

ASPIRATIONS ON HOLD?

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YOUNG LIVES IN
THE WEST BANK
AND GAZA



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Cover photograph: Atef Safadi.

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1 Young Lives in the West Bank and Gaza

Seventy percent of West Bank and Gaza's population is under the age of 30, and their share will continue to grow in the years ahead. The aspirations and ambitions of this large and growing population of children and youth have the potential to define the future of the West Bank and Gaza. This assessment seeks to contribute to the understanding of factors driving the choices of young men and women at this critical juncture of their lives, with a particular emphasis on the roles that changing gender norms and the conflict environment are having on their aspirations for education, jobs, and forming families.

Young Palestinians are moving into adulthood in a world surrounded by roadblocks and barriers, and gripped by soaring unemployment and uncertainty about what their futures may hold. Still, this generation remains optimistic and ambitious. They are pursuing high school and college degrees, and hanging on to expectations for better jobs and better lives than was possible for their parents' generation. In the face of such bleak prospects, why? What is driving these youth's aspirations for high levels of education and good jobs?

Palestinians of three generations participated with 19 other countries in a rapid qualitative assessment conducted by the World Bank to explore issues of gender, economic agency, and social norms.¹ This report presents the testimonies from adolescents and youth of the West Bank and Gaza who engaged in the study. The young people selected to join the study re-

side in six localities of Hebron and Rafah governorates that have been deeply affected by violent conflict and economic turbulence. And their perceptions and experiences provide valuable insights into how gender norms greatly shape their choices, and also the immense resilience, drive, and frustrations that can arise from living through such harsh circumstances.

To provide a broad context for the youth's testimonies, this report first takes stock of developments affecting the West Bank and Gaza over the past decade.² In this period, the Palestinian territories witnessed two major episodes of conflict: the Second Intifada beginning in 2000 and the crisis in Gaza in 2007. Both episodes had severe and wide-ranging economic repercussions, and were accompanied by restrictions on internal and external mobility of people and goods. As a result, in the last decade, the West Bank

¹ The exercise was conducted in 97 communities (about 4,000 individuals) in Latin America (Dominican Republic and Peru), Europe and Central Asia (Moldova, Poland, and Serbia), Africa (Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sudan, South Africa, and Tanzania), South Asia (Afghanistan, Bhutan, and India), the Middle East (West Bank and Gaza and the Republic of Yemen), East Asia (Indonesia and Vietnam), and the Pacific Islands (Fiji and Papua New Guinea). (World Bank 2011)

² The quantitative analysis in this report builds on findings presented in *Coping with Conflict: Poverty and Inclusion in the West Bank and Gaza* (World Bank 2011). The main datasets employed are the 2004–2009 Palestinian Expenditure and Consumption Surveys (PECS), and several rounds of the Palestinian Labor Force Surveys (PLFS).

and Gaza has witnessed economic volatility without parallel (even in comparison to countries affected by large financial crises), massive spikes in poverty, and some of the highest rates of unemployment in the world. Young people's unemployment rates are even higher, and much more so for young women.

The youth's focus groups indicate that traditional gender norms remain very strong in their society, and mainly seem to be reinforced by the difficult conflict environment. Men's status as the breadwinners means that boys, especially from poor families, are likely to withdraw from school sooner than girls in order to take up income earning roles; and the weak economy intensifies these pressures. Young men report that they are also coping with their difficult circumstances by taking temporary and risky jobs, wasting time in fruitless job searches, and delaying hopes of marriage. On their part, educated young women confront an even more difficult climate for asserting more independence. Poor safety, the weak economy, and traditional norms for their roles in society discourage young women's mobility, greatly limit the types of work they can do, and constrain their say in family formation decisions.

Although a traditional society, modern gender norms can also be observed in the youths' experiences and aspirations. School attainment is equally high for both young women and men. Most young people of both sexes express strong desires for good jobs. Also, in their ideals if not in practice, neither young men nor young women perceive strong gender differences in job opportunities. And while family priorities are widely present in the narratives, a common refrain from both sexes is that they either need to or prefer to postpone building families until after they are able "to make something of my own," as a young woman from Hebron points out. In addition, focus groups with older adult women reveal their sense of having gained a stronger voice in their households as they have had to usher their families through the tumultuous period.

Generational differences can also be observed. While the adolescents in this study express great optimism

about their future schooling and career goals, this optimism turns to increasing frustration and stress in the discussions about job experiences among the youth and adults.

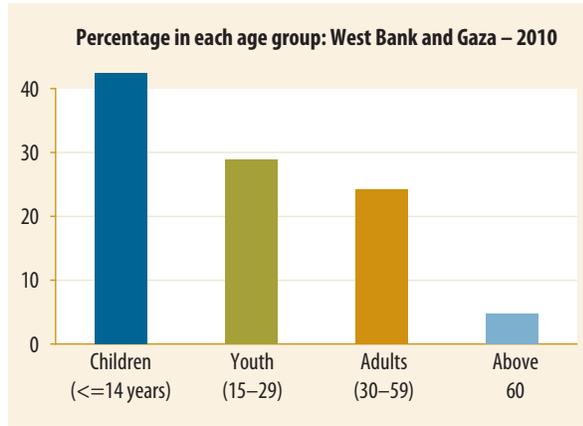
A consistent refrain from the young voices in the six communities visited is their fervent hope for an end to the conflict so that they can recover normalcy in their lives and enjoy more choices and control over the key decisions that will shape their life paths—their education, their working lives, and their formation of families. Armed with a good education and keenly aware of the changing world and events beyond their borders, this is a generation well equipped to envision and move forward on goals for themselves. But in the present environment they are finding almost nowhere to go with their skills and aspirations.

A Young and Growing Population, a Volatile and Constricted Economy

The population of the West Bank and Gaza is young and growing: nearly 30 percent of Palestinians are currently between the ages of 15 and 29, and 7 in 10 Palestinians are younger than 30 (Figure 1). These young men and women of the West Bank and Gaza are more educated and healthier than any previous generation of their society. The Palestinian territories also outperform other countries with similar GNI per capita³ as well as its neighbors in the Middle East and North Africa region in terms of health and education outcomes. Life expectancy and literacy rates in the West Bank and Gaza are much higher than in countries with similar per capita incomes such as India, Egypt, Nigeria, Cameroon and Ghana (Figure 2). In fact, Palestinian measures are on par with its much richer neighbors in the region, Turkey and Jordan, which have seven and three times the per capita income of the West Bank and Gaza, respectively.

³ US\$, Atlas Method

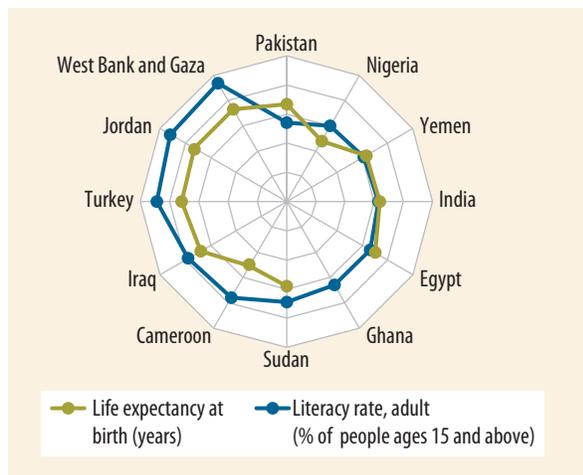
FIGURE 1. A Very Young and Growing Population



Source: Staff calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2011). World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision, CD-ROM Edition.

This young, educated, healthy population represents a vast potential resource for the future development of the West Bank and Gaza. However, conflict has had far reaching economic consequences on the Palestinian economy, and combined with its dependence on Israel and the rest of the world, have made the economy particularly vulnerable to crises. These crises have been manifested in eco-

FIGURE 2. Life Expectancy and Literacy in the West Bank and Gaza Compared to Selected Countries



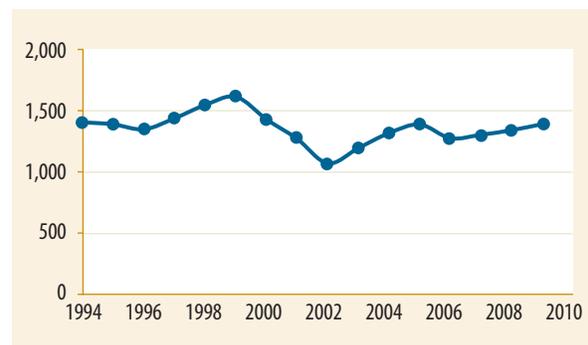
Source: World Bank central database, latest available years.

nomics uncertainty, spikes in poverty and high rates of joblessness, all of which disproportionately affect the young majority, and can severely curtail the ability of young people to translate their aspirations to reality.

Volatility in GDP per capita in the West Bank and Gaza over the last two decades has been almost without parallel (Figure 3). And contractions in the economy followed major episodes of conflict: after the Second Intifada, per capita GDP fell sharply: from USD1612 in 1999 to USD 1070 in 2002. At this time, Israel was an important source of employment for Palestinian workers, was its main trading partner, and undertook tax collection on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. The events following the Second Intifada adversely affected all three channels and therefore severely impacted the economy. Internal and external restrictions on mobility were scaled up, and despite some relaxations since, remain a persistent feature of the economy.

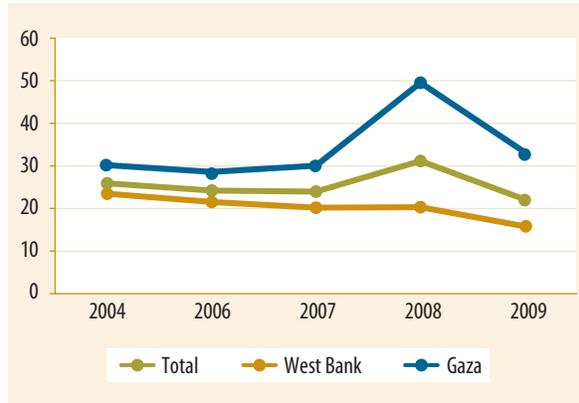
Similarly, after parliamentary elections in 2006, the formation of a Hamas government was followed by a fiscal crisis. Clearance revenues to the Palestinian Authority were held back, direct financial support from international donors was temporarily suspended, and a complete embargo was imposed on the Gaza Strip in 2007. Gaza underwent a severe economic downturn, reflected in a spike in poverty rates to nearly 50 percent (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3. GDP Per Capita in the Palestinian Territories (in Constant USD)



Source: National Accounts, PCBS.

FIGURE 4. Poverty Headcount Rates – West Bank And Gaza (2004–2009)



Source: PECS, 2004–2009.

The recovery in poverty in Gaza between 2007 and 2009 occurred despite little improvement in fundamental economic indicators. The crisis was accompanied by unprecedented contractions in economic activity in Gaza: a 20 percent contraction in 2006 followed by an 8 percent contraction in 2007 and a 6 percent contraction in 2008. Despite a subsequent recovery, by the end of 2010, real GDP per capita in Gaza was 33 percent below its 1999 level. The decline in poverty in Gaza in 2009 was also not accompanied by any significant improvements in labor market outcomes. Peaking at 41 percent in Gaza in 2008, unemployment rates remain as high as 38 percent in Gaza in 2010. One in two young Gazans looking for work could not find a job. Instead, the decline in poverty was largely driven by an increase in foreign aid and social assistance to households. By late 2007, international aid had been reinstated and social assistance expanded. By 2009, 71 percent of all Gazans were beneficiaries of at least one form of social assistance.

The far-reaching influence of conflict episodes and the accompanying mobility restrictions are also evident in broader labor market indicators such as labor force participation, employment and wages. Rates of unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza over the last decade have been amongst the highest in the world. Following the Second Intifada, unemploy-

ment rates peaked above 30 percent, and were still well above 20 percent in 2009. At the same time, even those who had jobs increasingly reported being under-employed: between 1998 and 2009, the incidence of underemployment rose from 15 percent to above 25 percent.⁴

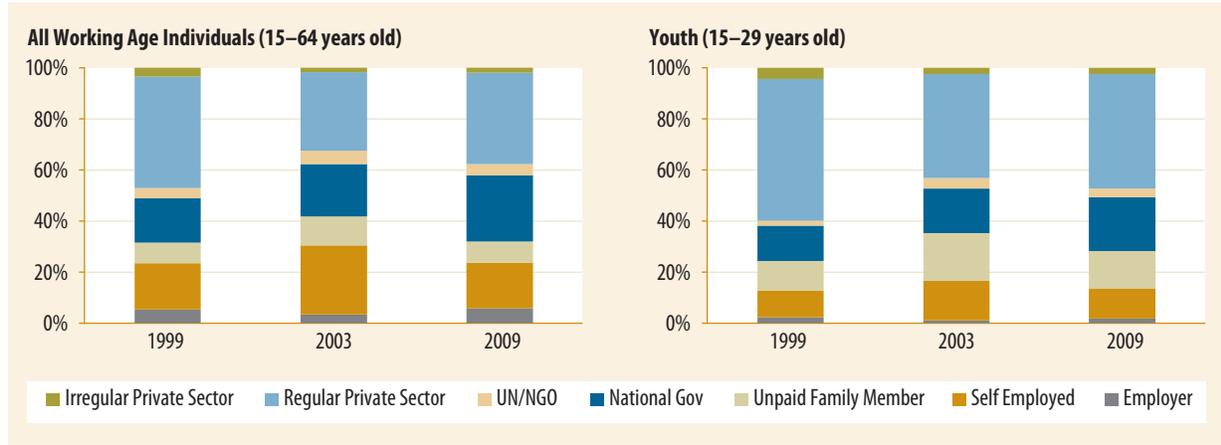
And during this period, the composition of employment has altered significantly, with a secular decline in the private sector and in productive job creation (Figure 5). As a result, there has been a growing reliance on the public sector to act as a safety net and absorb job seekers. The share of the private sector in employment fell from almost half of all jobs in 1999 to 38 percent in 2009. At the same time, the share of the government in total employment increased from 17 percent to almost a quarter of all jobs. In the immediate aftermath of the Second Intifada, self-employment also became an increasingly important short-term response.

Young people and women have been particularly hard hit by the lack of productive employment opportunities. Unemployment amongst the youth in 2000 was 4 percentage points higher than the average (Figure 6). By 2009, this gap had increased to 10 percentage points over the already high rates of overall unemployment. And insofar as the youth have so far been more reliant on private sector work, this concentration, born of choice or compulsion, could also underpin the higher rates of unemployment. Their heightened vulnerability is also evident in the large and growing proportion of youth employed as unpaid family workers: increasing from 11 percent in 1999 to 15 percent in 2009.

Female unemployment rates have also been steadily rising. In 2008 and 2009, female unemployment in Gaza was higher than 40 percent, and above male unemployment rates (Figure 7). At the same time, female labor force participation has been slowly rising. This suggests that with widespread male un-

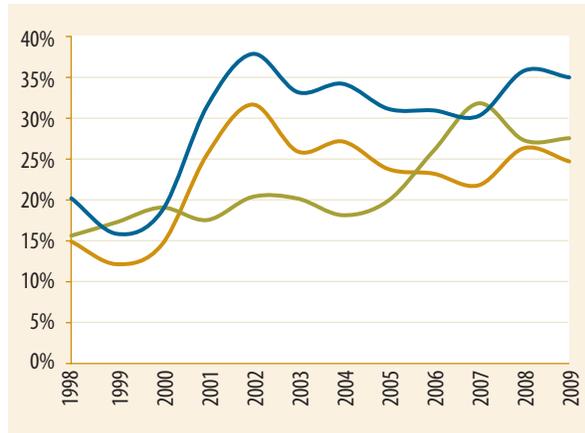
⁴ An employed person is defined as under-employed if reported hours worked per week are less than 35.

FIGURE 5. Employment by Sector in the West Bank and Gaza



Source: PLFS – 1999, 2003, 2009.

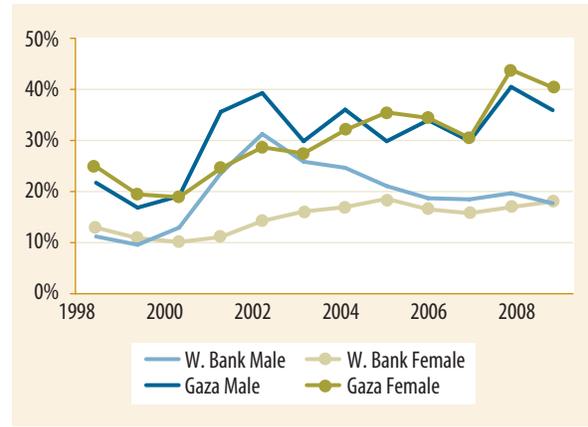
FIGURE 6. Unemployment and Under-employment in the West Bank and Gaza



Source: PLFS. Unemployment and Underemployment are for all working age (15–64 year old) individuals. Youth unemployment is for 15–29 years old individuals.

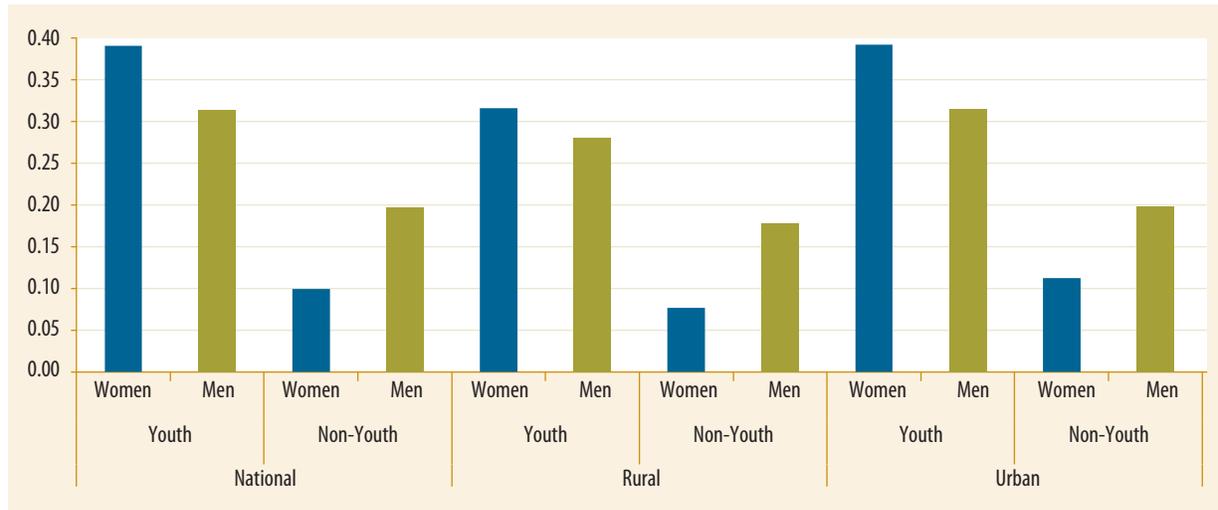
employment, women are increasingly looking for work, but with few jobs to go around, they are finding it very difficult to land jobs. Indeed, young women (aged 15–29) in both rural and urban areas face higher rates of unemployment than men. However, older women (aged 30–64) have lower rates of unemployment relative to men, which may in part reflect traditions and norms that discourage women’s economic participation as well as the weak prospects for them to succeed in the labor market (Figure 8).

FIGURE 7. Unemployment Rates, by Gender, West Bank and Gaza



Source: PLFS. Unemployment rates are for all working age (15–64 year old) men and women.

Pessimism about employment prospects is reflected in the low and falling labor force participation rates which are symptomatic of the lack of private sector job creation, especially in Gaza. The lack of jobs and the high unemployment rates are very discouraging, especially for young people and women. As explored in the sections to follow, they often just stop looking for work and drop out of the labor force. In the short span of five years from 1998 to 2002, youth labor force participation rates fell by 5 percentage points to 32 percent and remain below 1998 levels a decade later. Worryingly, educated

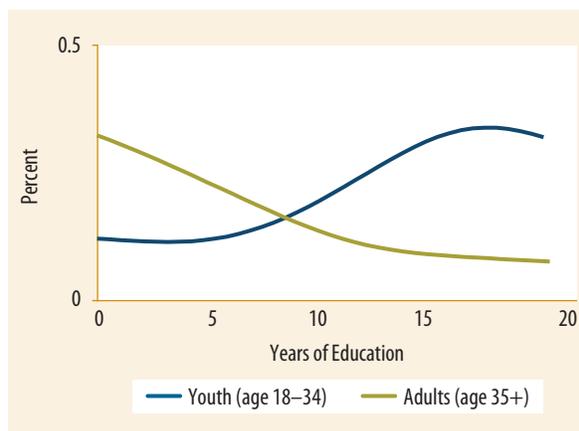
FIGURE 8. Unemployment Rates, by Gender, Age and Location

Source: PECS 2009.

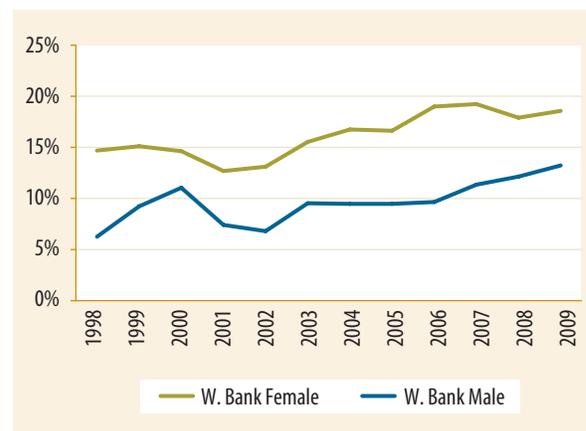
youth are the most likely to drop out of the labor force (Figure 9).

With this backdrop, it is no surprise that female labor force participation rates are one of the lowest in the developing world, hovering around a mere 15 percent of the working age female population (Figure 10). However, in both the West Bank and Gaza, labor force participation among women has been steadily rising since 2003, suggesting that more

women are actively looking for work. The younger generation no longer faces the same returns to employment either. Over the past decade, real wages in the West Bank and Gaza have fallen across all education levels, especially among the least educated (Figure 11). The mean wage earned by those with secondary school education fell by 25 percent between 1999 and 2009 and by as much as 45 percent for illiterate workers. Part of the explanation for this trend is the loss in job opportunities for Palestin-

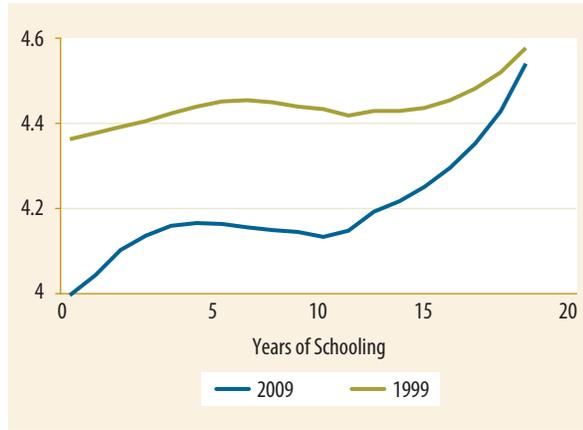
FIGURE 9. Men Out of the Labor Force by Age and Education – 2009

Source: PECS, 2009.

FIGURE 10. Female Labor Force Participation, By Gender, West Bank and Gaza

Source: PLFS, Various years.

FIGURE 11. Mean Wages by Years of Schooling: 2009 Versus 1999



Source: PLFS
Non-linear regressions of real wages on years of schooling, males in 1999 and 2009. Wages are measured in logarithms.

ians in Israel after the Second Intifada: the share of Palestinians working in Israel coming from Gaza fell from a high of 17 percent in 1998 to zero in 2005 and beyond. These job losses were primarily among the less educated, but paid relatively better compared to similar jobs in the West Bank and Gaza.

However, even after accounting for the reduced incidence of Israeli wage premiums, the estimated wage gap between those with college degrees and elementary school education rises by 13 percentage points between 1999 and 2003. And these discouraging trends are yet to reverse: real wages have continued to stagnate between 2003 and 2009.

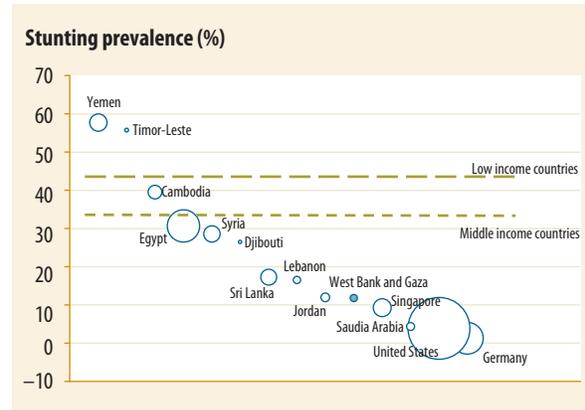
All of this, set within the context of a demographic youth bulge that will only grow in the years to come. Under supportive conditions with high rates of job creation, a disproportionately young population offers great potential for economic development in a society. Yet the reality of the labor market facing these growing ranks of young entrants is dismal. Absent a significant expansion of economic opportunities, the rate of joblessness will only continue to mount with each passing year. This loss of productivity is all the more discouraging because young Palestinians are well prepared to succeed in the world of work if given the opportunity.

A Growing, Healthy and Well-Educated Young Population

Despite the economic and political uncertainty, the Palestinian territories have sustained a stellar performance on many dimensions of human development: for instance, the Palestinian territories perform at par with the United States and Germany on early childhood nutrition indicators. Only 11.5 percent of children under the age of 5 suffer from stunting (low height for age), a third of the corresponding estimate for the average middle income country. A mere 1.4 percent are affected by wasting (low weight for height), a rate that is 7 times lower than the average for middle-income countries. Compared to a sample of more than 130 countries, anthropometric outcomes in the West Bank and Gaza are better than most other countries in the world, irrespective of income (Figure 12 and Figure 13).

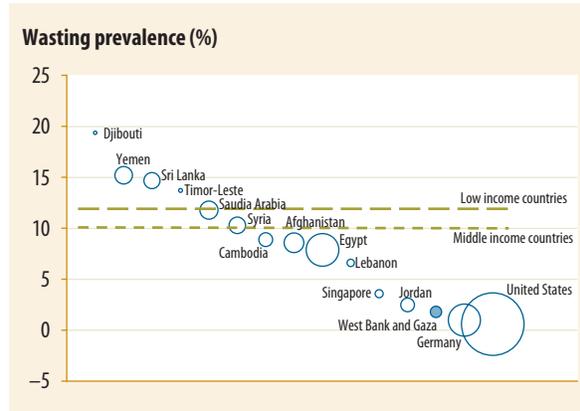
These outstanding child nutritional outcomes are consistent with other indicators of child and maternal health. Vaccination rates exceed those of the average middle income country: almost all children are immunized against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, measles and tuberculosis. Nutrition inputs such as breastfeeding behavior and diarrhea incidence are also consistent, and there near universal coverage of

FIGURE 12. Incidence of Stunting in the Palestinian Territories and around the World



Source: World Health Organization, Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition; Size of bubbles proportional to total population.

FIGURE 13. Incidence of Wasting in the Palestinian Territories and around the World



Source: World Health Organization, Global Database on Child Growth and Malnutrition; Size of bubbles proportional to total population.

prenatal care—every pregnant woman is attended at least once by skilled health personnel (Table 1).⁵

Similarly, access to basic education is near universal—all children, whether girls or boys, whether in Gaza or the West Bank, enroll in school between the ages of 6 to 12. Only 1 percent of young men and women, in both urban and rural parts of the West Bank and Gaza, are illiterate (Figure 14). Indeed, at every level of education, there are few differences in attainment across rural and urban areas.

These insights from household and labor force survey data paint a picture of an economy scarred by

TABLE 1. Health and Nutrition Related Markers

	Palestinian Territories	Middle Income
Received immunization (ages 0–5)	99%	
Received DPT3 (ages 1–5)	95%	81%
Received Measles (ages 2–5)	96%	83%
Received BCG (ages 0–5)	99%	88%
Prenatal care	99%	84%
Nutrition markers		
Breastfed (ages 1–5)	97%	
Breastfed >=6 months (ages 1–5)	89%	

Source: DHS 2006. WHO Database.

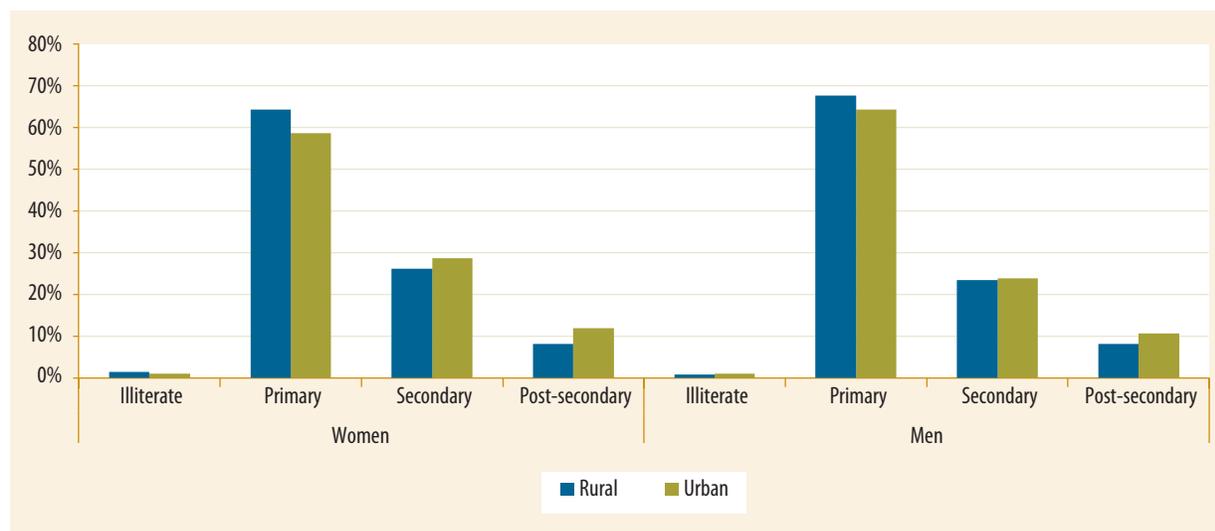
conflict: volatility in macro-economic indicators such as GDP and sectoral growth, a private sector that is severely inhibited by its lack of access to inputs and markets, and widespread joblessness. Yet it is one where young men and women are growing up healthy and relatively well educated. With such low measurable returns on the labor market, why do young Palestinians continue to invest in education? As fathers and heads of households lose jobs or cannot find employment, mothers and sons are increasingly looking for ways to support their families, through self-employment and informal and unpaid work. In these adverse labor market conditions, what coping strategies are Palestinian households resorting to?

These manifestations of prolonged insecurity and economic uncertainty in the labor market can also interact powerfully with gender norms in a traditional society. How do young women, facing the double burden of conservative norms about their roles outside the family and the home, and concerns about their safety and security, translate their education and aspirations into opportunities for work? How do men cope with their frustrations in the face of their inability to be good providers for their families? And how do young men deal with the pressure of having to grow up too soon?

To answer these questions, we turn now to findings from new qualitative data collection. While the testimonies of young Palestinian men and women resonate with the broader socio-economic indicators above, they also reveal the strong ideals and values that are driving their aspirations, as well as their deep frustrations with the sheer lack of opportunities for making the most of their potential and capabilities.

⁵ A usual marker that is looked at is “exclusive breastfeeding” among children 6 months-old or younger. WHO database lists a rate of exclusive breastfeeding of 26.5 for West Bank and Gaza compared to 39.5 for middle income countries. However it is unclear, for the West Bank and Gaza context, how this measure is calculated, and on the basis of which instrument. For this reason, we have chosen not to feature this information in the table.

FIGURE 14. Education of Men and Women Ages 15–29, Urban and Rural



Source: PECS 2009.

2 The Qualitative Assessment: Learning from the Youth

The rapid qualitative assessment mobilized nearly 4,000 individuals from 20 countries into focus groups to explore questions of gender norms and strategic life choices shaping education, economic participation, and family formation. Nearly 100 communities from diverse urban and rural contexts participated in the global exercise.

In the West Bank and Gaza, this initiative was led by the Centre for Development Studies at Birzeit University. Of particular interest in this field work was to learn more about whether and how the conflict may be affecting men and women differently on the ground. The field work was conducted in early 2011 in three communities in Hebron Governorate and three communities in Rafah Governorate of the Gaza Strip (see Table 2). The governorates and communities were selected because they have been more directly affected by the conflict relative to most

other areas of the West Bank and Gaza. On balance, the sample is also marked by higher poverty, although Al-Jnena of Rafah and University Quarter in Hebron provide insights into the strong effects of the conflict even in better off contexts. Dirbas of Hebron is the only rural community sampled, and its name has been changed to protect the anonymity of the study participants there due to the small population of this site. The findings from this tiny sample cannot be generalized to wider contexts of the West Bank and Gaza, but these testimonies can shed valuable light on how individuals and communities are coping with protracted conflict and weak local economies.

The field reports from all six communities document numerous references to the harmful effects of the 2000 Intifada, including civilian deaths, property and infrastructure destruction, loss of property

TABLE 2. Sample Communities – Qualitative Assessment

Community	Established	Population	Est. poverty (10 yrs ago)
Rafah			
Yebna	1948–50	4000	60% (40%)
Al Salam	1978	5000–6000	35% (55%)
Al Jnena	1980	20,000	15–20% (10%)
Hebron			
Old City	800–900 years old	5,500	80%, (95%)
University Quarter	50 years old	3000–3200	10%, (15%)
Dirbas (pseudonym)	97 years old, refugees since 1948	450–500	50%, (60%)

Source: West Bank and Gaza Rapid Qualitative Assessment 2011. Key informant data.

to settler communities, and outmigration to other areas of the West Bank and Gaza. All three of the Rafah communities, which lie next to or near the border with Egypt, also lost lives and property during the 2006 siege; and in the aftermath they have experienced repeated bombings of tunnels that were dug to bypass trade restrictions with Egypt. Both Rafah and Hebron contain numerous barriers, armed forces, street closures, and checkpoints that greatly restrict the movements of people and goods. Most communities also contain numerous workers who lost jobs in Israel. The most conflict-affected community in the sample is Old City, which is surrounded by four heavily guarded settler enclaves and barriers; and the key informant there reports that most commercial businesses had to close down because people outside of the area are too frightened to pass through the checkpoints and come into this once important commercial center of Hebron.

The field work in each community included six focus groups as well as two-to-three interviews with key informants and residents. The focus groups were conducted separately with males and females of three generations: adults (ages 25 to 60), youth (ages 18 to 24), and adolescents (ages 10 to 16). This report draws mainly on the testimonies from the two younger generations. Examples of questions to the younger focus groups include: Why did you decide to end your education? What do most young people do here when they finish their education? Is it easier for young men or young women to find a job in this community? At what age do young people start to form their own families here? Is this a good age? The annex provides additional information on the study methodology.

In their responses, the youth provide insights into their attitudes and understandings about, and their experiences with, moving into adulthood that are just not possible to learn from survey data. The youth elaborate on how they themselves, and their families and their peers, weigh choices and make decisions about their education, economic participation, and formation of families. The capability to

exercise such “strategic life choices”—or agency—is “critical for people to live the lives they want...” ((Kabeer 1999: 437). These path-defining choices are made, moreover, most often in times of youth:

Of the observable markers of transition—such as completing school, leaving home, beginning one’s work life, marrying and becoming a parent—financial independence seems to be the best predictor of self-perceived adulthood, in rich and poor countries alike. It refers to economic independence—not having to depend on parents or other family members for livelihoods. As young people begin to be financially independent, they naturally confront more severe restraints on their own consumption and investment decisions” (WDR 2007:56).

Young people’s accounts reveal their choices to be exceptionally constrained by their difficult living conditions. It is also well known that women’s and men’s agency differs around the world due to gender inequalities; and the analysis that follows spends some time assessing the effects of conflict on gender norms and on young women’s and men’s agency.

Social norms are concrete directives for actions that derive from a society’s values; they refer to the informal and formal rules that govern what a person can and cannot do as they go about their daily life (Portes 2006). The gender dimensions of social norms stem from a society’s deepest values of what it means to be a “real” woman or a “real” man. A young man’s or young woman’s status in their family and with the wider community is grounded in upholding social norms for their roles and responsibilities. Failure to conform to these dictates can trigger strong social sanctions. Young women, for instance, in the traditional communities in this sample conform to seclusion practices that require them to be accompanied by a man in public; and they may be harshly scolded for dressing or behaving without sufficient modesty and deference. Young men enjoy more freedom of action, but may face ridicule for not acting tough;

or they may experience acute frustration if they cannot find work and assume their gender-ascribed provider role.

At the same time, periods of great stress and conflict can be moments when some gender norms relax due

to the exigencies of insecurity and economic stress, and this can create opportunities for new forms of agency to take hold. These processes are most evident in the narratives of the older adult women, which we examine in a concluding section of the report.

3

“Building a Future”: Education for All

“...all families send boys and girls because now everyone should get educated.”
—18 year-old male student, University Quarter, Hebron.

“[E]ducation is a girl’s best weapon to face the world.,
—An adolescent girl from Al-Jnena, Rafah

In spite of protracted conflict, in spite of high unemployment, in spite of scarce opportunities to realize the benefits of a good education, young people across the six localities visited for the qualitative assessment value education extremely highly. “Education is the most important, regardless of the injustice of employability,” insists a young woman from a Rafah neighborhood called Al-Jnena. Or, as 16 yr old teen boy from University Quarter in Hebron tells us, “Of course, if someone wants to find a respectable job he has to get educated.” Optimistic, ambitious, and very aware of the world beyond them, these young people seem to be hoping against hope that the political and economic turmoil will not last and they will have opportunities to lead more normal lives.

Why is education so strongly valued? As common around the world, these youth deem their schooling as a means to good jobs. But the young people’s testimonies of the West Bank and Gaza also stress education’s multitude of intrinsic benefits for themselves as individuals and for their wider society. In fact, on balance, these well educated youth empha-

size education’s less tangible dimensions more than their peers from the 19 other countries that participated in the global qualitative assessment. Young Palestinians also argue fervently for educating girls as much as boys.

Among the adolescent focus groups, we observe very strong ideals for completing high levels of education and obtaining high status jobs. This optimism, however, becomes more guarded in the youth focus groups, with young men from poorer families especially questioning the value of education and more likely to withdraw from high school so that they can begin to earn incomes. Due to economic hardship, gender norms, and insecurity, young women also report that they must curtail their educational aspirations.

Investing in Work, Independence, Dignity and a Strong Society

Palestinian children generally complete at least Tawjihi, the examination at the end of 12th grade.

A sizable number also aim for college and advanced degrees, without which chances of a good job are seen to be severely reduced. But education is also highly valued for less material purposes of gaining autonomy and respect and contributing to the future of their society.

The adolescent and youth focus groups of both sexes very widely voice aspirations for professional careers. “The one who gets an education can find a job in the government or be a teacher,” explains a young woman in her focus group from the neighborhood of Old City in Hebron. Similarly, an adolescent girl from this same neighborhood thinks that “education is important because all professions are available to whoever finishes education.”

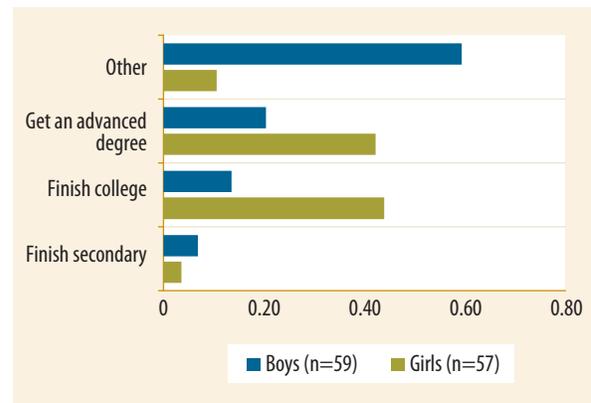
But Palestinian youth also associate their education with their personal development and gaining autonomy, a stronger character, and capabilities for better decision-making—all core dimensions of exercising agency. According to a young woman of Yebna refugee camp in Rafah, education “builds a person’s character and gives them their independence.” Similarly, young women from focus groups of Hebron maintain that education “is very important to develop a person’s personality,” and those with education enjoy “self-confidence.” The youth see the educated as more equipped to make decisions and live in society. “The educated have good relations with people,” says a young woman of University Quarter.

Education, moreover, affords personal dignity and social recognition—benefits that may be especially valued in a context that is providing scarce other means for young people to develop these. A young man from Old City suggests that education “is important because when you have a degree you have your respect wherever you go;” while another young man from the same focus group adds that the “education of someone is the most important thing in life, his worth grows.” Or, this teenage woman University Quarter also sees education as key pathway to gaining respect: “For example my father is a trader and he has money. But because he is not educated,

you feel that he lacks a lot of things. He will live and die and people will say he is not educated.”

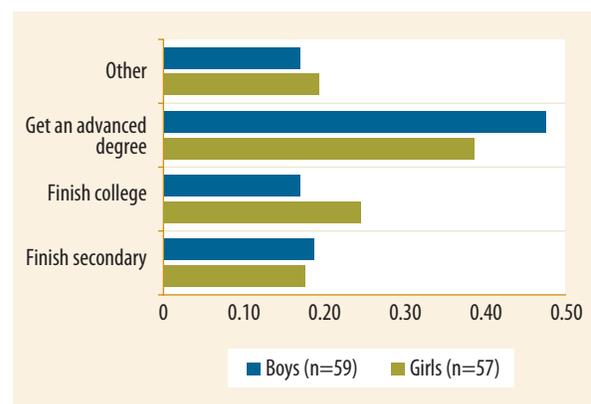
In the adolescent focus groups, the facilitators asked each of the boys and girls to indicate in private on small slips of paper the level of schooling that they would *ideally* like to achieve and the level that they *expect* to reach (Figure 15 and Figure 16). Overall, more than 60 percent of both the boys’ and girls’ participating in the focus groups say that they *expect* to complete higher education. A boy in rural Dirbas,

FIGURE 15. Ideal Level of Education (Share of Individual Responses Reported in 12 Focus Groups)



Source: PECS, 2004–2009.

FIGURE 16. Expected Levels of Education (Share of Individual Responses Reported in 12 Focus Groups)



Source: PECS, 2004–2009.

for example, wants “to get a PhD because it is good for guaranteeing the future, to make money, and raise the generations.” And in the girls focus group from this village, a participant adds, “I agree that going to school is very important so that we get educated in universities and teach the new generation and to achieve our ambitions.” Similarly, a girl from University Quarter states, “I intend to continue as much as possible because I have a high ambition and would like to be an autopsy doctor.”

Yet, in response to the question about how much education they would *ideally* like to attain, more than half of the adolescent boys indicate that they would prefer to pursue other routes after completing secondary school. Most unfortunately, the focus groups with the boys do not probe into what these other preferences might entail, but vocational training or apprenticeships are likely among them. In urban University Quarter, two boys in that group of 14 mention that staying in school longer than necessary is a waste of time and they want to help their fathers in maintaining the family as soon as possible. A 13yr-old boy explains, “No, (higher education) is not important for us because we could get out of

school and learn a craft and work without a university degree.” Other boys in that group then immediately countered such claims, strongly arguing that someone without a college degree will remain “humiliated” and without “position” throughout their life.

On balance, large shares of boys and girls in this sample are optimistic and expect to get advanced professional degrees or finish college. The boys’ responses on ideal levels, nevertheless, foreshadow closely the frustrations that we will hear shortly from the young men’s focus groups about having to withdraw from school and facing very scarce economic opportunities. For their part, quite a few adolescent girls express aspirations for college but expect that they will have to end their formal schooling sooner, and we explore the factors shaping these views below as well.

The youth of the West Bank and Gaza also understand education’s benefits beyond the individual level. As one young woman from Yebna in Gaza puts it, “An educated person is helpful and useful for their society.” Some focus group participants, like this

BOX A: A Courageous and Ambitious Schoolgirl

Below are selections from an interview with Zahra (a pseudonym), a 10th grader from Al-Jnena, a community of Rafah. Zahra’s father is a trader and her mother a housewife. She attends a relatively new secondary school in her community.

The establishment of this school made things easier for me, especially when it comes to transportation. If I had to go to another [school], it would have taken me 30 minutes to go ... and another 30 to go back home. And since my family has some financial problems, I don’t think that my father could have afforded to give me money for transportation.....

The Israeli war and the siege affected us a lot because there are no job opportunities and there are a lot of goods which cannot come into Gaza. We cannot travel anywhere. My brother had a scholarship to pursue his education abroad but he could not travel because of the [conflict].

The war had a bigger effect on my younger brothers and sisters because they were always scared and crying. But as for me, it gave me motivation to do better at school so that I would fight ... with my knowledge. And when you ask young children about what they want to be in the future, a lot of them would tell you that they want to be fighters defending their country, or doctors to heal those who are wounded

We have had our share of suffering for a while. We had no gas, no electricity, and we used to sleep in the dark. But now things are getting better, especially now that they started importing things through the tunnels from Egypt. Tunnels also have some disadvantages. They increased child labor, and we heard that a lot of children died in the tunnels. And the continuous bombing of the tunnels destroyed a lot of houses on the borders....

And because of our bad financial situation, sometimes my father cannot afford to give me money to go in the school trips. And they get very worried when I go out because they say I am at a critical age and they should know where I am all the time, and who I am with, and who my friends are.

The school conducts a lot of activities and I am taking part in cultural contests. Eventually, I hope that I finish my education and that my parents can afford to send me to university. I hope that the siege will be lifted and that we will have a country like every other country.

girl from Old City, also see their education as a way to fight for the West Bank and Gaza and help end the conflict: “We ought to learn because if we don’t learn we will never free our land” (also see Box A).

Investing in Motherhood, Freedom of Movement and Personal Security

Most adolescents and youth, male and female, are adamant that education is a right that should not be denied to anyone. When asked how families decide who to send to school when there is little money, young women living in the neighborhood of University Quarter in Hebron speak for others in the rest of the focus groups in declaring that “there is no specific way because here boys and girls go to school and education is compulsory” and “everyone should learn and go to school there is no difference between girl and boy.” The young men in this neighborhood agree that “families send both girls and boys and they don’t allow girls to stop going to school to start with anyway.”

Families are investing equally in educating their girls and boys, and the youth offer three explanations for this gender equality: educated women are better mothers, enjoy more freedom of action in public, and are also better equipped to deal with whatever difficulties they may face. The testimonies indicate that these attitudes and beliefs are being shaped by both traditional and changing gender norms for women’s roles and by the stress of conflict.

According to a young woman from Yebna, “education is very important especially if you are a mother. It helps you raise your children better.” Education is highly valued for girls not necessarily as a pathway into working lives, but because it equips them to be better mothers. Education, explains an adult man from Yebna, “makes the future for boys and girls. Boys get jobs with it, and women teach their children.”

Strict gender norms for women’s and men’s roles are in flux around the world, and education seems to

play an especially powerful role in relaxing strictures that limit the life paths of girls and women to primarily domestic roles. Practices that require female seclusion can be found across this sample; and poor security conditions mainly seem to reinforce these practices due to heightened concerns for women’s and girls’ reputations and safety. Fear of the conflict is widespread in the narratives at all ages, but adolescents appear to be especially outspoken and emphatic. Adolescent boys in rural Dirbas of Rafah, for instance, make a stark contrast between women’s and girl’s vulnerability in public and their own: “I am afraid for my sister or mother to go out because it is not safe in this community; Of course it doesn’t work that she goes out alone, there is no safety in the world.” Boys, instead, can move freely, “Wherever we want we can go alone. The young man if he got hurt he can defend himself.”

Nonetheless, it is deemed permissible for educated women with good jobs to move about in public unaccompanied by a male guardian and to interact with men in the workplace. A focus group of men from Hebron explains that professional women’s larger freedoms are due to their education and greater knowledge of how to conduct themselves in ways that would not harm family honor if someone might call them names or be otherwise abusive towards them. It is also acceptable for female students as well as older women to move around more freely compared to young women who are no longer studying. Young women in the focus group from University Quarter explain that:

Due to the social circumstances we live in and because of customs and traditions, and the look of people and what not, women cannot move freely; the community looks badly at the uneducated woman and doesn’t appreciate her. But the educated woman has the right to go out and move because she completed her studies.

Similarly, when asked if women can move freely, a young woman in Yebna of Rafah explains, “Yes

they do but only if they are escorted by a brother or a father. But university students somehow have more freedom than other women.” Greater physical mobility is also accorded to women heads of households (who usually tend to be widows or divorcees) if family circumstances compel them to go out and work. Hence, for educated women with good jobs, female students, older women, widows and divorcees, local dictates regarding their physical mobility have eased over the years. Young women who are no longer studying, however, seem to be kept under a watchful eye, and the conflict is reinforcing the mobility restrictions on them.

“Education,” says a young woman from Old City, “is the best weapon for the girl these days. Education develops the girl and the society as a whole. It also makes the girl able to make a decision.” Indeed, the notion of education as a weapon for girls appears as a recurring expression in the focus groups, and has a particular resonance in the conflict-affected contexts of this sample. A young man in University Quarter argues, “On the contrary I would pay more attention to the education of a girl than to the young man because for the girl you don’t know what time and life will do to her tomorrow. So she’d better have her degree as a weapon in her hand.”

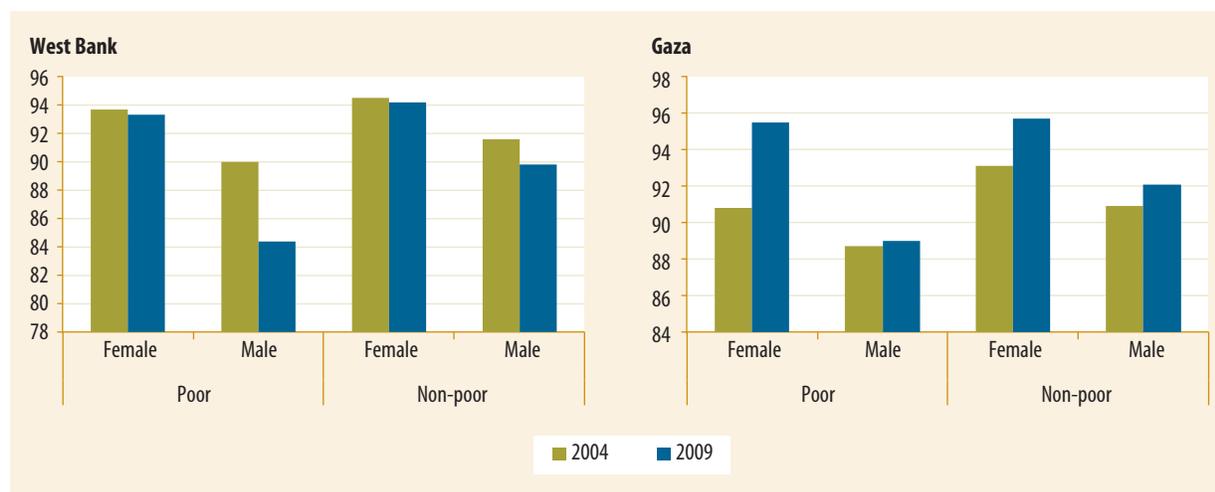
A Decision to Regret: Withdrawing From School

While access to and the value of education is high for Palestinian girls and boys alike, many youth voice frustrations with having to end their schooling. Perhaps surprising, boys are deciding to withdraw from school at earlier ages than girls. Economic constraints and gender norms for male breadwinner roles seem to be playing an important role in shaping these decisions.

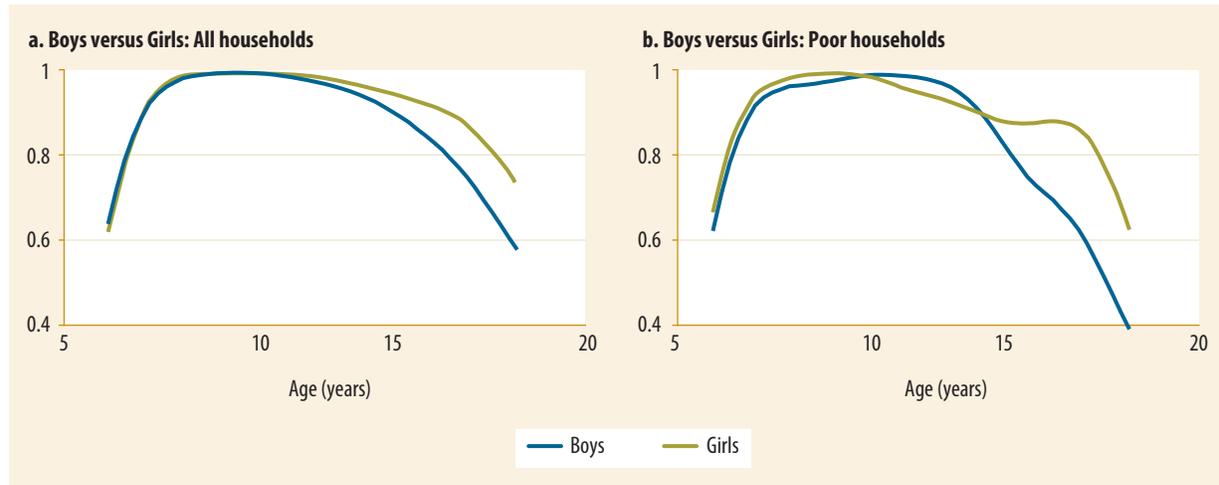
Overall, school enrollment is high for children aged 6 to 18, although important gender differences in drop outs begin to emerge in high school years. Young men withdraw from education sooner than girls, and their enrollment rates are more sensitive than girls to their household’s economic conditions (see Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19). Enrollment falls sharply among boys after the age of 14 in both the West Bank and Gaza, while for girls drop outs increase in the later years of high school. In both regions in 2009, poor girls had enrollment rates comparable to their better off peers but poor boys lagged greatly.

These gender disparities are reflecting the present climate of gender norms that support girls’ education and preparations for adulthood, on the one hand, but place greater pressures on boys and young men

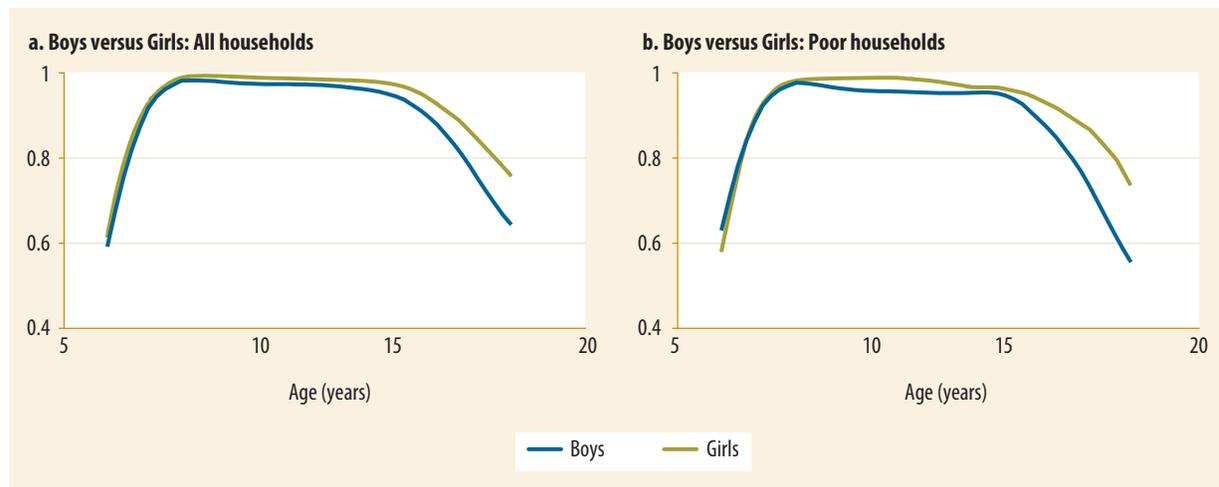
FIGURE 17. School Enrollment among Children Aged 6 to 18



Source: PECS 2004, 2009.

FIGURE 18. School Enrollment by Age (6–18 Years) in the West Bank

Source: PECS 2009.

FIGURE 19. School Enrollment by Age (6–18 Years) in Gaza

Source: PECS 2009.

to assume breadwinner roles when family resources are constrained, on the other. In the West Bank, the share of school-age boys in school *declined* between 2004 and 2009. It may be that the weaker market in Gaza is having a salutary effect of discouraging higher drop outs there.

Breadwinning Teen Boys out of School

Household economic circumstances are by far the most common reasons why young people say they

withdraw from school. For boys from poor families, the pressures to end education and earn income in order to help their families can begin even before their high school years. Gender norms for males to assume breadwinner roles also fuel these important decisions.

Boys and young men most often relate that the decision to stop school is made by fathers. Many also claim to have decided of their own accord to end their education, although their decisions must be understood as made in a context of very constrained

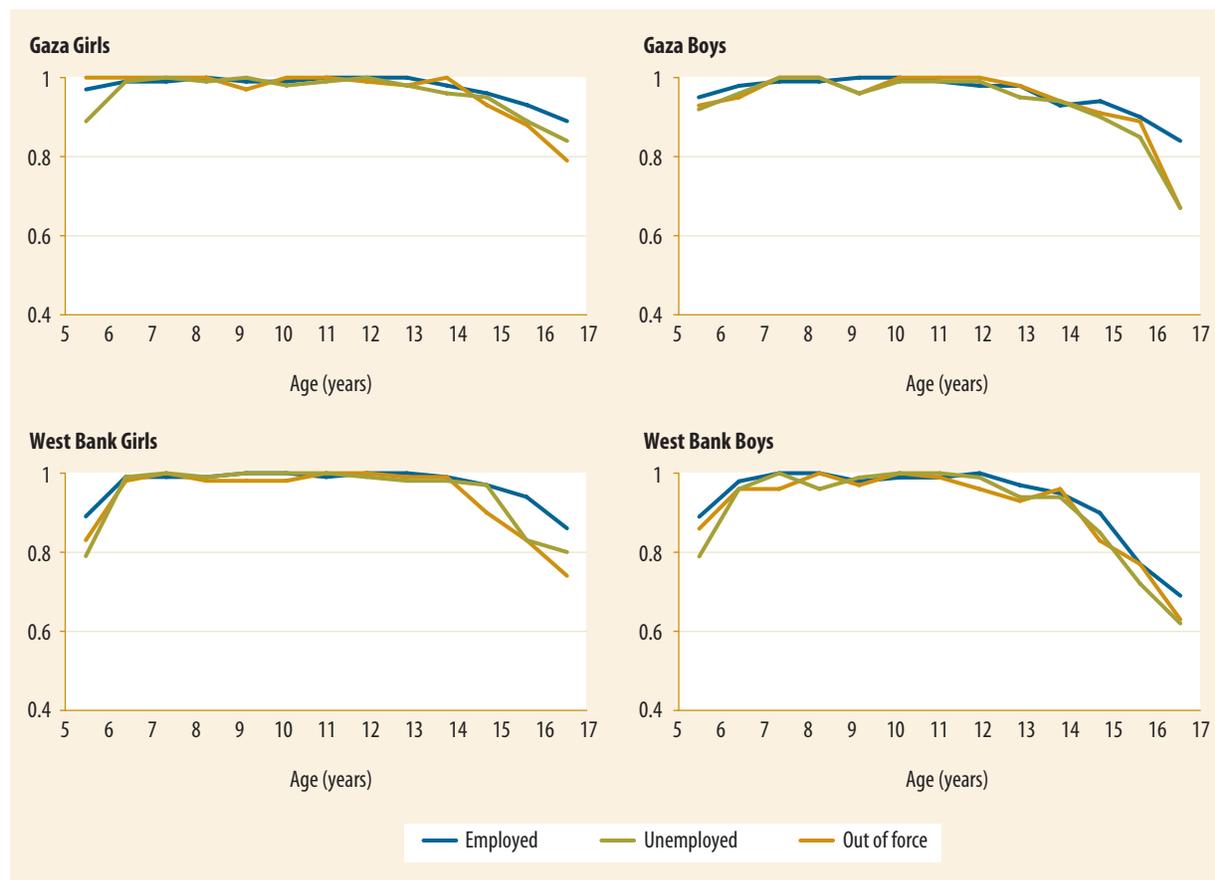
choices. A young man of Dirbas in Hebron explains that he quit school halfway through 12th grade because “my brother had a company and he lost a lot, and so I had to drop out to help out my family with money.” In this community, many local businesses were forced to shut down after the closures. In University Quarter, young men relate that when the main breadwinner loses his job: “sometimes the father would be fed up and unable to work; and want his son to provide for him. So it doesn’t work for the son to continue his education, and he starts to work and spend money on the family.” In the boys focus group of University Quarter, some also argue that they can “learn a craft and work without a university degree.”

In Gaza, the young men’s focus groups also describe pressures on boys to withdraw from school at young

ages due to economic stress. Half of the adolescents in the focus group from the Yebna camp neighborhood report reaching just 6th-8th grade: “because of the bad economic situation” and “because I have a very big family.” Similarly, in Al-Salam of Rafah, “I had no choice but to drop school and help my family.” The situation would’ve been different “if my father was working.”

These boys’ and young men’s accounts about unemployed fathers or relatives, and the ensuing financial problems of the household, are consistent with survey findings that link boys’ educational outcomes to the household’s labor market outcomes. In Gaza, enrollment rates for 17 year old boys are almost 20 points higher if the head is employed than for boys in households where the head is unemployed or out of the labor force (Figure 20).

FIGURE 20. Enrollment and Employment Status of the Head of Household



Source: DHS 2006.

Diverse Pressures on Teen Women to Remain Homebound

The young women's focus groups also most often report financial pressures as reasons for withdrawing from school, but their dropouts typically begin later in their teen years than for the boys. "I had to drop out of university because there was no money to pay for it. It was a very difficult decision to make," laments a young woman from Al-Salam in Gaza. Gender norms for their roles, concerns for their reputations, and insecurity also greatly constrain young women's educational choices upon high school completion.

Marriage and childbearing soon after high school, in addition to financial constraints, remain important reasons why young women do not reach their desired levels of education. The choice to marry, usually made by the parents, typically means that they do not enroll in, or stop attending, higher education. Once married, a young women's chances to continue education are contingent on the husband's and his family's approval. Pursuing a university degree means that she must also resist powerful norms in the wider community that demand that she first and foremost prioritize family. "It was really hard for me to drop my education but after I had my first child, my main concern was only my children," states a young woman of Yebna in Rafah.

For young women who are finding ways to remain in university, the stresses of conflict, a weak economy, and norms that discourage their economic partici-

pation seem to be steering them more than ever to go into traditionally female-dominated disciplines, namely teaching or healthcare or other work in the public sector. A young woman from Yebna confides of being pushed out of a veterinary school because "it required me to go out to farms with men in my practical study, which neither my husband nor his family accepted. My only solution would have been to change my major." This young woman's experience is common. In the past few years, the female share of graduates in humanities and arts increased from 55 to 70% in 2004–2009, while the female share in the sciences decreased from 58 to 53%, with women in engineering falling from 35% to 30% during the same time period (World Bank Edstats, August 2011).

Women's educational choices are also restricted by the presence of Israeli armed forces and checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza. It is extremely hard for young women to attend schools or take jobs that require even modest commutes. According to the women's focus group from Old City, "the father would say that because of the political situation it is better to stay home than get harassed ...". In addition to safety and reputational risks, young women's domestic obligations and poor local transport infrastructure restrict their mobility. In rural Dirbas, the young women's group reports that their decision to "leave school was difficult, but it was made because of the inadequate transportation to school in the other cities, and because for most parents sending their girls to come home late was out of the question..."

4

Few Pathways Into Desirable Jobs

“[T]hey try to find a job or they sit in the coffee shops waiting.”

—Young man, Al-Jnena, Rafah

“Everyone waits for a job in order for their future to be stable and secure.”

—20 year old female college student, University Quarter, Hebron

“I didn’t work at all after graduation. I have been graduated a year now and I am here sitting, haven’t found a job,” confides a young man from University Quarter. Few youth report themselves or their peers to have accessed desirable jobs, making their transition toward independence and adulthood exceedingly difficult. Rather, the youth’s discourse about their economic opportunities and future prospects is filled with frustration and anxiety. They may be educated, but job openings for new entrants are indicated to be practically nonexistent. The few “good” jobs are seen to require special connections, while the somewhat more available “bad” jobs pay poorly, are often temporary or voluntary, or risk their workers’ reputations and safety. And while their society is providing a level playing field for educating both girls and boys, the leap from a student to a worker is much harder to make for young educated women.

Scarce Choices for First Jobs

When asked about their first jobs, the youth express hopelessness in the face of their “horrible political and economic situation” (young man, Al-Salam). Young

people report spending months and even years looking for work. A young woman from Old City relates that after her peers complete their education, “They stay at home, go apply for [jobs with] companies. Get depressed. And say, ‘Why did I waste my time with education?’ I know a lot of cases [like this].”

Relatively few of the focus group participants report ever being employed, although many indicate that they are still studying. The references to having early work experiences in the young men’s groups include jobs for the government, volunteering, construction, taxi driving, restaurant work, and nursing. Three young women from Old City report their first jobs to be at a bank, factory, and a salon. Many of the youth’s early work opportunities seem to be temporary or voluntary: “I was a volunteer at an organization. I was a secretary. I was a social worker in a project” (Al-Salam), “I worked in construction” (Al-Jnena), or “I worked at the Summer Games as a part of an unemployment program” (Yebna).

Digging tunnels emerges as a prominent activity among young men and boys in the three Gaza communities visited (see Box B). Although illegal and

BOX B: Risking Life in the Rafah Tunnels

First, there were nine of us living in a house under very hard economic circumstances. My father is an old man who cannot work and we were very young. My eldest brother was the only provider for the household because he was a university graduate and employed. As we grew up, the needs of the house grew with us and we could not continue our education; we had to work in order to be able to live.

The only option we could find was working in the underground tunnels that link the Gaza Strip with Egypt because there are no job opportunities in our area other than the tunnels. We started working in 2007, me and my twin brother. We were about 19 years old then. We were doing very well and we were paid well too, I was paid \$110 per day, and my brother too. So things were getting better for us and we gave the money we earned to our mother so she can purchase whatever the household needs. We started providing for ourselves and we were counting only on ourselves. I was able to buy anything I wanted and go out whenever I wanted. I was considered a man in the house. We were able to register my brother ... at the university. Our life conditions got better. We built a house and each one of us has his own apartment, and my eldest brother is now engaged. We also bought a car for the family.

But the big event that really affected us was the death of my brother. He died in the tunnels. Both of us had work that day, but I woke up feeling sick so he told me to stay at home and he would go alone. He was inside the tunnel with 5 other guys getting the goods out of it, and above their tunnels was another tunnel where they import petrol. Some trouble happened in that tunnel and the petrol started leaking into the tunnels where my brother was. None of the six guys in there managed to get out because the petrol spread so fast and suffocated all of them. They all died including my brother.

Of course that affected all of us really badly. I stopped working in the tunnels for a whole year. But then things started to deteriorate again for us, economically, and we had some debt from building the house. So I went back to working in tunnels to help pay those debts. And have a decent life for me and my family. In spite of all the danger I face daily, I am still working in the tunnels to this day...

life threatening, the work is justified by the severe lack of opportunities in the region. “It is very hard to find a job here or anywhere because there are no job opportunities for graduates in general. That’s why most young men chose to face death while working in tunnels just to be able to provide for themselves,” declares a young man from Yebna. Unfortunately, all three focus groups with boys in Rafah indicate that they also take up jobs in the tunnels, although they, too, are well aware of its deadliness and have lost loved ones to the tunnels. “Five months ago I lost my brother in the tunnels and all of my brothers still work in tunnels,” announces a boy from Yebna.

When asked what is keeping them from getting a good job, focus groups very consistently report that they cannot access the few good jobs available because “we don’t have high contacts.” According to a young woman from University Quarter, “an ordinary job like a seller at a store” could possibly be had without connections, but not a job that requires a degree. The need for connections appears in reference to both the private and public sectors. “Whoever has a company or a store will hire his family and relatives only and doesn’t hire anyone else” and “working in the government too is the same—all connections and nothing works there unless you know somebody,” reports the young men’s group

from University Quarter. While the young women’s group there states that “whoever doesn’t have connections stays at home and doesn’t work.” Focus groups also sometimes mention needing a “party affiliation” or “favoritism” to access a job.

When facilitators asked the focus groups what happens when a woman or a man loses their job in their community, problems of “depression” and “nervousness” are common responses for both sexes, but additional anti-social behaviors are often associated with unemployed men. In Yebna, for example, young women warn that women who lose jobs become depressed, while men not only become depressed and frustrated but also “might start smoking or even using drugs.” In the face of men’s joblessness, young men in Al Jnena speak of “angriness, heavy smoking, problems with his wife”. Expectations that surround men’s provider role make joblessness an especially heavy burden for them.

Strong Normative Assessments Applied to Jobs

As part of the global exercise, facilitators asked the focus groups to share their views of the best and worst ways that residents of their community make

TABLE 3. Best and Worst Jobs, Young Men’s Focus Group, University Quarter, Hebron

Best ways to make a living	Men	Women	Presence	Worst ways to make a living	Men	Women	Presence
Trade	X	X	A lot	Spying	X		Little
Import	X	X	A lot	Stealing	X	X	A lot
Government Job	X	X	A lot	Weapon trade	X		A lot
plumber	X		Medium	Scamming	X	X	A lot
Art	X	X	Little	Money fraud	X	X	A lot
Work inside Israel	X		Little	Money laundering	X	X	Little
Craftwork	X	X	Medium	Work in Jewish settlements	X		Little
Manufacturing	X	X	Medium	Begging	X	X	Little
Agriculture	X	X	Medium	Stealing cars	X		Little
Money exchanger	X		Medium				
Stock market	X	X	Medium				
Fashion design	X	X	Medium				
Work in politics	X	X	Medium				
Taxi driver	X		Medium				
Accountant	X	X	Medium				
Sell body parts	X		Medium				
Stock shares	X	X	Medium				

a living. Their discussions shed light on the strong values that color the youths’ attitudes about jobs. Also, these educated youths don’t perceive most job opportunities to be gender segregated, but they nevertheless understand very well that young women are greatly disadvantaged in their local economy.

Each of the focus groups compiled a list of the “good” and “bad” local jobs, and then identified which of the jobs are performed mainly by men, by women, or by both sexes. Around the world, focus group participants identify the good jobs in their local economy as being well paid and reliable, and bringing status and respectability to the workers who hold them. Bad jobs, by contrast, pay poorly or unreliably; can be physically strenuous; may involve immoral, undignified, or illicit conduct; and run great reputational risks for their jobholders.

Youth of the West Bank and Gaza apply an especially strong moral assessment in their determinations of good and bad ways to earn a living. A 23 year-old young man of University Quarter explains that a job is desirable “because first and foremost it

is halal (religiously acceptable) money.” The other members of his focus group indicate that good jobs are not harmful for their workers, and are “suitable and honest and bring a lot of money.” Conversely, young women from Old City explain that “bad jobs are such because they are immoral and they cause a bad reputation and problems.” Such highly principled views about jobs appear consistently in the Palestinian testimonies.

When speaking about the best jobs in their communities, the youth most often name work in education, health, construction, trade, police, security, agriculture, and services (with marked gender differences which will be discussed in the coming section). But these jobs are not easy to come by. The worst ways to earn a living that youth identify include various illegal or unlawful (haram) activities, such as trade in alcohol, tobacco, drugs and weapons, digging tunnels, and demeaning work such as cleaning or difficult farm work for low pay. These types of jobs appear regularly across the conflict-affected communities in the global sample, suggesting that underground economies may be larger and

more important coping mechanisms in these contexts than may often be recognized (see Box B).

Testimonies worldwide reveal that traditional gender norms also strongly color men's and women's conceptions of which jobs are acceptable and for which sex. Half of the good jobs identified around the world are deemed to be acceptable to both genders, while a further third are only accessible to men, and the remainder just to women (WDR2012, page 211). The youth in the West Bank and Gaza, however, depart from these global patterns, deeming a much larger fraction jobs to be wide open to both sexes. Table 3 from the young men's focus groups in University Quarter can illustrate well this pattern found among the youth across the six localities. The young people's views of almost every desirable job being accessible to both sexes perhaps are reflecting the strong gender equality in their educational experiences. The older adult focus groups from the West Bank and Gaza report the more common pattern of important gender segregation in jobs that was found in the global sample.

While, ideally, most jobs are seen by youth to be accessible to both genders, ensuing discussions about their work experiences display views about jobs that are strongly biased by gender norms and

which in practice leave very few jobs accessible to women. According to two young women of University Quarter, when asked what determines whether a job is better for a woman or a man: "It depends on the job and its kind, for example, a job that is for men are such as a mechanic, a taxi driver, a construction worker, worker at a quarry." "But definitely the light and simple works need woman such as a secretary and a seller at a store." The young men from University Quarter make similar observations about gender differences in suitable jobs: "a woman cannot, due to her physical nature, lift things and import stuff because it is difficult for her. And she cannot be a money exchanger. Muscles in men and not in women determine that they work in construction and metalwork and carpentry. A man also cannot be a teacher in a nursery because he cannot deal with children the way a woman can and knows how to."

As explored next, such biases about suitable jobs are part and parcel of wider forces that are heavily discouraging women's access to economic opportunities. And while both young women and men observe many types of potentially desirable jobs, they mainly express deep frustrations and powerlessness with finding any acceptable work in their beleaguered economy.

5 Close to Home: The Circumscribed Economic Choices of Young Women

“The main role for a woman is to raise the children, but if she could work and help provide for her family and still be the mother she is supposed to be then that would be great.”
—Young man, neighborhood of Rafah, Gaza Strip

A large majority of the young women in this study are well educated and express desires to be out in the working world, at least before marriage if not afterwards. But young women seeking to enter the workforce face powerful pressures to remain in their homes and give up goals for economic independence. Young women encounter pervasive concerns for their reputations and safety, broad acceptance of discriminatory treatment against them, and norms to prioritize strongly their domestic responsibilities before any job. The pressures on young women to forego economic aspirations are magnified further by the insecurity and poor job prospects in their communities.

Reputational and Safety Risks in Public

According to young women in University Quarter, “It is very ordinary and easy for a young man to go to work and make something of himself” but “it is very difficult for parents to let their daughter go to work outside [the home] even if the job is good, unless it was in a nearby place such as Doura for example (10 minutes away by car). But farther than that would be impossible for the family to allow.” This

account from a young man of University Quarter is typical: “There is one young woman who started going on tours around shops as a sales agent and everyone started taking her phone number to harass her and hit on her so she quit the job, she couldn’t continue with it,” reports a young man from University Quarter. The boys of University Quarter similarly express deep concerns about girls’ potential for harassment in public: “I can move around and thank God I am not a girl. Yes, they go out, but someone has to accompany them lest someone hits on them.” In short, focus groups everywhere point to young women’s vulnerability to harassment and reputational harm as explanations for their limited economic roles.

As discussed above, the great stress around a young woman’s protection and honor must also be understood within a context where seclusion practices are normative, and where a woman’s presence alone in public or in the workplace is still perceived by many to deviate from acceptable conducts for their gender. In such a climate, working women are widely reported to be vulnerable to all manner of abuses. According to young man of University Quarter, “If she works as a secretary, they [her boss] will harass her a lot and force her to do things she doesn’t

like to do.” In Dirbas, young women warn that women are “yelled at” and could be harassed by the employer.

The conflict context, moreover, strongly reinforces the restrictions on women’s mobility. Young men in Old City, where contact with Israeli soldiers and settlers is likely, explain that for a woman to be checked by a soldier is an indignity: “A young woman might curse at a soldier. This is not good for her. It is not good to see a girl being checked by a soldier... Dignity is the most important thing.”

Thus while an “educated woman has the right to move,” the focus group accounts tell a story of quite forceful and interlocking pressures on women to comply with norms of seclusion or confine their choices to a small set of “preferred” or “honorable” jobs close to their homes. In reality, these types of jobs appear to be very few, and include working from home (sewing, knitting, and embroidering) or as a teacher, daycare provider, hairdresser, or in government offices. In Old City, young women consider secretaries, university professors, judges, and lawyers to be unsuitable work, either because they leave women socially vulnerable or because they lack the emotional fortitude: “The secretary

at a private office, that’s bad because something might happen to her...” These young women conclude that instead of these professions, women should be pursuing “hairdressing and sewing” as well as schoolteachers where interactions with the opposite sex are minimal. In Dirbas, the young men warn that, “Working in a restaurant for women might bring bad words about her...” Nor can young women consider jobs requiring night-time work. An adolescent girl in Yebna warns that it is too dangerous for them to consider “driving, trade, and being a nurse because it has night shifts”; and a girl from Al-Salam observed that pharmacy jobs are bad because of their night shifts. Box C presents the push and pull of factors that led a woman to run a daycare rather than pursue more desirable prospects in her profession.

Women explain that they must maintain strict codes of silence about any harassment on the job or when moving about in public lest they be accused of inviting it and damage their family’s honor. “The girl even when she is not at wrong she will be blamed,” warns a young woman from Old City. In the face of harassment, young women of Dirbas insist, “She doesn’t ask help from anyone in fear of getting fired from work. Or her parents would punish her for a

BOX C: Bucking Tradition: A Working and Single Woman of University Quarter

Nancy, age 28, holds a diploma in business administration and runs a daycare in her neighborhood. She resides in a relatively affluent area of Hebron, and families can afford her services. Nancy would rather be doing secretarial work, but that is not acceptable unless she can land a job with a large company and that is very difficult. Her first job in accounting was with a women’s company; however, when the company moved to Bethlehem she had to give up the job because her family would not allow her to commute there. If she had a choice, she would have kept the job and commuted. Instead, the only viable option was to find work in her own city, and preferably in her own neighborhood, hence the daycare.

Although Nancy manages her own business, she still must live by her society’s rules for women. Every time she has to leave the house, she needs to inform her mother or father where she is going. If any of her relatives see her anywhere besides work, they tell her parents, who then ask her to explain. One time her cousin saw her in town, and she had to explain to her parents that she was visiting the ministry of education for paper work. If she goes out socially, she has to take one of her sisters with her. She would have more freedom to move about if she were married. Society does not see married women as a threat, while single women, especially not the very young ones, are seen as more daring and in need of more careful monitoring than a married or younger unmarried woman.

Nancy resisted covering her hair with a veil when she was young. But when she was 14 and in 10th grade, a neighbor phoned her mother about her uncovered hair. She spent the next six years wearing the head scarf in her neighborhood, but taking it off at school and then university. Also, she would take it off when not in Hebron.

However, after a while, that became more difficult and she just got used to wearing it. The most difficult thing is that everyone in the neighborhood knows her and her family, so she cannot but act carefully within the social norms. If she needs to be somewhere for work, she has to ask a permission from her mother, even at age 28 and even though she has her own business.

crime she didn't do." Only if a woman has strong trust with her mother, would she dare confide in her. This is not an environment where they can press for better treatment. The normative pressures, moreover, are no doubt intensified by men's own frustrations with the tight job market. A 39 year-old Hebron man confides that young men in his community would become jealous if their sister had a job and they did not. On a similar note, another man argues that the lack of public safety for women is a troubling consequence of the transition underway in gender norms: "Women have just started entering society, so the man is still trying to maintain his control." The qualitative findings on the many pressures on women to restrict themselves to nearby jobs are consistent with PLFS data on the location of workplace that suggest women are much more likely than men to work closer to home. In 1999, before the Second Intifada, 88 percent of working women went to work within their own governorate (Figure 21). Since then, this share has risen to 90 percent by 2003, and 92 percent by 2009.

Gender Differences in Earnings

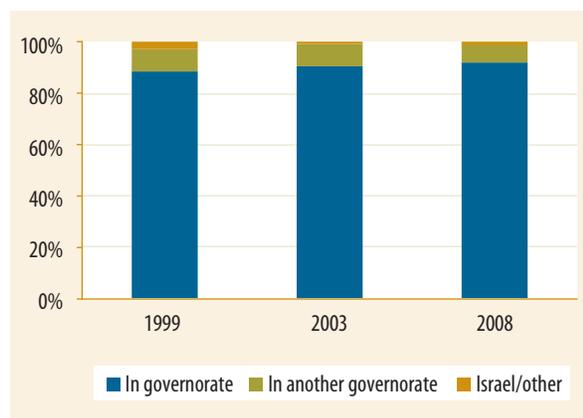
Women's economic participation is also dampened by routine practices in the workplace that reinforce their subordinate status, perhaps the most evident of which is lower pay than men. When asked if women

face discrimination, the young women in Dirbas explain that:

They are discriminated against in the salary even though they both do the same work. For example at a [local] plastic company, a woman gets 900 NIS a month (\$247) and a man gets 1800 NIS a month (\$495). If the [same] job is for a woman and a man, for example at a factory, you find that a man receives more than a woman even though the woman produces more than him in [the same] time and her work is better. But that's it. It's because our society is a male society. They remain the strongest.

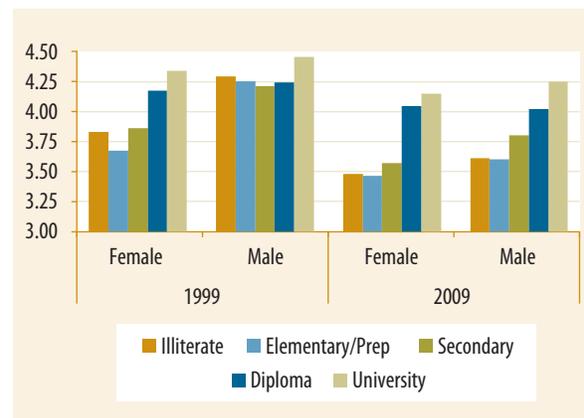
Young men in University Quarter are equally aware of the discrimination: "She gets subjected to a lot of things, one of which is the salary. She takes half of the man's salary, even if they are in the same job and they work at the same thing." Key informants for the qualitative assessment indicate that local women in low skilled jobs on average earn less than 70 percent of what men earn in the same jobs; and they estimate that gender wage gap widened by 10 percentage points during the past decade. Wider surveys also indicate that women on average earn significantly less than men (Figure 22), especially

FIGURE 21. Location of Work for Women



Source: PLFS- 1999, 2003, 2008.

FIGURE 22. Wages, by Education and Gender



Source: PLFS. Mean of log wages.

for the majority of workers without college degrees. In 2009, a university educated woman on average earned 10 percent less than a similarly educated man; while a secondary school educated woman earned 23 percent less than her male counterpart. These wage gaps suggest that low returns are another reason for low female labor force participation, particularly among less educated women.

Pressures on Working Mothers to Prioritize Family

In the global sample, young adults are more likely than older adults to support more “modern” gender norms of women combining domestic and breadwinner roles. In the West Bank and Gaza, young people’s voices on this matter are more qualified. Many young women and girls express desires to hold jobs, but they also adhere to powerful norms that prioritize housework and childcare obligations well above a career. As a young woman from Yebna describes, “a woman’s main role is to be a good mother for her children. So she must find a way to balance that with her work.” Even when women may be speaking of their achievements as workers, it is not divorced from motherhood: “I believe that women must work in order to prove herself in society and be a better mother,” states a young woman from Al-Jnena.

The predominant narrative among young men is even more guarded about women combining domestic and economic roles. “Women can work,” states a young man from Yebna, “... if they can balance both work and home chores. But women’s main role is parenting and raising the children in a good way. [The community] respects and supports her as long as she puts her family before her job.” In short, few livelihoods meet the strict prescriptions regarding women’s interaction with male strangers; mobility, honor and safety; and balancing family and work priorities. Young men in University Quarter provide a particularly comprehensive summary of the myriad pressures that discourage women’s economic participation:

... the main factors impacting women is to balance work and home duties, marriage and children’s responsibilities ... In addition, [they are] prone to sexual harassment by the employer and to being exploited in low wages, as the woman is not able to speak up and defend herself because she is weak. And as you know, our customs and traditions don’t have mercy. And people will start talking if just once they find her coming home late, or just once look at her [and disapprove] of what she is wearing to work.

6 Family Formation Choices: Who Decides?

“My mother is one of the best mothers in the world. But I feel that she was treated unjustly when she got married at 15. She is all consumed by how she will raise us and take care of us.”
—Adolescent boy, neighborhood of University Quarter, Hebron.

Decisions about family formation are among the most fundamental for shaping an individual’s life path. For this field work, youth reflected on how couples in their communities come together to form new families and begin childbearing. In both young women’s and young men’s focus groups around the world, facilitators asked questions such as the following:

At what age do young people usually come together to start their own families in your community? Is this a good age?

Do you think marriage practices should change in the future? If so, how?

At what age do women typically have their first child in this community? Is this a good age?

The questions are designed to elicit young people’s views both about “customary” marriage and childbearing practices, and their notions of how these decisions might “ideally” be made. In the West Bank and Gaza, the youth describe many formal dictates about when and how a young woman and man may become a couple; and they report that these tradi-

tions are widely upheld. The youth, however, consistently and passionately voice strong desires for more control over these key decisions about the course of their lives. If given the choice, young women especially yearn for more time to be single, and young men for less burdensome dowry and wedding expenses.

Like their peers worldwide, Palestinian young women voice desires for delaying the formation of a family to a moment when they are well educated and have the physical and psychological maturity needed for a good adult family life. When asked about the age that women in their community normally marry and start having children, the responses from the young women of Yebna closely echo the others: “at the age of 18, which is not a good age because all girls should be able to continue their education first.” They then elaborate that having a baby a year later is very common but “not a good age. She’s still young. The best age is 23.” Young women further caution that marriages and pregnancies can still on occasion “happen at 15 and 16 for girls, and they are not good ages because she hasn’t matured yet ...” Some young women and girls also question why parents, and mainly fathers, should alone be making the vital decision about a daughter’s marriage.

Family laws can also reinforce gender norms by limiting women's agency within the household. The legal minimum age of marriage is lower for girls in the Palestinian territories (West Bank: 15; Gaza: 17) than boys. Delaying marriage can potentially improve a woman's decision-making power within the household, especially with respect to education, choice of partner and the decision to work. Some laws directly affect and limit women's agency within the household.

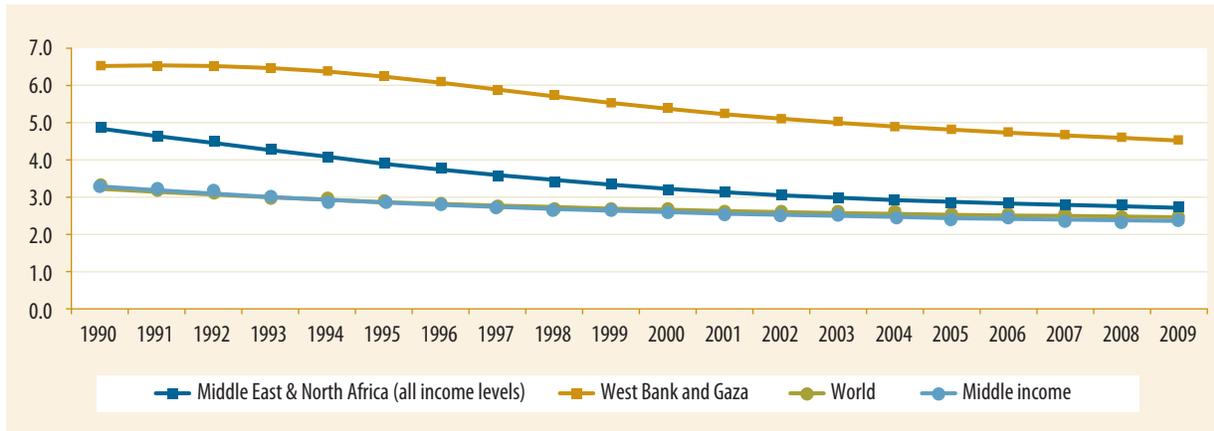
On their part, young men especially express concerns for the asset transfers and wedding expenses that accompany marriage. Some describe heavy dowry burdens and other marriage customs as "nonsense" that "should stop" given the present economic circumstances. "When I finished the university, I thought of working and making something of myself and getting engaged and married. And here I am having not found a job yet and I'm unable to do anything," laments a young man from University Quarter. Many young men in their focus groups indicate that they must put off any hopes of marrying. Like this young man from Al-Jnena, their testimonies call for reducing the financial burdens: "Yes, for sure, it is better to change the ceremony, the dowry, because there are no good jobs."

The ideal of large families remains strong in the communities, and young women widely report that they will have to yield to strong pressure from husbands and in-laws over the number of children they will have. Youth refer to the use of family planning (their estimates range between 1 and 20 percent in their communities). Yet, their responses to whether women can themselves control their childbearing are unanimously negative. "We live in a masculine society, so most of such decisions are made by men," states a young woman of Al-Jnena. And a young woman of Yebna similarly testifies that women cannot decide on these matters, "not by herself at least." If a woman were to refuse

having more children, explains one young man," he would tell her: 'I will marry another wife if you don't have a baby.'" "It is the parents in law" who decide, according to a young woman of Old City; in particular, "the mother in law" says a young man of University Quarter. And the pressures for babies come not only from family but also the wider community: "as soon as a young woman gets married she is eager to get pregnant and have babies because if she takes too long with it, people will start to gossip and ask questions," declares a young woman in University Quarter.

Strong family values, the capacity of husbands and in-laws to control women's childbearing, and the high status conferred upon mothers of large families are all helping to stimulate high fertility rates in the West Bank and Gaza. These youth widely assert desires for fewer children than their mothers, however, who are reported to have had up to 17 children by the focus groups. Rather, young people express desires for 2 to 6 children in their focus groups, which is a higher range than that of other young people in the global sample. According to wider survey evidence, the fertility rate in the West Bank and Gaza is one of the highest in MENA at 4.5 births per woman in 2009. The significant decline from 6.5 births in 1990 (Figure 23) is consistent with the focus group accounts for smaller families.

In all of their focus groups these more educated youth express aspirations for more say over their formation of families, but are finding relatively few outlets for acting on them. Although rare, some allow for conditions where a couple might have more influence over who and when they marry and their family size. This was most evident in the better off community of University Quarter, where one young woman suggests, "If the man is old fashioned he would want to have a lot [of children]. But if he is educated and understanding he would agree to have less."

FIGURE 23. Fertility Rates in the West Bank and Gaza Relative to Mena and the World

Source: World Development Indicators, 2011.

7 “Living in a State of War”: Women Taking Charge, Men Frustrated

Most of the older men in [Yebna] used to go work in Israel and bring home a lot of money. They were perfectly capable of providing for their families, among others. They were considered the best of the society and were consulted on everything regarding their communities.
—Men, neighborhood of Yebna, Rafah

In this section we set aside the young people’s focus groups in order to present testimonies from the older adult focus groups (above age 25) about their conceptions of agency. These discussions with the young people’s “parents” reveal important gender differences in strategies for coping with the conflict. The older adults’ experiences and sense of agency also provide a wider context for understanding the limited choices facing youth as they head into adulthood under these difficult circumstances.

Overall, the adult women and men report sharply different trends in their sense of agency. The men speak widely of rising frustration and powerlessness in the face of their inability to be good providers, authority figures, and protectors for their families and communities. Women, by contrast, report being empowered by their experiences with pulling their families through the hardships and traumas of living in a war zone.⁶ These strong gender differences in agency are seen to increase the stress facing couples.

The qualitative assessment probed into the adults’ general understandings of agency by undertaking an

exercise entitled the Ladder of Power and Freedom. The Ladder activity opens with a facilitator asking focus group members to identify the characteristics of the most powerful and freest women (or men, if a men’s focus group) who live in their neighborhood. For instance, the traits that women in Old City attach to their most power and free women include: “Brave. Confident. Does not accept injustice and insult... Able to manage matters herself... She takes responsibility. [Has] endurance [and] ability to teach her kids endurance. Boldness.... Leadership. Able to undertake an economic project.” The facilitator then probes for traits of the least powerful and least free women who reside in the community. And In Old City, the powerless women are portrayed as: “No boldness/weak personality; not taking responsibility; the one who leaves matters to others... afraid of society. She does nothing but cry... Apathy... afraid, the nervous woman, always troubled.”

⁶ This same pattern in contrasting women’s and men’s agency is also on display in the three other conflict affected countries in the global sample, Afghanistan, Liberia, and Sudan (Petesch 2012).

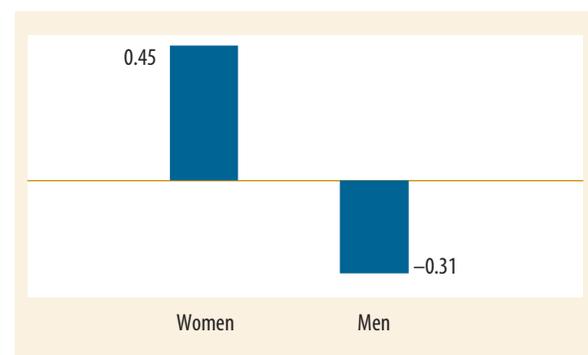
As the focus group is discussing these issues, the facilitator draws a ladder on a large flipchart, and annotates the top step with the traits of the most powerful and free women, and the bottom step with traits of the least powerful and free women. The group is free to add as many steps between their top and bottom ladder steps as they deem necessary to capture the different levels of women’s power and freedom perceived to exist in their community. Then the focus group discusses factors that help women to move up the ladder, and factors that push them down to lower steps. At the close of the activity, the focus group collaborates in distributing 100 “representative” women (or men) of their community to each of their ladder steps to indicate the share of local women on each step *now* and the share on each step a *decade ago*.

Men’s ladders around the world typically stress economic factors, and this was also the case in the West Bank and Gaza ladders. The “strong men” who reside on the top step of the ladder for Al-Salam, a Rafah community that borders Egypt, enjoy stable work with a good income, are decision makers, and have freedom to travel. And Al-Salam’s men can climb into this top stop if they: “Work in trade and earn a lot of money and become rich. Get promoted. Start a successful business.” The men also name three triggers that send men falling to a lower step: “Losing money in business. Become a drug dealer or go to prison.” They estimate that ten years ago perhaps 30 percent of the men in their community resided on the top step, but the share has since dropped to 20 percent. Their bottom step men are described as “weak,” “uneducated,” and relying on an “unstable job;” and step one is seen to have doubled in size to 40 percent of the men in their community. In stark contrast, the women’s focus group of Al-Salam in Rafah perceives that the share of women on their bottom two steps has plummeted from 60 to 20 percent in the past decade. Women say that they have climbed up through “marriage, work, a university degree,” and now many fewer can be found on their bottom step where women are “poor,” “uneducated,” “unsocial,” and have “small families.” Figure 24 displays the av-

erage “mobility index” that the focus groups report for the distribution of 100 representative local men or women on their ladders. The index captures the difference between a ladder’s mean step now and mean step ten years ago. In all but one of the six localities, the women perceive that many women in their communities are finding ways to climb up the ladders of power and freedom. Women say that their characters have grown stronger and they have developed new capacities from having to confront adversity and usher their families and communities through the protracted strife. As a 35 year old woman from Old City explains: “a strong woman has to empower herself by herself, just like her mother. Since we are living in a state of war, most of the ... women’s husbands are either in prison, or they are widows. So these women who have sacrificed to raise their children may not have been educated, but that doesn’t change the fact that such a woman’s children may become doctors.” Or, in Dirbas, a village in Hebron, powerful women are seen as the ones who are taking responsibility; they have to improvise and economize: “she owns her decision ... Now the intifada made her personality stronger, raised her voice.” Box D examines similar perceptions of women gaining a larger say in their households.

In sharp contrast, men in all six communities report falling down the steps of their ladders. A 45 year-old

FIGURE 24. Average Mobility Index on Ladders of Power and Freedom (12 Adult Focus Groups)



BOX D: Slowly Changing Gender Norms

Another activity with the older adult focus groups explores their ideals of what it means to be a “good wife” and a “good husband” in their community. The global assessment found these views to be surprisingly consistent whether a rich or poor context, whether urban or rural, men’s focus group or women’s, and indeed all across the world. A very strong normative framework shapes household roles and relations, even where many differences between men’s and women’s roles are disappearing in practice.

The table below presents the traits for the good wife and husband from the women’s focus group of University Quarter. The good wife is “tolerant,” “cooperative,” and manages the domestic domain. The good husband is the provider for all, and the “strong personality” or dominant authority in the household. Again, such perceptions are very prevalent throughout the West Bank and Gaza and right across the global sample.

Good wife	Good husband
Religiously committed now	Religion
Cooperative	Morals
Raising of her children	Generous in his house
Takes care of her family	Strict
Doesn’t make problems	Provides all the needs of the family
Economizing	Patient
Cares about family and mother in-law	Strong personality
Tolerant	Little anger and good economic situation
Helpful to others	compassionate with his wife and affectionate

“Raising her children properly” is a good wife’s job, according to women in Al-Salam. And when asked if a good wife contributes to family income, a woman there replies, “She doesn’t have to, because the husband is obliged to supply all of their needs.” Although some wives are certainly working in the West Bank and Gaza, and many husbands are unemployed and likely helping somewhat more around the house, these changing roles are not as recognized or appreciated in the normative frameworks that surround households. Traditional gender roles remain very strong.

The focus groups also reflected on how the good husband and wife of today compare with the good husband and wife of the previous generation in their community. And for women of University Quarter, the good wife of their parents’ day is seen as having “no freedom,” “did not leave the house,” and “more obedient,” while the good husband of the past use to be more “stubborn,” “full of pride,” “dominating,” and less supportive of a wife helping to meet household expenses. The men’s focus group of University Quarter, however, never mentions an income earning role for their good wife of either generation. Also, rather than associating such strongly negative qualities for the good husband of the previous generation, the men describe him in more forgiving terms of “less educated,” and needing to be “more self-made” and demonstrating his “manhood.” Around the world, men are still recognized as the main household authority, but both sexes acknowledge women to be gaining more influence.

Notions of a good girl and good boy echo closely the role models set by their parents. When the adolescent focus groups were asked to describe the characteristics of a good girl, with remarkable consistency they portray her as: “religious, wears the hijab, has good morals, educated, obedient, her clothing is respectable, does not wear make-up, her way of walking, does not have a boyfriend, helps her family, forgiving, has good manners, polite, honest.” The bad girl is the one who behaves in the opposite way, is “not religious, impolite, [wears] clothing that catches the attention, increasing the bad reputation of the family” etc. Many of the attributes of the good boy are similar to those of good girls: “polite, religious, educated, obedient, respectful, his morals are good.” Yet, there are other qualities that reflect boys’ greater freedom of movement and participation in social activities outside the home: “doesn’t smoke, doesn’t use drugs, has good friends, patriot.” Girls and boys are socialized from very early on in the different feminine and masculine qualities that make for a good girl and boy, and these processes help to explain why gender norms are so resistant to change across generations.

man from Old City could speak for many other men in the study: “Unfortunately, the economic situation plays a lot in someone’s personality and being strong. If he is able to provide for his family his personality would be stronger.” Men talk bitterly of emasculation and emotional turmoil. A man from

Old City asks, “How can I be happy when my children are sad, in addition to the terrible economic and political situation, and the fighting between political parties? I’m not happy at all. I see most of our community to be unhappy because everyone is suffering.”

Among factors that the men of this community say are eroding their sense of control over their lives are: unemployment, low wages, economic breakdown, psychological problems, feeling marginalized and rejected by others, social problems, divorce, separation, widowhood. For these men whose lives have been severely affected by prolonged political violence and economic blockades, “freedom means stability, safety.” Two of the ways men identify for climbing back up their ladders are to reach out and help others in the community, or, importantly, rely on their women: “If the wife takes the initiative to lead the family his family will become better. If not, it will lead to problems.” In many contexts, men acknowledge women’s central roles in helping them and their children to cope with their stressful conditions.

The adult study participants around the world also reflected on causes, forms, and consequences of marital strife in their communities. Like focus groups elsewhere around the world, women and men of the West Bank and Gaza acknowledge domestic violence to be occasional problems for couples where they live and perceive a somewhat worsening trend over the past decade; however, focus groups (as opposed to private interviews) likely understate prevalence rates. In a survey conducted in 2006, about a quarter of Palestinian women report one act of physical violence by their husband during 2005 and a third report at least one act of violence at any point before 2005 (World Bank 2010). Reports of psychological abuse climb to 70 percent of the West Bank women and 50 percent of Gaza women.

Both men’s and women’s testimonies indicate that women can be physically or verbally punished as a consequence of men’s anger, frustrations, and sense

of inadequacy in the face of insecurity and economic turbulence. Focus groups also report that conducts and attitudes associated with women’s increasing agency can fuel violence against them. In Yebna, men link domestic violence with “the darkness of life” and recognize that “the poor economic situation and a wife’s negative behavior could lead to abuse.” While in Al-Salam, a man suggests that “men may abuse their wives if they were pressured due to work problems.” In University Quarter, a man posits that “the most important reason [for domestic violence] is the temper, a tired psychology because of the high living cost.”

Women’s focus groups also frequently list the harsh circumstances in their communities as triggers of domestic violence, but they stress even more than men that a wife’s disobedience or challenges to their husband’s authority can result in violent abuse. The women’s groups everywhere warn that they could be punished for making “added requests” for funds, or for “refusal to comply with sexual needs of man,” “the woman raises her voice to him,” “her pride/haughtiness,” “not respecting her husband,” “her negligence of him,” “she retorts back and answers him,” “her going out without his permission,” “she doesn’t listen to his orders.”

If women’s expectations and conducts are changing because of their education, because of relaxing norms surrounding their physical mobility and economic roles, or because of their larger say over household affairs, these changes are not coming easily for them. Men’s frustrations and insecurity seem to be preventing a faster relaxation of norms, and inhibiting women from making stronger contributions to their households and communities.

8

Hope in the Face of Adversity

“I had a goal of getting a proper job.”

—*Young woman, Al Salam*

The experiences and perspectives of the youth expressed in this report must be considered within the context of a society that has undergone prolonged conflict and political and economic uncertainty, and an economy that continues to be characterized by enormous impediments to the mobility of people and goods. Visible manifestations of the restrictions include the marked volatility in GDP since the Second Intifada and sharp declines in the agricultural and manufacturing growth, which in turn severely limit prospects for job creation. While the observed trends in poverty, unemployment and labor force participation may not be unexpected, it is indeed remarkable that within this very same context and period of time, the Palestinian territories display stellar performance in health and education outcomes.

Although living through conflict, young Palestinians hold the same expectations for their futures as do youth in peaceful contexts. They aspire to be well educated, have decent work, marry, and provide for their families. Broad based access to education has no doubt strengthened their agency, their valuation of autonomy and dignity, and their ambitions for respectable and stable work. The call for greater economic opportunities is a common refrain among young men and women throughout the Middle

East and North Africa region. In response, countries around the region are renewing efforts to diversify the economy, promote private sector-led job creation, bridge skills mismatches, and boost competitiveness.

However, the viability of reforms such as these in the Palestinian context is predicated on a critical pre-condition: the significant easing of restrictions on the access to natural resources and markets and lifting of the closure regime that have hitherto constrained private sector growth, investment and consequently job creation.^{7,8} These measures are essential for the West Bank and Gaza’s educated population to be able to translate their aspirations into reality. Absent fundamental changes in this status-quo, policies to boost labor demand and expand the opportunity base will yield limited returns, especially in Gaza.

From broader indicators of labor market distress to the voices of young people covered in this report, a

⁷ World Bank, 2011b.

⁸ The Government of Israel cites overriding security concerns that restrict its ability to continue to ease or lift restrictions on the West Bank and Gaza.

common narrative is one the contrast between the significant investments in and ambitions of young people and the harsh reality of the labor market. In the face of pervasive insecurity and scarce opportunities, young men set aside their goals and adopt coping strategies that include cutting their education short; undertaking temporary, dangerous or illicit work; waiting idly; and postponing thoughts of marriage. Young women, for their part, must cope with even more constrained choices due to mobility restrictions, safety and reputational risks, discrimination, and traditional gender norms that lock them into domestic roles soon after completing education. While the exigencies of conflict can create space for women to assume greater economic independence, Palestinian women in the difficult contexts sampled for this study report very few outlets for their agency beyond their domestic roles.

Creating job opportunities therefore, is pressing for social as well as economic reasons. Jobs not only bring earnings, but also independence, status, belonging, and a sense of fairness to their job holders. Economic opportunities also help to build more cohesive and secure communities.

Given the limited scope for private sector led job creation, efforts could be made to boost opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship for young people, especially out of the home. The range of support services needed to make such small home-based businesses viable include not only ac-

cess to credit, but also financial literacy, marketing and business skills. Interventions that help small producers to form economic organizations to purchase inputs and identify larger markets can also boost productivity.

Similarly, knowledge-based industries and services such as Information Communications Technology (ICT) based businesses can provide opportunities for bringing young people into the labor market. Many aspects of back-office and business process outsourcing services such as call centers, transcription and data entry do not require the physical presence of workers at the clients' workplace, and output is easy to monitor and verify. These options lend themselves to environments where mobility constraints, social or externally imposed, restrict the ability of labor to move around freely (See Box E).

Over and above the physical restrictions on movement, Palestinian women are further constrained in their ability to move around by concerns about safety and harassment, and by social norms. In this context, safe, reliable transportation could improve their ability to travel safely to study, work, and access services. One option, recently implemented in Mexico and long in place in India, is "*women only*" buses, compartments or carriages on public transport. The private sector can also ease mobility constraints for women directly. For example, some Indian firms provide *women-only corporate buses* to take women from their homes directly and safely to the work-

BOX E: Bringing Jobs to the Doorstep: Desicrew's Innovative Business Model

Desicrew is a rural business process outsourcing (BPO) company in India that uses an innovative business model to bring young rural women into the workforce. Rural BPOs shift back office tasks from urban locations to small towns and villages, creating high-skill employment outside of major urban centers. Employees enter data, manage databases, transcribe interviews, or aggregate information from the internet for corporate clients. Given the lower costs of living in rural areas, the wages are attractive for rural youth while generating large cost savings for clients.

Approximately two-thirds of Desicrew's employees are women, for many of whom this is a unique and new opportunity, as they do not have the option to work in a city. Parents are unwilling to let their daughters move outside their immediate area because of a combination of safety concerns and cultural restrictions. To convince parents to allow their daughters to work, the company undertook an extensive information campaign, stressing on the benefits of well-paid regular employment and the safety and prestige in working in a company that is seen as modern and urban. Desicrew's experience suggests that rural outsourcing can play an important role in empowering women, improving their self-esteem and confidence and their bargaining power within the household.

Source: Ranger (2010); Desicrew official website (<http://desicrew.in/index.html>).

place. In the West Bank and Gaza, transport services designed to help women reach jobs reliably and safely across checkpoints would reduce an important barrier.

Across the communities visited for the qualitative assessment, men and women of all generations also express concern about the risks of harassment that women face in the workplace and in the public domain more generally. While legislation that addresses harassment in the workplace is an important achievement, implementation and enforcement of these laws remains an issue (as it does elsewhere in the world). Active measures such as trainings, complaint mechanisms, and hotlines are needed to promote greater sensitivity in the workplace and to improve monitoring and reporting mechanisms. A new initiative in Egypt, called HarassMap, is a mobile phone-based reporting system of cases of harassment, which is raising awareness of the problem and warning women of trouble spots.⁹ ICT approaches that allow women to report and share information anonymously are an innovative means to counter harassment in countries where women may be afraid to report such events to family, employers,

or the police out of fear of stigmatization, blame, or retribution.

In light of the complexity of vulnerability revealed by the qualitative and quantitative analysis, and the strong potential for long-run scars caused by current coping mechanisms, greater investments are merited in survey research to monitor conditions and trends facing the youth. For example, current surveys should be refined to include more context-relevant and gender-sensitive indicators for gauging the impacts of prolonged insecurity and uncertainty on welfare. The qualitative data sheds light on many of these: measures of travel time, internal and external mobility restrictions, alternative and informal income sources in the face of limited private sector job opportunities, workplace harassment, to name a few. Filling the knowledge gaps on the mechanisms through which insecurity and conflict affect the daily lives of ordinary people will go a long way towards building a better understanding and designing more effective policy responses in the future.

⁹ <http://www.harassmap.org>.

Global Qualitative Assessment Methodology

D*efining Gender in the 21st Century* was designed to provide an unprecedented “bottom-up” exploration of how gender shapes the lives of men and women across 20 countries around the world. The study was conducted as background for the *World Development 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. In addition to West Bank and Gaza, the field work reached urban and rural communities of Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Dominican Republic, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Moldova, Peru, Papua New Guinea, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, and Vietnam. Nearly 4,000 individuals from three generations participated in the study between June 2010 and March 2011.

The rapid assessment explores trends in gender roles and norms, and what women and men say drive their major decisions surrounding education, economic participation, and family formation. Small, single-sex discussion groups reflected on questions such as: How did you decide to end your education? Are men and women better at different jobs? Do women and men save differently? What makes a good husband? A good wife? Qualitative methods are appropriate for examining these questions because they permit exploration of factors that are multidimensional and need to be traced over time as well as contextually grounded for sound interpretation of their meaning and significance in the lives of women and men and their communities.

Country selection for the global study was shaped by where there was strong interest in World Bank country departments to learn from the study and to incorporate findings into their own policy analysis and guidance activities. The samples are small, and are not representative of their general country or regional contexts. At the community level, the samples were designed to capture a mix of urban and rural contexts as well as more modern and traditional gender norms. In every country, teams conducted field work in both middle class and poorer neighborhoods of cities and towns, as well as in prosperous and poor villages.

Within communities, five different data collection tools were used: three structured focus group discussions (one per age group), a key informant interview in the form of a community questionnaire with close- and open-ended questions, and a mini case study. The table below summarizes the general topics covered with each method. Focus groups lasted two-and-a-half to three hours on average. Biases can sometimes be introduced by focus group dynamics, whereby more assertive group members dominate discussions. In addition to mobilizing single-sex focus groups of roughly similar ages, facilitators received training on additional measures to foster inclusive discussions that would capture a range of attitudes and experiences that are common in the community. On some key questions, for instance, focus group members had opportunities to respond by “voting” in private and then volunteering to discuss their responses.

Local researchers with extensive country knowledge and qualitative field experience led the studies. Dr. Samia M. Al-Botmeh, then director of the Centre for Development Studies, Birzeit University, led the West Bank and Gaza study. The facilitators recruited to conduct the focus groups and interviews were

generally experienced facilitators and received training and a detailed methodology guide in preparation for their field work. The methodology guide reviews the study's conceptual approach and sampling procedures, presents each of the study instruments, and discusses documentation and analysis techniques.

Qualitative Assessment Data Collection Tools and Respondents

Data Collection Method	Time	Topics	Respondents
Activity 1. Community Questionnaire	1 hour	To gain an understanding of the local context, and community level factors that may contribute to gender differences and changes in gender norms and practices surrounding economic decision-making and access to opportunities.	1 or 2 key informants
Activity 2. Focus Group Discussion: Making Economic Choices (youth)	2.5 hours	To explore with young women and men: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Daily time use • Decisions surrounding transitions from school to work and family formation • Independence, cooperation, and obligations in economic decision-making processes • Divorce, family dispute resolution mechanisms • Local economic opportunities • Savings practices • Community participation • Knowledge of gender-related rights • Role models • Hopes for the future 	1 FGD of 8 to 12 female youth, ages 18 to 24 1 FGD of 8 to 12 male youth, ages 18 to 24
Activity 3. Focus Group Discussion with Adults: Ladder of Power and Freedom (adults)	2.5 hours	To explore with adult women and men: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Differences in the exercise of power and freedom, with a focus on economic decisions • Local economic opportunities • Independence, cooperation, and obligations in economic decision-making processes • Divorce, family dispute resolution mechanisms • Sources of economic support • Household gender relations • General patterns of domestic and community violence • Hopes for the future 	1 FGD of 8 to 12 female adults, ages 25 to 60 1 FGD of 8 to 12 male adults, ages 25 to 60
Activity 4. Focus Group Discussions: Reaching for Success (adolescents)	2.5 hours	To explore with adolescents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happiness • Daily time use • Aspirations for the future • The value of education • Education/work balance • The transition to life after studying • Dating, Formation of families • Norms surrounding adolescent girls and boys • Knowledge of gender-related rights • Domestic violence and public safety • Community participation • Role models 	1 FGD of 8 to 12 female youth, ages 10–16 1 FGD of 8 to 12 male youth, ages 10–16
Activity 5. Mini Case Study	1 to 2 hours	To provide in-depth analysis of a finding that emerges as important for understanding gender norms or structures shaping economic decisions in that locality.	1 or 2 key informants

As part of the field work in each site, facilitators interviewed local key informants to complete a Community Questionnaire, which covers extensive background information about the sample community. Key informants might be a community leader, government official, politician, an important local employer, a business or financial leader, teacher, or healthcare worker. The selection of the participants for the adolescent and youth focus groups was based on the age requirements noted in table 2; field teams also received instructions for the groups to be composed, as much as possible, to reflect the range of educational and livelihood experiences that are common in the community for that age group.

The dataset from the field work is comprised of narrative and numerical data. The study's principal findings rest on systematic content analysis of the narrative data, which comprises over 7,000 pages of text for the global dataset, and has been treated as a single database and coded with the social science software NVivo. There is also extensive numerical data from the Community Questionnaire and NVivo frequencies of responses on the full range of study topics. For discussion of limitations with the qualitative sampling, data collection and analysis techniques employed in this study, the reader is encouraged to consult the forthcoming global report that is based on the *Defining Gender in the 21st Century* dataset (World Bank 2011).

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