 in 2017, i.e. 8% of the total number of Palestinian female population aged 15 years and above, whereas the number of illiterate males in this governorate was 1.6% of the total number of Palestinian male population of the same age group. It is worth noting that the illiteracy rate among males and females was 5.2% in rural areas, compared to 4.7% in urban areas. Furthermore, the unemployment rate in the “Tubas and Northern Valleys governorate” was 11.9% of the total governorate population, whereas the number of economically active women in this governorate was 3,312

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<sup>28</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017: Census Final Results – Summary – Jenin Governorate, 2019. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2405.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017: Census Final Results – Summary – Tulkarem Governorate, 2018. <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2392.pdf>

females, i.e. only 17.6% of the female population, compared to 14,639 males, who comprise 75.3% of the total male population in the governorate.<sup>30</sup>

In Qalqilya Governorate, the male labor participation rate was 76.2%, compared to 19.2% among females.<sup>31</sup> The percentage of women and men with disabilities in Qalqilya governorate was 2%. As for the reality of education, statistical findings showed that only one-third of this governorate's population aged 5 years and above have enrolled in education. A drop is noted in the levels of educational enrollment for both sexes, which reduced the gender gap in enrollment rates. Also, the unemployment rate in the Qalqilya governorate was 14.1%, and the number of unemployed persons was 4,259 there. Estimates indicate that 743 economically active females in this governorate are unemployed, comprising 18.2% of the female economically active population there, compared to 3,516 males, who comprise 13.4% of economically active males.<sup>32</sup>

## **Gender-based violence (GBV) at the global and local levels**

In this section, we will discuss the different approaches at the global, regional, and local levels in combating violence and raising the levels of women's empowerment and protection from violence amidst the living conditions faced by women and girls. Although the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) indicates that violence against women constitutes a grave violation of the basic human rights of women and girls globally, it is still one of the most common crimes perpetrated against them. Available data on violence against women from sources such as UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDOC, UN and WHO, point out that violence against women is still considered a global "pandemic", as described by the United Nations Secretary-General.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it constitutes a source of great concern. Violence can occur in different private and public spaces, including on the internet and through other evolving technologies. It is deeply rooted in historical inequalities between

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<sup>30</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017: Census Final Results – Detailed Report – “Tubas and Northern Valleys Governorate”, 2019.

<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2448.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Labor Force Survey in Palestine, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Population, Housing and Establishments Census 2017: Census Final Results – Summary – Qalqilya Governorate, 2019:

<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book2404.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Violence against Women and Girls: The Shadow Pandemic. 2020

<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>

women and men, and it can cause significant physical, social, psychological and economic damages to women.<sup>34</sup>

According to a global review conducted by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2013, which covered 35% of women globally, 35% of women have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner. Also, more than 7% of women on the global level reported that they suffered from non-partner sexual violence. The review also shows that, according to some country reports, 70% of women were subjected to physical or sexual violence by men during their lifetime, mostly by a husband or another intimate partner. It is also estimated that 1 out of every 5 girls has experienced abuse during her childhood, whereas estimates in some countries are as high as 1 in 3 girls who experienced such abuse.<sup>35</sup>

Despite this global approach in combatting violence against women from a human rights perspective, Palestinian women are undergoing multiple forms of violence under the political context of occupation and social characteristics of the Palestinian society. It is worth noting that this does not only affect women, but it puts everyone at risk of entering the cycle of violence. Therefore, within the current situation, women are facing double, and in many cases, multiple forms of violence, as they also suffer from marginalized social roles and status at the local level, and oftentimes they are excluded from the official protection system.<sup>36</sup> To further explore the widespread violence in the Palestinian society, one can refer to the Domestic Violence Survey conducted by the PCBS in 2019. This survey was carried out three times in Palestine since the inception of the Palestinian National Authority. The first survey was conducted in 2005 and the second one was performed in 2011. These surveys are particularly important because they shed light on the dangerous phenomenon of violence in the Palestinian society, the extent of its prevalence, and the changes in its characteristics. The 2019 survey provides an updated database on violence against women, children, youth, elderly and persons with disabilities, along with new indicators related to cyber violence. The findings of the three

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<sup>34</sup> A Practitioner's Toolkit on Women's Access to Justice Programming, 2018

[https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/PractitionerToolkit/WA2J\\_Module3.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/PractitionerToolkit/WA2J_Module3.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence: Core Elements and Quality Guidelines, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

<https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Essential-Services-Package-Module-1-ar.pdf>

English version available on: <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Essential-Services-Package-en.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women 2011-2019: <https://www.pal-tahrir.info/audio/files/Strategy.pdf>

aforementioned surveys showed that violence against women is strikingly high, and that domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence in Palestine.<sup>37</sup>

## **Procedures and measures for the provision of protection and other services to women victims of violence: Why is there a wide gap between adopted decisions and practices on the ground?**

Societal and domestic violence are still being perpetrated against women and girls in Palestine in spite of the measures, procedures and decisions taken by the State of Palestine to combat such violence. These measures include, for example, the endorsement of the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women in Palestine;<sup>38</sup> adoption of the National Referral System for Battered Women and Girls in 2013;<sup>39</sup> issuance of the resolution to adopt a gender-responsive budget;<sup>40</sup> Cabinet Decision No. (9) of 2011 regarding the Bylaws of Battered Women's Protection Centers;<sup>41</sup> and Cabinet Decision No. 18/54 on the adoption of procedures for the referral of women victims of violence during the Coronavirus-related state of emergency<sup>42</sup>. These measures also include the Ministry of Health decisions of 2017 on exempting battered women from fees of medical reports issued by public hospitals and the 2019 exemption [of battered women] from treatment expenses in the emergency departments of all medical centers belonging to the Ministry,<sup>43</sup> as well as the adoption of protocols for case management and follow-up of shelters and the creation of special departments for dealing with gender-based violence in several ministries and the Police and Public Prosecution Office (PPO). It is worth noting that the main factors that augment violence are attributed to the absence of a legal system based on gender equality and the lack of guarantees of women's rights stipulated in the CEDAW Convention of 1979, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

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<sup>37</sup> (Arabic source) Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society, 2019, Op. Cit.

<sup>38</sup> See: National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women 2011-2019.

<sup>39</sup> See: (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision No. (18) of 2013 on the National Referral System for Battered Women: <http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=16570>

<sup>40</sup> See: (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision to adopt a gender-sensitive budget in 2009 that government departments must adhere to: <https://www.mowa.pna.ps/work-area/43.html>

<sup>41</sup> See: (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision No. (9) of 2011 on the Bylaws of Battered Women's protection centers: <http://palestinecabinet.gov.ps/GovService/Upload/Laws/09112016112650.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> See: (Arabic source) Cabinet Decision No. 18/54 of 27 April 2020 to adopt procedures for the referral of women victims of violence during the emergency period: <http://www.palestinecabinet.gov.ps/portal/decree/>

<sup>43</sup> The Ministry of Health decided to exempt battered women from fees of medical reports in public hospitals, in addition to their 2019 exemption of battered women from medical treatment fees in emergency departments: <http://www.moh.ps/mohsite/index/ArticleView/ArticleId/4750/Language/>

(both of which were stipulated in 1966). Moreover, the prevailing patriarchal culture entrenches discrimination against women and girls on the basis of certain customs and traditions that tolerate gender-based violence to control women's lives and determine their fate, under the view that women's primary role is to reproduce children for the sustainability and continuity of the family and its reputation. The above-mentioned procedures and measures were insufficient to deter violence and provide women and girls with protection, human dignity, and right to self-determination. Thus, women and girls' rights in all sectors still remain deficient and unprotected by the State of Palestine.

The Violence Survey, which was conducted in 2019, shows that there are gaps between the officially adopted decisions, policies and measures to combat violence against women, achieve gender justice and strengthen protection systems from one side, and the actual reality on the ground from another side. For example, the Violence Survey showed that the highest incidence of domestic violence against married women aged 18 to 64 years was in the form of psychological violence, which comprised 56.6% of cases, followed by economic violence (41%), social violence (32.5%), physical violence (17.8%), and sexual violence (8.8%). As for violence against women aged 18-64 years who were never married before, psychological violence was the highest (39.3%), followed by physical violence (13.9%), social violence (8.1%), economic violence (3.2%), and sexual violence (0.6%). With regard to violence against elderly women, the highest percentage was violence related to health neglect (23.8%). On the other hand, women with disabilities were mainly exposed to psychological violence (31%) and physical violence (19%). It was also noticed that violence is most widespread in rural areas, "C" areas, and areas under the control of the Israeli occupation. These areas particularly suffer from a constant lack of services and the inability of official institutions to deal with cases of violence therein.<sup>44</sup>

The aforementioned survey also showed that, contrary to men, women are less exposed to violence in public spaces and shopping places. However, women have a higher percentage of being subjected to domestic violence, which could be attributed to restrictions on women's movement and the latter spending most of their time with family, regardless of whether they are married or not and in all age groups. In the public sphere, it was seen that men are more subjected to violence than women due to gender-specific roles that give them the freedom to be present in public places (unlike the restrictions imposed on women). This division of roles is much greater

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<sup>44</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society, 2019, Op. Cit.

in marginalized and remote areas, especially in Areas “C”, which are isolated from the rest of the West Bank territories due to the occupation's control over them.<sup>45</sup>

During the pandemic outbreak, Palestinian women faced the risk of COVID-19 infection, which was accompanied by risks of violence and other social and economic burdens. For example, unprecedented levels of violence against women were revealed by a survey conducted by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs to measure the level of violence against women during the state of emergency related to the pandemic. Furthermore, women had to stay at home during the state of emergency and were unable to see their relatives throughout the quarantine period.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, 47% of women turned to their families to seek protection during the state of emergency and had to stay at home. Also, a large percentage of women (24%) were exposed to verbal violence and 11% of them were subjected to sexual harassment. Moreover, 35% of women suffered from bullying, 21% were subjected to blackmailing and exploitation, and 7% of women experienced cyber blackmailing.<sup>47</sup> It is also worth noting that 15% of women suffered from significant physical violence due to court closures, movement restrictions, and difficulty of accessing reporting centers. Not less importantly, elderly women suffered from substantial violence due to their separation from their sons and daughters who support them in terms of providing basic necessities and essential care services. Additionally, 88% of women with disabilities underwent different types of economic, social, physical, psychological and verbal violence.<sup>48</sup>

With regard to resorting to protection centers/institutions by unmarried young men and women who experienced domestic violence, 36% of these youth noted that they know about the existence of protection centers or institutions in their area, locality, or governorate. Also, the percentage of women who are aware of the existence of these centers and institutions was 41%, compared to 32% among the youth.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, an increase was seen in the number of publications, announcements and illustrative and educational booklets issued by civil society institutions, international organizations and official bodies working in the field of combating violence against women and girls. Many of these publications contain addresses, contact details and helplines for women and girls in case of experiencing violence in all the governorates of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Some of them also contain

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> (Arabic source) Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2020. Exploratory Study on the Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Gender-based Violence in the State of Palestine (April 14-24, 2020): Main Findings, Summary of the Findings, Ramallah - Palestine.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Household Violence Survey, 2019 (Op. Cit.)

information on personnel working in the field of intervention, referral, and protection of battered women.<sup>50</sup>

However, the discriminatory attitudes of some personnel working in the justice system impede women's access to justice. In fact, many institutions that provide services and protection (such as the Public Prosecution Office (PPO), Police, and the judiciary) often fail to sensitively deal with gender-based violence, and some of them refuse to combat domestic violence and classify certain crimes as gender-based violence cases under the pretext that addressing violence within family contexts might “damage the social fabric” or “undermine the reputation” of Palestinian families. Unfortunately, many personnel working in the justice sector have traditional views and opinions regarding violence against women. Moreover, their leniency towards perpetrators in light of a deficient legal system negatively affects women and girls’ tendency to seek interventions and legal protection. For example, the Palestinian Family Law allows women to stipulate certain conditions in the marriage contract, such as the right to travel or the right to divorce unilaterally. But some practices on the ground prevent women from exercising these rights due to undermining them by misogynistic judges or because of social restrictions that prevent women from exercising these rights. In light of the weak and unjust legal system, many women resort to the customary justice system as a less costly, less complicated and quicker option for resolving disputes compared to official courts. And although the informal justice system is considered an alternative, it lacks legal remedies and monitoring mechanisms from the government/formal sector.

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<sup>50</sup> (Arabic source) Guidebook of the organizations working to combat violence against women. Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH), 2015:  
<http://www.miftah.org/Publications/Books/GuideViolenceAgainstWomenOrganizations.pdf>

## Chapter Two

### **The reality of institutions providing social, psychological, health, legal and economic services to battered women in Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Tubas and Jenin governorates**

This chapter discusses the nature of available services in the four governorates and the extent of women's request for - or reluctance to request - services. The concept of protection will also be identified from the service providers' perspective. The chapter will also discuss mechanisms for the coordination, activation and implementation of the National Referral System for providing services to women. The available human resources/staff will also be examined, along with their level of suitability for sensitively dealing with issues related to battered women in these governorates.

**What protection services are provided by institutions to women, and are these services suitable for enabling women to access protection services in an effective manner? How?**

The vast majority of survey participants agreed about the availability of social/psychological, health, legal, and economic/relief services to battered women in the four governorates. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of these services are currently being provided, either based on specialization in one or more fields or on the basis of assisting beneficiary groups other than women, such as men, workers, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. However, these institutions also have specialized programs for women, provided that there is sufficient funding and grants for implementing projects. Thus, some of the interventions targeting battered women are not sustainable, which in turn weakens the impact on women's access to protection. Perhaps the best example of this is the poor provision – or in many cases the absence - of services that have an economic nature. As stated by Mr. Daoud Dweik: *“Women who visit the directorates undergo hard socio-economic conditions. There is a direct relationship between poverty and exposure to violence, as well as between lack of education and exposure to violence. Elimination of poverty is the most important approach for eliminating violence.”*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Daoud Al-Deek, Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) Undersecretary.

Moreover, institutions have varying capacities and contributions in providing protection services to women who are exposed to violence. Also, the surrounding factors affect these institutions' ability to carry out their roles in protecting women, such as the societal restrictions and the weak legal and policy system that failed to support these institutions' performance of their roles. On the other hand, awareness and educational services are among the most sustainable and continuous interventions by institutions that provide this type of services. It can also be concluded that there are educational and awareness-raising interventions in all fields and specializations of the institutions working with battered women in the four governorates. In other words, awareness and education do not only apply to social and psychological aspects, but they also extend to the economic, relief and health fields. This type of intervention is highly suitable for tackling women's needs for advice and guidance, but it does not seem to be sufficient for enabling them to access protection. However, it is commensurate with the available human resources in institutions which mainly focus on women's awareness, education and counseling.

The efforts of international, governmental and non-governmental organizations working on combating violence against women (VAW) cases are focused on enhancing women's access to services and justice for achieving this purpose. One of the survey participants working on cases of battered women stated the following: ***"We work on community awareness to change stereotypical roles, as well as supporting the referral system and safety homes [...]. We also work with family protection units and the judiciary, mainly to ensure battered women's access to services."***<sup>52</sup>

International organizations working on battered women's issues at the national level or on the level of the four governorates extend their impact through sectoral plans and strategies that target official and non-governmental organizations to enable them to provide services to women. According to one of the survey participants: ***"We set a goal, namely to strengthen national strategies for the provision of services [...]; enhance support for institutions; encourage institutions working on combating violence to be effective; build networks for safeguarding and enhancing the work on regional protection networks so that they function as an effective tool for eliminating violence; and to create safe spaces in areas undergoing special circumstances, such as Gaza, Old City of Hebron, and Areas (C)."***<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Phone interview with Bisan Abu Ruqti from UN Women, 25 February 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Sana Al-Assi, Gender Program Officer, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

However, the following questions remain: How do women benefit from the different strategies and efforts that are planned for them and their families? How can these plans and measures contribute to protecting women from the risks of violence and enable them to survive and safely access justice? When talking about the reality and geographic focus of institutions operating in the four governorates, we find that women in these governorates have a smaller chance of benefiting from various services. In fact, in many cases, they may not even get a chance to overcome the heinous violence perpetrated against them. For example, one of the participants in the survey noted that: *“The northern regions have not been approached. We must learn to address each other, hence we must go to the first line and to marginalized areas. It is imperative that we change our plans and strategies”*.<sup>54</sup>

This opinion was reinforced by another participant; when asked about the reality of services provided to women in the four governorates, she replied: *“There are many things missing in the north. For example, there are no robust protection networks like the ones which exist in the center and south. In the north, everyone is working on their own due to the absence of strong community institutions. The social environment in the north is also different from the south. For example, there is more than one means for solving issues in the south, such as households and families who intervene to solve cases. But in the north, families do not intervene to support and assist women. This makes you feel as if you are completely on your own.”*<sup>55</sup>

However, the literature review revealed that women in Palestine generally share their experiences of violence in the local context and its root causes related to the occupation, patriarchal community system, and the weak and ineffective laws. Also, there are different protection systems for providing safety to battered women. Nevertheless, in the Palestinian society, there are other contexts that offer a broader understanding of the reality of services and protection in the four governorates. Therefore, we will present these contexts in detail as mentioned in the focus groups conducted in the four governorates.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Daoud Al-Deek, MoSD Undersecretary.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Saeda Al-Atrash, Director of Mehwar Center.

## Qalqilya Governorate

The majority of survey respondents in Qalqilya stated that their institutions provide services related to women's rights, such as counseling and legal support, psychological support services, treatment and health education services, community rehabilitation, women's capacity development, enhancing women's skills in professional crafts, as well as following up/monitoring work terms and conditions and the rights of male and female workers. On the other hand, some respondents indicated that their institutions do not provide specific programs or interventions that target women who undergo violence. Instead, these institutions tend to transfer cases they may encounter (related to violence against women) to other parties, as mentioned by some participants: *"There is no special program for working with battered women, and whenever any case of violence against women is encountered, it gets referred to relevant institutions".*<sup>56</sup>

The diversity of services provided to women seeking help is indeed significant, as it seems to help them confront challenges in private and public spheres, and might even improve their living conditions. For example, according to a survey participant: *"I used to be dissatisfied with the quality of services provided by myself. But after a while, I reached a conclusion which I also heard from women themselves: that, even if a minimal service is provided to battered women (who lack so many things), it is in their opinion of great value albeit incomplete.*"<sup>57</sup> Another respondent pointed out that: *"When female university students are targeted by awareness and educational programs, we notice a great level of improvement in their awareness from the first session to the last one, as well as accumulating knowledge and reasoning on a scientific basis."*<sup>58</sup>

However, regarding the measures taken by institutions to provide battered women with protection, most participants noted that women are in constant need for a safety network that provides them with an option to resort to in case of violence or danger on their lives. For example, a participant stated that: *"Having no safe house for battered women in Qalqilya is an obstacle that endangers the lives of battered women, and whoever tries to transfer her to a safe house outside the governorate is exposed to risks and threats by the victim's family. The time it takes to decide upon the referral of a battered woman to a safe house may cause her to become hesitant and afraid and might even withdraw the complaint altogether."*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Female participant in the Qalqilya focus group related to institutions.

<sup>57</sup> Female participant in the Qalqilya focus group related to institutions.

<sup>58</sup> Female participant in the Jenin focus group related to institutions.

<sup>59</sup> Female participant in the Qalqilya focus group related to institutions

The majority of participants also agreed that protecting women from violence requires that women feel safe at home or outside in all aspects of life, *coupled with receiving support and assistance at the social and economic levels. Most participants also indicated that women's protection in Qalqilya Governorate is deficient due to the poor protection systems therein and the weakness and small number of institutions tackling violence against women.* Moreover, a survey participant pointed to *"the non-existence or shortage of competent institutions that can deal with the referred persons, including children and women with disabilities. Consequently, the current institutions are solving only a few problems facing women in the Qalqilya Governorate and not all of them."* Another participant agreed with this viewpoint, noting that *"The financial aspect is one of the greatest obstacles. Case studies of women beneficiaries showed the need for urgent financial support, which is not easy to provide. Women are also in need of protection, which is also not effortlessly attainable"*.

Regarding other obstacles in providing protection to women and the sensitivity of cases where women resort to the law, a participant stated the following: *"I was following up a sensitive file related to a battered women who told a policewoman about the details of her case, which was directly referred to the public prosecution. To the surprise of the battered woman, the notice for testifying at court was sent to her home address instead of her work address. This made her feel scared and worried and led to many inquiries and questions from neighbors and others"*. Survey participants also mentioned the risks facing female employees working in institutions that tackle violence against women cases. They believe that these employees are also unprotected and are sometimes subjected to danger. For example, a survey participant was previously harassed and threatened by a victim's relatives due to her institution's intervention in a case involving violence. Also, a participant who previously made an intervention in a violence case indicated the following: *"I was previously threatened and confronted by the parents of some children who were in need of assistance. This is because of the prevailing culture that does not accept interventions by a service provider and considers that an intrusion in their personal matters"*. With regard to one of the cases that she worked on, she stated: *"I saw signs of child abuse on one of the girls in kindergarten. After talking with the girl, I discovered that her mother gave her a beating with a radio cord, so I transferred her to the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). After following up the matter, I discovered that both of her parents are drug addicts, and they sent me a warning through my brother asking me not to interfere in their personal matters."*

## Tulkarem Governorate

The majority of survey respondents [in Tulkarem governorate] indicated that their institutions have economic empowerment services, health insurance, social and relief services, referral to safe houses, capacity development services in the field of economic empowerment, as well as social, psychological and legal awareness and educational services. However, the provision of legal services related to protection was confined to the Family Protection Unit (FPU) of the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP) in this governorate. Institutions in Tulkarem have various roles and interventions within the framework of programs related to battered women/survivors (whether before or after they are subjected to violence). In this respect, civil society institutions are currently providing (preventive) awareness and educational services to women. However, most of these institutions do not have clear and systematic follow-up programs for working with battered women, except for the “Directorate of Social Development” in the governorate; which provides services to battered women and constantly follows up with them after their survival from violence.

Most survey participants in Tulkarem governorate noted that women's protection requires the provision of security to women. They also agreed with what was presented earlier by the Qalqilya group, as one of the participants stated that: *“Security is the basis of everything; it provides a decent life for citizens in general and women in particular. Protection is part of security, and it is a shield that protects from violence, abuse, and other types of harm undergone by families in general.”*<sup>60</sup> Another participant agreed with her, noting that: *“Social protection is much needed for households in general, including the protection of the elderly, women, children and disabled persons. However, battered women and children are in need of protection most of all.”*<sup>61</sup>

It is worth noting that economic reasons and fear of "scandals" prevent women from seeking services and requesting protection in Tulkarem Governorate. Also, some cases do not get reported as a result of family and clan intermediation for spousal reconciliation. Moreover, some women do not request such services for fear of losing their children due to threats by their husbands or husbands’ families to deprive them of seeing their children if they ask for divorce or separation. Furthermore, service providers have weak protection systems which expose women to threats in some cases when dealing with women's issues in Tulkarem governorate.

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<sup>60</sup> Participant in the Tulkarem focus group related to institutions.

<sup>61</sup> Participant in the Tulkarem focus group related to institutions.

## Jenin Governorate

Most survey respondents in Jenin noted that their institutions provide legal, psychological and social counseling services, along with awareness and economic development services by either helping women find job opportunities or integrating them in economic projects implemented by partner institutions. Moreover, their institutions contribute to developing women's skills by offering them training courses in small enterprise management, embroidery and tailoring. Some survey participants also stated that women working inside the Green Line and Israeli settlements are exposed to violations (including violence) and risks of occupational diseases. For example, a participant noted that: *"Women working in settlements and inside the Green Line are subjected to violations and violence committed against them. Also, in the context of my work, I learned that women working in medicinal herb cultivation are exposed to the risk of some diseases that may cause cancer, and which might affect their children if they are pregnant due to the effect of some gases and acids. Unfortunately, such tasks are usually assigned to Arab male and female workers."*<sup>62</sup>

Women in Jenin Governorate also face difficulties in accessing services and receiving protection from violence. For example, a participant pointed out that *"many women go through tough times without anyone knowing about their situation. A substantial number of women do not know who to resort to and who to speak with about their cases. They have no clear address (assistance party) to go to. Where are women's organizations whose mandate is to help these women? There is currently a program related to that in a few locations, but the relevant institutions are highly absent in most marginalized areas"*.<sup>63</sup>

The majority of survey respondents also agreed that women's protection from violence requires the provision of a safe place for battered women. They also agreed that the introduction and ratification of a law that protects women from violence and criminalizes offenders can enhance women's protection and safety. The respondents also noted that the main reason behind women's hesitation from seeking protection was their fear of being deprived of work or the ability to leave home. Moreover, some girls are unable to defend themselves because power relations are usually to the advantage of male family members. This causes many girls to refrain from reporting cases of violence in fear of social stigmas and scandals that can undermine

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<sup>62</sup> Female participant in the Jenin focus group related to institutions.

<sup>63</sup> Female participant in the Jenin focus group related to institutions.

their reputation, not to mention the lack of confidentiality, privacy and professionalism of many institutional workers when dealing with such cases. For example, a survey participant mentioned that she learned about a case of violence against a women through her son who heard about it from the Policeman who was tackling that case (i.e. lack of confidentiality and privacy).

## **Tubas Governorate**

Most survey respondents in Tubas stated that the institutions that they work for provide awareness-raising services and seminars and trainings for combating violence, along with social, preventive and curative services. Their organizations also provide services to women with disabilities, as well as community rehabilitation services, legal counseling, and economic empowerment courses for women.

It is worth noting that the economic factor played a major role in battered women's request (or lack of request) for services. Therefore, social interventions remain deficient as long as there are no sustainable women's empowerment programs that enhance their economic self-reliance, thereby augmenting their options for combating violence and overcoming its accompanying effects. This explains why women who benefited from economic empowerment projects could successfully recover and overcome difficulties in their lives: *"Many battered women who benefited from economic empowerment, psychological, social and legal programs were able to establish their private enterprises, which brought about radical changes in their lives. Service providers noticed the substantial changes and shifts in these women's personality before and after enrolling in these courses."*<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, social norms, customs and restrictions make women afraid of reporting cases of violence and seeking assistance. Among those fears is the fear of losing child custody and of being "scandalized" (put to shame) if the truth about the perpetrated violence is exposed in light of the fragile social environment of these women. Also, the negative experiences of some women, especially those who previously approached institutions that deal with violence cases, indicate that women often lose hope for changing their conditions. This is because many of these institutions fail to help these women in getting out of the cycle of violence: *"The experience of battered women affects others, and this leads to women's refraining from reporting/filing complaints about cases of violence"*.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Female participant in the Jenin focus group related to institutions.

<sup>65</sup> Female participant in the Tubas focus group related to institutions.

These restrictions are even harsher when it comes to women with disabilities, whereas "*customs and traditions play a major role in creating fears of disgrace, especially among women with disabilities, and this in itself is considered an act of violence against these women.*"<sup>66</sup>

**Is the number of women approaching institutions close to the real number of women facing violence? And if the answer is “no”, what are the causes of impeding or limiting women's access to centers and institutions that provide different social, psychological, health, legal and economic services?**

The participants in the four discussion groups agreed that the reported number of battered women (within relevant institutions) is nowhere close to the number of women who actually suffer from violence. Therefore, the reported numbers are much less than the real number of women undergoing violence, especially when it comes to women with disabilities. For example, according to a Tubas group participant, the number of disabled women who seek assistance is very small due to feeling ashamed of their disability, and this is considered an act of violence per se.

The views of relevant institutions largely corresponded with the findings of the “Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society” conducted by the PCBS in 2019, which showed that only 1.4% of women subjected to violence resort to competent authorities that provide services for eliminating violence.

**Based on the opinions of participants in the discussion groups, the reasons that hinder or reduce battered women’s access to relevant services are as follows:**

- Relevant services do not reach all women, thus many women do not know about the institutions that provide these services. Also, they do not know about the role of these institutions in combating violence and the different services provided to them.
- Many women have a lack of trust towards service-providing institutions, especially due to the lack of confidentiality, privacy and professionalism of some staff members assigned to deal with such cases. This inferior service causes women to constantly be afraid of the consequences of disclosing their sensitive information to other parties if they seek assistance from service-providing institutions. Women tend to make endless calculations, especially when they seek legal aid or protection from official institutions, including the Civil Police and

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<sup>66</sup> Female participant in the Tubas focus group related to institutions.

Public Prosecution Office (PPO). With regard to judges' practices related to violence against women cases, a participant mentioned the following: "*I wish that you could join one of the closed sessions with judges and witness to how judges support violence and demonstrate prejudice against women*" (Participant from the Tubas group).

- The prevailing societal culture represented by local customs and traditions, which considers that women's seeking of assistance services is a "stigma" to the family. There are also pressures from informal tribal and customary frameworks, which see that women's resorting to such institutions would lead to the disclosure of family secrets, thus leading to a "scandal" (as mentioned by more than one female participant in each discussion group). Moreover, some women do not contact relevant institutions due to their fear or potential risks/threats if their husband or family members find out about that. Not less importantly, many women fear the loss of child custody after being threatened by their husband or husband's family of not being allowed to see their children again if they choose to escape violence by demanding a divorce or separation. Furthermore, many working girls and women do not report their suffered violence so that they would not be deprived of working or leaving the house. A participant from the Tulkarem group also mentioned that "*many girls do not report their suffered cases of violence for fear of scandals or putting their reputation to shame*. It is also worth noting that some women are prevented from receiving such services due to family and clan intermediation for spousal reconciliation. Other women are unable to seek such services due to their poor economic condition that causes a great hurdle and prevents and discourages them from going to court, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, many women's assistance services were not being provided directly during the COVID-19 emergency period despite that the Ministry of Health is well-trained in dealing with cases of violence. Therefore, and as mentioned by a participant from the Tubas group, some cases were put on a side or ignored due to "national health priorities".

### **Protection: The concept of Protection and factors that lead to its provision**

Survey participants had different responses regarding their description and definition of the concept of Protection and the elements/factors that lead to women's protection. However, all of them agreed that all individuals have the right to protection. In their opinion, protection should cover all household members, including the elderly, women, children and disabled persons. However, they stated that the groups that are mostly in need of protection are battered women and children. Moreover, according to their opinion, the suitable protection of women depends on

their specific needs, whereas women might be in need of political or social protection, or protection from perpetrated violence, or economic protection/relief to enable them and their families to lead a decent life where they feel more safe and secure. The majority of survey participants indicated that Protection means to enjoy safety in all aspects of life, whether at home, in the street, or at work. They also added that the protection of battered women needs adequate case management by coordinating with partner institutions to enhance women's safety, which also requires the provision of social, psychological and economic support to women to boost their self-reliance. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that women are not completely dependent on institutions and that they can develop themselves, enhance their personal capabilities, and unleash their potentials to become influential in their society and environment. This in turn can lead to women's empowerment and reintegration into society.

On the other hand, survey respondents indicated that safe houses for battered women for a certain period of time are important for women's protection and the provision of a safe environment for them to enable their reintegration into society. **The participants also mentioned the importance of enacting a law that protects women from violence and criminalizes violent offenders, thereby contributing to the provision of safety, security and women's protection.**

### **National system for women's referral to health, social and legal services**

Discussions with institutions in the four governorates showed that they do not have a clear idea and details about the National Referral System and its ways of implementation. It was also discovered that governmental institutions were more familiar with the referral system compared to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Survey participants from relevant institutions in the four governorates agreed that all organizations use the National Referral System in an ineffective manner, except for the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). For example, participants from MoSD directorates noted that they follow the procedures of the National Referral System during their interventions in battered women's cases. However, since this system is a cycle of effective communication between institutions in different sectors, their intervention in battered women's cases requires that they coordinate with partner institutions. In this respect, coordination and referrals between relevant institutions are carried out based on the various specializations to provide integrated services to women, thereby finding safe ways for women's protection. Survey participants also noted that the National Referral System can only be effectively implemented by involving partner institutions in this

system and enhancing communication with supportive institutions (especially civil society organizations) through the Women's Protection Network and Child Protection Network. Nevertheless, participants from Police departments in Tulkarem governorate stated the absence of adequate and integrated coordination between institutions, adding that the National Referral System is not being correctly implemented by partner organizations and that the system lacks clear strategies.

### **How available are financial and human resources in the institutions that provide protection to women?**

This question was posed to organizational officers in an attempt to understand the funding reality in Palestine with regard to programs for eliminating violence and protecting women. These officers work for different institutions, including the MoSD, international organizations specialized in combating violence, and local institutions aimed at combating and eradicating violence and providing protection in the four governorates. Therefore, the general circumstances certainly affected the funding of governmental and non-governmental organizations working in this field, especially in the areas covered by the survey.

Interviews were conducted with two representatives from international organizations, as well as the MoSD Undersecretary and the Director of Mehwar Center. All the interviewees agreed that the allocated resources for women's protection are quite limited and do not meet the basic needs. The interviewees shared similar views particularly with regard to the lack of resources in the four governorates, rising rates of poverty, and the difficult economic conditions that greatly affect women in these governorates. And although the number of institutions is increasing there, the number of cases is also on a rise. On the global level, there are crises emanating from wars, refugees, famines and the COVID-19 pandemic, thus affecting Palestine's share from the limited resources and allocated budgets. Moreover, the emergence of new crises is leading to more violence and additional needs.

The MoSD Undersecretary indicated that the allocated budget for the MoSD does not exceed 5% of the general budget despite the numerous groups covered by the Ministry (such as children, women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly). This is attributed to the government's poor condition and its suffered financial crises. The MoSD Undersecretary further explained the condition of the Palestinian government and its financial crises and the impact of the latter on ministerial budgets. This negatively affected the condition of the MoSD and its available resources due to the limited budget, hence affecting the offered programs, infrastructure and staff

training. Moreover, he indicated that there is only one (female) protection counselor in each directorate, which is a very small number. The MoSD Undersecretary stressed the importance of providing economic support to battered women, especially because violence starts by controlling women. Therefore, economic independence can lead to women's empowerment, whereas poverty reduction and economic empowerment are the most important approaches for eliminating violence. Furthermore, he noted that most women who resort to MoSD directorates usually suffer from difficult socio-economic conditions, and that there is a direct relationship between poverty and exposure to violence and between lack of education and exposure to violence. The MoSD Undersecretary also pointed out that, for a long time, the Ministry has recognized the importance of developing and raising the capacities of staff working in the field of combating violence, and that they have been targeting women's protection counselors.

On her part, the Director of "Mehwar Center for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and their Families" stated that the northern West Bank suffers from bad economic conditions. She also noted that, despite the abundance of agricultural lands in this area, poverty is preventing battered women from cultivating and benefiting from these lands. With regard to the availability of services provided to battered women, she indicated that, in general, there is a lack of personnel, capabilities, and rehabilitation and empowerment services due to financial constraints and problems in initiating projects. She also asserted that economic empowerment programs are in need of more research and development. The Director of Mehwar Center also highlighted that the ratification of the Family Protection Law will create a real problem due to the lack of sufficient staff and resources for its enforcement. Therefore, the introduced policies, laws and measures require adequate budgetary allocations to effectively implement them on the ground.

The respondents in the four discussion groups agreed with the organizational officers' viewpoint regarding the limited resources for eliminating violence and providing protection; shortage in personnel and budget for supporting battered women; and poor allocated budgets for staff training and development. The participants also emphasized that the number of staff members providing services to women is very low.

Survey participants (from institutions) in the four governorates pointed to the presence of some staff training and capacity building efforts but not on a systematic and continuous basis. They also mentioned that a certain type of training is generally conducted for a specific group, and it gets repeated without including all staff members. Therefore, there is a gap in employee awareness on women's issues and

rights within the relevant institutions, thereby affecting the quality of provided services. The participants also mentioned that there is no follow-up of conducted trainings to measure the impact of training on raising the performance level of male and female workers in their interventions related to battered women.

Some institutions also indicated that they do not allocate a specific budget for staff training, and that they address this matter by participating in trainings organized by other institutions upon the latter's invitation. They also stated that trainings are usually linked to projects and not conducted on a permanent or regular basis. A group of participants also highlighted that the approaches and attitudes of some organizations' staff working with battered women are sometimes not supportive to women. This is due to their lack of conviction in the rights of women who face discrimination, which certainly affects the level of services provided to women. The participants also indicated that no budget is allocated for meeting women's immediate needs despite the urgency of this matter in many cases. Furthermore, there are no economic empowerment programs in place despite the participants' belief that economic independence and empowerment greatly help women to get out of the cycle of violence.

## **Chapter Three: Assessment of the reality of provided services from the viewpoint of women beneficiaries and service-providing institutions**

### **Quantitative data analysis of women beneficiaries in the four governorates along with data of relevant institutions**

This chapter reviews quantitative data and statistics related to the analysis of questionnaires filled out by women beneficiaries from services related to eliminating violence and providing protection, as well as the findings of the analysis of questionnaires completed by institutions.

41 women beneficiaries in the four governorates participated in completing the questionnaires designed for women subjected to violence. The questionnaires contained the following items:

- Availability and proportionality.
- Responsiveness in times of emergency, especially during the COVID-19 period.
- Obstacles in accessing services.
- Services provided to women with disabilities.
- Protection mechanisms and risk assessment.

The questionnaires designed for institutions were completed by 33 relevant institutions engaged in providing social, psychological, health and economic services. The questionnaires related to institutions included information related to the following aspects:

- Availability and proportionality.
- Accessibility and acceptability.
- Ethical practices.
- Services provided to women with disabilities.
- Documentation and data collection.
- Dissemination and exchange of information.
- Lobbying and advocacy.
- Financial and human resources.

The results of the two questionnaires will be discussed in detail, and the exact percentages for each item will also be included.

## **First: Indicators related to women beneficiaries**

### **Questionnaire related to women beneficiaries:**

The first section of the questionnaire contained demographic information, including the name (optional), age, place of residence and condition of residence, governorate, marital status, educational attainment, number of sons and daughters, and disability (if present). It also included a question on whether the respondent's parents are still alive.

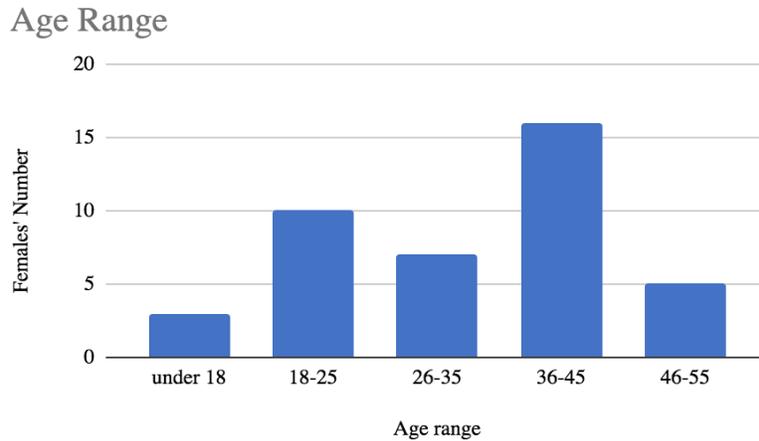
The second section of the questionnaire included nine items related to:

- Level of suitability, efficiency and effectiveness of services provided to women, including their satisfaction about the level of availability and proportionality: 13 questions.
- Responsiveness in times of emergency (especially during COVID-19 period): two questions.
- Accessibility and acceptability: 5 questions.
- Ethical practices: 3 questions.
- Women with disabilities: 3 questions.
- Protection mechanisms and risks: 5 questions.
- Dissemination and exchange of information: 4 questions.
- Human Resources: 3 questions

A total of 41 women participated in completing the questionnaires, 24 of whom preferred to stay anonymous (writing a person's name on the questionnaire was optional).

### **Demographic information**

**Age range:** The ages of respondent women ranged from 15 to 50 years, and most of them were in the 36-45 age group. The figure below provides more details about the respondents' age range:



**Marital status of women beneficiaries:** The percentage of beneficiary women who were married at the age of 18 to 25 years was 65%, whereas the percentage of those who got married under the age of 18 was 26%. Around 6% of them were married at an age between 26 to 35 years. Currently, 56% of the respondents are married (i.e. 23 women), 17% are divorced (7 women), 15% are not married (6 women), 5% are widows, 5% are engaged, and one woman is separated.

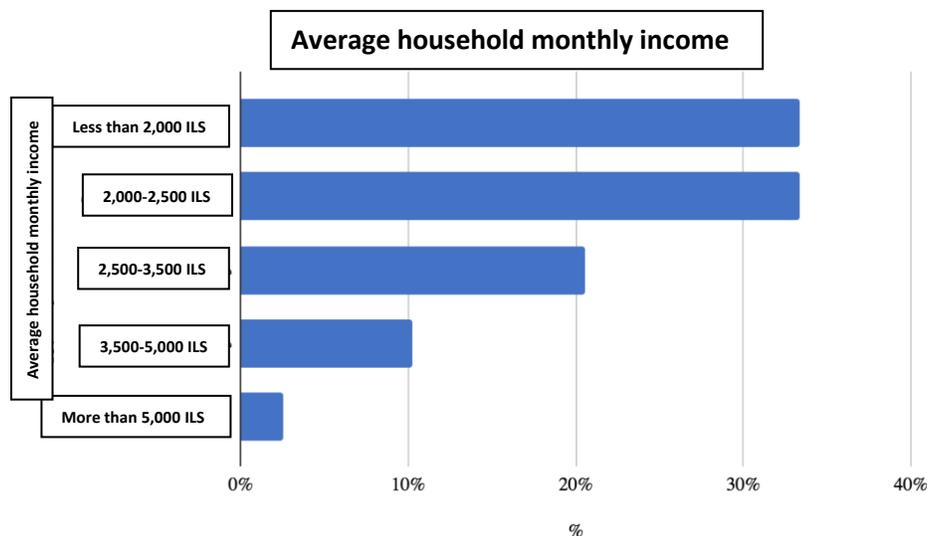
**Educational attainment:** The women who filled out the questionnaires have different educational backgrounds. 39% of the respondents finished high school education, and only 32% of them received basic education (elementary/preparatory stage), whereas 22% completed university studies. Also, 5% of the women received a diploma and 2% completed postgraduate studies.

**Women with disabilities:** 8 of the interviewed women have a disability, including 5 with a physical disability/mobility impairment and 3 with a hearing, mental or visual disability.

**Women whose parents are alive:** 11 of the respondent women have deceased parents, whereas the parents of the other women are still alive.

**Employment:** 68% of respondent women reported that they are not working, whereas the others are working, mostly in the private sector. However, three of the women who reported that they are not working are actually working in agriculture and animal husbandry to help their husbands, as discovered through other questions.

**Monthly household income:** With regard to the average monthly income of respondent women’s households, the findings were as shown in the figure below:



**Comment:** The above-mentioned graph shows a direct relationship between the poor economic condition of women and their exposure to violence. This corresponds with what was said by the Ministry of Social Development Undersecretary regarding the fact that women’s economic independence strengthens and empowers women and prevents them from falling into the cycle of violence.

**Women’s seeking of services from relevant institutions and their level of satisfaction from the provided services**

The number of women who have never requested services from relevant institutions was 12 out of 41 women who participated in completing the questionnaire, whereas 29 women sought services from such institutions.

When asked about the nature of requested services, 76% of women reported that they sought social and psychological (“psychosocial”) services, 10% requested health services, 7% sought economic services, and 7% asked for legal services.

The levels of satisfaction of these women vis-à-vis the provided services were varied. For example, 36% of respondents stated that they were very satisfied, 36% were dissatisfied, and 29% were satisfied to some extent.

**Comment:** Through the nature of services requested by these women, it was clear that most of them sought psychosocial services. This is because these services are urgently needed by women when they are exposed to violence. On the other hand,

women's tendency to seek psychosocial services could be attributed to the strong presence of competent psychosocial service providers in their areas of residence. The findings also revealed that the percentage of women seeking legal services was only 7%. This is because women tend to avoid resorting to legal institutions and going to court, as they prefer to resolve disputes within the family in order not to lose their children. This greatly corresponds with what was mentioned in the discussion groups related to institutions in the four governorates. Moreover, women's few requests for economic services is due to the small number of economic empowerment and support institutions in these governorates, as mentioned in the discussion groups related to institutions.

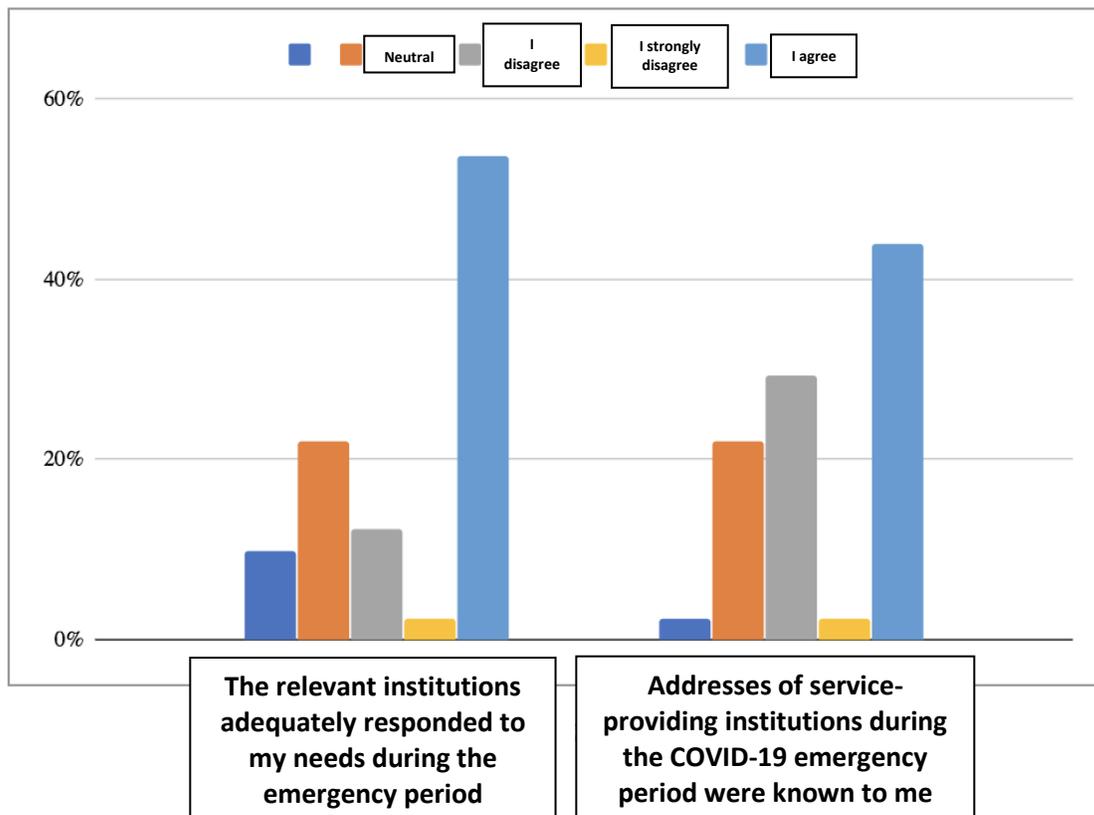
### **Knowledge of protocols related to filing complaints**

In response to a question related to this matter, only 4 women indicated that they have a complete knowledge/familiarity with the applied protocols and procedures for filing complaints. Meanwhile, 8 women stated they have partial knowledge of these protocols and procedures, and the majority of respondents (17) indicated that they do not know how to file a complaint. Also, only two women respondents among those who completed the questionnaires mentioned that they have previously filed a complaint.

A hypothetical question was asked regarding the prospects of follow-up, verification and investigation of a complaint after its reporting and submission, and whether they believe that the results will be effective. In this respect, 68% of women indicated that they believe that institutions will investigate and follow up complaints until an outcome is reached, whereas 32% believe that (in other words) the filed complaints will be in vain.

**Comment:** The results of the survey point to a poor/minimal knowledge among women in complaint filing protocols and procedures. This calls upon relevant institutions (especially those involved in raising awareness about combating and eliminating violence) to work on increasing women's knowledge of the applied procedures for filing complaints. It is also recommended to provide women with institutional counseling and guidebooks that explain the relevant protocols and procedures.

The figure below shows the extent of beneficiary women's knowledge of service-providing institutions during the COVID-19 period and the responsiveness of these institutions to women's needs:



**Comment:** Less than 50% of respondents indicated that they knew the addresses/contact details of service-providing institutions during the COVID-19 emergency period. This means that the concerned institutions must inform people about their provided services and nature of their programs and interventions, by using diverse mass media and social media mechanisms.

### Percentages and analysis of the questionnaire related to women beneficiaries

The table below shows the data (percentages) related to questions posed in the women beneficiaries’ questionnaire.

Note: For analysis purposes, “strongly agree” and “agree” were presented as “agree” in the following table.

Availability and Proportionality	Agree	Strongly		
		Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
I know the addresses of institutions that provide health, social, psychological and economic services to women exposed to violence and women in distress.	49%	10%	20%	22%
The reputation and standing of institutions that provide services to women are considered good according to myself and others.	71%		10%	20%
The work procedures of institutions that provide services to women are always quick, clear and simple.	51%		22%	27%
The relevant institutions provide their services to women and girls in a timely manner and without delay.	39%	2%	17%	41%
Working hours of institutions are well adapted to the circumstances of women in the region.	66%	2%	12%	20%
Institutions that provide services to women have comfortable and convenient waiting areas.	63%		22%	15%
The male and female workers of [relevant] institutions are great in terms of cooperation, listening, good and respectful treatment, and preservation of privacy.	76%		5%	20%
I am satisfied with the psychosocial and legal support services provided by these institutions.	73%		10%	17%
The [relevant] institutions played an effective role in raising my awareness about issues related to discrimination, equality, and combating violence against women.	80%		2%	17%
Institutions contribute to enhancing women's awareness and insight to promote their access to their rights.	80%		2%	17%
The male and female workers [of institutions] constantly follow up cases related to battered women.	63%		7%	29%
Institutions have strengthened my life skills and experiences that help me deal more effectively with the pressures of life (life skills include communication, problem-solving, decision-making, negotiation skills, and self-affirmation).	78%	2%	5%	15%

**Comment on the section related to Availability and Proportionality:**

This section showed that, in general, women are satisfied with the institutions' raising of their awareness vis-à-vis their rights. The reputation and standing of service-providing institutions are also good, and most women are satisfied with the level of abundance by professional ethics during the provision of services. Women were also satisfied with the role of institutions in empowering battered women and equipping them with different skills, which is a positive indicator that should be further strengthened. However, regarding the items that received less than 70%, there is a need to conduct discussions and examine different matters within institutions to understand the reasons behind the low percentages and come up with suggestions and solutions to improve the aspects that need intervention. This is especially true with regard to the adopted procedures in terms of their easiness, swiftness, timeliness, and responsiveness to women's cases. It is also recommended to review the working hours of these institutions to better accommodate the suitable times and circumstances of these women. Additionally, it is vital to upgrade the institutions' infrastructure - especially those related to waiting areas - to ensure comfort and privacy for service recipients. In this respect, we suggest that institutions perform assessments for measuring beneficiary women's satisfaction from the nature of provided services and the ways of their provision, in order to formulate interventions that properly serve beneficiaries. It is also worth noting that more than 50% of respondents reported that they do not know about service-providing institutions. This necessitates the formulation of a promotional and media plan to inform about service-providing institutions in the aforementioned governorates.

<b>Responsiveness to Emergency Cases (COVID-19 Pandemic)</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
The institutions adequately responded to your needs during the emergency period.	54%	2%	12%	32%
The addresses of service-providing institutions during the COVID-19 emergency period were known to me.	44%	2%	29%	24%
<b>Comment:</b> Given the limited knowledge about service-providing institutions, these institutions must promote their services and programs in a way that targets the society in general, and women in particular.				
<b>Obstacles to Accessing Services</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
Military checkpoints greatly impede my safe access and travel to service-providing institutions.	66%		27%	7%
The Annexation Wall, military gates and difficult roads greatly hinder my access to institutions to request services.	61%	2%	27%	10%
The poor economic condition faced by myself and my household significantly prevents me from accessing services [i.e. a financial burden].	73%	5%	15%	7%
My [high level of] trust in institutions greatly contributes to my disclosure of my suffered violence.	73%	2%	10%	15%
I always prefer to resort to family (tribal) mediation to find solutions for violence against women cases.	12%	20%	41%	27%
I always prefer to talk to those who are close to me about my suffered violence.	51%	7%	22%	20%
The institutions that I resorted to were able to mitigate and eliminate my suffered violence in an acceptable way.	66%		2%	32%
The [relevant] institutions provide all required services and meet all of women's needs (i.e. psychosocial, health, legal and economic support) in an integrated way.	54%	2%	17%	27%
Seeking help from institutions in violence-related cases significantly increases the risks faced by women.	51%		27%	22%
Seeking help from institutions significantly enhances the safety and security of my children and prevents them from harm.	61%	5%	5%	29%
Social stigmas are <u>not</u> an obstacle for women in seeking services from relevant institutions.	41%	20%	22%	17%
<b>Comment:</b> The item on resorting to family (tribal) mediation to find solutions for violence against women cases received only 12%, and this is a positive indicator.				
<b>Comment:</b> In this section, which is related to “obstacles to accessing services”, women’s trust in service-providing institutions is somehow complicated. This is because the percentage of women who said that their [high level of] trust in institutions greatly contributes to their disclosure of violence was 73%, which is a good percentage. However, under the same section in a different question, 51% of women saw that seeking help from these institutions in violence-related cases significantly increases the risks faced by women. This means that most women trust service-providing institutions, but they might face serious risks if their husbands or family members find out about their resorting to them. This could be the reason behind the small number of women who request services from institutions, due to their fear of suffering the consequences (if their husbands or family members find out about this matter). This is fully consistent with what was mentioned by discussion group participants, who noted that the number of women who request such services is very small compared to the real number of women undergoing violence. This is due to their fear and potential threats if their family members find out about their resorting to competent institutions to combat and eliminate violence.				

<b>Women with Disabilities</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
The institutions provide adequate services for women with disabilities and take their needs into consideration.	41%	5%	15%	39%
Institutions have suitable facilities (such as corridors and passageways) for women with disabilities.	29%	5%	32%	34%
The employees of women-related institutions possess the necessary skills and experience and they deal sensitively with women with disabilities.	37%		22%	41%
<b>Comment:</b> The results of this section greatly corresponded with the opinions of discussion groups and representatives of international organizations and Ministry of Social Development, who were also dissatisfied with the nature of provided services and interventions related to disabled women who undergo violence. This calls for performing infrastructure development for these institutions in order to make the infrastructure more suitable and easily accessible and maximize disabled women's benefit from these services. Moreover, it is important to enhance the staff capacities of these institutions by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills and encouraging them to take disabled women's privacy into consideration. Institutional staff should also be more sensitive and considerate of disabled women's needs (especially those who are subjected to violence).				
<b>Protection Mechanisms and Risk Assessment</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
The institutions' procedures in dealing with battered women's cases are sufficient for ensuring women's protection and safety from risks.	66%	2%	7%	24%
Intervention procedures followed by institutions greatly enhance women's recovery from violence and its effects.	71%	2%	7%	20%
Institutions that provide services to battered women put the interest and decision of battered women at the top of their work priorities.	71%	2%	2%	24%
In cases of risk to the lives of battered women, information and insight are appropriately provided by institutions regarding the roles and responsibilities of the Family Protection Police, Family Prosecution, social development counselor, and other related parties.	63%	5%	5%	27%
The institutions' measures are sufficient to protect women who are subjected to the risk of violence.	37%	12%	20%	32%
Official and national laws and policies are adequate to protect women from the risks of violence.	7%	27%	39%	27%
Police, prosecution and court procedures provide battered women with easy access to justice.	29%	24%	27%	20%

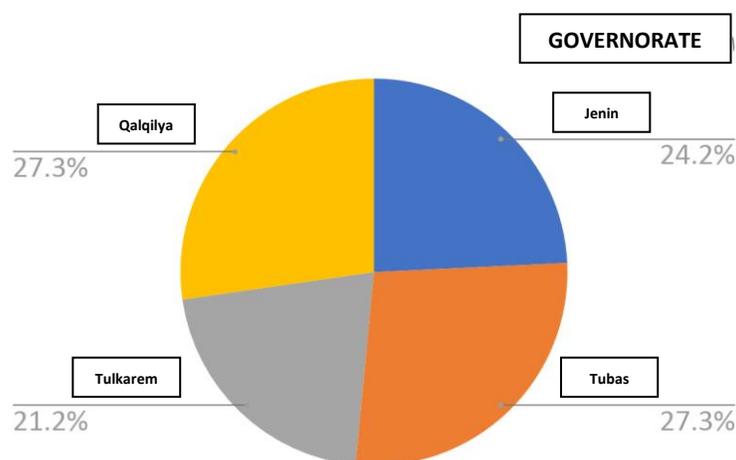
**Comment:** This dimension, which is related to Protection Mechanisms and Risk Assessment, showed a certain degree of satisfaction about the procedures followed by institutions in dealing with women and helping them get out of the cycle of violence. Most women also agreed that institutions put the interest of women as a top priority in their work, which is a positive indicator that should be further strengthened. This led to a higher percentage of women beneficiaries who are satisfied with the institutions' work and support.

On the other hand, figures show a high dissatisfaction and a low level of trust among women regarding the institutions' measures to protect women who are subjected to the risk of violence (37%). The respondent women also did not have a favourable opinion about the official and national laws and policies for protecting women (only 7%), and they had a negative view about the Police, prosecution and court procedures for enhancing battered women's access to justice (29%). This greatly corresponds with the statements of the Director of Mehwar Center concerning the provision of protection under the justice system and great the gaps in that system. On the other hand, results showed that women are aware of the weakness and fragility of laws related to protecting women from the risks of violence. Therefore, it is imperative to review and examine the reasons behind these figures to develop correct interventions and exert pressure to provide protection mechanisms. It is also recommended to perform lobbying activities with decision-makers to ratify and amend women's protection laws, especially the Penal Code and the Violence Against Women Act.

### **Second: Indicators related to service-providing institutions**

This section presents the findings of the analysis of questionnaires completed by institutions that provide social, psychological, legal, health, educational and economic services. The number of female and male participants in the groups related to institutions was 38 (32 female and 6 male). Five questionnaires were excluded from the analysis due to having more than one participant from the same institution. In other words, the number of participating institutions was 33, and the numbers of male and female participants according to each governorate were as follows: Jenin 10, Tubas 9, Tulkarem 7, and Qalqilya 12 (Attached is a list of names of institutions that participated in the discussion groups).

Some of these institutions were recently established, while others are much older (for example, one of them was established in 1960).



**The findings (in percentages) of the questionnaires completed by service-providing institutions**

	Availability and Proportionality	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
1	The institution has good programs that target the needs of battered women/survivors of violence.	94%			6%
2	There is a profound awareness among the institution's personnel regarding the concept of gender-based violence and human rights.	97%		3%	
3	The institution has very clear procedures for providing services, including leaflets, brochures, regulations and guidelines for service provision.	94%		3%	3%
4	The institution has stable and sustainable programs and services that aim to serve women.	79%	3%	3%	15%
5	The work procedures of the institution contribute to providing services to women in a quick and simple manner.	97%	3%		
6	The institution provides its services in a timely manner and without delay.	91%	3%	3%	3%
7	The institution's working hours are well adapted to the overall circumstances of women in the region.	97%			3%
8	The institution always responds promptly to women's inquiries and complaints.	82%		3%	15%
9	The institution has clear criteria for participating with stakeholders, women and targeted groups in the planning, development and evaluation of its projects and programs.	88%			12%
10	The institution adopts an individual case approach in its interventions in women and battered women's cases	48%	9%	15%	27%
11	The institution always adheres to the multilateral approach in dealing with women's cases, and it integrates men, households and husbands in its services.	82%	3%	12%	3%
12	The institution always takes women's needs into consideration during the provision of relevant services.	97%	3%		
13	Employees of the institution are always keen on meeting the needs of women who seek services, clarify their available options, and listen carefully to their complaints.	85%		6%	9%

14	The institution maintains a clear system for the procedures of tackling violence against women cases.	91%	3%		6%
<b>Emergency Response (during the COVID-19 Pandemic)</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
15	The institution has specific standards for the prevention of gender-based violence and responding to emergency situations.	79%		6%	15%
16	The institution has accurate data and information on violence against women cases during the COVID-19 period.	61%		9%	30%
17	The institution has some identified helplines during the Covonavirus-related emergency period.	73%		12%	15%
18	The institution has appropriately modified its programs and work priorities to be more responsive to women's needs during the COVID-19 period.	73%		9%	18%
<b>Accessibility and Acceptability</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
19	The institution has adequate physical amenities and facilities, including toilets and a comfortable and clean waiting area.	76%	3%	12%	9%
20	Women greatly trust the knowledge, experiences and skills of the institution's employees.	91%			9%
21	Military checkpoints between women's places of residence and the institution greatly impede women's access.	61%	3%	18%	18%
22	The Apartheid Wall is a real obstacle for women's access to service-providing institutions.	73%	3%	6%	18%
23	Women's access to service-providing institutions constitutes a great financial burden for them.	61%	6%	9%	24%
<b>Ethical Practices</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
24	The institution fully adheres to an ethical code of conduct that regulates its work practices with battered women.	97%			3%
25	The institution has an effectively implemented accountability system that punishes those who violate the code of conduct.	79%		3%	18%
<b>Women with Disabilities</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
26	The institution has adequate programs aimed at serving women with disabilities.	61%		15%	24%
27	Women with disabilities always resort to the institution to benefit from its provided services.	55%		21%	24%
28	The institution has suitable facilities for women with disabilities.	48%	9%	18%	24%
29	Employees of the institution possess the necessary skills and experience for tackling disabled women's cases and protecting their rights.	70%	3%	6%	21%
<b>Protection Mechanisms and Risk Assessment</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
30	The institution has clear and documented mechanisms and procedures for assessing the risks of violence.	88%	3%		9%

31	The institution has a comprehensive protocol for dealing with the National Referral System for providing health, social and legal services to battered women.	82%		3%	15%
32	The institution has clear procedures in place to protect battered women from additional safety risks due to the institution's intervention in their case.	73%		12%	15%
33	The institution has a clear network of contacts/active parties that are involved in protecting women in the region.	94%			6%
34	The institution conducts the necessary coordination and networking with other institutions when dealing with cases of women at risk.	100%			
35	In high-risk cases, the institution always informs the survivor/battered woman about the roles and responsibilities of the Family Protection Police, Family Prosecution, social development counselor and other related parties.	91%			9%
36	The institution has sufficient experience for formulating plans for the victim's safety from violence and life-threatening risks (case management).	82%		3%	15%
37	The institution has effective procedures for enhancing the safety of women who are at risk.	79%		3%	18%
<b>Documentation and Data Collection</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
38	The institution is always concerned about the safety of its female employees during its interventions with women whose lives are at risk.	79%	3%		18%
39	The institution has a good documentation system for collecting data and information related to violence against women cases.	79%	6%	6%	9%
40	The institution safely maintains a record of battered women's cases and keeps it out of the reach of all unauthorized parties.	85%	6%	3%	6%
<b>Information Dissemination and Sharing</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
41	The nature of the institution's work is sufficiently known by the women who seek relevant services.	82%		3%	15%
42	The institution publishes adequate information about its provided services to women through different publications and media means.	82%		6%	12%
43	The institution continuously disseminates documents and publications related to gender-based violence.	79%		3%	18%
44	The institution uses innovative methods to raise awareness about gender-based violence.	88%			12%
<b>Lobbying and Advocacy</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
45	The institution actively participates in developing policy papers for amending legislations and laws related to women's rights.	82%		9%	9%
46	The institution actively participates in different coalitions for combating women's rights and eliminating gender discrimination.	82%		9%	9%

<b>Financial and Human Resources</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
47	The [female and male] employees of the institution have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience.	94%		3%	3%
48	The employees of the institution participate every year in capacity development and training programs in the field of combating violence against women.	91%		3%	6%
49	The institution has modern technical equipment and supplies that help them perform their tasks.	73%		9%	18%
50	The institution has sufficient financial and human resources to provide services and programs that target women.	61%	3%	9%	27%
51	The institution has a sufficient budget for working on violence against women cases.	45%	3%	15%	36%

**Items that scored 85% or higher:**

<b>Availability and Proportionality</b>		<b>Agree/ Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
13	Employees of the institution are always keen on meeting the needs of women who seek services, clarify their available options, and listen carefully to their complaints.	85%		6%	9%
40	The institution safely maintains a record of battered women's cases and keeps it out of the reach of all unauthorized parties.	85%	6%	3%	6%
9	The institution has clear criteria for participating with stakeholders, women and targeted groups in the planning, development and evaluation of its projects and programs.	88%			12%
30	The institution has clear and documented mechanisms and procedures for assessing the risks of violence.	88%	3%		9%
44	The institution uses innovative methods to raise awareness about gender-based violence.	88%			12%
6	The institution provides its services in a timely manner and without delay.	91%	3%	3%	3%
14	The institution maintains a clear system for the procedures of tackling violence against women cases.	91%	3%		6%
20	Women greatly trust the knowledge, experiences and skills of the institution's employees.	91%			9%
35	In high-risk cases, the institution always informs the survivor/battered woman about the roles and responsibilities of the Family Protection Police, Family Prosecution, social development counselor, and other related parties.	91%			9%
48	The employees of the institution participate every year in capacity development and training programs in the field of combating violence against women.	91%		3%	6%
1	The institution has good programs that target the needs of battered women/survivors of violence.	94%			6%

3	The institution has very clear procedures for providing services, including leaflets, brochures, regulations and guidelines for service provision.	94%	3%		3%
33	The institution has a clear network of contacts/active parties that are involved in protecting women in the region.	94%			6%
47	The [female and male] employees of the institution have sufficient knowledge, skills and experience.	94%	3%		3%
2	There is a profound awareness among the institution's personnel regarding the concept of gender-based violence and human rights.	97%	3%		
5	The work procedures of the institution contribute to providing services to women in a quick and simple manner.	97%	3%		
7	The institution's working hours are well adapted to the overall circumstances of women in the region.	97%			3%
12	The institution always takes women's needs into consideration during the provision of relevant services.	97%	3%		
24	The institution fully adheres to an ethical code of conduct that regulates its work practices with battered women.	97%			3%
34	The institution conducts the necessary coordination and networking with other institutions when dealing with cases of women at risk.	100%			

### Items that scored less than 70%

Availability and Proportionality		Agree /Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral
51	The institution has a sufficient budget for working on violence against women cases.	45%	3%	15%	36%
10	The institution adopts an individual case approach in its interventions in women and battered women's cases	48%	9%	15%	27%
28	The institution has suitable facilities for women with disabilities.	48%	9%	18%	24%
27	Women with disabilities always resort to the institution to benefit from its provided services.	55%		21%	24%
16	The institution has accurate data and information on violence against women cases during the COVID-19 period.	61%		9%	30%
21	Military checkpoints between women's places of residence and the institution greatly impede women's access.	61%	3%	18%	18%
23	Women's access to service-providing institutions constitutes a great financial burden for them.	61%	6%	9%	24%
26	The institution has adequate programs aimed at serving women with disabilities.	61%		15%	24%
50	The institution has sufficient financial and human resources to provide services and programs that target women.	61%	3%	9%	27%

**General Comments:** The percentages derived from the statistical analysis indicate that institutions have an excellent evaluation of their own performance and services. For example, 20 items were assessed at 85% or higher, and the item related to the institution's "coordination and networking with other institutions when dealing with

cases of women at risk” was rated at 100%. This reflects a great conviction among institutions regarding their implemented programs and interventions.

However, it was seen that disabled women were somewhat dissatisfied with these institutions. For example, only 61% of women with disabilities saw that the relevant institutions had adequate programs aimed at serving them, and as few as 55% of disabled women always resort to the relevant institutions to benefit from their services. Moreover, 48% of women with disabilities see that the relevant institutions have suitable facilities for disabled women.

This greatly corresponds with what was mentioned in the discussion groups related to institutions. It is also worth noting that, according to service-providing institutions, 70% of employees possess the necessary skills and experience for tackling disabled women's cases. This calls for developing the capacities of staff who provide services to disabled women who undergo violence. Furthermore, the item on the availability of sufficient budgets for working on violence against women cases had a low rating (45%) by institutions, which corresponds with what was stated during the discussion groups and by the international organizations and Ministry of Social Development (MoSD).

The percentages related to services and programs for women with disabilities were also fully consistent with what was mentioned during the meetings with MoSD officials and the discussion groups. These percentages were also somewhat consistent with the data/results of the questionnaire completed by women beneficiaries. For example, only 41% of beneficiary women agreed that the institutions provide adequate services for women with disabilities and take their needs into consideration. Moreover, 29% of beneficiary women believe that the institutions have facilities that are adequate for women with disabilities. Furthermore, 37% of beneficiary women see that the employees of women-related institutions have sufficient skills and experiences and they deal sensitively with women with disabilities, whereas the rating by the institutions' staff was much higher (70%) regarding this aspect (as mentioned above).

It is also worth noting that the questionnaires filled by institutions showed their dissatisfaction regarding the available financial and human resources for providing services. For example, only 61% of service-providing institutions saw that they have sufficient financial and human resources for providing services and programs that target women, which is a real obstacle for the attainment of quality services. Data also showed that 45% of institutions have sufficient budgets for working on cases related to violence against women. The latter result completely matches what was mentioned by the experts from the two international organizations, MoSD

Undersecretary, and Director of Mehwar Center; regarding the lack of financial and human resources which greatly affect the services provided to battered women. This stresses the importance of lobbying and influencing decision-makers to increase the resources and funds provided to governmental and non-governmental organizations to enable them to confront violence in a much better manner.

**Comparison between the opinions/viewpoints of institutions and women beneficiaries**

<b>Questions</b>	<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Women Beneficiaries</b>
<b>The work procedures of the institution contribute to providing services to women in a quick and simple manner.</b>	97%	51%
<b>The institution provides its services in a timely manner and without delay.</b>	91%	39%
<b>The institution's working hours are well adapted to the overall circumstances of women in the region.</b>	97%	66%
<b>Military checkpoints between women's places of residence and the institution greatly impede women's access.</b>	61%	66%
<b>The Apartheid Wall is a real obstacle for women's access to service-providing institutions.</b>	73%	61%
<b>Women's access to service-providing institutions constitutes a great financial burden for them.</b>	61%	73%
<b>The institution has an effectively implemented accountability system that punishes those who violate the code of conduct.</b>	79%	68%
<b>The institution has adequate programs that provide services to women with disabilities.</b>	61%	41%
<b>The institution has suitable facilities for women with disabilities.</b>	48%	29%
<b>Employees of the institution possess the necessary skills and experience for tackling disabled women's cases and protecting their rights.</b>	70%	37%
<b>The institution has clear procedures in place to protect battered women from additional safety risks due to the institution's intervention in their case.</b>	73%	66%

**Comment:** There is a vast difference between the view and evaluation of institutions from one side, and those of women beneficiaries regarding institutions on the other side. As indicated in another section of this survey, the institutions have a high level of satisfaction vis-à-vis their services, programs and performed interventions. However, the opinions and perspectives of women beneficiaries regarding these institutions are quite different. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions examine and study the viewpoints and opinions of women regarding their work, in order to conduct the necessary modifications and development.

## **Chapter Four**

This chapter explores three main aspects. The first aspect is related to the achievements in the field of eliminating violence and provision of protection to battered women. Answers related to this aspect were provided during the interviews with the international experts, MoSD Undersecretary, and Director of Mehwar Center. The second aspect of this chapter highlights the gaps, loopholes and challenges facing service-providing institutions. These matters were discussed by the experts from the two international organizations; MoSD; and relevant institutions working in this field. Finally, the chapter presents the recommendations that were put forward following the discussions with the international experts and MoSD.

### **1. Achievements from the perspective of service providers and international organizations**

This aspect was explained by local institutions, MoSD, and international organizations. During these discussions, the interviewed persons were asked to determine the achievements made in the field of providing protection and eliminating violence. In this regard, the interviewees unanimously agreed that a number of success stories and achievements were made by governmental and non-governmental organizations throughout their long years of work. The most prominent and vital of these achievements were as follows:

- Palestine was one of the first countries that developed a strategy for combating violence against women (2011-2019). However, it is expected that a new strategy would be formulated soon because the covered period has ended.
- Work on the elimination of violence is now being addressed by multiple sectors, which is a great achievement. These efforts culminated with the introduction of the National Referral System, which enabled the joint response approach and the provision of comprehensive, specialized and complementary services to women victims of violence. Moreover, there has been the formulation of unified policies to confront gender-based violence (GBV).
- There is now a much stronger cooperation and coordination between governmental institutions and civil society organizations, who now work in the framework of a unified agenda to combat gender-based violence.

- Establishment of protection homes and shelters and introducing a special system for these centers. This took place in light of joint coordination between governmental institutions and civil society organizations to refer/transfer women whose lives are at risk to the aforementioned centers. There are three such centers in the West Bank, which is considered an achievement compared to neighboring countries.
  
- Due to conducting national surveys, Palestine has comprehensive statistical information about the reality of violence in the country. These surveys took place in 2005, 2011 and 2019, respectively, and they provide data and statistical information on gender-based violence, thus enabling the detection of gaps, challenges and loopholes in this field. This data also helps institutions in formulating and modifying plans, designing interventions, and determining priorities based on survey results.
  
- Work has been initiated in introducing a joint and unified documentation system among institutions with regard to gender-based violence data.
  
- Palestine has strong institutions with a long experience in the field of interventions and support for battered women. These institutions have strong access and operations in marginalized areas for the service of women, which is considered a notable achievement. They also have competent human capital and staff who are qualified to intervene in battered women's cases. Many of these institutions also have hotlines to provide their services, and they use advanced techniques for dealing with survivors of violence (such as conference calls related to cases), which constitutes a great achievement in terms of risk assessment. Therefore, the institutions working in the justice, social, health and security sectors now have a more specialized basis or infrastructure, as well as having special forums for combating violence, such as the NGOs Forum to Combat Violence against Women. Moreover, they have networks for amending laws and legislations, developing policies for protecting women, and lobbying for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.
  
- The presence of specialized units within governmental institutions (such as specialized Police, specialized Prosecution, and specialized judges) had a positive impact and raised the level of provided services. This also led to a high level of compliance with professional ethics during the provision of services to women in terms of taking their privacy and confidentiality into

consideration. Therefore, establishing these units within governmental institutions paved the way for specialized staff who understand the different aspects of violence against women (VAW) and deal sensitively with such issues.

- The creation of safe areas/homes for women made it possible for battered women to access all health, social, psychological, legal and entertainment services. This saves a lot of time, effort and money for women as these centers are located within health institutions in several governorates and also in the Old City of Jerusalem, which greatly encourages women to resort to these centers. Another advantage is that these health institutions are socially acceptable and easily accessible, and they do not cause a social stigma for those who resort to them.
- The role and monitoring by the Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) are considered a positive point that supports the parties who work on countering violence.
- Saving the lives of a significant number of women who resorted to these institutions and whose lives were in danger.
- Empowering many women socially, educationally and economically, along with reintegrating numerous battered women into their societies.
- The important protocol and positive measures approved by the Palestinian Cabinet in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, there was the approval of new procedures for receiving battered women during the COVID-19 period, which is also a good achievement in terms of women's referral (regardless of whether they are infected or not).
- Amendment of several articles related to women in the effective laws, and the stipulation of some administrative decisions for the advantage of women. Examples include a decree to amend the minimum marriage age in the Personal Status Law to 18 years (2019), with some exceptions. Moreover, there was the issuance of an administrative decision to increase the age of custody to 15 years (2019), as well as an administrative regulation that makes it possible for women to nullify a marriage before it enters into full effect. Furthermore, a Decree Law was issued to allow women to open and manage bank accounts for their children (2019), along with another Decree Law that allows mothers to issue passports for their children (2019). Not less importantly, there was the repealing of Article

(308) of the Penal Code, which permitted the marriage of a rapist to his victim, along with the amendment of Article (98) of Penal Code No. 16 of 1960, which used to give reduced sentences to those who committed a crime under certain pretexts. Furthermore, there was the amendment of Article (99) [of the Penal Code], which was related to murder; where women and children came to be excluded from this article.

## **2. Obstacles, gaps and challenges from the viewpoint of service providers, international organizations, and institutions that combat Gender-based Violence**

The majority of interviewed representatives from the MoSD, international organizations and other institutions agreed that the current challenges and gaps are still substantial, diverse and intertwined. These challenges and gaps can be summarized as follows: Challenges and gaps related to institutions and the political and legal system; challenges related to society and the male-dominated culture; and gaps related to understanding women's perceptions regarding interventions and their expectations from the relevant institutions.

### **Gaps related to institutions and the political and legal system:**

- Given the lack of control of the Palestinian government over different Palestinian areas and their division into what is called areas "A", "B" and "C", perpetrators of violence are sometimes not prosecuted because they flee to areas that Palestinian authorities cannot reach.
- There are obstacles related to the legal aspect, such as ineffective laws for protecting women from violence and suspending some proposed laws for protecting women from violence (e.g., Family Protection Bill). Moreover, there was resistance to amending some discriminatory laws against women, not to mention the conflict between laws due to the complicated political reality on the ground. Also, the absence of the Palestinian Parliament further complicated the reality of women in the country. Consequently, there are several legal references related to Palestinian women because the laws governing women in the West Bank are very different from those in the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, which causes a state of confusion with regard to women.

- Limited financial resources constitute one of the most important gaps and challenges. For example, the budget allocated to the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) is 5% of the total general budget, which is a very small percentage, especially in light of the numerous groups served by the Ministry. Non-governmental institutions also suffer from limited financial resources for supporting battered women's programs and providing protection to them. Therefore, the financial factor has a negative effect in terms of service sustainability, and the provision of services is now fully contingent upon the availability of budgets and funding for occasional projects.
- There is a gap in qualifying/training service providers and enhancing their capabilities, along with the failure to protect the staff working on providing services and protection to battered women.
- Another important aspect is women's confidence in service providers. Sometimes, this aspect is an impediment to women's requests for services and their resorting to the concerned institutions. Also, there are very few specialized institutions that children, women with disabilities and other persons can be referred to, whereas the existing institutions tackle only a part of women's problems and not all of them. Moreover, protection centers are not adequately set up to receive women with disabilities, which translates into prejudice to the rights of these women. There is also no trained staff to deal with disabled battered women, especially those with mental disabilities. There are also unreported cases of battered women with disabilities or those suffering from mental illnesses. Consequently, the protection centers do not receive these cases, and certain associations get contacted for assistance or the disabled women are sent back to their families.
- The institutions based in the northern West Bank suffer from neglect, and there are deficiencies in the institutions that have branches in the north. For example, some institutions have a strong performance in the middle of the West Bank but do not sufficiently focus on the northern region.
- Many unprofessional and unqualified institutions entered the field of working with battered women because anti-violence programs usually receive a lot of support (funds).

***"They ask women to talk about their suffering; then they keep their wounds open and leave. Their goal is to merely fill up programs out of "fashion", in a way similar to what happened during the incursions period (many institutions enhanced their work during the incursions). Nowadays, the "fashion"/trend is working against violence, especially during the COVID-19 period . Our institutions therefore open the wounds, but they do not know how to cure them".***

(Female participant in the Tubas Group)

Many cases related to women also require economic empowerment and financial support, along with the provision of rapid response and protection. This is what many institutions are indeed lacking, especially when it comes to women with disabilities:

***"Women oftentimes need urgent financial support that is hard to acquire. They also need protection that is not easy to provide in light of the unaccommodating conditions of safe houses where a rapid response is missing. In fact, there is no rapid response at all in the current work with battered women. Therefore, it is important to study the different cases and to listen carefully to women. What we do is to help these women understand the causes of their problems and point to them that there are suitable and positive solutions that they can resort to.***

(Participant from the Jenin group)

The conducted interviews with women, institutions and the MoSD showed that women beneficiaries and relevant institutions have a clear lack of knowledge about the National Referral System. Women beneficiaries also mentioned that they do not sufficiently understand the protection procedures and referral systems. Additionally, relevant institutions are not familiar with the system and methods of coordination and networking. Furthermore, the referral system is not being properly implemented, as noted by relevant institutions and confirmed by the MoSD Undersecretary.

## **Obstacles related to the male-dominated culture:**

- Traditional culture, norms, traditions, social stigma and opposition to women's rights and issues have far-reaching implications and continuously affect women's enjoyment of rights, equality and gender justice. This culture aims to control and impede women's access to services because it views violence as a “personal issue” that falls within the private domain and that there is no need to get it out in the public sphere. Through different means, they aim to prevent women from resorting to competent institutions to seek relevant services. Not less importantly, some workers in the field of combating violence sometimes have viewpoints which are against women's rights and their enjoyment of equity and justice, which greatly undermines the quality and acceptability of these services and minimizes the number of women who seek them.

*“Women’s interaction with awareness programs in marginalized areas is minimal, as they do not disclose their suffered violence due to the fear of repercussions. During my work in this governorate for 6 years, no social problem or any battered woman’s case was reported so far. Of course, this is not because the governorate is free of problems, but surely due to women’s fear of reporting cases of violence.”*

(Participant from the Jenin group)

- Women's issues and countering violence against women are still being seen as the responsibility of women's organizations without the provision of much support from other institutions. Therefore, it seems that they deal with the issue of violence as if it is merely a feminist issue without understanding that it is also a societal and developmental problem.

## **Gaps related to understanding women’s perceptions regarding interventions and their expectations from the relevant institutions**

- Among the main problems facing service providers is that those who seek services have very high expectations where they anticipate that their needs and problems will be tackled immediately and comprehensively by the institution in a very short time.
- The lack of women’s economic independence often prevents them from filing complaints and makes them reluctant to seek help and make decisions about their lives after suffering from violence.

- Failure to regularly and continuously receive services due to the beneficiaries' conviction that problems ought to be solved swiftly and that simple solutions are always available. Also, in some cases, women tend to focus on receiving financial aid more than benefiting from psychological and social interventions. Moreover, solutions are sometimes imposed on women beneficiaries where the latter are requested to implement them without having a chance to discuss these solutions.
- Based on their statements, one of the challenges facing institutional workers is that they sometimes feel helpless during their women-related interventions, especially when women beneficiaries overly focus on the financial side more than the moral side. For example, a participant from a discussion group related to institutions mentioned the following: *"Sometimes you feel totally helpless as a service provider. I feel that I will receive full attention if I provide financial support, but many times I feel that nobody will listen to me if there is no such support"*.

### **3. Recommendations by local service providers and international organizations**

#### **Recommendations to tackle problems and challenges in the provision of different services for the purpose of protecting women and achieving justice**

A number of recommendations were set forth to improve the level of services provided to women who undergo violence. This includes recommendations related to the work and orientations of institutions; recommendations on staff development and protection; and recommendations that focus on improving economic conditions, increasing budgetary allocations, and enhancing women's economic empowerment programs. Other recommendations were linked to the societal culture and awareness of women's rights, while others focused on policies, laws, and protection systems. Furthermore, there were special recommendations for women with disabilities and others that are related to the media and its pivotal role. **The following is a set of recommendations mentioned by the male and female participants in the survey:**

- Allocate budgets and recruit qualified and specialized human resources in the four governorates. It is also important to allocate special budgets for battered women, especially within the framework of MoSD, in order to enable the Ministry to respond to the urgent needs of women. The participants in the discussion groups also recommended that the Palestinian Cabinet would allocate a special budget for battered women in the framework of the budget for ministries and directorates that

serve battered women, provided that these budgets are logical and implementable on the ground.

***"In many cases, incoming battered women are in need of essential things that the Ministry cannot cover. Therefore, the social workers sometimes provide these things to them from their own account (i.e. at the workers' personal expense)".***

(Participant from the group of institutions from Qalqilya)

- Recruit professional personnel because there is a shortage of that in most institutions. It is also vital to increase the number of staff in the MoSD directorates, and to train them and develop their capacities to deal with violence against women cases with complete sensitivity and confidentiality. Moreover, it is essential to protect service providers by having a protection system in place, as well as motivating them by approving a risk allowance to be disbursed for them.

***"There is no protection for women's protection counselors despite the difficult situations and conditions that they face. Therefore, protection is currently taking place on an individual effort only by using one's personal knowledge and experience. Consequently, service providers are working permanently day and night, both within the framework of COVID-19 and other frameworks, without having any good incentives. We have indeed protected many women, but there is no risk allowance given to us. Therefore, it is difficult to ask service providers to work day and night with no protection system in place, no incentives, and no risk allowance".***

(Mrs. Saeda Al-Atrash, Director of Mehwar Center)

- Review the strategies adopted by institutions in the field of women's protection and elimination of violence, in order to activate their work and strengthen their support for women's issues.
- When formulating strategies for working with battered women, it is important to take into account the continuity and sustainability of provided services, as well as seeking other funding sources so that these services would not be interrupted.
- The legal and social institutions that witness service interruptions for any given reason should ensure the continuation of services by referring cases to specialized

institutions. It is also important to enhance networking and cooperation between governmental and civil society institutions working in the field of eliminating violence and providing protection.

- Review the system and bylaws of protection centers. For example, there is a gap in protection centers due to the exclusion of 7 different groups, including women with severe disabilities, which constitutes a great prejudice to their rights. Protection centers must also be well-prepared and qualified to receive women with disabilities.
- Change/amend different laws and the justice system, as well as reviewing regulations and ratifying the Family Protection Bill to ensure the protection of battered women. It is also necessary to provide protection tools and strengthen joint action and cooperation between institutions, along with having a political willingness to replace the tribal system with the legal system.
- Institutions working with women - especially on violence-related issues - should review their programs related to battered women, especially because current trends are showing that violence in the society is increasing and not decreasing.
- Conduct a needs assessment to identify women's different needs, such as food, social and economic needs, etc., and only afterwards should there be the identification of the appropriate interventions related to women.
- Enhance women's access to services and ensure that all women who are in need have access to relevant institutions. What is quite helpful in that respect is to activate and develop the National Referral System to refer women to vital services, along with solidifying the relations and coordination between governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the field of serving battered women.
- Women need entities/parties that represent them in courts and provide them with legal services free of charge. It is also important to enhance women's social and economic empowerment programs, whereas it is not enough to simply offer training courses to women. Therefore, there is a need to constantly follow up women's issues and help them find job opportunities.

***“Many women took part in economic empowerment courses, such as beading, cosmetology, and food processing courses. Consequently, they managed to create their own enterprises, which gave them a lot of strength. Most of these projects are located in rural areas. The courses were indeed a success due to having qualified trainers and good training materials. When a woman contributes to the household income and becomes more productive, this gives her more power and control. Therefore, an economically liberated woman becomes liberated on several levels”.***

(Participant from the group of institutions from Jenin)

- Raise the level of societal awareness and change the culture that is hostile to women's rights and issues and is insensitive to gender-based violence. Additionally, it is important to conduct awareness and educational programs for raising women's knowledge of their social and legal rights and providing them with the contact details of institutions that provide social, legal and economic services.

***“It is important to influence the societal culture in order to make it more supportive of women's rights and issues, as well as working with women at the awareness and economic levels. Otherwise, we would be doing everything in vain”.***

(Participant from the Qalqilya group)

***“Qalqilya needs a lot of work. Even those working with battered women need some serious guidance and development. This is because many of them possess a chauvinistic mindset that always blames women for every problem (such as viewing mothers as “ferocious” or seeing the daughter-in-law as a bad person who provokes her mother-in-law), thus they blame the battered woman for everything and stand with the offenders, who they perceive as victims”.***

(Participant from the Qalqilya group)

- Strengthen the role of women in institutions and municipal councils. Moreover, it is important to establish women's committees in every area in order to protect women, whereas the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Local Government should make this mandatory.

***"During the COVID-19 period, I worked on establishing a women's committee. But unfortunately, I was forced to dissolve it and was threatened with work termination by a member of the village council in which the committee was established. He told me that if I wanted to stay in my job I must dissolve the committee, although I had contacted him in a prior period to receive his help in forming that committee".***

(Participant from the group of institutions from Qalqilya)

- The targeting of males and cooperation with them in different programs for countering violence and providing protection. It is also recommended to reach out to young couples and give them training courses, as well as proposing that the Sharia court would introduce a pre-marriage training requirement for young couples.

***"Working with men is sometimes problematic because many of them have a distorted viewpoint. Thus, it is imperative to work with both males and females to bridge the gap between them and enhance the provision of services."***

(Participant from the Qalqilya group)

***"Men in general have no inclination or tendency to attend training sessions and workshops, and especially those related to women. We do not have positive expectations from men."***

(Participant from the group of institutions from Tubas)

- Target all areas with the necessary services. In this respect, it is worth noting that city centers are sometimes neglected due to the belief that these areas do not need services. Based on previous experiences, it was found that all areas, including the cities, are in urgent need of relevant services. Moreover, the Jenin group recommended the introduction of projects that particularly target battered women because many institutions lack special programs for helping battered women/survivors of violence. There is also a need to focus on marginalized areas and groups - such as the Old City of Hebron, Areas "C", Bedouin communities, areas within the wall, and border/friction areas - as well as working with grassroots organizations in these areas.
- Pay particular attention to women with disabilities due to their great needs and limited resources. This should include home visits to familiarize them with the institutions' programs and interventions and encourage them to request such

services. Moreover, it is important to upgrade shelters and safe houses to make them convenient for women with disabilities.

- Relevant institutions should do interventions and provide services in a more comprehensive manner where they also cover children and families, as well as paying attention to marginalized groups; especially the elderly, children, and young girls who are subjected to violence.
- Enhance the work of social support networks. This requires the enhancement of joint efforts and cooperation between governmental and civil society organizations to form strong protection networks. Therefore, it will be a great achievement if we enhance women's protection and support networks.
- Adopt a bolder discourse and approach with regard to battered women's protection. In this respect, a larger audience should be mobilized to confront violence and discrimination against women, as well as using social media platforms since they are highly accessible by people. Furthermore, it is important to work with community leaders and media professionals, along with using new and creative tools and techniques to reach out to people and influence them. This requires the review of the currently used tools in order to change the negative stereotypes against women.
- The recommendations of concerned parties must be taken into consideration when planning and designing programs that target battered women in the four governorates. These recommendations must also be reviewed and implemented by decision-makers. Therefore, it is important to take the recommendations of different studies and researches into consideration, as well as translating these recommendations into concrete action plans and programs.

## Chapter Five

### 1. General Conclusions

- **Concerning service availability to battered women:** Survey results showed that some services are available to battered women at the health, social, psychological, economic and legal levels. However, despite the availability of these services in the four governorates, they vary from one governorate to another in terms of the extent of integrated interventions to ensure women's access to services (such as protection). The work scope of these institutions is also different from one area to another depending on the programs and adopted measures for protecting women and ensuring their safety. This is due to the weak capacity and shortage of human and financial resources in most institutions, thus restricting their ability to access different geographical areas inside these governorates. Governmental institutions also have weak capabilities due to the current political system and military occupation, which restrict these institutions' operations and prevents them from taking the necessary measures for women's protection, especially in areas "C".
- **Concerning factors that affect women's decision to contact relevant services:** Women's decisions to contact service-providing institutions and resort to protection are affected by a number of factors related to safety, trust, and alternatives in case of seeking services. This includes their fear of losing their children if they decide to seek protection, as well as their level of trust in these institutions. This decision is also affected by their experiences and those of their peers regarding the benefits and harms of approaching these institutions (for example, what level of protection was provided by these institutions?). Also, the economic factor is a critical factor for women who consider escaping from their suffered violence or finding a way to stop it.
- **Concerning service-providing institutions' impact on women's protection:** Despite the efforts of international, governmental and non-governmental institutions to combat violence against women in the four governorates and the growing concern about violence against women and girls at the level of policies, procedures, measures and plans for combating violence, these efforts are still insufficient to eliminate violence against women. Additionally, there is the absence of legal guarantees for women's protection, which forces women to remain silent and not report the violence that they face. This enables the traditional (family and tribal) customs to play a stronger role in filling the vacuum resulting

from the weak capacity of relevant institutions in confronting violence and its related consequences on women and their families.

- **Concerning factors that largely affect women's recovery and survival from violence:** The economic factor greatly affects the situation of women who undergo violence and social pressure. For example, survey findings showed a direct relationship between women's ability to confront violence and their level of financial independence and economic empowerment. Therefore, it is not wise to introduce sectoral interventions and programs for enhancing women's safety without having sustainable economic programs and support. Thus, any intervention related to protection will be incomplete without economic support. Consequently, and based on the recommendations of survey participants, the economic factor plays a pivotal role in enhancing women's protection from violence.
  
- **Concerning the institutions' conditions and their impact on the situation of battered women:** The quality of services provided to battered women is affected by a number of factors, such as the environment and the internal condition of these institutions in the four governorates. Another factor is the availability of financial resources for implementing special programs for combating violence against women, and the recruitment of well-trained personnel for working on women's issues. Most assessments showed the lack of financial resources in these institutions and their inability to cover different geographic areas in the four governorates. It was also noticed that major institutions many times are less concerned with these governorates and do not distribute resources equitably during the planning and implementation of programs that target battered women, including marginalized areas. This also applies to women with disabilities in these governorates. Furthermore, there is a lack of sustainability in the programs and services that tackle battered women's cases. It is also worth noting that effective coordination, and integrated roles and responsibilities, between institutions have a fundamental role in providing women with the needed services. Survey results showed that there is some degree of effective coordination between institutions, but, according to some survey respondents, this coordination needs to be systematic, institutionalized and sustainable instead of being limited to intervention cases.
  
- **Concerning the relationship between implementing the National Referral System and women's access to protection:** Despite the ongoing efforts of international, governmental and non-governmental organizations for enhancing the implementation of the national system for referring battered women to health,

social and legal services, work under this system and its related protocols is still incomplete, ambiguous and not applied by most institutions, especially among the female staff of NGOs working in the aforementioned governorates. However, the survey indicated that governmental institutions (especially the MoSD) do in fact implement this system, which is based on effective coordination between institutions. However, this system's coordination and implementation do not include all institutions working on combating violence against women in these governorates.

- **Concerning the relationship between effective laws and the actual response to battered women's needs:** The absence and weakness of different laws and conflict between them led to ineffective policies and measures for protecting women from violence. Many institutions aimed to overcome this problem by introducing procedures and adopting measures at the local and/or national levels. However, these measures still remain deficient given the absence of fair laws that enable women to recover from violence and support their reparation for damages resulting from perpetrated violence. If such laws were available, women would not hesitate to seek different services and request protection from official institutions.
- **Concerning institutions' response to women's needs during the emergency period:** The state of emergency related to the COVID-19 crisis exposed the weakness and fragility of anti-violence systems and the failure of institutions and their personnel to respond to women's needs. This led to the lack of practical options for women to confront violence. Several indicators also pointed out that women face multiple burdens during crises and emergency situations, which in turn doubles their exposure to violence.

## **2. General Recommendations and the Required Sectoral Interventions**

A set of steps are needed to improve the level of health, social, psychological and legal services for enhancing women's protection from violence. These steps include the following:

**At the legal system level:** To boost efforts and strengthen inter-institutional cooperation to reform the legal system related to women's protection from violence. This includes, for example, the ratification of the Family Protection Bill and addressing problems and conflicts in effective laws between the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem (such as the different penal codes and

personal status laws). This will lead to a better response to women's needs for protection.

**At the level of implementing the National Referral System for referring women to the services of concerned institutions:** To activate and implement the National Referral System for providing women with health, social and legal services. It is also essential to assess this system's level of effectiveness in the four governorates and enhance coordination and cooperation between governmental institutions and NGOs that target women who are exposed to violence.

**At the level of budgets for confronting violence against women:** To increase the allocated budgets and create economic programs that target women who are exposed to violence in the four governorates. Also, there should be an equitable distribution of financial resources and the quantitative and qualitative enhancement of human resources, in order to tackle the cases of battered women more effectively in these governorates.

**At the level of efficiency and quality of services provided to battered women:** To develop employee capacities and raise the efficiency of services provided to women in these governorates. Furthermore, female and male personnel in these governorates should undergo continuous training, as well as assessing the impact of training on the services provided to women.

**At the level of assessing the services provided to women in the four governorates:** Institutions must assess the benefits gained by battered women from the different services, programs, interventions and strategies, regardless of whether they were carried out by international, governmental or non-governmental institutions. It is also important to continuously monitor the impact of provided services on meeting women's needs, along with examining the level of women's access to these services. Institutions must also explore the protection options available to battered women and establish beneficial programs that help these women and protect them from violence.

**At the level of institutions' response to women's needs during the emergency period:** Relevant institutions should enhance their coordination at the sectoral level to respond to women's needs and keep abreast of the different changes in women's conditions during the emergency period. Therefore, these institutions must adopt alternative programs that respond to women's needs for protection from violence in times of emergency. These

institutions should also cooperate together in formulating practical action plans that target women and create alternatives for them to receive assistance and protection from violence. This can include alternative support lines for women on the sectoral level when they are unable to leave their homes or move freely during emergencies.

**At the level of programs and strategies' alignment with disabled women's needs:** Institutions must pay more attention to the empowering women with disabilities and women in marginalized areas in the four governorates. It is also imperative to align the different interventions and programs with women's needs for protection from violence. This is because many of these institutions do not have a strong impact on the situation of women with disabilities and women in marginalized areas, areas adjacent to the separation wall and areas "C".

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