

Impact of the 'Great March of Return' on Gender-based Violence

Situation report – 8 June 2018 – GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine¹

The humanitarian situation in Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate. Since 30 March 2018, the Gaza Strip has been tense with weekly demonstrations held by Palestinians beside Israel's perimeter fence as part of the 'Great March of Return'. According to OCHA², as of 8 June, 101 Palestinians were killed in the context of the demonstrations, including 13 children and more than 13,000 were injured. Other 34 Palestinians were killed during the same period in contexts other than demonstrations. The large number of casualties is expected to increase the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) of the women impacted.

Increased risk of gender-based violence

Recent studiesⁱ clearly show the negative impact of the blockade (e.g. the dire economic situation) on women's conditions in the Gaza Strip especially concerning psychological stress, which threatens the stability of the family. The mass demonstrations are expected to further intensify the situation of the families affected making the living conditions of women worse and increasing their risk of GBV. More specifically, distinct impacts can be identified for the following groups:

- **Mothers with injured children** (around 15.6% of total hospitalized injured³) reported increased gender-based violence, especially psychological/emotional violence as mothers were often blamed by their husbands and other family members for 'allowing' their children to participate. Additionally, the extra care associated with the injured child is mostly borne by the mothers as it is seen as their role by the family and society as a whole. Mothers from poorer household also reported an extra burden in being responsible for seeking medical assistance for their injured children causing them further embarrassment.
- **Women whose husbands have been killed or injured** during the demonstrations are expected to meet the financial needs of the family, which is difficult in a situation with a high unemployment rate. Moreover, widows and wives who were subjected to forced child marriage often do not have proper education, which makes the job search even more difficult.
- **Widowed women** are in higher risk of immediate psychological/emotional and economic violence by family members, as some are expected to re-marry, potentially with a brother of the former husband. Additionally, the family of the late husband will often take control over the finances. 83.7 percent of the males killed are between the age of 18-39⁴, which means that many of the women left behind are around the age of thirty, and, therefore, still perceived by society to be able to re-marry, thereby risking the custody of their children.
- **Girl children who lost a father or who are expected to have a father with disability** are in increased risk of forced child marriage due to reduced income as the father/husband is usually the

¹ The situational report is based on a rapid assessment conducted by the GBV Sub-Cluster through Women's Affairs center and UNFPA. The information was captured through focus group interviews as well as in-depth interviews with women. To access the full report, please contact either Amira Mohana, mohana@unfpa.org or Nishan Krishnapalan, krishnapalan@unfpa.org

² OCHA OPT, *Four Palestinians killed and over 600 injured in Gaza during continuing demonstrations along the fence with Israel*, 8 June 2018, at <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/four-palestinians-killed-and-over-600-injured-gaza-during-continuing-demonstrations-along>

³ OCHA OPT, *Humanitarian Snapshot: casualties in the context of demonstrations and hostilities in Gaza*, 8 June 2018, at

<https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-snapshot-casualties-context-demonstrations-and-hostilities-gaza-30-march-7-june>

⁴ Ministry of Health in Gaza

breadwinner of the family. Marrying off daughters is perceived as a protection mechanism to ensure the livelihood of girl children. In reality, it turns out to be a negative coping mechanism.

Challenges in GBV service provision

GBV service provisions in the Gaza Strip are already under tremendous pressure. The blockade has put major constraints on developing professional human capacity in many areas of GBV service provision. Additionally, GBV services have been negatively affected by the long hours of power cuts due to the energy and fuel crisis, which has resulted in cancelled activities and reduced working hours. As reported by the Health Cluster, the influx of injured in the context of the mass demonstrations has exacerbated the already fragile situation of the health system in the Gaza Strip. This will affect women, especially pregnant, elderly and those with chronic illnesses as well as GBV survivors, as health is the culturally accepted entry point to detect, treat and refer cases.

'My daughter was injured. Whenever my husband passes by and sees our daughter bed ridden or using the crutches he tells me it is my fault and that her future is ruined. My daughter and I are now in a very bad psychological condition while these comments are repeated daily' - Women of an injured child

Recommendations

- 1 Income generating activities for women of killed or injured husbands
- 2 Mental health and psychosocial support for women and girls impacted by the demonstrations
- 3 Conduct outreach to create awareness on GBV, GBV services and conduct counselling sessions for impacted families to prevent GBV

Action to be taken by GBV Sub-Cluster

1. Raise awareness on available GBV services for impacted families
2. Provide mental health and psychosocial support for women who lost their husbands as well as women with injured husband and children
3. Connect women who lost a bread-winner to income generating activities



ⁱⁱ Women and Men's Study, UNESCO (2016)

ⁱⁱ GBV Information Management System, GBV Sub-Cluster Palestine (accessed on 14 March 2018)