Re-integration of Women Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: Combating Violence against Women in Palestinian Society

Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University
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Acronyms

GBV	Gender-based violence
VAW	Violence Against Women
WELOD	Women's Empowerment and Local Development 3
WCLAC	Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling

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Acknowledgements

Introduction[1]

In recent times, feminists, women's organizations, governments, and international donors and organizations have focused attention on addressing gender-based violence (GBV) and means to protect women from violence. The re-integration of women survivors of violence was not given serious consideration by these organizations until the late 1990s, but re-integration is now a new field addressed academically and practically in Palestinian society. This is the first study of its kind on the re-integration of women survivors of violence in the Palestinian context. It is part of the activities implemented by Italian Development Cooperation Agency Program: "Women's Empowerment and Local Development 3" (WELOD3).*

The aim of this study is to define the concept of re-integration and its strategic implementation from the perspective of women survivors in Palestinian society. It focuses on experiences and stories of re-integration, alongside the perceptions of service providers engaged in combating violence. The study starts by explaining that violence is a global phenomenon that assumes political, social and economic forms, intersecting with other existing power relations in society such as class, nationalism, ethnicity (as a social structure), and gender. Consequently, the causes of violence and its manifestations can vary from one economic, political, and social context to another. GBV[2] lies within a broader and more comprehensive context in society. Women experience GBV in different forms and at different levels according to the social, economic, political and cultural contexts within existing power structures and relationships. Accordingly, the phenomenon of GBV can only be tackled once the causes that produce violence are taken into consideration through an analysis of programs and policies designed to combat GBV. The issue of how to re-integrate victims of dangerous cases of violence in the context of their local communities, particularly those who sought refuge in shelters [3] must be addressed.

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1 Field workers Iman Assaf and Areen Hawari contributed to compiling documents from organizations and partially to some literature summaries. Researcher Iman Assaf conducted the interviews in the West Bank with partial participation from of the senior researcher of the research.

2 The conceptualization of violence can vary. Some sources use gender-based violence (GBV), some use the term "violence against women" (VAW), and other sources use both terms. This study uses the broader definition of GBV as "any damage rooted in social roles and disproportionate power structures" (Ward, 2002; Benjamin and Murchison, 2004:4). The definition by Bloom (2008:14) describes it as "a general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society." For further information on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, see the following link:

http://daccess.dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/Gen/N94/095/03/PDF/N9409503.pdf?OpenElement

3 Shelter is a concept used for places where women seek refugee due to violence against them, while some others use safe houses which has a similar meaning.

The study aims to promote deeper understanding of the meaning of re-integration from a woman's perspective. We believe that women are capable of creating strategies that can help them to re-build their lives. This contrasts with the common belief that they are victims who need others to guide them and dictate to them how to behave. The best way to help these women is through understanding and fulfilling their needs and demands. We also have to take into account that the options open to abused women exist within the context of extreme poverty and destruction of the social fabric resulting from the interaction of occupation and the neo-liberalist policies of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Consequently, the issue of re-integration and the decision to return or not to a previous community is linked not only to social and cultural identity, but to how women continuously negotiate social identities in society to integrate into new networks. In the context of occupied Palestine, the destruction of the social and economic infrastructure has resulted in the impoverishment of broad sectors of the Palestinian population. The adoption of neo-liberal, free market policies by the PA, and the shrinking of the state role in providing social, health and educational services, has deepened poverty still further.

The consequences of these policies have been detrimental to women. According to the most recent available statistics issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) (2011, 2013), poverty rates in households headed by women are higher than in male-headed households. Poverty suffered by women is reinforced by patriarchal social structures that restrict women's work outside the home, divide the labor market between the two sexes on an unjust basis, and deprive women of economic independence as a tool to combat and resist violence against them.

Any definition of the mechanisms and strategies of re-integration requires an understanding of the complications of GBV in the existing Palestinian social, economic, and political situation. An in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of GBV in Palestinian society is beyond the scope of this study, which will focus simply on a brief presentation of violence, its general definition, prevalence, and frequency. The study will then present an analysis of the current re-integration process and suggest recommendations for national measures to re-integrate women survivors of violence into society.

As discussed in the study, the policies adopted by NGOs and other international and national organizations are not always effective because they fail to comprehend local dynamics and sometimes they impose policies and intervention they believes that they represent the best solutions for the problems of abused women. For example, efforts to empower and raise awareness among/of abused women in shelters without creating parallel and continuous programs within the local and social environment, especially in households where violence against women is prevalent, leave women victims vulnerable to psycho-social conflict, with subsequent adverse consequences.

Various qualitative and quantitative research methods were adopted to fulfill the study objective of examining re-integration in the context of occupied Palestine. A review of literature included material on GBV in general and the re-integration of women survivors in local communities globally and in the Palestinian context. The study also used quantitative statistics published by the PCBS and other data for analysis to assemble an overview of GBV in Palestine.

Due to the difficulties of using a questionnaire to collect quantitative data on women survivors of violence, owed to their sensitive situation, the study used qualitative research methodology, including case studies, to address women's perceptions and priorities. Qualitative methods used in the study included focus groups and semi-structured interviews with open questions. Despite the restrictions imposed on the generalization of qualitative research results for several reasons, including the small size of the study sample, qualitative research methods are more suited to capturing the true experiences, suffering and feelings of abused women. It also aids understanding of the attitudes and experiences of women survivors toward the re-integration process within their families and local communities, thereby enabling realistic recommendations to be made. The interviews included general topics such as the social and demographic background of survivors, narratives of their stories of violence, experiences inside shelters (safe houses), their perception of re-integration, and strategies for adaptation with their families and local community. Other issues related and discussed are individual experience of each woman survivor of violence and the role of other participants who work with the abused women.

Research sample

This research focused only on women survivors of violence who had left the shelters, or were about to leave, due to the diversity of those subjected to violence and their different needs in order to re-integrate into their communities as it is difficult to represent all abused women. The study targeted the survivors who left specifically the Beit al-Aman shelter (safe house) in Nablus in the north of the West Bank, and the Mehwar Center in Bethlehem in the central West Bank. The research excluded the Emergency Center in Jericho as a temporary station for dealing with abused women pending referral to these other two houses.

The selection of the sample took into consideration, as much as possible, the inclusion of a broad spectrum of forms of violence to which the women survivors of violence had been subjected. Documents from the Nablus safe house classified

these forms of violence as follows:

- sexual violence outside the family
- rape within the family (incest), i.e., sexual assault within the family against the will of the victim rather than consensual sexual relations between relatives who may not marry, which is classified as adultery
- death threats
- restrictions on freedom
- physical abuse
- psychological abuse
- economic abuse.

The study also took into account the social and demographic background in terms of education, age, governorate, status, employment, and place of residence (village, city, camp). This diversity was deliberate to assess the differences between all these groups and evaluate why these survivors had succumbed to the cycle of violence.

Due to the sensitivity of the study topic and confidentiality of cases, we obtained the approval of the Minister of Social Development to conduct the research, interview the women survivors, and benefit from the data available in the registers of safe houses. We coordinated with the director of the Gender Unit at the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) to gain access to social workers dealing with women victims. These social workers coordinated the interviews with targeted women in the Ministry's offices in the governorates. All the interviews were recorded, with the exception of one.

Interviews were conducted during the period from February to the end of July 2015. The research team interviewed 14 survivors of violence and several representatives of parties working in the field, including the director of the Gender Unit at the MoSD; the director of Beit al-Aman safe house in Nablus; the director of the Mehwar Center; three social workers; the Tawasol coordinator in Ramallah; and the head of the legal unit in Ramallah governorate. Interviews with women survivors took place in all West Bank governorates, with the exception of Ramallah, Qalqilia and Tubas governorates where survivors and their families refused to be interviewed.

Two focus groups were organized with parties working in re-integration to ascertain a deeper understanding of the concept of re-integration, how it is planned and implemented, and the dynamics and challenges faced in this work. The research was intended to contribute initial information on this field. The first focus group was held in the offices of the MoSD with social workers responsible for

working with survivors in governorates and monitoring them once they leave the safe houses. The second focus group was held in the governorates with Tawasol[4] coordinators; two lawyers, one from the legal department of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the other from the governorate; and two employees from the MoSD responsible for the economic empowerment of abused women, including those who had left safe houses.

Study challenges and constraints

A number of challenges and constraints impacted the study and its results. The key challenge at the outset was the political context of occupation, the geographical fragmentation of Palestine, and the political division of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The political division had a crucial impact by restricting research to abused women in the West Bank and excluding those in the remaining Palestinian territories; this limited a comprehensive overview of all Palestinian society. It also obstructed examination of potential diversity in violence, experiences in combating it, and means of re-integration of women survivors in different regions. Another significant challenge faced by the study is the scarcity of international literature addressing the re-integration of women survivors once they leave safe houses. At the same time, there are no studies relevant to the subject in the Palestinian context, putting a heavy burden on the current study to establish a backdrop for future research.

Despite stating the confidential nature of the research from the outset, there were difficulties in locating women survivors and convincing them to participate due to the sensitivity of the subject and perceived fears and risks. The sensitivity of the topic and the fears of women survivors undoubtedly limited the number and distribution of women survivors open to be interviewed.

Bureaucratic procedures created a serious challenge during the research process: obtaining official approval for access to relevant documents, approval for interviews with women survivors and workers working with them, and permission to hold focus groups. Despite high levels of cooperation and flexibility demonstrated by

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4 Tawasol centers have been established as Women's empowerment centres in 11 West Bank governorates within the Italian Cooperation's programme WELOD, in partnership with Ministry if Women's Affairs and the Governorates. These centers are linked to women and children's units in the governorates (in most Governorates the Tawasol Coordinator is the Director of the Unit and their main goal is to strengthen the networking among women's organizations and Institution, to promote women's socio-economic empowerment, to promote women's political participation and to combat gender based violence). For further information see "Programme WELOD-Women's Empowerment and Local Development: Participatory Gender Analysis and Strategic Planning in 11 Women's Empowerment Centres (Tawasol) in the West Bank"- Italian Cooperation in Jerusalem 2012 and "Building Solidarity Networks as a Strategy to Combating Violence against Women. The experience of WELOD Programme" - Italian Cooperation in Jerusalem 2012

the parties targeted by the research, especially the MoSD, it proved more time-consuming than anticipated to obtain approval and disseminate decisions to governorates for implementation on the ground. For example, interviews with survivors were only permitted using female social workers in governorate offices, and in some limited cases, in the safe houses, which are already over-burdened. For this reason, the organization and holding of interviews took a long time and compromised the research schedule. The research team worked hard to overcome all the challenges posed.

The next part of the study addresses re-integration as an important phase in combating GBV, especially domestic violence. Women subjected to violence request services, assistance, and support from more than one party and on more than one level, including protection in safe houses for severe cases. Nevertheless, entry to the safe house can create confrontation between survivors and their families and local communities. This must be acknowledged when the women leave the safe house and as part of the re-integration process in local communities.

Chapter Two

Re-integration of Women Survivors of Violence in Palestinian Society from a Literature Perspective

In recent decades, the prevalence of all forms of violence, including gender-based violence, has prompted strategies and programs to be developed to combat this phenomenon, including the re-integration of women survivors in their families and in local communities.[5] The multiple ramifications of GBV make it difficult to cover all the different aspects, age groups, and gender issues. For this reason, this study focuses on the re-integration of women survivors of GBV once they leave the safe houses because these women represent extreme cases of suffering due to violence and are the most difficult to re-integrate.

Before entering into an in-depth discussion on the re-integration of women survivors, the concept of re-integration should be defined. **The word 'integrate' in Arabic is a verb that means to 'become entrenched in something'. It can also mean the merging of two things or more into one, unifying them tightly.**

On a conceptual level, this study tends to use the concept of integration rather than inclusion. The first is based on free will and a willingness to belong and integrate with the group, which assists in every way possible. In contrast, inclusion is usually external to a person's will, as in being immature or having a lack of freedom. Integration here does not mean identification, but harmony and agreement (Bin Bilqassem, unknown date). Another study affirms that integration requires two conditions: a person's will and their personal striving to integrate and adapt. This is a voluntary expression of their "integration" and the ability of the community to respect personal differences and distinctions (Maliki, 5:2013). It must be noted that integration is an ongoing long-term process. For women survivors of GBV, integration means return to their original environment in a manner that ensures a decent life. If that is not possible, it may be return to an alternative environment to which the survivor will belong according to her own wishes and free will, accepted by the local community that respects her decisions. This is in addition to providing all means of support to the victim to ensure her re-integration.

The literature available on the re-integration of women survivors of violence does not discuss re-integration from a conceptual aspect. Re-integration is addressed as a means to return the survivor to her normal life within family and community through programs and activities that meet protection, health and legal needs, alongside psychological and social support to empower survivors professionally and economically to interact socially in a normal life (see United Nations Population Fund).

EU guidelines on "violence against women and girls and combating all forms of discrimination against them" are circulated internationally and adopted in regions where the EU implements its activities. The guidelines focus on three fundamental principles: prevention of violence; protecting and supporting victims of violence; and prosecution of the perpetrator.[6] The widespread prevalence of GBV[7] in areas of armed conflict, natural disasters, emergencies and crises, prompted the United Nations to coordinate with a number of organizations to establish common criteria, to be developed annually, that define violence, its forms, and protection and integration mechanisms. The handbook issued by UNICEF (2010) distinguishes between two basic models adopted by international organizations in interventions to combat violence: the multi-sector model and the multi-level model.

According to this handbook, no one sector can combat violence. Therefore, the multi-sector model starts out from the premise that each sector is responsible for close coordination with other sectors to respond to the protection requirements of female survivors of violence, and should provide them with remedial and consultative services to re-integrate them into society. These sectors include: the health sector; psychological and social sector; educational and economic sector; legal or justice sector; and the security sector (police). The handbook claims that this model focuses on the rights and needs of women survivors to access support services, maintains dignity, ensures confidentiality and safety, and enables identification of the procedure to be followed in dealing with the GBV incident. In addition, close cooperation should take place with local women's groups and representatives from the ministry responsible for the rights of women. Women and girls must be included from the outset in the design of programs to ensure they play an effective role during implementation, evaluation, and development processes.

The second, multi-level model was developed to prioritize the issue of prevention of violent incidents and ensure the institutionalization of structural, systematic and individual protection. This demands the reform of legislation and the courts, of training and employment policies, and of the security services (GBV Area of Responsibility Working Group, 2010: 13-15). Despite holistic interventions and executive procedures for services provided to women survivors of GBV covering protection, treatment, empowerment and re-integration, in addition to coordination by service providers, World Health Organization statistics show

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5 Combating and eradicating GBV as a phenomenon requires structural changes that address the causes of deepening violence in general, particularly against women. This is linked at its core to global capitalism based on exploitation and control of populations and their resources, and with colonialism in its direct and indirect forms. The ongoing struggle to create structural changes that eliminate the causes of violence should not undermine attempts to alleviate the intensity of violence suffered by Palestinian women and abused persons (male and female) for the foreseeable future, whether on a national or an individual level.

6 EU Guidelines of Violence Against Women and Girls and Combating All Forms of Discrimination Against Them

http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/documents/eu_westbank/20110307_violence againstwomen_en.pdf

7 UNICEF Committee, International Rescue and Programs Committee, UNFPA and International Medical Corps (GBV Area of Responsibility Working Group, 2010)

that levels of violence are still high. In fact, violence may be increasing in some regions of the world due to the fact that most of the policies and strategies adopted concentrate on treating the impact of violence and attempt to prevent it without analyzing the structures that gave rise to it. In practice, the focus is on individual treatment while the collective empowerment of women survivors of violence is ignored. International organizations often implement a package of interventions and activities in the regions they operate in without taking into account the different social, economic, cultural and political contexts, the existence of colonialism, or regions involved in ethnic or religious armed conflict, especially in the third world.

Some evidence from the field shows that intervention programs that target GBV victims are not always successful. For example, GBV violence is aggravated by many factors, including poverty and unemployment and the challenges these present to the role of the father or husband. In the case of Afghanistan, Benjamin and Murchison (2004:18) observed that the creation of job opportunities to empower women survivors of violence sometimes had negative implications and jeopardized the women's lives. Additionally, the institutionalization of protection measures requires a high level of commitment by national governments, often shackled to the policies of international organizations, particularly the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which may require the state to withdraw care services and shift responsibility to the shoulders of civil society organizations.

One study in Turkey stated that women's movements and organizations had initiated the establishment of safe houses in the 1980s due to the weakness of the government in this sphere. The same study also stated that the women's movement later put pressure on the government to provide safe houses and to give financial support to all civil and government safe houses. However, the study pointed out that difficulties arose due to the scarcity of resources allocated to the safe houses by the government and/or the shrinking of services provided by a government (Diner Toktas, 2013). In this regard, we cannot ignore the role played by civil society organizations globally, including in Palestine. These organizations have established safe houses in the belief that they understand women's circumstances and the root causes beyond their problems, and can provide them with more support than that offered by the government.

Very few studies address the issue of safe houses (or shelters) as a means of protection for abused women. Westlund (1999) discussed the difference between modern organizations – which often fail to provide permanent protection or real empowerment for GBV survivors – and the shelters or safe houses. She believes that those in charge of safe houses must address the individual needs of each survivor in the context of social class, ethnicity, and educational and cultural

status. Westlund focuses on the need not to treat the survivor as a mentally ill patient or as someone guilty of a crime. She believes that safe houses should work on empowerment and advocacy programs with the external world, and that community activities and campaigns may help the success of safe houses (Westlund, 1999, pp 1064-1065). However, we find that most of the policies adopted did not transform the system as Westlund had hoped, and at the same time, were very far from the vision of Foku, who criticized individual solutions and focused on making structural changes.

Most of the literature focused on studying and examining all aspects of the experiences of abused women in the safe houses. Some studies were interested in women voicing their experiences inside the safe houses, about the services and programs provided, and satisfaction with the services on offer. Some women survivors of domestic violence reaffirmed the importance of safe houses and the positive impact on their lives as protection from homelessness and continuous violence, enabling them to maintain custody of their children. The safe houses also provided basic needs such as information, help with children, and emotional support (Lyon, Lane and Menard, 2008). Another study conducted in the United States explored the characteristics of women who sought refuge in safe houses and found that the majority were young, black (meaning they are from an ethnicity different from a white American), housewives, and had not completed their education (Grossman, 2011). One study pointed out the impact of the service philosophy adopted by workers in safe houses, and the effect of staff awareness of the definition of violence on the assistance provided to abused women, whether in safe houses or during their return to the local community (Wathen et al., 2015). Another article revealed the increasing difficulties resulting from the scarcity of the resources allocated by the state and/or shrinking of services provided by the state, as in the Turkish case (Diner and Toktas, 2013).

Critelli and Willet (2013) addressed the problems and challenges faced by a safe house in Pakistan based on in-depth interviews conducted with the female founders of the house and its staff. The article addressed the impact of the cultural and political context on the work of this safe house during the emergency period when the political climate was tense and uncertain, and human rights activists were being arrested by the authorities. There was also instability from increasing Islamic fundamentalism and a lack of respect for the international conventions signed by the state such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), or implementation of existing agreements on the protection of women. Many challenges existed regarding the re-integration of women into the community, the right of women to make choices in their lives, strong opposition in the local community, and assaults and defamation of female workers in the safe house. The staff faced difficulties

in helping these women, as they could not provide rapid solutions for them, especially in cases where women were asking for a divorce and were under threat from their families. As a result, abused women remained in the safe house for a longer period than they were supposed to stay officially (some remained for two years instead of three months). Further to these problems, there were added difficulties of financial security and the creation of job opportunities for divorced women who had lost the traditional financial support from their ex-spouses. Re-integration was hampered due to the social stigma attached to these women and the failure of society to accept them. These constraints, especially the material ones, obliged most of the women (about two thirds of them) to return to their spouses or families. The remaining one third of women decided to search for work and homes to live alone. The study findings indicated that the decision to seek independence from the family did not always provide protection for women survivors after leaving the safe houses because some still faced threats from their families, and the workplace may also be a source of exploitation. The Pakistani experience led to calls for the establishment of an economic rehabilitation center for women and a permanent place of residence for women workers; these may be options to be studied for the Palestinian case.

At the same time, the relevant parties must take into account the social, economic, political and cultural environment of each woman survivor. For instance, in the Afghan case, the study by Benjamin and Murchison (2004:18) concluded that the creation of job opportunities for women survivors of violence sometimes has negative implications and some women were subjected to further violence because the local community was opposed to female employment.

A safe house is the final resort used by abused women to obtain help and protection from violence, but these women eventually have to leave the safe house where they sought refuge. The re-integration of women survivors and the nature of help required at this stage varies from one woman to another according their social background, family environment, and the form of violence they were subjected to. Thus, the requirements for re-integration are different for each woman. Additionally, the success of the re-integration process within the local community depends to a large extent on the support and empowerment received by the survivor during the stay in the safe house, the conditions upon leaving, and the follow up and services provided, especially in the initial stage after leaving. Other factors include structural, economic, social and cultural aspects, plus individual factors related to educational level, age, economic independence, marital status, and if the survivor has children.

The real problem faced by women survivors upon leaving the safe house is the response of service providers. Moe (2007) examined the way in which social structures and organizations respond to battered women and their constructive criticism as a first step in combating violence. Moe stated that social marginalization, beyond gender, is instrumental in obtaining institutional help. The experiences of abused women reveal that perseverance in requesting help is effective in resisting violence prior to entering the safe house, during the woman's time in the safe house, and after leaving it. These women attempted to avoid their violent husbands during marriage, protected their children, and obtained custody by asking for legal assistance and help from family and friends. However, the researcher refers to structural constraints that limit the survivor's ability to re-integrate into the community. The researcher gives several examples, such as the inability to obtain employment for some women due to a previous criminal offense, or a lack of finance to take advantage of the legal framework by filing for divorce. She also indicates constraints related to ethnicity, language difficulties by non-American white women, and the failure to register in legal registers, which deprives women of state services and support. The researcher stated that women's stories emphasized the positive impact of any assistance, albeit very small. This is because support from organizations motivates women to ask for assistance from other sources.

In the Arab world, civil society organizations funded by international and regional bodies have adopted and implemented a variety of programs designed to empower women and eliminate gender-based discrimination, marginalization, and poverty. Additionally, national committees and non-governmental bodies have been formed to draft national strategies to combat violence against women. The Arab Women's Organization (AWO) prepared a strategy (2011-2020) to assist Arab states to adopt a holistic approach to confronting violence against women and promoting programs to protect women and girls (Arab Women's Organization, 2011). In some Arab countries, civil society organizations took steps to confront gender-based violence by providing health and psychological treatment, social counseling, and protection in safe houses. In Lebanon, many centers and societies worked together to confront domestic and community violence against women through programs and activities such as safe houses for abused women, economic support, developing the skills of social workers, raising awareness among security forces and lawyers, and developing work strategies with men (AWO 2009, Lebanese Ministry of Social Development, the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women). Algeria was one of the first Arab countries to establish a safe house for abused women in the early 1990s.

Combating Gender-Based Violence in the Palestinian Context

A rapid review of literature addressing violence and GBV in the occupied Palestinian context reveals it to be focused on identifying the prevalence, characteristics, impact on marital relations, and mental health cases resulting from the exposure of women to violence and maltreatment. A survey entitled *Palestinian Women and Domestic Violence Issues* was conducted by Mohammad Haj Yehya of the Bissan Center for Research and Development in 1995. The PCBS has conducted comprehensive and broader surveys on violence, the first of which was the Domestic Violence Survey 2005-2006, followed by a number of analytical studies of the survey data. In 2012, PCBS issued the Survey of Violence in Palestinian Society – Main Findings, 2011. The Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University also conducted a study.

Previous studies and surveys have shown that the percentage of married Palestinian women who have experienced at least one form of violence on at least one occasion rose from 23% in 2005 to 37% in 2011 (PCBS, 2012). Some local literature discussed political violence as a form of violence and its impact on Palestinian women, but does not consider occupational violence in the broader and more comprehensive framework of violence in the Palestinian context. This means that it is the infrastructure that produces violence, intersecting and interacting with other forms of violence embedded in the local culture and strengthened by the patriarchal structure, as discussed later.[8]

Literature on GBV in Palestine does not refer to the re-integration of women in their families and local communities, but some studies indicate that Palestinian women subjected to violence adopt multiple strategies based on the economic,

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8 The Asian & Pacific Islander Institute refers to domestic violence used in that culture to justify gender inequality and violence by invoking traditional cultural beliefs about how women should be treated. Defense of the culture, location, country, religion, etc., is, in fact, a defense of the patriarchal system in that country's, religion, culture or identity, and the culture of violence everywhere. Patriarchal culture may be manifested in an army base or a rural town, just as the patriarchal culture in Chicago differs from that in Dubai or Manila.

Patriarchy is social relations of power between men and women, women and women, and men and men. It is a system to maintain the privileges of class, gender, social standing, racism, and heterosexuals, and it is the status quo of power. It is based on primitive forms of oppression such as violence, and its subtle forms such as laws to perpetuate inequality, parental beliefs about males, and heterosexual dominance in GBV. Patriarchy is a structural strength affecting power relationships, whether harmful or harmless (Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence -APIIDV). For more information, please refer to:

http://www.apiidv.org/violence/patriarchy-power.php

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social, political and cultural context, and the social and demographic background of each woman. Resort to a safe house remains the least preferred option by abused women. PCBS data (2012) revealed many of the methods and strategies used to confront a husband's violence, the majority of them passive in nature. More than two thirds of assaulted women opted to remain silent and not to inform anyone. Just under two thirds of them opted to ignore the husband and stop speaking to him for several days. Breaking the silence about violence against women starts by telling the family, and may extend to either requesting relatives to intervene or leaving the marital home to move in with the family temporarily or permanently. Families may not always react in the same way: some are supportive and help their daughter to divorce and move out of the cycle of a violent relationship. However, in the majority of cases, family intervention does not take this form.

Access to equitable solutions for women is subject to the existing framework of power relations and traditions that uphold the dominance and rights of men at the expense of women and their rights. Under this framework, issues of violence are resolved in the private sphere and outside legal and regulatory frameworks, as confirmed in interviews conducted for this study. A number of women survivors reported that their families returned them to the husband's house despite the violence they were subjected to. The majority of families interviewed objected to the divorce of their daughters as a solution to escape from a violent relationship. Statistical data show that where kinship or friendships are weak, the percentage of women who request help decreases. Formal choices such as a woman's center or the police were the options exercised the least, or almost negligibly by less than one per cent of women. Very few women go to a safe house except as a last resort or when referred by the police or other parties when the woman's life is in danger, according to the reports of partner parties.

We have to take into account that the options open to abused women exist within the context of extreme poverty and the destruction of the social fabric resulting from the interaction of occupation, the neo-liberal policies of the PA, and the patriarchal social culture that reinforces power relations and male dominance within the family and society at the expense of women and their subjection. Women's options are colored by their social and cultural identities and their interaction within these contexts. Thus, the strategies used by women to resist violence differ from one woman to another. For example, poor and illiterate mothers usually have fragile and weak circumstances that oblige them to keep silent and not to talk about the violence for fear of the abuser, losing housing and support, or losing custody of the children. There are also fears of social condemnation and stigma for disclosing family affairs, and sometimes the belief exists that the woman herself provoked the violence against her. This difficult setting, reinforced by weak formal social protection frameworks, limited

information, and lack of trust in the existing frameworks does not mean that all women capitulate. The powerful experiences of women who entered safe houses demonstrate their resistance to the reality of violence against them, as this study will describe later.

Chapter Three

Re-integration of Women Survivors: Ambitions versus Reality

Re-integration of Women Survivors: Ambitions versus Reality

As clarified in the introduction, the research determinants were to analyze the integration and re-integration solely of women survivors of violence who had left the safe house. These women constitute a visible category through whom the re-integration process can be understood and analyzed since they have full contact with the service provider organizations entrusted to follow-up the re-integration, unlike other abused women who are invisible to official institutions and are therefore outside the scope of official re-integration. Resistance to GBV is a complex issue and the return of women survivors to their homes and re-integration in their environment and communities is even more complicated. On a practical level, the economic, social, political and cultural context has an impact on protection and re-integration models. In the Palestinian context, the issue of re-integration must take into account an occupation that produces violence in all its forms, interacting with capitalism to generate class violence and the exploitation of workers (males and females) and the poor in cities, camps and rural areas. In addition, the existence of authoritative patriarchal violence exploits and abuses women, albeit in different forms linked to class, age, education, marital and employment status, and other determinants of these women.

Reality of Re-integration of Women Survivors in Palestinian Society

It is difficult to capture all aspects of the re-integration process of women survivors of GBV. Nevertheless, preliminary indicators point out that local women's organizations and the Palestinian government have become increasingly aware that the re-integration of women survivors in their local communities is a significant factor in tackling violence and is a key part of strategies to combat and resist GBV. Women's organizations and the Palestinian government are now more cognizant of the importance of preventing GBV and providing support and services for abused women.

Reports by organizations and grassroots women's bodies confirm that violence against women started to attract attention in an organized manner at the beginning of the nineties. Some organizations like the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling started to provide counseling and awareness services about violence against women. In 2000, the Palestinian NGO Forum for Combating Violence against Women (al-Muntada) was established by a number of women's civil organizations to improve institutional mechanisms in Palestinian society that protect and support abused women. The National Committee for Combating Violence against Women was established in 2008 by a decision issued by the Council of Ministers and is headed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In coordination with partners and parties working with abused women, the Committee developed a National

Strategy for Combating Violence against Women 2011–2019; a medium-term plan for the period 2011–2013 was derived from this strategy.

The women's movement and the Ministry of Women's Affairs looked seriously at potential amendments to domestic legislation, specifically the Penal Code and Personal Status Law, and the draft of the Law for the protection of the family from violence" waiting to be approved by the Cabinet, all of which include discriminatory articles against women. The content of these laws is based on women's inferiority, subordination and dependence on men, and impacts on women's basic rights and other rights related to personal freedom and self-determination. The blocking of a new Penal Code may indicate that the elimination of violence in society as a whole, and against women in particular, is not a priority for the PA. It may also be an indication of the extent of social constraints and the strength of the patriarchal system, as well as highlighting the internal political tensions between the Palestinian Authority and religious and traditional authorities opposed to such legislation. More importantly, this is taking place under an occupation that imposes a state of siege, preventing geographical and political communication, and disrupting parliamentary functions to approve and legislate. The Palestinian people and social groups live in a constant state of confrontation with the occupation, its policies, and its daily practices. There is also the draft of the "Law for the Protection of the Family from Violence" (Family Protection Bill) waiting to be approved by the Cabinet.

Documents from the Ministry of Women's Affairs indicate how its capacities to combat gender-based violence are constrained by the weaknesses in legislation, the difficulty of international agencies and donors to take local factors into account in tackling violence, and poor intervention mechanisms to protect the abused. There are no shelters in the Gaza Strip and only three houses in the West Bank which consists of: Safe house in Nablus, Mehwar Center in Bethlehem, Emergency house in Jericho, and the Girls house in Bethlehem (only for young girls less than 18 years old). Other constraints include a lack of protection for staff working in safe houses and the absence of follow up mechanisms or staff supervision.

A critical review of programs to combat violence in the Palestinian context indicates that these programs are the outcome of pressure put on the government as the key party by the women's movement and international donors.[9] The pivotal focus of plans and programs is on legal amendments dealing with issues of abused women, awareness campaigns, workshops and training to change patriarchal traditions and stereotypical gender relationships, the institutionalization of opposition to

9 For further information, see Rima Hamami, "Gender Policy in the Peace Package: Programming GBV, Governance and Globalization in Occupied Palestine" 2014. Unpublished research paper (preliminary copy).

violence and the establishment of safe houses for abused women. These are all important issues, but they fail to address the substantial structural violence in the occupied Palestinian context, including the damaged economic structure and the colonial dominance over all aspects of life in Palestinian society.[10]

In recent years, the PA attempted to develop strategies to support the most extreme cases of GBV where women were forced to ask for external help and resort to safe houses. Several parties participate in the re-integration of women survivors into their local communities and each party implements the tasks entrusted to it. Together, these tasks ensure that women survivors can live a decent life and enjoy their rights after leaving the safe house. Partners in the re-integration process are the Ministry of Social Development; the police; shelters (safe houses) ; the Ministry of Women's Affairs; the governorate, represented in the legal counselor and the security department and the Tawasol center; and civil society organizations, specifically women's centers and frameworks. Recently, the Council of Ministers issued Decision No. 18 of 2013 on a national referral system for abused women[11] to regulate the relationship between service providers and improve women's access to health, legal, and social services. This Decision identified the parties responsible in the health and social sectors, including the Family Protection Units in police centers, safe houses, and social workers for women in the Ministry of Social Development and the governorate. The Decision was preceded by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Interior, represented by the police, and the Ministry of Social Development to protect abused women. According to this MoU, Family Protection Units at police centers should monitor abused women and children. In 2011, the Palestinian Council of Ministers issued the Abused Women's Protection Centers System No. 12 of 2011, which regulates the work, tasks and jurisdiction of these centers. The responsibility for referral and follow-up of abused women was limited to the official authorities, and the role of civil society organizations was marginalized.

As mentioned above, in Palestine, there are three centers for abused women in danger: the Jericho Emergency Center, Beit al-Aman in Nablus, and the Mehwar Center in Bethlehem, in addition to the Girls house in Bethlehem for unmarried girls under 18. The Emergency Center, which was established by the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, receives cases only for a few days during which negotiations between the family and the relevant parties take place to end the violence. If the woman needs to stay for a longer period (more than one month),

10 This is apparent in the projects and programs of the Ministry of Women's Development and grassroots women's organizations.
11 For further information on the text of the Decision, see: http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=16570

she will be referred to one of the two safe houses. The safe houses receive all women except those whose problems are related to drugs, prostitution, mental health issues, or disabilities. Women are referred by one of the parties authorized to make referrals to safe houses.

Beit al-Aman in Nablus was established in 1999 and managed by the Family Defense Society in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development. Data from the shelter (safe house) in Nablus show that 179 abused women, with 39 of their children, were received during the period from 2011 to 2013. The newest safe house was the Mehwar Center, it was established in 2007 financed by Italian funds and assisted technically in partnership with MoSD and WCLAC in Bethlehem received 321 abused women during the period 2007-2014. It is unclear whether the number of women is related to actual capacity or simply the number of women who needed protection in these houses.

Abused women in safe houses are from various governorates of the West Bank; the siege imposed by the occupation on the Gaza Strip prevents abused women from using the safe houses in the West Bank, despite the fact that the Gaza Strip has no alternative facility to provide protection. The lack of a unified and organized database for all organizations working with women in danger who register in the legal departments of governorates or in safe houses makes accurate comparisons about abused women and their situation very difficult. However, preliminary data point to differences in the number of abused women per governorate. The Nablus safe house indicates that a high percentage of abused women are from Nablus governorate (around 40%), while the Mehwar Center data indicate that a high percentage of abused women received in the Center are from Bethlehem governorate. Additionally, data from both houses indicate that abused women are from rural origins, are young (below 32 years of age), and the less educated are more vulnerable. These findings match the results of studies in other parts of the world, as revealed in the study conducted by Grossman and Lundy, 2011.[12]

High poverty rates and low educational levels in rural areas, especially in marginalized and remote communities, plus low social awareness and male dominance in these regions, may all be factors. Young, less educated and poor women are more vulnerable and have weak negotiating positions in power relations that give women an inferior status within the family against male dominance. Sometimes, younger women may be more willing to ask for official external help beyond family and traditional assistance.

The forms of violence to which abused women in safe houses had been subjected varied, but the highest percentage (one third) was violence and sexual assault

12 The annex provides further clarification on statistics of women using the safe houses or who reported to Ramallah governorate.

by persons from outside the family. This was followed by psychological violence (18%), physical violence (14%), sexual assaults from inside the family (incest) (9%), and death threats (6%). A woman may have been subjected to multiple and interrelated forms of violence.

Social and Demographic Background of Participants in the Study

Research data analysis revealed that the attributes of individuals in the purposive sample selected for the research were similar to the general characteristics of the research community of women who entered safe houses. The majority of survivors of violence interviewed for this study were young, ranging in age between early twenties and late thirties. While some were illiterate, the majority had intermediate education and some had university education. The dominant background of those interviewed was rural. The nature of violence they suffered from and the reasons for entering the safe house varied from life-threatening violence by the husband, incest (sexual assault in the family), sexual violence from outside the family, and running away from home because parents refused to allow marriage to a specific person. All these reasons require official intervention to protect the survivor, whether against her will or not, based on the assumption that her life is threatened. Interview data also indicate that 7 out of 14 survivors belonged to families that suffered from poverty or disintegration resulting from the absence of the mother due to divorce or death. Two survivors suffered violence from their husbands, who were holders of the blue (Israeli) ID card, depriving the women of their legal rights associated with marriage, divorce and custody. The fact that these husbands are not subject to Palestinian laws and regulations prevents the mothers from resolving the problem of the children's identity because technically the two spouses have different places of residence.

Practical Experience of Re-integration from a Needs and Interests Perspective

Re-integration is linked to the philosophy and status of the individual and his goals and interests. For survivors, re-integration means to lead a calm and stable life free from violence. This is expressed clearly and directly by the survivors. Some see re-integration as shedding the mantle of family control and violence and becoming self-reliant. One survivor said: "I am looking forward to a new and good life. I do not want to go back to my parent's house because it is impossible to return to insults and threats. I want to be independent." Another survivor confirmed: "I want to go out and live my life," although she was looking for a gradual process of re-integration and not a dramatic one. Another survivor commented: "I want to live my life. I want my independence. I want so many things. I want to work." These statements reflect the survivors' eagerness for a decent life, free of insults, and at the same time, the freedom and capacity for self-determination and self-reliance.

Stakeholders in the re-integration process define the concept in different ways, though they agree on the general framework. The director of Beit al-Aman in Nablus defines re-integration as: "The return of a survivor of violence to society through self-reliance and economic development; and by social re-integration so she does not return to the same situation she was living in previously." The director of the Mehwar Center based her definition of re-integration on a human rights perspective and giving the survivor the right to determine her destiny: "The re-integration of a survivor of violence requires protection and empowerment. We will re-integrate them in their communities based on a plan devised with the survivors that respects their right to self-determination, which is a priority to ensure their safety and dignity. Hence, re-integration is carried out in the correct way." A social researcher in the governorate said: "Re-integration is the beginning of a journey where a woman feels like a human being like everyone else, but under supervision as we cannot give her full independence. We are with her at work; she is under our supervision and we know who she works with. We talk to her frequently over the phone."

Ultimately, and based on the definition identified in the focus groups, re-integration may be defined as: "The continuous process involving civil society organizations and the government with the aim of rehabilitating the survivor psychologically, socially, legally, and empowering her economically to ensure her return of her own free will to her native environment (the family and local community), or to an alternative environment, with the commitment of the parties concerned to provide legal, social, health and economic services. In addition, working with the family and local community to attempt changes in the environment that generated the violence against the survivor and to help re-embrace her."

The content and stages of re-integration process

The earlier quote by a social researcher of the right of the survivor to receive services, to self-determination and full independence while remaining under supervision, raises a very important issue about the nature of the relationship between the survivor and the service providers during the various phases of the re-integration process. Where are the boundaries between protection of the survivor to ensure her security and safety versus her right to self-determination and full independence so that custody does not violate her rights? For example, are the police entitled to transfer the survivor to a safe house based on a report about the gravity of the matter even if she refuses? The decisive point is undoubtedly the safety and security of the survivor and to what extent her life is threatened, while ensuring her right to self-determination and independence, on condition that she is capable of determining her options. A report on the threat to the life of the survivor requires active involvement on the part of the survivor herself to determine the level of risk, whether at the time the complaint is submitted or

when she is scheduled to leave the safe house. She also has the right to determine her place of residence rather than leaving this in the hands of the family. The basic principle is to ensure that the woman's right to self-determination is not compromised and is not contingent on the approval of the family. This has been highlighted by several survivors who were interviewed. If a woman is capable of determining her options and the threat to her life no longer exists, it is a flagrant violation of her basic rights to make her right to self-determination conditional on the will of her family. Again, this is an interpretation of power relationships and patriarchal hegemony that constrains women's rights.

Important issues in the framework of re-integrating GBV survivors within their families and local communities include the following:

a. **The survivor is the focus of the re-integration process**: The fundamental principle is that the survivor should be at the center of the re-integration process. The decision to return to her original environment or an alternative one rests with her. Her right to self-determination is paramount. Coordination with her family and other parties is secondary and should take place in an environment that guarantees her rights and interests.

b. The re-integration process is a continuous and long-term process.

c. The re-integration process has several phases: The first phase is receiving the case of an abused woman, which starts at the moment she arrives at one of the relevant institutions and is transferred to a safe house. The second phase is guidance and empowerment in the safe house. The third and final stage is when the survivor leaves the safe house and returns to live in her original environment under new conditions or in a new environment that guarantees all her rights.

d. The re-integration process is a comprehensive, integral and interrelated process. At each phase, several partners cooperate in the work with the survivor to meet her needs. Partner parties should comply with clear principles at every phase.

e. The mechanisms adopted must take into account the survivor's social background and the nature of the violence she was exposed to (i.e., the distinctive attributes of each survivor).

The phases of the re-integration process are interdependent and cannot be separated from each other because each phase complements what was initiated in a previous phase.

First Phase: Reception and Transfer of Cases of Abused Women

For women exposed to dangerous situations that require immediate and rapid intervention, the re-integration process may start with the arrival of the abused woman to one of the partner parties dealing with GBV. Following the submission of a complaint, the Family Protection Unit at the police station initiates negotiations with the family or takes preventive procedures against offenders depending on the nature of the assault.

Several parties are involved in this phase: the body to which the abused woman reported, the MoSD, the governorate, the Family Protection Unit at the police station, which is usually the first point of contact with abused women, or the Ministry of Health in the case of injuries. The pivotal actor at this phase is the Family Protection Unit at the police station as the referral point to assess the gravity of the case.

It is evident from the analysis of interviews that the establishment of Family Protection Unit at police stations during recent years was a positive step. For example, it allows women to deal with female staff who understand GBV issues, and also permits privacy inside police stations in a dedicated physical space. The experiences of women who repeatedly resorted to the police for assistance illustrate that the establishment of safe houses was a milestone as it provided a place to stay and vital services in contrast with the past when an abused woman was put in jail for protection. From society's point of view, this converted her from a victim to a guilty person or criminal, enhancing the traditional patriarchal perceptions in society.

Analysis of interviews revealed that the police react in different ways towards offenders and abused women depending on the nature of the violence inflicted. We may illustrate several cases, but there is no set model. For instance, Family Protection Unit at police stations resolve some cases of violence through negotiations with the survivor's family, particularly in cases that have not reached a dangerous stage or did not involve physical and sexual abuse. This also applies in some cases of running away from home to get married, in which no measures are taken against the offenders. Family Protection Unit at police stations act rapidly in cases of violence that threaten the lives of women and they also pursue legal action against offenders with the public prosecution.

However, most of those interviewed agreed that the experience at the police station was difficult, albeit with different experiences. One of the difficulties is the procedures for the transfer of abused women to safe houses. The cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Interior, represented by police directorates and the MoSD, stipulates that new cases cannot be received by safe houses without a transfer ordered by the Family Protection Unit and the MoSD. Giving

the MoSD sole responsibility creates a problem when the abused woman arrives at the police station outside the working hours of the MoSD social worker and the survivor has to wait at the police station until the next day. Means to resolve this problem must be found and a party assigned to be responsible for these issues.

Weakness in following up procedures and rules of behavior of police personnel towards abused women leave them vulnerable to exploitation by police officers who know their records and may seek to impose a personal relationship or fulfill a personal interest. One survivor claimed that she had been exposed to harassment by police personnel. Although her claims require verification, it indicates the possibility of such an event with other cases. The risks are promoted in view of the imbalance in power relationships between abused women looking for protection, or claiming their rights, and the police apparatus, which is historically associated with oppression in the Palestinian memory from the period of the colonial civil authority. This is aggravated by male patriarchal domination over women. The interviews illustrated that the significance of the violence undergone by some women was belittled or mocked. For example, cases of marital violence that had not posed a danger to the abused were not taken seriously, or cases of girls fleeing homes to marry a person to whom the family is opposed were dealt with in a cursory manner.

The same applies to some abused women who report repeatedly to the police. One survivor stated that the police do not provide protection for a survivor of violence after she leaves the safe house. She claimed that the police refused to accept her complaint, although she did not explain the reason. However, the matter is worth examination in the context of the daily practices of the police towards survivors. Another survivor stated that police intervention in her case and their harsh position against her father was only prompted by favoritism towards the other family in her case. The interviews also made evident that the focus of the Family Protection Unit is usually an assessment of the existing danger and ways to provide protection for the abused women. This may result in an arbitrary decision to transfer the woman to a safe house against her will, ignoring the repercussions of such a decision and the psychological impact on survivors and their families. Some survivors said that they were not fully aware that submitting a complaint would take them away from their houses and children. One even said that she thought that she would stay at the police station for few hours and then return home. Protection is an important and grave issue, but the survivor must be made aware of what is going to happen. Additional criteria need to be identified about the decision to transfer abused women to safe houses.

Interviews with specialists in this field, social workers dealing with issues of violence, and focus groups, raised the significant issue of coordination and

Complimentarity between the unit of family protection in police station and other institutions. The role of the Ministry of Health is very important during this phase to assess the health of the survivor and ensure necessary treatment and care in cases of physical or sexual violence, or both. Coordination with the MoSD in writing the social report and with the safe houses that receive abused women is also important.

The real steps to prepare the survivor for re-integration start when she enters the safe house through programs to enhance awareness and empowerment.

Second Phase: Guidance and Empowerment in Safe Houses as the Foundation for Re-integration

Safe houses are the cornerstone of the second phase in dealing with women transferred from police stations or the MoSD. After the arrival of the survivor to one of the two safe houses, the Mehwar Center or Beit al-Aman, and receipt of a report on her case, the abused woman and her family meet in a case conference with representatives of the main partner parties: the MoSD; the Family Protection Department in the police station; the legal consultant of the legal department; and the director of the women and family unit of the governorate from which the survivor originates, who is also the Tawasol centre coordinator in most governorates. (In most governorates, the director of the Women and Children unit is herself the Tawasol coordinator.) The conference evaluates the case and devises a plan of action. Initially, the survivor is assisted to adapt to her new location and break down any barriers. Then, the nature of the problem and violence in her case is considered, identifying the source of assault and the attacker, whether a family member or an outsider, while working with the family to analyze the problem and determine ways to resolve it.

The period spent at the safe house may vary from one survivor to another according to the nature of the violence and progress in negotiations with the family, depending on whether the aggressor is being prosecuted or if the woman's life is at risk. Generally, the stay lasts from two to seven months. Girls usually spend a longer period than married women, especially in incest cases, and some women enter the safe house on more than one occasion. This usually occurs when a decisive resolution is not achieved and the abused woman returns time and time again to the same violence-generating environment.

Rehabilitation and Empowerment in Safe Houses

In the Palestinian context, GBV is addressed using (at least in theory) an international perspective and a multi-sectoral model that covers health, psychosocial and legal aspects to ensure the safety and security of the survivor

at all phases in which the violence is investigated. The philosophy and vision of survivor re-integration is anchored around the survivor as an active participant capable of taking appropriate decisions to emerge from the state of violence she was exposed to, rather than as a negative victim. This philosophy is espoused, but is not necessarily achieved in every case, as illustrated later in the study.

The philosophy and vision adopted by safe houses is reflected in the policies, procedures and services provided that **aim to empower abused women in the face of violence.** These programs have a direct impact on the survivors' re-integration within their families and local community once they leave the safe house and prepare women to face and adapt to the community outside.

The interviews reveal what a difficult and harsh experience entry to the safe house is from the perspective of the survivor. They see this as the most difficult stage of their life, regardless of the protection it provides from violence, because the survivor has to leave her home, family, and personal environment to stay with strangers. She is moved from an environment with relative independence and freedom of movement to a new restrained environment, closed and isolated from society, where the survivor is subjugated to the will of another person with whom she may clash at times or who may give her orders. Survivors described the trauma of their first days in the safe house. One said:

> "When you are exposed to violence for the first time and leave your family, it is very difficult. You go through a stage where you arrive at the police station and then to a refuge. It is really difficult to accept the idea...for instance, you were living your life, you had a mobile phone and internet connection, the door opens at your family's house, you go in and out. But when you are at the Center, you look around. Everything is closed, no phone calls are allowed. Even your family must be scheduled by appointment and you cannot go out. This caused me a crisis."

These procedures in the safe house are intended to provide security and protection from any threat from the family, or self-harm if the woman considers running away, or the possibility of aggressive behavior due to the survivor's mental state or illness. They also protect her from any violence she may be exposed to from other survivors in the house. At the same time, the survivor passes through a state of shock and alienation and needs time to accept the rules and procedures that regulate life inside safe houses. Some survivors take a long time to adapt to the new environment. Interviews illustrated that suffering is most pronounced during the early days at the safe house without their families, particularly mothers who are separated from their children. One mother said that all she needed was to hear the voices of her children. Action must be taken to assist the survivor to

absorb and accommodate the new reality she is living in, taking into account her individual characteristics. For example, mothers must be able to communicate with their children from day one, and women's personal needs for clothing and personal effects should be met.

The psychological stress experienced by the GBV survivor at the safe house is due to the separation from her family, especially the children, feelings of alienation and loneliness, and living conditions governed by restrictions. These factors may pressure the survivor to agree to any settlement, compromising her rights to protection and a safe environment free from violence. Hence the gravity of the action plan drawn up in the conference held during the early days of the survivor's entry to the safe house to study her case. As described above, the survivor is in shock at this stage, suffering from psychological stress, and is emotionally weak and fragile. She may not be able to understand the implications of the solutions proposed. It could be very difficult for her to consider her needs and interests; she is indirectly under the guardianship of the partner parties studying her case. For this reason, decisions regarding the fate of the survivor should not be taken in the early days of her stay at the safe house, but rather after she settles down, when another conference on her case should be convened to determine a solution.

Abused women tend to surrender to the new realities of life, especially in cases of marital violence where the woman's family perceive her flight to the police as an affront to customs and traditions. This leaves the woman without a key ally in negotiations with the husband. Husbands usually become more obstinate if they are imprisoned as a result of the wife's complaint and, in a framework of imbalanced power relationships, some women feel forced to accept tribal mediation. Ultimately, the survivor is the main loser in the negotiations between her and the aggressor. Although tribal mediation is intended to achieve justice, it is intrinsically based on patriarchal domination. It regulates the right of males to dominate, and the duty of women to be obedient and to sacrifice themselves in the interests of the family and children. Therefore, tribal mediation is mostly seen as an impediment to women achieving their rights and an attempt to silence women.

Nevertheless, tribal mediation remains one of the options accepted by the institutions [working in this field] in some regions such as the north and south of the West Bank when all other options to resolve the problem have been exhausted. In the cases of survivors who originate from a region where tribal law dominates over the law and rights systems, it is an inevitable tool for rapid protection of the survivor, especially in cases like pregnancy outside marriage. However, it cannot be relied upon as a decisive solution. Although tribal mediation can be positive in providing some rights for women, it is primarily achieved by a

temporary compromise and does not aim to attempt to make a radical change in the woman's circumstances. In addition, the implementation of the decision reached through tribal mediation is not followed up. When official institutions such as the MoSD or the governorate address tribal leaders, there is a higher chance that the ruling will be in the interests of the survivor. Tribal leaders do not usually enforce women's interests under a framework that places women on a lower level versus male hegemony. Nevertheless, when other power relationships with government institutions are involved, the patriarchal domination of males is put aside and just decisions regarding women may be taken.

In one case where the MoSD had to resort to tribal mediation, the survivor was rejected by her brothers who did not want her to return to her family home, apparently because they were attempting to seize her inheritance. In that case, tribal leaders forced the brothers to take their sister in and to build an independent house for her. This verdict was issued a year ago and the brothers have not yet complied; the tribal leaders have not enforced the implementation of their decision.

Under agreements and regulations, only the authorized government parties can order an abused woman to be sent to a safe house. Other specified parties are then delegated to discuss the violence and determine ways to address it. Workers in safe houses can face interference by PA officials in cases of violence that end up in safe houses, especially those involving sexual assault and molestation. The aggressor may mobilize his influential contacts, but this interference violates the confidentiality of the case and transforms the survivor from victim to offender because she caused the arrest of the true aggressor. Such interference puts huge psychological pressure on the survivor, sometimes forcing her to accept solutions contrary to her interests such as dropping the lawsuit against the aggressor. Some safe houses have faced attempts to force them to receive individuals who are not entitled to their services, such as prostitutes who may pose a threat to the other residents. Alternative frameworks need to be established to address the issue of women working in prostitution and their re-integration within the community.

Once a survivor has entered the safe house, an integrated plan is devised with the active participation of the survivor and her family. Safe houses are responsible for preparing the survivor for re-integration as well as keeping her safe and secure. The action plan may be interrupted if the survivor insists on leaving the safe house before her re-integration is fully implemented. However, before the survivor is released, she is informed several times in conferences with her and her family about the risks that may threaten her life. If the survivor insists, she is allowed to leave and new ways have to be developed to monitor such cases outside the safe house.

The plan of action includes psychological and social counseling services. The interviews confirmed the importance of these sessions in restoring the equilibrium of a survivor of violence by exploring the damage she has suffered, confronting it, and how to re-engage in her local community.

Social education and awareness is at the core of women's empowerment and includes theoretical topics related to gender issues, training courses on communication skills, leadership, how to be self-reliant, and women's legal rights. These programs aim to enhance the survivor's self-confidence and her capabilities to confront the challenges that she may face after leaving the safe house.

Safe houses also provide care and education services for children. The Mehwar Center has a nursery and kindergarten for the children of survivors. Another dimension of empowerment is offering survivors an opportunity to return to high school or university, providing them with a suitable environment, and supervising them at academic institutions where they are enrolled. There have been successful experiences in this field. Safe houses also offer literacy since a large proportion of survivors lack basic education. **The services provided to survivors include legal support services**, especially for women who want to divorce their abusive husbands. They receive support in the procedures for divorce, alimony, child custody, and support services after leaving the safe house.

Economic empowerment is at the core of safe house programs to help survivors to be self-reliant once they leave the safe house because families rarely offer any material support. A variety of training courses are offered, but as interviewees pointed out, there is no clear plan for the development of vocational skills. Some beneficiaries are trained in handcrafts such as embroidery and beading, but specialized training is contingent on the availability of funding. Vocational training offered by Beit al-Aman with Spanish funding aims to set the foundations for the empowerment of abused women. Training includes video and photography skills to enable survivors to work as photographers in weddings and other parties. There is also three-month training in physical education coaching and in beauty professions. Other training courses are available for current and former residents, who are provided with transportation costs. The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation contributes to the economic empowerment of women survivors with WELOD programme, through vocational training and Tawasol network. Other initiatives are being put in place to better address this aspect of the re-integration process. Besides training, the Mehwar center, also supported by AICS, provides an opportunity for battered women to work in a workshop that belongs to the center.

In interviews, women described different experiences in safe houses: some describe it as positive and some emphasize the negative aspects. The effectiveness

of the programs, activities, and training courses is influenced by the willingness of the survivor to engage in these activities, and this is influenced primarily by the survivor's mental state.

In general, survivors of violence talk of positive experiences in safe houses. One described the impact of the programs and services provided as taking her life from one place to another: "Bit by bit, as a result of these training courses and services, I started to work on my inner self, until I reached a stage where those at the Center thought that I must go out into the community, start a new life and make a living, trying to forget what I went through." Another survivor said that the psychological and legal counseling she received about divorce and child custody enabled her to "express her feelings easily". There are many examples of the benefits gained from the services provided to survivors, including economic empowerment.

Survivors were also given the opportunity to take personal initiatives. One of them decided to form a committee to represent survivors when dealing with the Center's administrative staff, who, in turn, approved the formation of an elected committee. This type of initiative is perceived as a model for other safe houses since it provides experience of collective organization for women, in addition to practical experience in leadership and democratic practices rather than a theoretical exercise that evaporates in a short period of time.

Some survivors complained about a lack of adequate care in safe houses. Some even compared the safe house to a prison: "I was imprisoned, doing nothing but eating, drinking, and breathing." Some survivors who used a safe house repeatedly said they preferred prison to staying in the safe house because of the pressures they were exposed to and the unbearable isolation. Others who had left the safe house reported that the vocational training and economic empowerment they had received did not take into account the specific level of education, experience and needs of each survivor. From their experiences outside, they believed that their training had not provided them with efficient tools to qualify for a job after leaving the safe house.

It should be taken into account that some of the experiences described by survivors were in their early days at the safe house. However, critical comments are valid and indicate problems that may exist in the performance of safe houses and partner parties. Long stays by some survivors and the repeated return of others is a clear indicator of the failure to provide a decisive resolution to the violence suffered by these women. Obviously, the quality and level of services provided by safe houses vary according to the funding available for activities, the efficiency of the staff employed there, and the quality of training given to work teams.

There is evidence that essential services such as psychosocial counseling services are inadequate for the needs of all survivors. The director at the Mehwar Center stated that they have no psychosocial counselor or even any staff qualified in this field. She said that psychological illness in survivors of violence is frequently misdiagnosed by psychiatrists, exposing the patient to further psychological disorders. It is clear that most of the training courses offered to survivors focused on skills related to handcrafts, but these do not provide serious opportunities to obtain a decent job that will sustain a survivor and her family.

A number of issues were raised about the administrative staff of the safe houses, including the following:

First, independence and governance of shelters (safe houses) : The powers granted to Beit al-Aman and the Mehwar Center vary; Beit al-Aman lacks the authority to make legal interventions without coordination with the MoSD. Both these safe houses confirm from experience that greater powers and independence would make their professional decisions more timely and relevant to the needs of a survivor. Safe houses must also have the authority to monitor survivors after they leave the safe house and should devise ways to maintain communication after the women leaves, such as providing them with a free phone line to enable communication with them in coordination with the MoSD social worker.

Second, Empowerment of staff working in safe houses: Workers in safe houses believe that ongoing training contributed to their empowerment and raised their awareness of issues of violence against women and ways to resolve them. Greater supervision of staff in safe houses is also necessary. There are differences in the training offered: the work team at the Mehwar Center underwent many training courses, with the support of Italian Cooperation, and learned by observation from the experiences of Italian institutions and women's organizations in dealing with abused women, and through training and supervision with local Palestinian institutions and women's organizations. As a result, the Center developed experience relevant to case conferences, identification of partners, means of cooperation, and expertise in legal interventions.

Third, Although procedures for protection centers have been defined, they are still at an early stage of implementation, including the transfer mechanisms. There remain contradictions and competition between service providers, although these vary from one organization or case to another, but they obstruct the resolution of some cases that have dragged on for some time. Limited or lack of communication and coordination between partner parties or weakness in their capacity to provide appropriate solutions is apparent.

Re-Integration of Women Survivors: When and Where to?

Once the survivor has completed the period permitted in the shelter (safe house) and the the necessary period for recovering period of rehabilitation, the survivor meets with female social workers in the MoSD offices in governorates and with the other partner parties to determine where the survivor should be re-integrated. Will she go back to her into the same environment where she was abused? Should social re-integration be inside or outside the governorate? The answers to such questions are complex and vary by case.

Another important issue is when the process of re-integration should begin. Is it better to start the process of re-integration into the local community while the woman is still in the safe house, before the protection and security requirements are completed, as in some international experiences where a woman is free to go out to work to provide for her children and return to the safe house. Or is it better to follow the current procedure used with most cases in shelters (safe houses) in Palestine, which begins with the idea of confinement of beneficiaries in the safe houses and do not let them go out of the houses at all until they ensure their security of the abused woman, and then embarking on complete re-integration in the community. This method provides a higher level of protection for the survivor.

Palestine is similar to other economic and social contexts in the options available for re-integration of survivors, but differs in some aspects. For example, the environment, geographical space, and the small communities do not facilitate re-integration into other communities far from male control. In addition, the patriarchal structure in some local communities and the traditions followed by many families make it unacceptable for a single or divorced woman to live on her own away from the protection and guardianship of the males of the family. In the few cases where women left the safe house before securing full protection, many family and societal risks arose, some life-threatening. One woman was in danger when she insisted to go out to work in spite of her family's opposition. Therefore, re-integration within the family or community should take place gradually. The majority of women interviewed emphasized that psychological, vocational and economic empowerment, plus enhanced awareness and skills are very important, but are not enough to make an abused woman leave the safe house and face the community alone. A gradual approach to re-integration could be through joint programs and activities between residents of shelters and other groups outside. Gradual re-integration help survivors to cope with life in the community, especially in the most serious cases, as in the case of sexual assault. It also gives the survivor and partner parties time to ensure that the dangers to the woman's life have faded. Gradual re-integration allows for the possibilities of re-integration in the local community away from violence to be explored.

Third Phase: Confrontation after Leaving the Safe House

As mentioned above, the survivor should leave the safe house at the end of the phase of rehabilitation and empowerment. However, the time scale for leaving is linked to a large extent to the nature of the violence undergone. In most cases, the woman returns to her original environment within the period of time permitted to stay, while some of them stay for long periods. For example, of 74 cases that entered the safe house in 2014, nine cases had stayed on, according to the director. Nevertheless, leaving the centers does not mean that these women and girls are protected from violence. Since 2011, there were about 15 cases in which women fled their homes again to return to the safe house. For each individual, different forms of violence prompted them to seek refuge in the safe house. The re-integration of survivors takes place on two levels: re-integration within the family and re-integration into the local community.

Re-integration of Survivors with their Family

The main objective of re-integration is the successful return home of the survivor and re-integration within her family and native environment in conditions that ensure her protection and guarantee her rights. This is the most common practice favored by all the parties, provided that the rights of the survivor to live in a safe environment are guaranteed and her needs met as she determines. Re-integration is influenced by the political, economic, social, and cultural context, the family environment to which the survivor will return upon leaving the safe house, the nature of violence to which she was subjected, the person who carried out the assault, and the individual capabilities of the survivor.

The general context and the structural political, economic and cultural determinants are important elements in shaping the possibilities for re-integrating survivors in the community. In the Palestinian context, the political and socio-economic patriarchy is a structural constraint to re-integration. The influence of the Israeli occupation has a direct impact in some cases; interviews show that the fragmentation and separation of the Palestinian people due to the occupation complicates the situation of some survivors and makes it impossible to be re-integrated in their original environment. Artificial borders created by the occupation and the tearing apart of geographic regions has not prevented social interaction among Palestinians wherever they live, nor has it eliminated family relations and marriages between them. Nevertheless, the deliberate division of Palestine, and the different political entities ruling these regions, generates additional complications in resolving marriage problems. Palestinian women from the West Bank or the Gaza Strip married to holders of Israeli identity cards usually lose their right to custody of their children or alimony in the case of a divorce.

The PA has no jurisdiction to prosecute these men or impose penalties on them. In addition, the ratification of laws to protect women from violence is a problem under the occupation of the Palestinian territories, as described at the beginning of the study.

At the same time, Palestinian socio-economic structure is being destroyed under occupation. Poverty and unemployment are prevalent, hampering the re-integration of survivors seeking economic independence due to limited job opportunities. The influence of Israeli occupation policies interconnect with the neo-liberal policies of the PA. Development is left to the private sector and there is an absence of developmental policies resistant to the occupation's hegemony, or to create employment opportunities. This has a negative impact on the ability of women survivors to achieve economic independence, let alone overcome the cultural influence of customs and traditions in communities and families that place constraints on women going to work. In this context, the survivor relies heavily on help from all partner parties to obtain a job or access other resources and assistance.

Re-integration process of survivors within the family is also subject to the family environment, class background, social status, values, and male domination. An open family environment that is flexible and free from patriarchal restrictions creates an atmosphere of positive interaction between the survivor and her family. If the family is ready to reconsider what made the survivor leave her home, this accelerates the negotiation process and the return of the survivor on acceptable conditions that preserve her rights. Bad economic conditions and the absence of a cordial family environment and a complete breakdown in communication can never bring about a substantive solution to the problem of violence and lead to further complications in the situation.

The survivor may be the one to reject interaction if she refuses to return to the house where she was subjected to violence, or is deeply traumatized, especially in cases of incest. Her refusal to return may be linked to changes in her personality that occurred during her stay in the safe house. The empowerment of some survivors contributes to a shift in awareness, outlook and personality, especially in those who stay for a long time in the safe house. While work is conducted with survivors, the same work does not take place with their families, creating a gap between the victim and her family or the local environment. This can create a feeling of alienation in survivors. Sometimes, parents refuse to take their daughter back, or even communicate with her, because she has caused them shame and stigmatized her family socially, or because she caused the arrest of the offender. The family may find the changes in their daughter's personality unacceptable, or even her appearance if they feel that it clashes with their culture and threatens the existing power relationships within the family.

In response, partner parties work intensively with all members of the family: males and females, or at least with the actors who influence interaction with the survivor, to secure a solution that goes beyond the issue of violence. To a large extent, failure to reintegrate the survivor is the result of efforts being fragmented and confined to the victim without her family. Another cause of failure is focusing primarily on the woman's return without taking into consideration the services required by the survivor in the first stages after leaving the safe house.

Work with families includes rebuilding trust between the family and the survivor. It also includes dismantling the causes of violence and restrictions on the survivor's freedom of movement, including tracking and surveillance if she leaves the house. Work with the survivor and her family must take into account the nature of the violence and the individual circumstances of each case. In some forms of violence, survivors and families may be more flexible in negotiating, understanding and ultimately overcoming the problem, while other forms of violence such as incest (sexual assault within the family), pregnancy outside marriage, and sometimes marital violence, are not repairable. Radical solutions have to be sought, such as prosecuting the perpetrator, removing him from the home, filing for divorce, and stopping the cycle of violence.

Intensive work with the survivor requires plans and specific long-term programs to be devised to monitor the re-integration. As the interviews made clear, it is impossible to achieve re-integration through one or two visits paid by a social worker during the first week after leaving the safe house. Nor can it be achieved by leaving the victim to face her fate alone, as often happens. Plans should be based on clear foundations and not contingent on the approval of the family. They should primarily be based on the interests of the survivor, ensuring her safety and security, providing conditions that guarantee her rights in socio-economic, health and psychological aspects, and safeguarding her dignity so she will not be victimized another time.

The action plan must include appropriate forms of communication such as meeting the woman privately without her parents to ensure that she can speak freely and not feel threatened. Ongoing telephone communication with the survivor is vital to follow up on developments after she leaves the safe house, and she must be also provided with any relevant numbers. This may not be effective in all cases because the family may confiscate the survivor's phone and prevent her from communicating with any external party. She could be coerced into saying that she is leading a normal life, contrary to the reality. The least that could happen is that the survivor will be unable financially to buy credit for her mobile. Therefore, visits should also be made to the survivor in her environment.

Re-integration is an integrated and an ongoing process. To ensure the continuity

of follow up of survivors' needs, this task should not be confined to specialized departments at the Ministry of Social Development, but should involve the contribution of other partners such as safe houses, NGOs and Tawasol centers, taking into account confidentiality. If work is confined to Family Department at the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry needs to adopt new and other procedures and practices, including the recruitment of additional specialized staff who are informed and supportive of issues related to abused women should be dedicated to such cases because the social workers available for women cannot undertake tasks beyond their abilities. These workers must be provided with resources and protection when they work in the field, including transportation costs for field visits and mobile phone credit to ensure communication with the survivor after working hours. All work must comply with the policies stipulated by law, especially the commitment of MoSD offices in the governorates to submit a report on every survivor of violence to the safe houses and other stakeholders.

Mechanisms for Re-integration within the Family

Family re-integration may take several forms. The definition of family is not limited to the nuclear family consisting of mother, father and children, or to the extended family consisting of several generations. Re-integration does not necessarily mean re-integration within the boundaries of the original family because it may be possible to reintegrate the survivor within a new marital family, or to live in a sheltered institution, or as an independent individual living away from the family. The strategy for re-integration within the family is often linked to the nature of the violence suffered by the survivor. Initial models for family re-integration include the following:

1: Re-integration within the original family

The return of the survivor to the family through a compromise agreed upon by all parties. In some cases, this is the start of a revised relationship between a family and their daughter, or between a husband and wife, particularly in cases where the behavior of the survivor before entering the safe house did not breach the family's fundamental values and customs (from the family perspective), or that the aggressor-especially if he is one of the members- did not exercise a serious violation against the survivor.

In some cases, the family is forced to accept the survivor, especially when she wishes to return to her original environment. Families usually refuse, especially brothers, and the acting parties intervene, including the governorate, or informal justice, safe houses and the MoSD offices. They force the family to take the daughter or sister back because return home to the original environment is one

of the survivor's rights. In one case when the brothers refused to allow their sister to return, this was apparently related to an issue of family inheritance. The survivor and partner parties following her case decided that she should return to her family's house. However, the survivor's return to her original family does not necessarily guarantee real re-integration within the family and surrounding environment and it remains uncertain whether she may fall back into the cycle of violence. Procedures to monitor these women and guarantee their rights need serious consideration.

2: Re-integration into a new family through marriage

Marriage is a strategy for re-integration into new families, away from the original family. Survivors may adopt different models of marital relations, including the following three:

First model: Re-integration in a new family based on consensual marriage and a prior relationship. Consensual marriage is based on the willingness of both parties and on a previous relationship between the survivor and the man she wishes to marry. This strategy is adopted by actors to re-integrate survivors in situations such as those when a woman runs away from her home and reports to the police or the governorate because the family refuse to allow her to marry the man of her choice. If the woman insists on marrying the man she has chosen, and the family insist on refusing, the woman is supported by the official parties, represented by the district governor, if the family's refusal is deemed to be unjustified. In all cases, the woman is treated as a minor whose guardian must approve of the marriage, but the governor rather than the woman's father will act to conclude the marriage contract. The committee involved in the conference on the case determines if the choice is suitable and is responsible for taking a decision on this matter.

Second model: Re-integration in a new family based on a marriage of convenience. This model is similar to a traditional marriage arranged by parents or friends, but the arrangement is made by the MoSD or the governorate upon the survivor's request, after finding a person who accepts this arrangement. This marriage is traditional in nature and is not based on a previous relationship or acquaintance. Furthermore, the woman enters into a fragile marriage compared with normal traditional marriages because she has been in a safe house. Nevertheless, this model is perceived by some survivors and social workers as one of the limited options available to uneducated older women who were not previously married, or for young divorced women who lack material and financial resources. This type of re-integration is not based on free will but is an escape from a reality that the survivor cannot bear or cope with. It places additional responsibilities on all partner parties to assist the woman by providing training, raising awareness,

and encouraging economic empowerment to make her capable of taking free decisions. In addition to continuous follow-up at least for a certain period to ensure the stability of the situation , and to provide the necessary services.

Third model: Re-integration in a new family based on a forced marriage. This is the imposition of a marriage because there is no other alternative, from the family's perspective. This is the main tool used in cases of sexual assault from outside the family. The reaction of the family to a sexual assault against their daughters varies: Some may kill the woman before she has a chance to get to a safe house. From a tribal perspective, the most common practice is to enforce a marriage between the raped woman and her rapist or molester. This unjust solution representing a violation of human rights is usually adopted under the pretext of protecting the raped woman from being killed, and for lack of another alternative. The majority of actors involved in reintegrating abused women believe that marriage to the rapist is unfair because the woman is left at the mercy of a man who opted to accept this marriage in order to flee imprisonment. Feminist organizations are opposed to this practice and have called for legal amendments to prevent the rapist from escaping punishment for the crime he committed against the victim.

3: Independent re-integration away from the original family

This mechanism is used in some cases for the re-integration of the survivor, in particular when it is difficult for them to return to her family and her original environment, although there was a difference in the receptivity of the local community and the parties to partner such a mechanism, as well as variation in the extent of their success. Women abused by their husbands and/or who have divorced may live with their children in a new residence. In one case, the woman said that she received significant support from the governorate and the MoSD, in addition to voluntary help from staff at the MoSD office in the governorate. It is accepted in society for women with older children to live on their own, but younger mothers face bigger obstacles in independent living away from their families. Single women face even greater obstacles in living independently and this is only an option for difficult and at risk cases. The option of changing the survivor's place of residence is limited due to patriarchal domination, and small populations and geographic space, making it impossible to hide abused women or even the safe house itself out of the sight of males and their authority. Success in using this strategy requires the initial approval of the family, whether conscious approval stemming from a conviction of the right to independence of the survivor, or negative consent because they do not care what the survivor does. There are a few successful models with survivors who have a strong personality and will, bolstered by training and empowerment during their stay at the safe house. Also, once the family stop any threatening behavior towards the survivor, it allows her a wider range of options.

4: Temporary re-integration in accommodation centers

In this case the survivor is placed temporarily in one of the social accommodation centers of the MoSD. This is often done following a decision from the Minister. This re-integration strategy breaches the right of the survivor to lead a normal life and to settle in a private residence. This was adopted in cases where there is failure in finding a solution to the situation of violence suffered by women.

All these options reflect the patriarchal hegemony and the weakness of socio-economic structures. Most of the options are devised within an imbalance of powers and distorted gender relationships where the survivor is treated as a minor who needs someone to take decisions on her behalf regarding where to live. She is forced to live under continuous surveillance. Having older children or being older are the only elements that provide the woman with legitimacy and the approval of the community to live in an independent residence. The social and psychological impact on survivors resulting from these strategies requires further in-depth studies.

Re-integration of a Survivor in the Local Community

The survivor's re-integration is the responsibility of the community as a whole just as much as it is the responsibility of official and civil society institutions, and the individuals themselves. Interviews revealed the psychological stress that a survivor goes through prior to her departure from the safe house, the state of anxiety about being accepted by her community, and how she perceives her relationship with the community. One survivor expressed her anxiety, saying: "At the beginning I was frightened of the society, but after leaving the center and working and settling outside, I saw how the community reacted. As long as I am on the right track and know the goal rooted in my head, why would society stand in my way?"

The interviews revealed that the economic empowerment and training courses offered to the survivor during her stay at the safe house provided her with confidence and enabled her to face the community and to become independent. Some even said that they became strong enough that they no longer cared about what society thought of them. There are success stories among some survivors who achieved a level of economic independence. The women who succeeded and were able to go on with their lives were primarily mothers. This may be attributed to a higher level of solidarity with abused mothers and the community's perceptions about women as breadwinners for their households.

In addition, the re-integration of women in the local community is influenced by the type of violence she underwent. Wives with children abused by their husbands and relatively older mothers usually receive greater solidarity from the local community and its institutions.

One woman, pointed out that the legal advisor at the governorate adopted her case, while the MoSD provided cash assistance payable every three months. After leaving the safe house, the MoSD supported her in renting a house and the office director provided her with a monthly allowance. The house was also furnished with assistance from the MoSD office and staff, who gave voluntary donations, and obtained a job though her personal connections.

Services and support after leaving the safe house: The interviews indicate that the initial period after leaving the safe house is critical in the life of the survivor and her engagement in public life. It depends to a great extent on the services and assistance offered by partner institutions. In that case survivor's re-integration has to be away from her family, the most significant contribution is financial and economic support for the survivor, such as housing, a job, or a monthly income that offers some protection and independence, especially as survivors face major problems in finding a job.

The structural obstacles related to the destruction of the occupied and dependent Palestinian economy, high rates of unemployment, and limited job opportunities deprive women of employment and economic independence. In some environments, there are objections by families to their daughters working. Some women see marriage as the solution to their problem as an alternative to economic empowerment and going out to work. As the earlier quotations make clear, the survivors focus on material economic assistance, but they also need continuous support and psychosocial guidance, some of which are provided by civil society organizations.

Return to the community does not necessarily imply that survivors are fully accepted as there is a lack of awareness about GBV or the dominant patriarchal power relations in Palestinian society, like in other communities. For example, some women reported being caught in the clasp of violence again while seeking assistance from protection institutions. One reported that she was harassed and was obliged to leave her job more than once for various reasons. She also complained that institutions denied her employment because she had been a prison inmate, although this was for her safety and not for committing a crime because safe houses were unable to provide protection at the time.

A gap exists between the anticipated role and contribution of civil society organizations, particularly those under the umbrella of the feminist movement, in resolving problems faced by abused women, especially in economic empowerment and employment, and actual practice on the ground. Expectations that these organizations can absorb and employ the women who leave safe houses are sometimes unrealistic and beyond the operational capacities of these bodies. The limited education and skills of the majority of the survivors restricts opportunities for employment in these organizations. Nevertheless, this does not relieve women's organizations from responsibility, they are required to provide assistance to survivors in search of jobs in the local community, and to support them socially when it is possible. In few cases, the survivors complained that some workers in women's organizations treat them as outlaws. This needs to be addressed by women's organisations, in order to confront the problem of workers' commitment to re-integration of women survivors issues. This limits engagement by abused women in the community and contributes to their isolation

Experiences of Resilience and Perseverance in Re-integration

Interviews revealed that some survivors were successful in re-integrating to a certain extent, while others are still struggling. In a striking case, a woman who suffered from domestic violence at the hands of her husband was later exposed to even more cruel violence at the hands of her father when he learned that she had filed for a divorce. After the divorce, she was subjected to several social constraints under the customs and traditions that criminalize a divorced woman. She had to undergo a battle for the custody of her children and only her strong personality helped her to overcome all these difficulties. At the safe house, she participated in specialized vocational training to learn special skills that contributed to her economic empowerment and enabled her to find a job. Her ability to overcome the violence she had lived under and its negative repercussions on her present life swayed her family to finally accept her divorce and give their support by making a separate unit in their house for her to live in. They also supported her financially as she earned a low monthly salary. However, she was unable to obtain any identity papers for her children because the husband was a Jerusalem resident and held an Israeli ID. Thus, the Palestinian authorities were unable to force the husband to pay alimony for the children. According to the social worker, this woman succeeded in re-integration within her family and local community.

One survivor suffered from domestic violence that could have cost her life because she insisted on going out to work. She is still subjected to domestic violence in a dysfunctional extended family with multiple wives. In spite of this, she succeeded in earning a diploma on her own initiative and without any serious support in order to escape the cycle of violence. Her struggle against domestic violence is ongoing as she continues to look for work, but she is frustrated by the limited job opportunities and weak support from women's institutions.

Another survivor insisted on realizing her dream to continue her university education after years of marriage and bearing children. The safe house that she entered repeatedly as a result of domestic violence provided her with assistance. She registered at a university and obtained high marks. Nevertheless, attempts to

re-integrate her within her original family after her divorce and achieve her dream of living in a separate house with her children and working to be self-reliant were unsuccessful.

These experiences illustrate that survivors have succeeded in resisting the violence inflicted upon them to varying degrees. Despite significant achievements in some aspects, they were unable to achieve complete success across their lives. The survivor's success is largely the result of strong will and perseverance in the face of challenges, and in resisting the social realities and constraints imposed on her. The absence of support after leaving the safe house did not discourage survivors, who continued their attempts to re-integrate in their local communities.

The second abused woman referred to above overcame continuous domestic violence to succeed in obtaining a job and achieving economic independence, although these were quickly lost due to domestic pressures. In the first and third examples described above, success was linked to the presence of a supporting party that provided assistance to enable the woman to achieve her objective, whether by providing a scholarship for enrolment in a university, providing independent housing for the woman and her children, providing a monthly stipend, offering quality training to obtain a suitable job, or psychosocial empowerment to regain self-esteem and arm the woman with the knowledge and skills to help her defy oppression and violence. In other cases that are not described here, follow up after leaving the safe house was an important element that assisted the survivor to face social isolation and was a significant factor in re-integration.

Even so, it was clear that these successes were only partial because follow up procedures are predominantly individual approaches that lack a holistic vision of handling the structural violence as an issue affecting society as a whole, and the issues of survivors in particular. Furthermore, in most cases, the survivor was left to face her fate alone apart from a few phone calls from the social worker; these calls could not provide adequate protection for survivors who had left the safe house. The re-integration of the survivor takes place in isolation from the family and community, meaning that patriarchal structures that produce violence and form the consciousness of family and society in issues related to domestic violence are not properly addressed or dismantled.

The survivor must be embraced under a new framework and with more balanced power relationships between her and the members of her family, especially males. This will ensure her personal rights, her self-determination, and her feelings of tranquility, and safety within her family and local community.

Interaction and Coordination between Partner Institutions

The basic issue is the level of coordination between partner institutions, i.e., shelters (safe houses), the MoSD represented by social workers in MoSD offices in the governorates, the Legal Department and the Women's Units (and Tawasol coordinator) in the governorates, and the Family Protection Unit at police stations. Legally, the MoSD is entitled to follow up cases of violence after the survivor leaves the safe house. During the first week after the survivor's departure, communication and coordination takes place between the safe house and the MoSD.

Interviews indicate the importance of coordination between the partner parties to guarantee successful re-integration of survivors within their families and local communities after leaving the safe house. At the same time, interviews revealed that coordination between partner parties was haphazard. First, the MoSD must provide the safe house with a final report on the situation of the survivor, but this does not happen sometimes due to the limited number of social workers in the MoSD offices in governorates and their heavy workload. This leaves little time to adequately pursue cases of abused women and perform the tasks required for the re-integration of survivors. It is also difficult for social workers to ensure continuous coordination with other partner institutions under such circumstances, although they are aware that coordination is a priority.

One social worker described the partnerships as providing protection for those working with the abused women as well as for the abused women themselves. She explained that and said:

> in practice, the nature of the relationship between safe houses and the MoSD offices is a cooperative and integrated one. This depends to a large extent on the social worker in the governorate and on the workers in the safe houses. In difficult cases, the relationship may sway from cooperation to conflict if the safe house puts pressure on the social worker to take an abused woman who is behaving aggressively, having a negative influence on other women at the Center, has attempted suicide, has entered the safe house under false pretenses or is ineligible as a resident because she suffers from mental illness, works in prostitution or was a victim of trafficking or is a drug addict. There have been attacks against social workers or against the property of the Center. The social worker insists that safe houses must assume full responsibility for those women pending a resolution of their cases.

The relationship with the Tawasol centers differs from one governorate to the other, depending on the social worker in each of the governorates. In some governorates, the relationship with the Tawasol centers is linked to the nature of the case and the social worker is the referral party who determines whether the Tawasol coordinator should be involved in the re-integration of the survivor, particularly the survivor's economic empowerment and supporting her to find a job through the civil society organizations involved with the Tawasol center in the governorate.

General Conclusions and Recommendations

This study does not aim to propose a national plan for the re-integration of violence survivors in their local communities, but offers the following conclusions, including recommendations and suggestions made by those interviewed:

At National Level

- The study concludes that the political, socio-economic, and cultural environments that produce all forms of violence, including GBV, should be addressed to make essential changes and ensure the sustainability of re-integration of violence survivors. Thus, combating violence requires the end of structural violence caused by the Israeli occupation that dominates the Palestinian people, and resistance against capitalism and patriarchal structures.

- There is a consensus on the need for a comprehensive vision for dealing with violence issues. Also laws and regulations need to be ratified to protect abused women and to act as a deterrent for offenders. These laws include the Penal Code, the Personal Status Law, and the "draft law for the protection of the family from violence" that would include compensation for violence suffered by an abused woman. The empowerment of a wife abused in her marital house, or a sister abused in the house of her family, is a tool to facilitate re-integration in the community. Housing is an important element of stability for the survivor that allows her to be independent of the perpetrator and to re-integrate in society. However, care must be exercised to ensure that these measures do not become a new justification for further violence against the survivor or are used arbitrarily by her. On the basis of this study, we believe that focus on amendments to laws at the expense of other issues will make it impossible to achieve the desired objectives of providing protection to survivors and re-integrating them in society.

- Policies and procedures must be adopted to ensure that survivors are protected from violence by PA institutions, including those involved in combating violence and the re-integration of survivors. Interference by influential PA officials and bodies must also be prevented. Some survivors talk about the rude treatment they received at police stations and governorates when they reported to them after leaving the safe house and how their complaints were sometimes not taken seriously.

- The government must assume responsibility for establishing more safe houses to meet the demand of abused women and to provide them with services. Also, safe houses, including non-governmental houses, must be granted the authority to coordinate and work with the MoSD both during the guidance

period and also once the survivor leaves the safe house. This step must be accompanied by the recruitment of adequate, qualified, and trained staff to work with survivors at the MoSD offices and in safe houses.

- The PA must commit itself to allocating budgets to support programs and activities that target survivors of violence in all phases, including during re-integration. It should also provide the requirements for economic empowerment, including vocational training, job opportunities, and loans to build economic independence and a decent standard of living for the survivor and her children. Data from the study demonstrate weaknesses in the economic empowerment programs provided for survivors during their stay at the safe house. These training courses were periodic and contingent on funding. They also fail to take into account the needs and abilities of the survivor or the possibility of finding a job once she returns to her life outside the safe house.

Institutions Working in the Re-integration Process

1. The re-integration of survivors is a complicated and continuous process based on participation by all sectors, whether governmental or non-governmental.

2. The continuity of the occupation and the fluctuation of the situation of the Palestinian Authority requires that the public, grassroots' institutions and organizations such as women's organizations and committees working with battered women, both individually for each institution, or through Tawasol play a more active role in the re-integration of survivors of violence within their communities.

3. The MoSD has taken significant steps to follow up the re-integration of survivors within society, but is still failing to meet the expectations of survivors as the interviews show. This is due various reasons including the staff of the Ministry and their roles, in particular the social workers as they are the primary actors in the re-integration process. In order to activate the role of the social workers, their role and responsibilities should be re-considered, and sufficient time should be allocated for them to follow up the battered women's issues or to employ new staff to carry out the tasks required in accordance with the comprehensive vision. Social workers (counselors) success in carrying out their role requires continuous development and implementation of raising awareness programs and training programs related to this issue. This will empower them to address and deal with wide spectrum of violence issues and on the diversity of local political, economic and socio-cultural contexts, in addition to the social class and cultural background of the survivor and the specific determinants of her case. Social workers also require financial and

material resources and protection, especially at the field work. They need to be supervised by professional and expert people of social counseling, and to provide support and to consult with them on how to deal with some cases, as well as organizing regular meetings for the social workers to discuss the cases they follow up, and exchange their experiences, and to psychological discharge.

4. Interviews asserted discrepancies in the relationship between partner parties, which are described as cooperative and conflicting according to the individual perception of workers dealing with re-integration. Re-integration is still in its infancy and further discussions and cooperation are required to establish the foundations of partnership and ensure that no partner party is neglected. Expectations about the capacity of partners must be realistic. At present, the basis on which the process operates is not sufficiently clear for each of the parties involved in re-integrating survivors of violence, particularly the role and contribution of the Tawasol centers in the governorates. The results of the study highlight weaknesses in coordination between the government, represented by the MoSD, and civil society or feminist organizations active in re-integration within the Tawasol network of women's units in the governorates. Tawasol centres network is about 250 women's organizations all over the West Bank, plus governmental organization dealing with women's issuses. The Tawasol centers are supposed to lead relationships with civil society organizations, despite of its activities in the governorates, coordination regarding re-integration of gender based violence survivors, and economic empowerment which is a slow process that needs time and efforts . The capacity of Tawasol centers must be expanded to encourage work by members in the Tawasol network to raise community awareness, provide economic empowerment, and find job opportunities for survivors who want to work after they leave the safe house.

5. A protocol must also be established with the party that provides psychological counseling at the Ministry of Health or in other clinics, centers, and hospitals, as well as safe houses. Provision of psychological counseling should be free for the gender based violence survivor, and done by experts who support abused women to overcome the traumatic effects of violence.

6. Discussions should be initiated within institutions and organizations active in the field of eliminating violence on the re-integration of survivors of violence as an integral part of their programs at all levels.

7. Working procedures must be developed based on practical experience and compatible with the existing political, economic, social and cultural contexts.

Local Community

1. Programs, activities and campaigns should be devised to raise awareness of violence, which is bolstered by the patriarchal social and cultural structures, and on the importance of addressing this issue, including the re-integration of survivors in the community.

2. The responsibility for devising such programs and activities lies with all actors in this field, both governmental and civic, including the MoSD, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Tawasol Centers, parties active within the Tawasol network, and the Palestinian NGO Forum for Combating Violence against Women.

3. Efforts should be focused on marginalized areas in the south and north of the West Bank, as well as areas adjacent to the Green Line, where the percentage of survivors of violence is highest.

4. Local initiatives should be encouraged to form local groups to combat violence against women, provide whatever support and assistance possible to abused women, and embrace survivors by supporting their efforts to re-integrate into the community.

Family

Working with survivors in isolation of their families and the surrounding environment, especially following leaving the safe houses, has resulted in the failure of re-integration in many cases. Therefore the priorities are:

1. Work with the entire family, both males and females, in particular with those who are influential within the family. Analyze the causes that led to the use of violence so that the family can support the abused woman rather than living in the presence of an antagonist environment. This must be undertaken in cooperation between the MoSD, safe houses, women's centers, and institutions active in the area or members of the Tawasol network.

2. Whenever possible, alternative programs to rehabilitate offenders should be adopted by providing guidance and counseling as part of efforts to combat violence against women and girls. This should be done in cooperation with the MoSD, women's centers active in combating violence, and with the Ministry of Health.

3. Provide support and assistance for the family such as financial aid, food and loans, in addition to providing health services for poor families, which is the responsibility of the MoSD.

Individual interventions (survivors)

1. Women survivors of violence cannot be grouped under one category as they differ in many ways: socially, class, age, and education. They suffer from different forms of violence. As a result, flexibility is required when dealing with these cases.

2. The right of the survivor to self-determination and independence must be guaranteed, on condition that this does not compromise protection from threats or unless a woman needs to be held in temporary custody because of a temporary behavioral disorder.

3. The empowerment of women outside safe houses and within their families and local communities should include:

Gradual re-integration and immersion in society during the stay of the survivor at the safe house, as long as her safety is not jeopardized. A number of survivors confirmed the difficulty of confronting society and family immediately after they leave the safe house. Gradual re-integration helps survivors to overcome their fears of society, such as holding some training courses or activities outside the safe house to prepare the survivor, or to make experimental visits to the family whenever possible and return to the safe house under the supervision of the safe house administration, the MoSD, and with the participation of civil society organizations and Tawasol when possible.

This is linked to the need for continuous follow up after the survivor leaves the safe house. Women often face intense family and social pressures. They can sometimes face rejection as a result of customs and traditions that are permissive with men and strict with women, especially a woman who dares to transcend expected behavior of sacrificing herself for the family and keeping its secrets. The ability to negotiate a change in circumstances is weakened by the unequal power relations. Therefore, it is vital to follow up with survivors in the early stages after they leave the safe house, when the foundations of new relationships and positions are established, to determine the status of the survivor in the family. The social worker may provide significant support for the survivor and enhance her negotiating position through field visits and telephone calls, while taking into account potential obstacles to communication for the survivor such as providing telephone credit.

Psychotherapeutic services and psychosocial counseling must to be provided, especially in cases of sexual assault where treatment is very costly and lengthy for the majority of survivors. Abandoning treatment causes relapses and hinders, even aborts, the re-integration process. This responsibility is entrusted to the Ministry of Health in coordination with the MoSD and safe houses to be sure that abused women will not accused of mental problem.

Freeing the survivor from economic dependency on the family or an abusive husband is a powerful factor for re-integration. However, the dire economic conditions imposed under the occupation have impoverished large sectors of the Palestinian population, especially women who head households. Therefore, empowerment must be a top priority for parties involved in re-integration through interventions such as vocational training to meet labor market demand, loans, and providing job opportunities in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor, the MoSD and civil society organizations. Women should be encouraged to join cooperative societies to safeguard their incomes from exploitative relationships. The experience of Pakistan is useful in this regard, where an external center for the employment of women was founded with a dormitory. This may be allocated for intractable cases of women whose life is threatened outside the safe house.

Monthly financial assistance must be provided and housing for women who divorced or cannot go back to live with the family for any other reason. This is the responsibility of the MoSD, yet we should take into account not to exempt the husband from his substantial and social responsibilities towards children and their expenses after divorce.

Free legal assistance must be provided for women by parties such as women's centers or the legal advisor at the governorate.

Mechanisms must be set up to address chronic cases where the parties concerned have failed to reach a just resolution in a manner that protects the survivor and maintains her dignity. Under a legal and social structure that protects the interests of males and demeans the value of women, it is difficult to reach settlements that protect the survivor. An example of this is marrying a woman to her sexual abuser: the offender goes unpunished and the victim is punished by being killed or married to her rapist. The offender must be punished for his crime and given no opportunity to escape punishment. At the same time, permanent protection must be provided for these women and intensive efforts conducted with the family and local community to persuade them that the woman is the victim who deserves their support and care.

External funding

There is consensus on the importance of funding to cover the expenses of programs and activities related to re-integration. Funding has been given by Italian Cooperation for the Tawasol centers and it continues through the WELOD 3 programme that includes also support to MoSA for running cost, supervision, awareness activities and training for the safe houses in Bethlehem and Nablus and support to economic empowerment progammes and learning opportunities for women. Also Spain is providing support for vocational training programs at

the safe houses. There is criticism that re-integration programs and activities for survivors are linked to short-term projects that are conditional on the priorities and programs of the donors themselves. This raises the issue of how to provide funding that meets the requirements and priorities of women survivors of GBV. Dialogue should be initiated with donors on the need to take into account the special political, socio-economic and cultural context that requires long-term support to establish a robust response to violence through high-priority programs by women's organizations. The relationship between donor and recipient must be built on a democratic and cooperative basis that maintains the independence of the parties receiving funds.

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Statistical Annex

Table 1: Percentage of married women exposed to violence from husband by region during the previous 12 months in the Palestinian Territories

Area	Psychological violence	Physical violence	Sexual violence	Social violence	Economic violence	Exposed to violence
The West Bank	48.8	17.4	10.2	44.8	41.6	29.9
The Gaza Strip	76.4	34.7	14.9	78.9	88.3	51.0
Palestinian Territories	58.6	23.5	11.8	54.8	55.1	37.0

Source: Violence in Palestinian Society: Main Findings, 2011, Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, Palestine.

Table 2: Percentage of women who entered the Center during the period from 2007 to end of 2014 by year

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Number	42	44	50	58	34	46	23	24	321

Source: Records of the Mehwar Center, 2015.

Table 3: Percentage of women who entered the Center during the period from 2007 to 2014 by district of origin

Area	Jericho	Hebron	Jerusalem	Bethlehem	Jenin	Ramallah	Tubas	Tulkarm	Gaza	Nablus	Qalqilia	Unknown	Total
No.	11	73	25	81	17	60	3	14	1	19	10	7	321

Source: Records of the Mehwar Center, 2015.

Table 4: Percentage of women who entered the Center from 2007 to the end of 2014 by age group

| Age Group	Below 15	15-20	21-26	27-32	33-38	Over 39	N/A	Total
	5	91	115	55	31	10	14	321

Source: Records of the Mehwar Center, 2015.

Table 5: Percentage of women who entered the Center from 2007 to the end of 2014 by level of education

| Level of Education	Illiterate	Elementary	Intermediate	Secondary	Diploma	Bachelor	N/A	Total
No.	1	9	15	39	4	8	246	321

Source: Records of the Mehwar Center, 2015.

Figure 1: Distribution of survivors in Beit al-Aman safe house in Nablus by governorate during the period 2007-2014
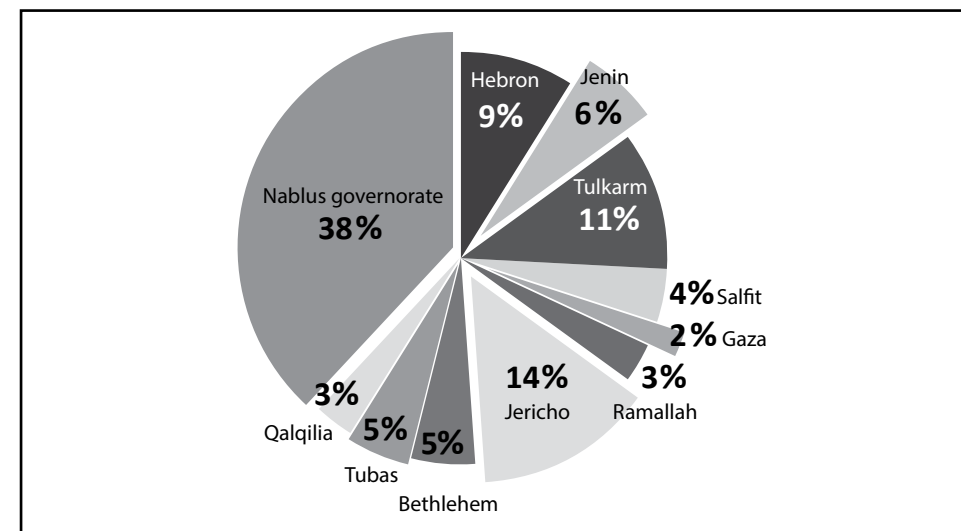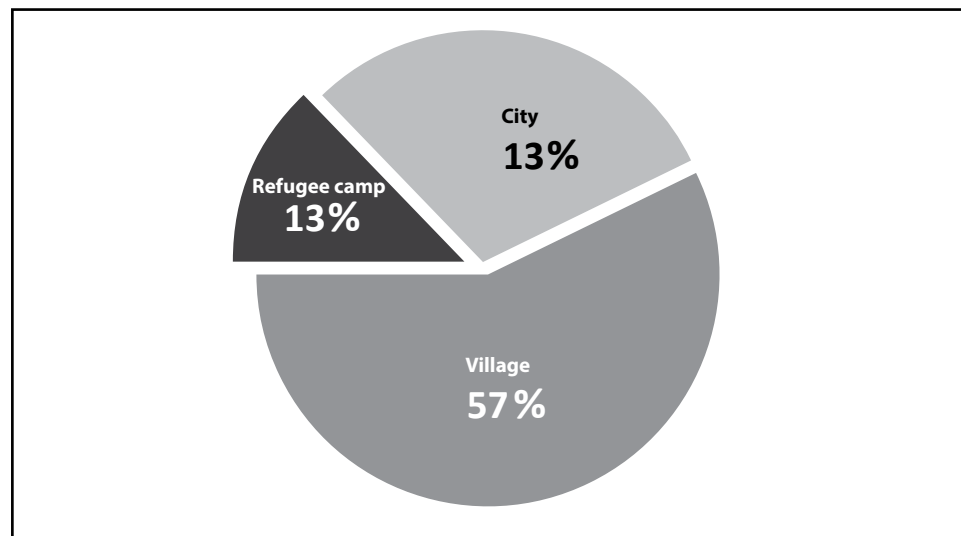

Source: Records of Beit al-Aman, 2015

Figure 2: Distribution of survivors in the Mehwar Center in Bethlehem by governorate during the period 2011-2013
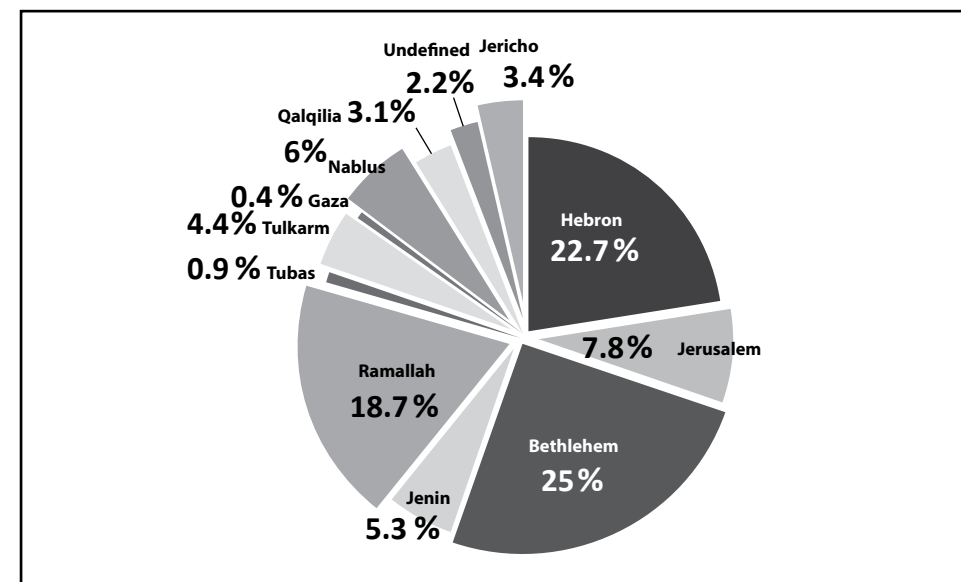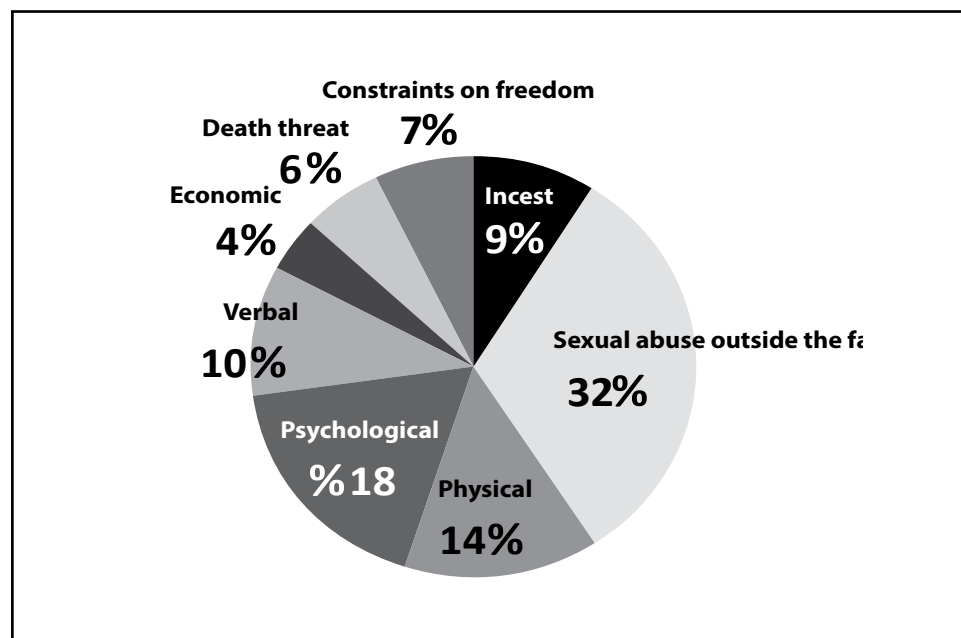

Source: Records of the Mehwar Center, 2015.

Figure 3: Distribution of survivors in Beit al-Aman by place of residence

Source: Records of Beit al-Aman, 2015

Figure 4: Distribution of survivors in Beit al-Aman by form of violence

Source: Records of Beit al-Aman, 2015

Interviews:

Nawal Tamimi, Director of the Protection Department at the Ministry of Social Development
Ikhlas Sufan, Director of Beit al-Aman in Nablus
Saeda Al-Atrash, Director of the Mehwar Center in Bethlehem
Etedal Al-Jariri, Tawasol coordinator in Ramallah governorate
Rana Izmiqna, Legal advisor to Ramallah governorate

List of Participants in the Focus Groups
The first focus group was convened on 1 March 2015 at the MoSD with the participation of social workers from the Ministry's offices in the governorates.

Name	Governorate	Position
Nawal Tamimi	MoSD, Ramallah	Director of the Protection Department
Salma Hantouli	MoSD Ramallah	Head of Gender Unit
Samar Darwish	Ramallah	Social Worker
Sabha Odwan	Qalqilia	Social Worker
Ta'yeed Dab'ee	Nablus	Social Worker
Arwa Hodali	Bethlehem	Social Worker
Raeda Darwish	Yatta	Social Worker
Kifah Abu Ayyash	Hebron	Social Worker
Tahani Barahmeh	Jericho	Social Worker
Manal Salameh	Jerusalem	Social Worker
Shams Salahdin	Tubas	Social Worker
Sahira Shadid	Tulkarm	Social Worker

The second focus group was convened on 13 April 2015 at the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Ramallah with the participation of Tawasol coordinators:

Name	Governorate	Position
Samira Masri	Salfit	Tawasol Coordinator
Safa' Abu Sneineh	Hebron	Tawasol Coordinator
Etedal Jariri	Ramallah	Tawasol Coordinator
Nahil Sawafta	Tubas	Tawasol Coordinator
Hanan Ghashash	Qalqilia	Tawasol Coordinator
Mirvat Afif	Jenin	Tawasol Coordinator
Rana Izmiqna	Ramallah	Legal Advisor
Khuloud Hantash	MoWA	Department of Public Relations
Najma Samhan	MoWA, Ramallah	Director of Supervision and Records/ Complaints Unit
Wafa' Aaraj	MoWA, Ramallah	Legal Advisor
Ghada Madmouj	MoWA, Ramallah	Director/ Complaints Unit

* WELOD PROGRAMME

Launched in 2009, the Women's Empowerment and Local Development programme (WELOD) is part of the Italian government's support to the Palestinian Authority's development priorities and key sectors outlined in the Palestinian National Development Plans 2014-2016, the Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2014-2016 and the National Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women 2011-2019. The programme is also in line with the newly formulated National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 and related Cross-Sectoral National Gender Strategy 2017-2022.

WELOD programme contributes to strengthening the Palestinian gender national machinery and the civil society organizations to advance women's rights and respond to women's needs. The programme promotes the economic, social and cultural empowerment of Palestinian women through different capacity development initiatives and through the women's empowerment centres (Tawasol) opened in 2011 in every West Bank governorate.

In order to promote the ownership and the institution building, WELOD offers budget support to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD). Actions include (a) the development of specific skills within the MoWA and the Gender Units aimed to mainstream gender in planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation of national plans, (b) the advancement of the socio-economic empowerment of Palestinian women, (c) the support to the anti-violence services managed by the MoSD, and (d) the creation, at the MoWA, of the first national observatory on gender-based violence and stalking.