



## **LESSONS LEARNED REPORT**

### **Children and Adolescents in Palestinian Households: Living with the Effects of Prolonged Conflict and Forced Migration**

#### **A REGIONAL STUDY**

Refugee Studies Centre  
Queen Elizabeth House  
University of Oxford

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## **Children and Adolescents in Palestinian Households: Living with the effects of prolonged conflict and forced migration**

*This study bridges the theoretical and applied divide which is common to much of the research directed at Palestinian children and adolescents in the Middle East. It integrates a research design with a practical agenda to improve delivery, policy and programmes and thereby help train practitioners to provide better services. Current policy and programming was taken into account in designing a participatory research methodology. This research approach, which crosses a number of disciplinary divides, has been a positive learning experience for the researchers, practitioners and sampled population of children, adolescents and caregivers. Its findings, partially provided below in a lessons learned report, should result in improved project, policy and programming delivery as well as a transferable good practice guide for refugee children and adolescents throughout the world.*

### **Overall Conclusions**

1. Palestinian children and adolescents are active, politically aware individuals. Programming and policy-making on their behalf should start with their input and involvement. This requires a significant shift in the IGO and NGO world from top down to a bottom up.
2. There is a need to raise awareness of the multiple discrimination which female Palestinian children and youth face at home and in school. This includes increased work load and reduced educational opportunities. There is a need to encourage self-expression and peer group solidarity with youth clubs for girls.
3. There is a need for counseling for older female Palestinian children and adolescents and their caregivers to deal with family and community efforts to see them into early or forced marriage.
4. Political street activism needs to be understood. The current lack of alternative spaces which Palestinian youth may occupy also needs to be carefully considered: play areas, computer centres, libraries, sports fields.
5. There is a need to reinforcing identity with projects recording memories of 1<sup>st</sup> generation. This can be through projects which record narratives of family and national history through formal education systems and informal ones.

## About the Project and the Teams

This research project commenced in January 1999, and the fieldwork was officially launched in June of that same year when the local researchers met to finalise the framework of their investigation. The fieldwork continued until October 2000 when the teams met again to share their findings. The events of the Al-Aqsa Intifada led to the decision to revisit some of the families at each site so that fieldwork was extended until April 2001. The project was made possible by the generous support of the [Mellon Foundation](#). Further support for dissemination was also extended by the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency](#) (SIDA) and the [Canadian International Development Agency](#) (CIDA). The advice and constant encouragement of Dr C. Makinson from the Mellon Foundation was of inestimable value.

Dr. [Dawn Chatty](#) and Professor [Gillian Hundt](#) directed the project. The teams working in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan liaised with Dawn Chatty and those working in Palestine – the West Bank and Gaza – liaised with Gillian Hundt. Maha Damaj who also served as the project research assistant edited the project newsletter.

We would like to thank all the researchers, field assistants, interviewers and the Palestinian children, and their families and caregivers for their cooperation and support throughout the two years in which this project was running. In order to maintain the anonymity and privacy of all those who helped provide information for this study, we have changed some names. In all cases we have used first names and camp location in the text.

### **Children and Adolescents in Palestinian Households: Living with the effects of prolonged conflict and forced migration**

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#### **Project Data**

Funder: The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation  
Duration: January 1999 – December 2000

#### **Principal Researchers**

Dr. D. Chatty, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford  
Prof. G. Hundt, School of Health and Social Studies, University of Warwick

#### **Research Assistant**

Ms. M. Damaj, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford

#### **Local Research Teams:**

Dr. Y. Abed, Dr. A. Thabet, Dr. A. El Alem, Gaza Health Services Research Centre, (Gaza)  
Dr. S. Al Zaroo, Ministry of Labour, Palestinian National Authority (West Bank)  
Dr. R. Farah, CERMOC (Jordan)  
Dr. B. Serhan, Welfare Association, Ms. S. Tabari (Lebanon)  
Dr. A. Abdul Rahim, Mrs. S. Gebreel, General Union of Palestinian Women (Syria)

## I. What the report is about and who is involved

This study specifically addresses children and adolescents in situations of prolonged conflict and forced migration. It examines what happens in children and adolescents' lives when they and the households they belong to are uprooted and forced to move. It examines children and adolescent lives in the context of the family group, the community, and the wider social, economic, and political arena. It looks into the ways in which children and adolescents within households are changed by past and current episodes of forced migration: alterations to individual rites of passage from childhood to adult status; transformations to family organization and structure; changes in informal and formal education and access to labour markets; and transformations in community cohesion and social institutions such as marriage, employment and care of the elderly. The study focuses on the situation of Palestinian children and adolescents in the Middle East region - Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine (West Bank and Gaza). The Palestine component of the study consists of two separate teams in recognition of the difficulty of internal travel and the large number of refugees represented.

### Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the direct and indirect effects of forced migration on children and adolescents in the region with particular emphasis on:
  - a) strategies of coping in households and families with children and adolescents
  - b) the effects of forced migration on these households and families
  - c) the social context of the direct and indirect effects of conflict
  - d) the attitudes to and incidence of violence within and outside households.
2. To develop a multidisciplinary approach in research on children and households affected by forced migration which can be used in an

applied context as well as a theoretical one.

3. To develop, in cooperation with local practitioners, programme managers and policy makers, participatory research methods relevant to situations of forced migration that focuses on children, adolescents and caregivers.
4. To generate concepts regarding children and households affected by forced migration that are culturally and socially sensitive to local contexts and which can be successfully applied to policy and practice and programme development.
5. To identify coping structures, strategies and mechanisms from which lessons may be learned and disseminated to researchers, practitioners and policy makers concerned with children and adolescents in the Middle East and elsewhere.

### Institutional Partners

[UNRWA](#), and [UNICEF](#) as well as numerous local NGOs in Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza were important partners in this study. They included:

#### UK

[Refugee Studies Centre](#), Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, (Dr. D. [Chatty](#))  
[School of Health and Social Studies](#), University of Warwick, (Professor G. [Hundt](#))

#### PALESTINE

Gaza Health Services Research Centre (Dr. Y. Abed, Dr. A. Thabet)  
[UNRWA](#) (Dr. A. El Alem)  
Ministry of Labour, [Palestinian National Authority](#) (Dr. S. Al Zaroo)

#### LEBANON

[Welfare Association](#)  
Dr. Bassem Serhan  
Ms. S. Tabari  
[UNRWA](#), Beirut  
[UNICEF](#), Beirut

**JORDAN**  
[CERMOG](#)  
Dr. Randa Farah

[UNICEF](#), Amman  
[UNRWA](#), Amman

**SYRIA**  
[General Union of Palestinian Women](#)  
Dr. Adnan Abdul Rahim  
Mrs. Samira Gebreel  
[UNICEF](#), Damascus  
[UNRWA](#), Damascus

## II. Approaches to Children and Adolescents: Current Practices



Research on children and adolescents, in general, is based on Western models of childhood and child development (Sheper-Hughes 1989, Boyden 1994). Perhaps the most fundamental principle which grounds these models is the belief that all children throughout the world have the same basic needs, pass through the same developmental stages, react in a like manner to armed conflict and forced migration and employ similar coping strategies. In many cultures, the category of adolescent is not recognised and individuals of the age of twelve or thirteen are expected to take on the roles and responsibilities of adults, marrying, raising families, seeking gainful employment and caring for the elderly in the household. How individuals in such cultures react to and cope with forced migration is bound to be different from individuals in cultures where adolescence is recognised as a transitional category from childhood to adult responsibility. Research is only now beginning to show that our Western-based assumptions of child development are not universal and that children do not automatically progress through the same sequence of developmental stages (Dawes and Tredoux 1989). Discussion with researchers working in Gaza indicated that the

puzzling findings of their questionnaires among children, which revealed a strong community-centric focus to their worries rather than the anticipated ego-centric focus, as would be the case in Europe or North America, could only be understood in the wider context of family and community cohesion (MacMullin, personal communications, 1998). Preliminary discussion with UNICEF programme officers in region revealed that the underlying issues which inform their programmes are set from headquarters and are based on Western assumptions of appropriate child development rather than an understanding of the cultural, social, political and economic context in which these phenomena occur. The regional offices make efforts to modify their programmes to fit local contexts. These alterations, however, are not based on any empirical study. They are, rather, an ad hoc assessment by local practitioners of what might fit their community.

**Current International Government Organizations (IGO) and National Non-Government organizations (NGO) practices**  
[UNRWA](#), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, provides basic education, health, relief

and social services to Palestinian refugees in Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. [UNRWA's operating budget](#) is reviewed by its Advisory Commission and submitted to the United Nations General Assembly every two years. In the past several years, its budget has been cut with negative repercussions on Palestinian refugee services. The general trend among international organizations to shift the focus from humanitarian relief to sustainable development has also affected [UNRWA](#). The agency now encourages the establishment of community-based organizations. However these local organizations are financially and logistically fundamentally unable to meet the needs of the Palestinian refugee population. There is no specific focus on children between the ages of 8-18 within [UNRWA](#) or these local NGOs.

The other international government organizations (IGO) in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine have slightly differing approaches to programme implementation as reflected in the different context within which they must operate. There are, however, some commonalities. Programmes geared specifically for Palestinian refugee children and adolescents are limited. The few that do exist, or did in the past, are not based on local priorities. In many cases, the programmes are identified and developed in agency headquarters (Europe or the United States) and sent to the Middle East regional offices ready to be implemented in the local community. In 1999 and 2000 for example, 'good parenting' and 'early childhood education' was the primary focus of [UNICEF](#) programming. Initially this programme was carried out in the form of 'train-the-trainer' projects as well as 'raising parental awareness' of what is 'good parenting' in the local communities. Interviews with trainers, some of them [UNRWA](#) staff working in the refugee camps revealed that the programmes came from [UNICEF](#) headquarters in New York with pre-prepared visual and video material. This suggests that the decision to implement this programme was a top-down process; the theme having been identified at headquarters

prior to engaging with the community and soliciting their participation or their perception of their needs and priorities. Once the material reaches the regional offices, however, there is a concerted effort made by local trainers and staff to re-mold the ready-made packages and to try to respond to what they perceive to be the local communities' social and cultural norms and requirement.

It is important to underscore that the basic premises upon which much IGO programming are based does not reflect a good understanding of the local social or cultural reality of the Palestinian community. For example, the 'good parenting' materials which accompany the programmes are built upon a conceptual model that deems Western 'developmental stages' as universal, dividing age groups into particular stages on a developmental scale accompanied by pictures and images of middle-class children happily playing with expensive toys or eating healthy and expensive foods. Most refugee children live in miserable and poor conditions and such images highlight what they 'do not have' as a particularly underprivileged community in society at large. Furthermore, the concepts of who are 'children', 'youths' or 'adults' are socially and historically constructed. IGO programmes aimed at reducing the incidents of 'child labour', for example, do not reflect on the possibility that Palestinian children and their families regard the paid employment which a child or youth undertakes as vital to the well-being of the family. This is not to say that children should be encouraged to work, but rather to plea for efforts to refocus the child within the wider web of social and economic relations such as the extended family, the school, the camp, and the market.

In Lebanon, a large number of IGOs and national NGOs operate. These include [UNICEF](#), [Norwegian People's Aid](#), [Welfare Association](#), [AFIDA-Australia](#), [World Vision](#), [Medical Aid for Palestinians](#), [Radda Barnen-Sweden](#), and [Save the Children-UK](#) among others. These programmes tend to focus on programmes of a developmental nature rather

than giving relief assistance. Vocational training for youth and in particular for school drop-outs, care for disabled children, summer residential activity clubs are among their projects.

In Syria, with the exception of a recently set up project for severely handicapped children run by [Save the Children](#), there are no IGOs operating in the country other than [UNICEF](#). There are, however, a number of large NGOs working with Palestinians. These include the Palestinian Women's Federation, Palestinian Youth Organization, General Union of Palestinian Teachers, Zahret Al Madayen Charity Association, and the [Palestinian Red Crescent Society](#). These organizations operate groups, after-school clubs and other projects which reinforce notions of Palestinian identity. They also occasionally provide relief assistance to the particularly needy.

[UNICEF](#) and [Save the Children](#) are major IGO actors in Jordan. Due to the specific nature of Palestinian identity in Jordan (as citizens) these projects target the Jordanian urban poor and not specifically Palestinian refugee children and adolescents. Their current focus is on good

parenting, early childhood activities, and peer consultants programmes for youth. A large number of NGOs also work in Jordan. These include the [Community Centers for Social Development](#), [Jordan River Foundation](#), [National Task Force for Children](#), and the [Swedish Organization for Individual Relief](#).

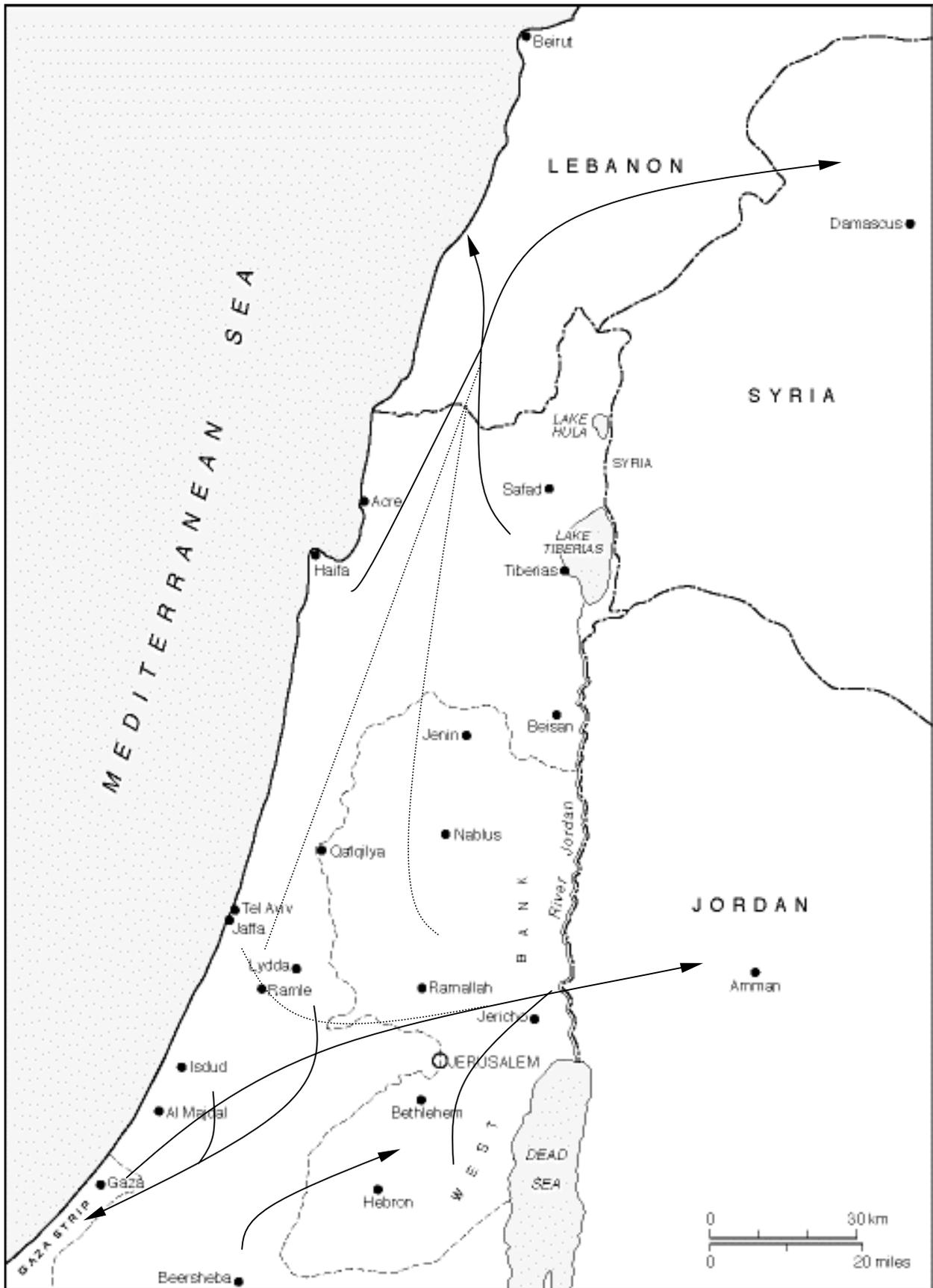
In Palestine, [UNICEF](#) is a major player along with [Save the Children](#), [Defence for Children International](#), [World Vision](#), [Care International \(Australia\)](#) to name a few. NGOs are also very numerous and include amongst them the [Gaza Community Mental Health Programme](#), Union of Health Workers, Cultural and Free Thought Association, the Red Crescent, [Canaan Institute](#), El Qattan Children's Centre, Palestinian Counseling Centre, [Terre des Hommes](#), [Tamer Institute](#), and the [Palestinian Red Crescent Society](#) to name a few. These organizations have programmes which run the gamut from mental and physical health programmes, therapy clinics, summer camps, workshops for teachers, emergency social support, training in human rights and democracy, and various cultural and library activities.

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### III. Methodology and Setting

This is a multi-centre study, with five field sites in the Middle East. Each site used a similar methodology adapted to the special skills and knowledge of its team. The research was conducted in two phases: a community level Participatory Research Approach (PRA); and a household sub-sample of 20 households in each site from which case material has been drawn.

In Phase one, participatory tools drew the entire community into the research and basic socio-demographic data was collected in an open, participatory manner that established



*Map 1: Journeys of exile of families interviewed for this study  
(Map derived from Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem)*

trust and confidence. Community social mapping, matrix and ranking to establish community ideas of well-being, mental and physical health, wealth and cohesion along with other techniques such as community and village time lines were also employed. One team decided to incorporate the participatory psychological approach developed by [MacMullin and Odeh](#) during this preliminary phase of research.

In phase two, a sample of 100 households (20 from each field site) with children from age 8 to 18 was drawn. The samples were stratified by socio-economic status, direct experience of forced migration and by age spread of household members.

The specific research tools for gathering data during this phase included:

- a. collection of narratives and life histories with a focus on critical incidents from children and adults of different generations within the same households
- b. semi-structured interviews with key informants
- c. natural group interviews with men, women and children in homes and schools
- d. participant observation.

### Setting

This section describes the settings of each team and the methods they used. Although a general methodology and research design had been negotiated at a regional meeting in Cyprus in July 1999, each local team developed their specific variation on this.

#### LEBANON

In 1949 there were 110,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon ([Palestinian Liberation Organisation, 2000](#)). In 2000, 370,000 refugees were registered with [UNRWA](#) and it is estimated that there are a further 10,000 who are unregistered. 53% live in camps and about 20% live in 'unofficial' camps. Lebanon denies Palestinian refugees their civil rights.

They need work permits for employment and these are issued when there are no Lebanese able to take on the work. Unemployment is

high at 40%. Health & educational services are in decline, especially those provided by [UNRWA](#), and NGOs have budget limitations.

### Methods

The study team worked in three areas Borj El-Barajneh camp (Beirut), [Borj El-Shemali camp](#) (Tyre, south-Lebanon) and with displaced families in the 4 buildings of an ex-hospital in Sabra, (near Shatila camp, Beirut). A survey was conducted in the [camps](#) to gather socio-economic indicators of the population. Group interviews were carried out with youth, and 20 household in-depth interviews

#### *Lebanon Study Team Research Assistants:*

Su'ad Hammad, Sana Hussein, Fayza Khalaf, Samia Jammal, Mahmoud Juma'a, Hiba Izahmad, and Mohammad Hamza

#### SYRIA

The number of Palestinian refugees in Syria is estimated to be more than 400,000 by the General Authority for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), the Syrian government administrative department that deals with them. This includes the 370,304 registered refugees of 1948 and their descendants of whom [UNRWA](#) has records, as well as those who came from Lebanon and Gaza during the last two decades. They make up less than 2.6% of the Syrian population. 45% of them are less than 19 years old and the average family size is 6 members. There are 10 [camps](#) in Syria near Damascus and Homs (see Map 2) and three additional sites. The largest camp is [Yarmouk camp](#) with 90,000 inhabitants. Many of the Palestinians are socio-economically disadvantaged - 26% of families live below the poverty line, 22% on the poverty line and [UNRWA](#) had 24,000 hardship cases registered in 1999 ([UNRWA 1999](#)). They do not have Syrian nationality.

## Methods

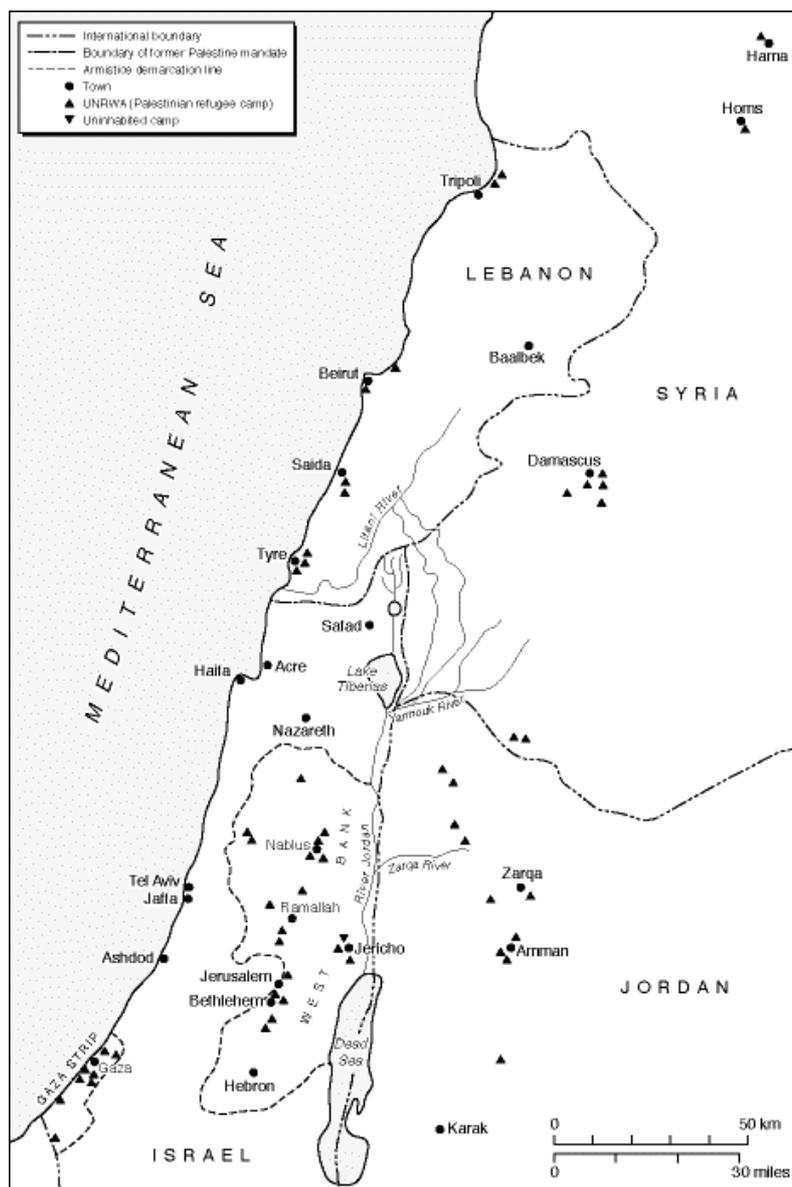
A multi-method approach was taken by the team. The first step was a PRA exercise in [Yarmouk camp](#), and some focus group interviews with [UNRWA](#) school teachers and youth leaders. A sample of 20 households was selected from three different socio-economic groups (rich, average, poor) and although the majority of households were Muslim, a few were Christian. Each household created social maps of their environment. A time line of the main events in Palestinian history since 1948 was used as an aid when interviewing although many interviewees created their own time line based on their own experiences. A family tree was created by the household during the interviews. Each household was interviewed several times in order to hear the voices of all three generations. Generally the three generations were all present during the interviews which were written up in brief notes during the interview and expanded through recall a few hours after the interview.

### *Syria Study Team Research Assistants:*

Maria Salem, Fuad Suradi,  
Mai Barkawi, and Manar  
Rabbai

## JORDAN

Jordan has the largest number of refugees in the diaspora with 1.6 million refugees registered with [UNRWA](#). These registered refugees constitute 32% of the total population ([UNRWA 1999](#)). Jordan is the only Arab country which has provided citizenship rights to most refugees. There have been repeated armed conflicts (1948, 1967, 1990-1991) resulting in waves of Palestinian forced migration into Jordan and internal armed conflicts (1968, 1970-71).



*Map 2: UNRWA Refugee Camps in the Middle East*

*(Adapted from map issued by Public Information Office – UNRWA H.Q. Gaza – 1997)*

## Methods:

The approach was multi-disciplinary and participatory. Two camps were chosen: Hitteen refugee camp is heterogeneous in terms of village of origin, trajectories of displacement and legal status and Hayy al-Mahasreh urban area which is homogeneous by village of origin, trajectories of displacement and legal status. A child-focused psychological intervention was carried out in a school setting. 20 households were interviewed with the focus on collecting life histories narratives of forced migration. There were both group and individual interviews. Participant observation was carried out in neighborhoods in the camps and focus groups were conducted with youth.

### ***Jordan Study Team Research***

#### ***Assistants:***

Suzan Al Salhi, Yousef Sa'adeh, Hassan Mohammad, Jihad Ghosheh, Bassima Abu Al Auf, and Suzan Barakat

### **GAZA**

The Gaza Strip is 50 kilometres long, 5 –12 kilometres wide and, in total, comprises 362 square kilometres. There are 4 towns, 8 refugee camps, fourteen villages and in total a population of more than 1 million there. The population is predominantly young; 47% are under 15 years of age and 5.2% are 60 years and over. In 1998, there were 798,444 registered refugees of whom 54.8% were living in camps ([Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1999](#)). [UNRWA](#) provides education, health and relief services to refugees living in and outside camps. The [Palestinian Authority](#) provides services to residents (non-refugees).

#### **Methods**

The study took place in 3 [camps](#) and one area outside the camps (El Bureij, Khan Younis, Beach camps and El-Zaytoon and Sheikh Radwan area). Three generational households were selected with grandfathers who were at least 11 years old in 1948 and grandchildren who were between 8-18 years of age. Grandparents were interviewed with parents and sometimes grandchildren were present. Women and girls were interviewed separately. The team consisted of a male and female social worker and a female nurse.

### ***Gaza Study Team Research***

#### ***Assistants:***

Eitdal El Khateib, Salah Hamdan, Jihad Okasha and Samah El Sabhah

## **IV. Memories of Journey into Exile**

### **◆ Life in Palestine**

The first generation (grandparents) reconstructs life in Palestine before 1948 and is crucial in the transmission of the 'image' of Palestine, the experience of the uprooting,

### **WEST BANK**

Palestinian refugees constitute 37% of the population of the West Bank. In 1997, 542,642 refugees were living in the West Bank of whom 26% were living in the nineteen [camps](#) and 74% were living outside the camps ([PCBS census 1997](#), UNRWA 1997). Nearly half the population (45%) is under 15 years of age – 17.5% are between 0-4 years of age and 27.5% are between 5-14 years of age. The fieldwork was carried out in the Hebron area.

#### **Methods**

A PRA exercise was conducted in Al-Fawwar camp. In addition a workshop was held with employees of NGOs and governmental organisations working with youth to review current provision and challenges. The team conducted 15 semi-structured interviews in two camps Al-Fawwar and Al-Aroub in the Hebron area of the West Bank. The households were all three generational households who came from different villages of origin and were located in different neighbourhoods within these camps. The households were visited 2-3 times and each generation was interviewed separately. The youth and adolescents were interviewed when possible outside the home in a community centre. This was in order to elicit their voices without the influence of elders or the presence of male relatives. Each interview took about 2 hours on average. The interviews were written up in Arabic and then translated into English.

### ***West Bank Study Team Research***

#### ***Assistants:***

Maesa Irfaeya and Hisham Sharabati

expulsion and refuge. They spoke of feelings of security and happiness in Palestine.

*We ate cow butter and ox butter. We had in our house 7 cows, 4 oxen, some sheep*

*and a horse. We had land that we cultivated with corn, wheat, sesame, watermelon, cucumber and eggplant. We never complained of illness like we do nowadays (Lebanon, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, female).*

*I was born in Bi'leen in 1930 and own in Bi'leen 300 dunums of land. I have the land deeds ... to prove ownership. We used to plant wheat, barley, lentils... (Jordan, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, male).*

*I finished four years of schooling. Teachers' salaries were very low, our homes were mostly made of mud although some were made of concrete. My father had 6 dunams of land. We used to cultivate wheat. After the British came, we started to grow fruit and vegetables. We used to take the produce to a market in Majdal (Gaza, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, male).*

*We were shepherds, we ploughed, harvested, threshed grain and picked olives. We were farmers - we didn't plant grapes, we planted barley, corn and wheat. God blesses these three seeds. There were supplies of milk, yogurt, oil and cheese ... I was taught by a person who used to receive an amount of corn or wheat in return for teaching me. There was no money, we used to exchange wheat corn and barley (West Bank, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, male).*

*People fled because they feared for their lives. Women and children fled first, while men stayed to defend the village. However, all they had were 10 rifles. What could they do? They later followed to Lebanon (Lebanon, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, female).*

*Before they entered, they occupied the minarets of the mosque and began shooting at people. When the Jordanian army unit was pulled out of the town, the local militia stopped fighting (Syria, 1<sup>st</sup> generation).*

*My grandmother told me how they left Palestine. Jews came to Palestine as foreign tourists, their numbers kept increasing, the British helped them. Palestinians were told to leave for a day or two and then return. They left and never returned (Lebanon, 3<sup>rd</sup> generation, male.)*

*There was a big British camp in Sarafand. When they withdrew, they left the tanks, cannons and guns for the Jews. We only had old rifles. Some people sold their wives' gold to buy guns to defend themselves. Jews used to live in a high area and they placed cannons to shoot down at us (Gaza, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, male).*

#### ◆ **Al Nakba (1948) – The Catastrophe**

The recurrent theme of each families' experience of Al Nakba appears in the narratives and life histories of all households. The grandparents related their experiences of the fighting and their journeys into exile to their children and grandchildren. In some households, these stories told to the interviewer were heard for the first time by some of the third generation. In other households, they were familiar family memories.

There were also more recent events such as the 1967 war (Al-Nazha) and the 1987-1993 Intifada that had profound consequences for many of the families in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.

#### ◆ Al Nazha (1967)

*In 1967, we fled from Aqbat Jaber at the sound of the Athan (morning prayers), we had nothing with us, and we walked while I was carrying my daughter who was 8 months old. We arrived in Amman barefoot (Jordan, 2nd generation, female).*

*I was young when I participated in the Intifada, then I became afraid of it. My brother Ameen was jailed administratively three times and my eldest brother was jailed before the Intifada. They came at night to arrest Ameen. He was jailed in Al Naqab prison and in Al Daharya prison where we used to visit him. We were very*

*happy to see him but bothered by the bars that separated us. My mother used to spend the whole visit crying. Visits to Al Naqab prison were forbidden but my mother used to send him letters (West Bank, 3rd generation).*

Life in the camps in the beginning was very difficult. In Gaza and the West Bank, most of the families were given tents to live in on arrival. Some families were given shelter by other families. They talked about the hardship, the overcrowding, the lack of money and services. There were cross-generational traumatic experiences in these households owing to the repeated experience of violence and political instability particularly in Gaza and the West Bank. Different generations in the same families had experienced separation from family members; seeing people being beaten wounded or killed; being under curfew; being imprisoned; tear gas inhalation; day or night raids and home demolition.

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## V. Common Issues and Emerging Themes

#### ◆ Palestinian Identity and the Desire to Return

Palestinian identity is reconstructed through internal factors, namely political and collective will, such as through popular memory and external factors which enhance 'otherness'. An example of these would be government policies preventing Palestinians freedom of access to the Civil Service or higher education.

*A dog in his homeland is a sultan! (Jordan, 1st generation, female)*

Memory implies identity and the younger generations are learning less about their past. In Jordan, most of the children and adolescents mention the name of their village of origin in

Palestine as their identity, while others just say Palestine.

*My grandmother tells me about Palestine, she is like a dictionary; she has many stories to tell about Palestine. She always tells us about Palestine. I wish I could visit Palestine. There is no one in the camp who does not wish to visit Palestine, my grandmother tells me we are from 48, and there is also 64 [he makes a mistake, meaning 67] she says those from the 67 territories are going to return but the people from 48 are not. My grandmother is from Marj Ibn Amer from Haifa, my grandmother always tells me about Marj Ibn Amer, and Haifa. She desires so much to return (Jordan, 3rd generation).*

*I'm a Palestinian to the roots, I have never visited Palestine but I loved her thanks to my mother, grandfather and grandmother (Syria, 3rd generation).*

#### ◆ The Issue of Return

There were different opinions and positions concerning the issue of return to Palestine. Many of the interviewees of different generations expressed a wish to return.

*I have built a two-storey house here. However, if they let me return, I would leave everything and accept to live under a tree in Palestine (Lebanon, 1st generation, female).*

*I wish I could die in my country (Lebanon, 2nd generation, male).*

*We believe that Palestine is the land of our fathers and grandfathers and we will never give it up no matter what they offer us as alternatives (Syria, 1st generation).*

*I wish I could visit Palestine; we had lands and lived a good and simple life. Here the houses are close to each other, the boys are in the streets...(Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*I would like to finish my studies and go back to Ajur (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

*I didn't think of leaving the camp and I refused to buy land here in the camp although it was very cheap. Each 1000 sq.m was only for 10 lira, but I want to go back to Beet Jebreen (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

*If I had to choose to go somewhere, I only chose Tel Alsafi. I always imagine going back to Tel Alsafi (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

*I refused to leave the camp and now if I have to choose I'll refuse to leave... I want to go back to Alfalojeh, there is no choice but going back even after 100 million years (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

Some younger people stated that they preferred to remain in the countries they had grown up in.

*If someone asks me where I am from, I say I am from Gaza and live in Schneller camp. I was brought up here and got used to the place. I would not like to go to Gaza, because my girlfriends are here. I am very attached to my girlfriends, they have a lot of influence on me, I tell them all my problems. I do not know anything about how people were living in Gaza (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*Over-crowding is the worst thing in the camp. People are very close to each other so you don't have any privacy; every body knows every thing about everybody. We like to buy a land and build a house outside Al-Fawwar camp. My husband thinks the same (West Bank, 2nd generation, female).*

Many of the refugees who belong to the first generation feel guilty because they left their place of origin and their grandchildren think they should have stayed. Some of the members of the West Bank households had visited the family village of origin. This is only a possibility for people on the West Bank, in Gaza and in Jordan. Although visiting place of origin is a painful experience for some children, the parents and grandparents always talk to their children about their place of origin and encourage them to visit it.

*Ajur had more than 20 ruins. I read this in some papers in the house. Once I went to Ajur with a summer camp, I was very happy to visit the village that my grandfathers left. I was very upset because*

*they left their land and came to the camps (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

*What I would like best is to go back to my village. I visited it. I told old people that our countryside is heaven. Why did you leave and let the Jews kill you? In Haifa, I saw people. Our village was beautiful, It has all the goods. Why did they leave it? Old people were scared by Deir Yassin; some places had a cease fire agreement but people ran away, My father made a white flag and ran because we heard shooting. My father was scared that Jews would come and kill us like they've done in Deir Yassin. My father was concerned about us for they killed young men of 20-25 years of age and buried them. Their families were looking for them (West Bank 3rd generation, female).*

*My father told me the story of his uncle and how Jews from Gat Settlement tried to buy his land with a lot of money but he refused and died with honour. I saw the land during my trip to Iraq Almanshieh, but I hated entering it. I felt a lot of pain. There are a big difference between reality on the ground and imagination. I can't express my sadness (West Bank, 2nd generation, male).*

*I didn't visit Samial but my sister Rawia visited it she told me that she cried when she was there. People used to go to clean the house and sit by it. My uncle came and we visited the empty place, my aunt (my wife's grandmother) found her silver bracelets in the wall of the house, where she hid them. There was a Yemeni Jew on one side of it. Once I fought with them because I picked up some garlic. They said it was theirs (West Bank, 2nd generation, male).*

*At the beginning of the occupation I organised a trip to Iraq Almanshiah. I took a jug and a handkerchief to bring soil. There was a tent for a Bedouin family. It was 10 o'clock in the morning, the man*

*was asleep but his wife was awake. I asked the wife to fill the jug with water from the old well. The man told me if it is your village why did you leave it? I said you kicked us out and he refused to give me water. I went to the Jew who was guarding the well. The Jew asked me and I told him this is my village. He was from Syria. He told me that they forced him to come to Israel and that he wanted to go back to Syria. He warned me not to go to the bushes because there were mines (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

#### ◆ Emigration

Some parents and young people talked about emigration as a possible choice for the future of their children as a way of escaping poverty, unemployment and refugee status. Mothers were more in favour of emigration than fathers, and most parents saw emigration as a final resort. For some of the parents emigration was linked to Palestine as a destination. Most boys, if provided with the opportunity, wanted to leave to work abroad. The countries mentioned by parents and youth included Denmark, Sweden, Canada, England, France, Germany, Brazil, and the Gulf.

#### ◆ Internal Discrimination as a Refugee

In Lebanon parents spoke of the denial of their civil rights by the Lebanese government. Many fathers reported feelings of humiliation and many children/adolescents said that they felt isolated and discriminated against by the host community.

*My children are against naturalisation...they feel the discrimination (Lebanon, 2nd generation, female).*

*There is no future for our children in Lebanon (Lebanon, 2nd generation, female).*

In Syria similar feelings of 'otherness' were expressed

*I realised that I was a refugee when I was six years old. Even when we were inside Palestine in Ramallah, they used to call us refugees (Syria, 2nd generation).*

*I don't like to visit Lebanon or Kuwait because people there hate us (Syria, 3rd generation).*

In Jordan, people of different generations spoke of being discriminated against as Palestinians, refugees and camp-dwellers.

*Here they tell us you are from Gaza, our son cannot enroll in university and the other cannot get a government job. We fled to Gaza in 1948, we are not from there... We suffered from the people of Gaza as well, they used to look at somebody and say 'haram (poor or pathetic) your face is like that of a refugee...!' (Jordan, 2nd generation, female).*

*Many people from the outside think we are terrible and we are all bad. They call us 'mukhayyamjiyyeh' (campers). Even my sister's family, who lives in Zarqa, they say that people in the camp are garbage, good for nothing, cows, etc (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

In Gaza, children reported their perceptions of what it meant to be a refugee and used these terms. It meant being humiliated, displaced, homeless and lost, deprived and feeling inferior. Similarly in the West Bank, the refugee children experienced discrimination very dramatically.

*We feel the discrimination against us when we go outside the camp, for instance, we feel it when a girl marries outside the camp and when some girls join the schools of Doura village (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

*Teachers are racist. This appears in their dealings with students. They always blame students from the camp for silly mistakes*

*and not students of Beit Omar. They also discriminate with marks. The first students are always from Beit Omar (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ Livelihood, Socio-Economic and Cultural Relations

The way people make their daily living is related to the way they reproduce themselves socially and culturally. Thus, it is not possible to isolate practices such as early marriage and close kinship relations from poverty and the absence of alternative institutions to support individuals.

*There is insufficient money, I can't (take special courses) and not all my friends go. Most of them work, some in construction, others at Jabri's. Maybe there are only four of my friends who are able to take the extra courses to help them, only those whose fathers have money. The problem is that most centers take 3 dinars and I cannot pay (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ The Camp, Space and Infrastructure Problems

All households were concerned with the poor living conditions in the camps.

*There are problems in the water, the narrow houses, unemployment and poverty... there is no place to breathe, neither for the families nor their children, no park or public space to go. (Jordan, 2nd generation, female).*

*1st Boy: We need better streets, less students inside the classrooms, we need playgrounds. We need playgrounds and footballs, which do not have holes in them. 2nd boy: I suggested to my father to put some wooden boards and to make the zinc roofs sturdier, because it is too old and it falls sometimes, but he did not listen to my suggestion.*

*3rd boy: Our desks, if one is broken, they do not replace it. (Jordan, 3rd generation, males)*

*The problem I face has to do with the neighbourhood, there are a lot of young men (zu'ran) 'hooligans' and there are often problems that break out in the area. The other day it was so serious, they brought in weapons and it is very disturbing, we heard the police and the ambulance (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*The houses are too narrow, overcrowding and population density, dirty water, unemployment, the narrow streets, the UNRWA clinic has no medicine and they treat patients badly. The schools, which do not even have proper desks, they do not care about the students, transportation is inefficient ... The employees or garbage collectors do not work on Fridays, so the waste accumulates. The market is narrow and the gangsters attack shopkeepers with knives, alcoholism is rampant and there is fear of the gangsters in the streets. As a result of overcrowding, there are many problems and it is difficult to maintain morals and traditions (Jordan, 1st generation, male).*

In Lebanon, parents, teachers, and NGO workers noted increasing frustration and anger in the camp. All interviewees (parents, teachers, NGOs, & children) mentioned that there are no creative outlets and play spaces for children

*Our houses are like graves not houses (Lebanon, 3rd generation, male).*

*When I cough my neighbours can hear me (Lebanon, 2nd generation, female).*

In the West Bank, many of the refugee children said they felt safe inside the camp, which is the only world with which they are intimately familiar.

*My family is here. The camp is better than many places. It is safer and there is no crime here. People have normal relations but my mother says it was better in the past. However, when I visit my brother in jail I feel that I am not living, I see all the beautiful places on the road. It is better than here. A lot of green areas (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

*I know the camp is not my place but I belong to it (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

The adults spoke of a sense of community and support. Despite the lack of infrastructure, people had learnt to live together.

*We should take care of our brothers and sisters, family cohesion is important to put up with this miserable situation. It is also important for the continuity of our resistance and steadfastness (West Bank, 2nd generation, male).*

*People's relationships are very good. We are the only family from Iraq Al-manshiah in our neighborhood and there are 10 different families but thank God nobody ever hurt anybody. Once a bad person needed blood because he was in an accident and everybody went to donate blood for him... I don't wish to go out of the camp unless to go back to Iraq Al-manshiah. We own land in Hebron, we visit it occasionally. We can build a house in Hebron but we don't want to. People are compassionate and cooperative (West Bank, 2nd generation, female).*

*Over-crowdedness makes us very close to each other, some times I listen to the neighbour's radio and I ask them to turn it up. Sometimes I smell the food at our neighbours and we share it. But when a problem occurs we hear the shouting at their houses. The most important problem is the narrowness of the place. Children can't play. People ask their neighbours to keep their children home. There are*

*problems of transportation inside the camp and of a shortage of water. People who live in far places in the camp are forced to walk because there is no transportation inside the camp (West Bank, 2nd generation female).*

*I don't like any thing in Al-Fawwar, but when some girls swear at the camp I feel I must defend it. We don't go out of it except on school trips. There is no government, no sewage infrastructure, a lot of insects and a shortage of water. Nothing is good. People relations are good at weddings and condolences (West Bank, 3rd generation female).*

#### ◆ Intergenerational Relations

The older generation felt that they did not have control over the younger generation of adolescents and the adolescents felt misunderstood and constrained by their elders.

*In the past, the young used to respect their elders and to take them into account. Today they answer back rudely to their fathers. Now I worry for my children and I am scared when my son goes out. My daughters go out to visit their sister and only to people that I know and like, because girls influence each other and can destroy the other (make them go astray)(Jordan, 1st generation female).*

*The youth of the past worked and did not know unemployment...Also, the son used to obey the neighbour, not only his father. Today, all the youth care about are clothes, perfumes, walking in the streets, carrying knives. He is a hero who dares to speak to his son or daughter. The reason for all this is the absence of religion, lack of work and the things they see on the television (Jordan, 1st generation, female).*

*The main problems we face is that the parents do not take care of the adolescents and they do not understand their psychological needs and the developments*

*they pass through. They are removed from the son or daughter (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*The main problem facing adolescents is the freedom to express one's opinion. Parents must allow the youth to express themselves and not to pressure them too much and not to constantly observe adolescents to a point it suffocates them, a person feels under constant surveillance (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

#### ◆ Education

This was seen as vital and important by everyone. Access to education for girls has improved over time. Many of the first generation women and some of the men spoke of how they regretted their lack of formal education.

*It was shameful for girls to go to school, Sara was the only girl in school, she finished the fourth grade (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

*Schools were only for the children of Sheikhs (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

*My father bought me the school uniform and the other school supplies but then he ripped the uniform off because a young man told him that if I learn the alphabet, I would write letters. When I remember this now, I swear at this man. I wish I could read so I can read the Quran (West Bank, 1st generation, female).*

*We are nothing without education. Education gives value to humans especially us the Palestinians, we are without money or support and we have no choice but education (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

*Nothing is better than education. For 38 years I imprint my thumbprint when I get my salary. This really depressed me. I lost*

*many work opportunities because I couldn't read (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

UNRWA is the main provider of education in the camps, although government schools and private schools are available. The quality of schooling and the interaction between teachers and pupils was raised in every setting.

*The teachers are not good; the kids run away and are loose. My generation, when we went to school we used to know what school means... I think government schools are better than UNRWA in terms of teachers and curriculum (Jordan, 1st generation, female).*

*The government schools are better because there is discipline ... in government schools there is no time for problems ...and the break is ten minutes...In UNRWA schools things are too free and there is no studying... they (students) take drugs like pills and smell AGO (a type of glue) (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ Abuse and violence

Very few informants referred to violence inside the family, however, many of them mentioned that violence is very common at school.

*Once in the kindergarten we hit a girl and threw her shoes in the toilet. The teacher hit us and kicked us out of class (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

*Once I couldn't memorize a verse so the teacher hit me with a pipe--which has a piece of metal inside it. I was very angry at the teacher (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

*My father sent me to school but I made a mistake in the alphabet and the teacher hit me so I ran away and never returned (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

There was concern that the curriculum in the schools was not Palestinian in content, that the schools were overcrowded and lacked facilities. Violence was a problem. Teachers were reported to use verbal and physical abuse and the children reported violence amongst themselves and sometimes within the family.

*Here one cannot live without the knife, but if you have one there is a problem and if you don't it is a problem too. If you have one and the police catches you, you go to prison for God knows how long. If you don't you may be attacked. These problems can start in grade five up (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*There are problems in school, the treatment is not equal. At home, my mother comes in and tells us your grades are bad anyway, get up and go to the kitchen to work. Then when my parents see the certificate, they beat us and burn our hands (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*The youth are unruly and carry razors. People worry for their children. The other day one of the 'gangsters' poured gasoline on a bus and burnt it. He was the ticket controller. The owner of the bus told him, he no longer has a job for him, so at night the young man went to the bus and burnt it. Now we live in terror in the camp, because there is unemployment, because the young men they study but do not work (Jordan, 2nd generation, female).*

*The problem of adolescents is that the school and the family are constantly punishing us....The situation in the streets forces the person to deal with others in the same way, if you want to become a man, you must carry a knife (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ Unemployment

The problem of unemployment concerns the young people and is demotivating.

*Teaching began to deteriorate in 1985 onwards. The economic situation became worse after that year. If someone finished tawjihi (high school) and his financial situation is bad, he can't go on to university anyway. The colleges are not good, neither are the job opportunities. People think I will work for 80 dinars after I finish school, which is better than going for four or five years to university for nothing. Even university graduates can't find jobs and it is worse for college graduates (Jordan, 2nd generation, male).*

*The most important problem today is that the youth say why should I trouble myself and study and at the end anyway I will not find a job? If they do find a job, it is a low salary, they are demoralized, and if they work, the highest wage is 80 dinars per month. Okay, what does 80 dinars do, if he wants to open a house and if he wants to get married? (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

#### ◆ Gender Issues

Girls faced discrimination from their parents, male siblings and society and are often considered physically and emotionally weak.

*My single sister is working and I do not approve of that.  
A female always needs male authority  
(Lebanon, 3rd generation, male).*

In addition, the girls complained about lack of freedom of movement compared to the boys and a lack of places to meet with each other outside of their homes and school.

*A girl is no longer allowed to play outside when she 'matures' that is around 12 years old. But most of us play inside the house even when younger (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*At home, there is discrimination between girls and boys. Boys can go any time with their friends and come back at any time, but girls cannot do that they are forced to stay home and not go anywhere. If I go out anywhere, it is only if my brothers take me to my uncle's house. Picnics? Maybe once a year, they do not let us go out, there are only centres for the young men, but nothing for us (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*There are differences between my thinking and my parents'. When I am bored I like to go out of the house but my Mum prefers me at home. I can see the discrimination between boys and girls, boys can spend 24 hours outside the house, but we stay home. It is true that it is better for girls to stay home but it is boring. I participated in the summer camp in Ramallah because my Dad was there. At first I hesitated in participating in the camp because I'll be far from my family, but I love people. I stayed for a couple of days but I cried every day because I am away from my family (West Bank, 3rd generation, female).*

There were also reports of gender discrimination in the schools.

*We have many problems in school, the teachers hit us a lot... Sometimes the girls who do not know how to read, instead of helping them... the teacher gives them a zero. This is the reason why the girls do not do well in school., they tell the girls they are 'donkeys'... The headmistress is very harsh on us...' Once she told the teacher that we are only good for wearing 'shoes' which are like 'our faces.' The daughter of the headmistress can wear anything she likes. But if we wear clothes that we are not supposed to, like putting nail polish on our fingers, or wearing colourful scarves, they give us hell (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

## VI. Coping Strategies of Youth

Coping strategies can be individual, collective and social, psychological and political. These are interrelated categories. Some of these coping strategies are shared by all youth in the region and some are country specific.

### ◆ Family Support and Solidarity

Cherishing and depending on the support of the family is one coping strategy that is shared by all. This is a group who live amongst their extended families and relatives, since the forced migration which for most occurred 50 years ago. Supportive family relationships enable these families to buffer and protect each other from some of the effects of poverty, unemployment, illness and political instability. In Lebanon, the youth reported feeling protected by their families whom they can depend on.

*I get all the help I need from my mother. I tell her everything that I face, bad or good. She stands by my side (Lebanon, 3rd generation, female).*

*If I face problems, I find those who support me, my older brother, my cousin and my uncle (Lebanon, 3rd generation, male).*

Children, women and other members of the family provide sources of labour, service and income in times of distress

*I was three years old when my father remarried. When I was young I used to have a peddler's cart which I used to sell ice cream. I made anywhere between one to one and a half dinars a day. My mother used to work in the fields so that she also could bring in some money to spend on the house...I struggled until I graduated and was the first on my class (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*I take care of my grandmother and my mentally disabled father (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*If I face a problem, I talk to my wife or stay alone in the mountains (West Bank, 2nd generation, male).*

### ◆ Early Marriage

NGO workers noted many cases of forced early marriage and instances where girls eloped to escape pressures faced at home. Some mothers think about marrying off their daughters early in order to reduce household expenses but fear to do so.

*I didn't say yes or no. I agreed to anything. I used to think, maybe if I got married, I would experience a different kind of life than the one at home. Maybe I will be happy with my husband. But things turned out that everything is the same (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

*I accepted to marry him, although I did not know him, due to the difficult conditions we had in our house... I used to do all the housework, clean the floor, wash the clothes, dishes and everything... and even used to go and wake her (her brother's wife) up so that she could get up to eat (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

The issue of early marriage was raised in Jordan in group interviews with girls.

*I am 12 years old, ...a suitor came for my sister, my mother is the one who forced her to marry, not my father...she was the first in school, but my mother insisted she get married. The first suitor who came she forced her to marry him. She said, if she does not marry him, she will not marry at all, she will not find someone better... My*

*sister was fifteen when she married (Jordan, 3rd generation, female)*

*The other thing is early marriage. Many girls would like to finish school but their parents do not allow them to finish. Even parents who are educated. Maybe because they have many girls 8 or 10, or the girl passed through some 'honour' thing (gossip/reputation), so they want to get rid of her and force her to marry early so that she does not face the same problem. (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

There is variation in the practice of early marriage in the region. It is influenced by education, socio-economic status and political conditions. In times of political instability such as the *Intifada* in Gaza and the West Bank, there was an increase in early marriage.

#### ◆ Sense of belonging through living in a camp

For many youth, the camp was their home even though they recognised their village of origin.

*I feel I belong to Yarmouk camp, even if I am asked in the future to choose between staying here in Yarmouk camp or returning to Loubieh I would prefer to stay here. I went to primary and preparatory UNRWA schools here and met all my friends here (Syria, 3rd generation, female).*

*I like living in the camp because all my friends and neighbours live here. If one is sick here, everybody would visit him. If there is a dispute between two persons or families, the community intervenes to solve it (Lebanon, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ Avoidance when social relations are tense

Conditions of overcrowding create social conflicts among neighbours. In addition, it is easy to spread rumours and gossip as a form of social control, especially over girls and

women. Thus severing relations with neighbours or avoiding socialising or moving too freely in the camp is a form of coping with overcrowding and social and cultural norms as well as problems.

*I do not like to interfere (in the sense of having close relations) with the neighbours... (Jordan, 2nd generation, female).*

#### ◆ Support of peers

*I have five friends, we play together and we visit each other, if we fight we make up very quickly (West Bank, 3rd generation, male).*

*My friends are like my sisters, nothing better than friendship, I tell my friends every thing, I turn to them when I face a problem (West Bank, 2nd generation, female).*

*If I face a problem I cannot solve, I turn to my mother or my girlfriend. If I have a problem in school I tell my mother, she then goes to the school and solves it (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*I began talking to my girlfriend, who has a similar problem and whose father is also going to get re-married, and sharing my problems with her. My girlfriend ran away from her home and went to her grandparent's house, she said she did not want her family anymore (Jordan, 3rd generation, female).*

#### ◆ Religion as a coping strategy

*I pray to God, I only complain to him (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

*I advise my children to remember and fear God, to be honest and trust worthy (West Bank, 1st generation, male).*

*I go to the Islamic Centre for the Orphans, I go there every Wednesday and Sunday they teach us Quran and Hadith, from nine to eleven. Sometimes they take us on trips to Jerash and Aqaba (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*Every father and mother have to tell their children about Palestine, it is an Islamic duty... (Jordan, 1st generation, male).*

*Whatever comes from God is welcome and acceptable (Lebanon, 3rd generation, female).*

#### ◆ **Palestinian Identity as a Coping Strategy**

As a collective, popular memory was inscribed onto the places in exile – such as through narratives and life-histories – they passed belonging to Palestine on to younger generations, named their streets and areas after Palestinian villages and historical events, decorated their homes with maps and Palestinian embroidery and reproduced their identities as different from the ‘others.’

*Inshallah, all people in the camp dream of returning to Palestine...relatives who went there filmed a video... There, the vegetables, the fruits...are different from the camp (Jordan, 1st generation, male).*

*I used to draw maps on the ground to show them where their original village and the surrounding villages are. We were willing to die for Palestine...especially during the Intifada (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*We hear that we might be allowed to return soon. I do not want to remain a refugee...I will go to Palestine (Lebanon, 3rd generation, female).*

*It is best to wait here until we go back to our country and live in dignity (Lebanon, 3rd generation, male).*

#### ◆ **Political Activism**

In Jordan, almost all refugees interviewed preferred not to be quoted regarding their political activities or ideological leanings. Refugees cope collectively by maintaining a sense of dignity. They emphasise that they do ‘not sell their land’ and they have ‘authentic origins’, roots and a Right of Return. The appropriation of Islamic values to revive belonging and the ‘dream of return’ to Palestine’ is noticeable. The scenes from the West Bank and Gaza today show that children and adolescents do not only have biological or physical needs, but are also political and social actors who are capable of fighting and resisting oppression and transforming society in radical ways. In Jordan, there were demonstrations in refugee camps, including Hitteen and children participated in great numbers in support of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and calling for their Right of Return.

In the West Bank and Gaza, people talked more openly about political activism.

*We are interested in political organisations, all our family members are affiliated to the Fatah Movement (West Bank, 2nd generation, male).*

*My brothers affiliated to the Resurrection Party. They used to meet up in my house. I used to carry weapon from the valley to the caves. I helped some one to run away dressing in women cloth, this was in 1956 . . . My brother joined the PLO (West Bank, 1st generation, female).*

#### ◆ **Education**

Education was seen through out as an important mechanism for survival and a way to resist.

*Our enemy is highly educated and we should be using his weapon while fighting him... (Syria, 2nd generation, male).*

*My priorities in life are the school, my family, reading, work, friends and the neighbourhood (Syria, 3rd generation).*

◆ **Formal and Informal Youth Groups**

In Syria, formal youth groups are particularly important in developing a social and political identity. In one of the camps in Jordan, it was observed that youth networks organise themselves around areas of interest, such as sports, religion, study, girls, etc. and they seem to occupy particular streets and areas within the Hayy.

*Sometimes I go to my friend, we bring books for the tawjihi class and discuss them (some cannot afford to buy the books so they meet and help each other) (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*

*We put together a football team in our neighbourhood and we play with another team at the end of the camp ... if they win we bring them a medal, and if we win they give us one... (Jordan, 3rd generation, male).*



*Children at a carnival in Al Buss Camp, Lebanon*

## VII. What have we learned?

The preliminary research findings clearly suggest the need for practitioners and policy makers working with children and adolescents to be aware of the broader context of extended family, kin, neighbours, and community. The general patterns which have emerged are, without exception, mediated by the specific historical, political and economic realities in the most recent place of temporary settlement for Palestinian refugees.

### Sampled populations

Families were selected purposively to be reasonably representative of the refugee population in terms of socio-economic measures. The access to the families was negotiated through the personal contacts of the research teams, who were all Palestinian refugees themselves and with the cooperation of UNRWA. The emphasis on transparency, the effort to explain the aims of the research to children and adults alike, and the informality of the participatory research process contributed to a high degree of repetition of themes by the sampled population and thus a presumed reliability of findings.

### Common Themes raised by adolescents

Among the themes which emerged across all five field sites were:

- Concerns about their identity as Palestinians, refugees, camp residents, and Muslims or Christians were widespread. In Jordan, the national policy of naturalization of Palestinians has created a split population. The middle class Palestinian family tends to be well-integrated into Jordanian society, while the lower classes identify more with the general Palestinian refugee population.
- Palestinian refugee camp populations are intermarrying. This phenomenon appears to be tied to the widespread feeling of discrimination as refugees among host country's populations.
- Most youth considered emigration a viable option to improve their lives. It is also raised an expression of loss of confidence in a just settlement in the Israeli / Palestinian conflict (in the Syrian data emigration did not emerge as a major theme, perhaps because of a greater sense of solidarity with the rest of the host population's sense of oppression).
- The sense of gender discrimination among adolescent girls emerged in most of the field reports.
- Education emerged as an important theme throughout, though the push to gain higher education was treated with reluctance by some. This was due to a growing perception that the lack of jobs available to Palestinians in the market, or the low pay that they could expect, was discouraging greater efforts by adolescents to carry on in school. In some field sites, places in UNRWA schools were highly sought (Lebanon), in others they were spurned (Jordan).
- Violence in schools and in the home, as well as gender-related abuse was reported, but it was difficult to determine whether this is on the rise or a persistent long-term problem. Each generation discussed the tradition of beating as punishment in school and at home in order to control unsocial behaviour or to force girls into accepting decisions made on their behalf by their elders. It emerges that these behavioural traits are accepted as part of tradition, though increasingly abhorred by youth.
- A distorted and unclear perception of Palestinian history emerged from many of the interviews. There was a tendency to confuse dates and names of ruling monarchs. Furthermore the interval between 1967 and 1990 seemed to elicit no sense of any occurrence of importance to Palestinians. This general topic is

directly related to the lack of any Palestinian curriculum in the UNRWA schools in all of the five field sites. Up until the last few years UNRWA schools were only allowed to follow the national curriculum and hence the interpretation of history of the country in which the building was located. Recently, international pressure on UNRWA schools in Lebanon has resulted in some effort to teach Palestinian history along side Lebanese history in these schools.

- Political activism of youth both girls and boys, particularly during the Intifada, was widespread and a source of prestige among their peers. This active participation in political events has emerged as a major coping mechanism, giving youth a sense of hope, if not choice in determining their future.

The themes above can be grouped into three broad subject headings:

- A. Family-Kin Relations
- B. Status and Position
- C. Manifestations of Identity

#### **A. Family-Kin Relations**

- Discrimination between the sexes was prominent
  - Girls faced restricted movement and freedom of expression
  - Girls have a heavy workload at home
  - Parents are more forgiving to males
  - Educational opportunities go to boys first
  - Gender and birth order are important in power relations
- Communications between the generation remain strong
  - Family gathering are becoming less frequent
  - Changing concepts of needs, opinions, and ambitions,
  - Sacrifice for family members still common
  - Abuse at home, verbal, physical, and psychological persists

- Mainly on children, youth and mothers, parents on children, husbands on wives, boys on girls.

- Transmission of Palestinian identity across generations remains important
  - Presence of generation '1' who fled Palestine in 1948 crucial
  - Generation '2' is less informed about Palestine
  - Generation '3' knows the village name, but otherwise knowledge is second hand and very vague.

- Marriage and Moral Codes reinforce traditional beliefs
  - Early, 'arranged' marriage is widespread (especially in the West Bank and Gaza)
  - Honour crimes are reported in West Bank, Gaza and Jordan
  - Veiling has multiplicity of purposes and sometimes provides more freedom of movement to girls

#### **B. Status and Position**

- Unemployment of parents and of youth consistently raised as major concern
  - Unavailability of jobs,
  - Discrimination in hiring
- Limited and overcrowded educational facilities
  - Limited capacity for vocational training
  - Absence of physical education, extremely limited playing area
  - No libraries, no computer labs,
  - Limited chances for university education (Gaza and Lebanon)
- Physical environment is overcrowded, lacking privacy or green space
  - Camps overcrowded and growing vertically
  - Poor sanitation, and no public services
  - Overcrowded homes, no privacy, no open spaces
  - No public libraries, no playing areas, no clubs for girls

- Limited legal rights are unequal depending upon country of residence
  - No civil rights in Lebanon, full rights in Syria and Jordan
  - Restrictions on travel in Jordan, Gaza and West Bank
  - Inequality between refugees and non-refugees in Gaza
  - No participation in decision making related to their future

### C. Manifestations of Identity

- Sense that collective identity of Palestinians is under threat post-Oslo
- Heterogeneous character of Palestinians also undermines collective identity
- Identity is constrained by lack of ownership of physical space

### Manifestations of identity that act as coping activities for Palestinian refugee children and youth within the field sites

	Jordan	West Bank / Gaza	Lebanon	Syria
Political	football teams identification with village of origin demonstrations discussion of political situation	intifada talk/action rejection of Oslo focus on right of return	talk of discrimination demonstrations	idea of homeland return dialect
Social / Economic	as camp dweller child labour (sacrifice) dropping out of school violence	Discrimination Refugees vs. residents 'demographic struggle'	child labour gangs marrying a visa	child labour frustration
Cultural	rejecting Palestinian dress food and dialect appropriating Islamic dress	naming streets festivals	Palestinian cable TV Games Dialect and food	Dialect Exhibitions festivals national days

## VIII. What are our conclusions?

These conclusions are drawn mainly from the working groups of our regional dissemination workshop and included the research teams as well as representatives from UNRWA, ARC, NAJDE, AI-JANA, SCF, and the Canada Fund. Because the West Bank and Gaza team leaders and most of the NGO representatives in those sites were unable to travel to attend the dissemination workshop, we were unable to set up a small working group to draw conclusions from their data.

### Jordan

- ✧ Children and adolescents need to be drawn into the whole process of planning, designing and implementing projects for their benefit by NGOs, policy makers, and donors.
- ✧ Create spaces for children and youth to express themselves physically through playgrounds and centres as well as socially through cultural and educational centres.
- ✧ Promote Palestinian history through formal and informal education (UNRWA schools as well as programmes portraying Palestinian history).
- ✧ Open channels between families and schools to help solve problems related to violence.
- ✧ Promote and support programmes which bring refugee children from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank to meet and share experiences.

### Syria

- ✧ Support positive coping and not glorify children's sacrifices through peer relations, respect of place, feeling valued by the community.
- ✧ Encourage participation of children in schools, non-formal learning with teachers, parental / community role, child- to child and understanding child labour.

### Lebanon

- ✧ Develop programmes for youth to engage in research and creative expression with others. Set up libraries and programmes to encourage reading and writing. Create opportunities to set up computer labs with suitable materials for children.
- ✧ Create opportunities for youth discussion groups to engage in problem solving. Create dialogue between parents and teachers and set up counseling units at schools.
- ✧ Present problems of UNRWA schools to UNRWA administrators and take other concrete recommendations to responsible agencies.
- ✧ Create a programme for school dropouts (relocating or vocational training).
- ✧ Set up gender sensitive training programmes at school, NGOs and the community. Create youth clubs for girls.

## IX. Overall Conclusions

1. Palestinian children and adolescents are active, politically aware individuals. Programming and policy-making on their behalf should start with their input and involvement. This requires a significant shift in the IGO and NGO world from top down to a bottom up.
2. There is a need to raise awareness of the multiple discrimination which female Palestinian children and youth face at home and in school. This includes increased work load and reduced educational opportunities. There is a need to encourage self-expression and peer group solidarity with youth clubs for girls.
3. There is a need for counseling for older female Palestinian children and adolescents and their caregivers to deal with family and community efforts to see them into early or forced marriage.
4. Political street activism needs to be understood. The current lack of alternative spaces which Palestinian youth may occupy also needs to be carefully considered: play areas, computer centres, libraries, sports fields.
5. There is a need to reinforcing identity with projects recording memories of 1<sup>st</sup> generation. This can be through projects which record narratives of family and national history through formal education systems and informal ones.



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