



Community Perspectives on Protection:

A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Analysis of Palestinian Communities in Southern Lebanon

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It was our intention in this analysis to understand more clearly the community knowledge, attitudes and practices towards protection of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon. As a result this analysis presents directly this information and does not seek to analyse or evaluate in detail the perspectives raised during discussions. The opinions presented here are therefore those of the community surveyed and cannot be assumed to reflect those of the author or the Danish Refugee Council.

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Danish Refugee Council:

The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) is a private, humanitarian organisation founded in 1956. DRC works with all aspects of the refugee cause, with the aim of helping and promoting durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people, on the basis of humanitarian principles and human rights. DRC understands "durable solutions" as any means by which the situation of refugees can be permanently and satisfactorily resolved, enabling them to live normal lives.

DRC has been operational in Lebanon since 2004 working with Lebanese, Iraqi and Palestinian populations in the field of emergency relief, education, livelihoods and protection.

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1 Introduction

Despite their collective residence in Lebanon for over 60 years, the 422,188¹ registered Palestinian refugees in Lebanon lack the protection² of basic refugee law and enjoy only limited rights and entitlements under national and international law. The majority live in crowded camps and informal gatherings under the primary 'leadership' of local Palestinian authorities (Popular Committees) who are mostly assigned by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), on the basis of local political factionalism.

Basic services, including health, education, social services, shelter and infrastructure rehabilitation are provided by UNRWA, though access varies by location (camp or gathering³) and individual status (UNRWA registered, Government of Lebanon (GoL) registered and unregistered/non-ID). Incentives to complete secondary and higher education are few due in part to GoL and professional syndicate restrictions on employment in many 'protected' professions. Palestinians in Lebanon are further marginalised by legally restricted property rights, and, in the case of non-IDs, have been subject to arrest and detainment as illegal aliens. Within communities individuals, including disabled, elderly, single-headed households etc, face additional vulnerabilities where UNRWA services are unable to cover all their needs.

The camps themselves are characterised by high levels of poverty and overcrowding, with a critical lack of economic opportunities for youth and adults and limited organised social and recreational opportunities for all age groups. Gatherings suffer similar problems; although overcrowding is less of a concern, many lack basic infrastructure and all are ineligible for UNRWA shelter rehabilitation support and Water/Sanitation interventions⁴. The gatherings fall under Lebanese jurisdiction and control, and Palestinians in these locations are typically subject to frequent negative discrimination by local authorities and police, compared to the Lebanese population who live alongside them.

In the absence of effective community policing and conflict-resolution mechanisms, Palestinians endure significant domestic and public violence. Personal safety and security are often under threat in the camps, which are characterised by frequent violence at all levels, from family to community. Sexual and gender based violence is prevalent (although rarely reported), and corporal punishment is widely used at home and in the schools⁵. Some of the refugee camps, especially, have become havens for militant groups, some extremist, that recruit the young into their ranks and further widen the spiral of violence. In one extreme case, that of Nahr el Bared in northern Lebanon, an entire camp was destroyed in a 4-month clash during the summer of 2007.

¹ Informal estimates suggest the figures is more likely between 250,000 – 300,000 as UNRWA does not strike off its lists the names of those who emigrate.

² DRC defines 'protection' as 'all activities aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and spirit of the relevant bodies of law'. Protection is about the 'safety, security, dignity and integrity of civilians.'

³ *Gatherings are areas where 25 or more Palestinian refugee households live together in a 'gathering'. Gatherings thus typically constitute relatively homogenous refugee communities such as smaller villages, households, living in the same multi storey building, along the same street etc.* FIFO, 2003, "Difficult past, uncertain future. Living Conditions Among Palestinian Refugees in Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon", <http://www.fifo.no/pub/rapp/409/409.pdf> p.18

⁴ "UNRWA Health, education, relief and social services are open to registered refugees regardless of where they are located." UNRWA August 2009

⁵ UNRWA has recently adopted a 'zero-tolerance' policy that should reduce the incidence of corporal punishment in schools. It should be noted that corporal punishment is also reported as prevalent in Lebanese schools.

Conflict between the Lebanese army and an extremist group (Fatah al Islam⁶) resulted in the displacement of 30,000 refugees and the destruction of their homes and livelihoods.

Within this context outlined, in March 2009 the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) launched a 12-month protection project with the aim of enhancing the protection environment for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The project focuses primarily on communities in the south and includes the 5 camps and 23 gatherings in the areas of Saida and Tyr. DRC views this as a pilot project that will develop and test interventions that can be later adapted to other parts of Lebanon.

The project aims to achieve impact by tackling protection issues at three levels: firstly, at the individual level by providing direct support to highly vulnerable refugees including non-ID refugees and families from Nahr el Bared (NBC) displaced in southern Lebanon; secondly, at the community level, through improved awareness of protection issues, referral and response capacities; and finally, at the regional/national level through information dissemination, coordination and advocacy.

A critical first activity under the project has been to carry out an analysis of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) relating to protection issues at Palestinian household and community levels. Specifically, the analysis sought to identify issues affecting Palestinians related to safety and violence, dignity and discrimination and governance and responsibility, in addition to exploring positive coping mechanisms and community priorities for action. The results of this analysis are summarised in the following report.

Through this KAP analysis it is hoped that an improved understanding of protection needs at community level can be both shared with communities and key stakeholders and integrated into the DRC project. DRC believes that real change will only be possible when key community members are engaged in working to improve their own protection environment based on their priorities and solutions. The community perspectives on protection are presented here with this in mind.

2 Methodology

The KAP analysis was conducted in all five camps and in ten of the 24 gatherings in southern Lebanon. The targeted gatherings were chosen based on their size and urban/rural location. Five gatherings were included in the Ein el Helweh sessions given their proximity to the main camp. At least one session with each target group was held in each location, though in Ein el Helweh more sessions were held to reflect the population size in the area.

The KAP analysis methodology adopted a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach working through group discussions with a minimum of 10 participants. Groups were selected based on community representation and vulnerability, i.e. children (7-13), youth (14-24), women, men, disabled and the elderly (55+). Group discussions lasted on average between 1 and 2 hours and were frequently heated and emotional; rarely did we hold a session where participants had little to say.

⁶ Many of the fighters were identified as non Palestinians who had recently infiltrated the camp population.

Key questions on safety and violence, dignity and discrimination, governance and responsibility were posed to each group. In addition the groups were asked to identify what they see as the priority protection issues that need action within their community and how they cope with risks. Children were asked to draw images of what made them feel safe and unsafe as an icebreaker into further discussions⁷.

	Location		Number Of Registered Refugees	Sessions held with at least 1 of each group unless specified	Total group sessions held in each location	Average number per group	Total number of participants
Camps	Ein El Hilweh		47,206	-	15	15	224
	<i>N.B Sessions in the above camp also included population from nearby gatherings – Baraksat, Boustan, Seerob, Jabal el Halib and Sikke</i>						
	Mieh Mieh		4,646	Elderly and disabled	2	11	23
	El Buss		9,752	-	6	15	89
	Rachidye		27,217	-	6	14	83
	Burj El Shemali		19,577	-	6	10	64
	TOTAL SESSIONS – CAMPS				35		
Gatherings	Saida area	Old Saida	2,700	Youth, women, children	3	11	34
		Wadi Zeina	4,050	-	6	10	61
	Tyr area	Qasmiyeh	2,430	No elderly	5	12	57
		Shebriha	1,382	Youth, women, elderly	3	12	37
		Jal el Baher	2,200	-	6	15	92
	TOTAL SESSIONS – GATHERINGS				23		
	TOTAL SESSIONS				58	13	
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS							764

2.1 Principles

DRC, and the consultant team responsible for this analysis, gave careful attention to the sensitivity of the subject matter under discussion and to ensuring that ethical considerations such as questions of confidentiality and trauma were taken into account during the analysis. Whilst the KAP analysis was not intended to explore a high level of personal detail regarding protection concerns, the following principles were applied.

⁷ Children were identified through existing child protection organisations. Trained staff from these organisations were present during sessions and provided follow up support to individuals where necessary.

- Data collection responsibilities were limited to a few designated individuals. Following consent of participants all sessions were videotaped. However, in a number of sessions, participants requested that the recording be limited to audio and not visual.
- A quick security assessment of the location was made prior to undertaking of any group discussions. Sessions were never held where unknown persons were present. At the exception of Jal El Baher, discussions were in a relatively private setting. In the absence of any facilities at Jal El Baher, three of the sessions were held in an unfinished wedding hall, and the other three in the backyards of private homes.
- The discussions focused on what people have experienced and not the identity of perpetrators.
- Topics were not pursued where it was evident that people were uncomfortable with discussing them.

Throughout the research every attempt was made to ensure the principles of 'do no harm'. Researchers were careful to avoid raising expectations and the focus was on listening to the voices of those participating in the research and discussing community suggestions for solutions to the problems expressed.

The findings of this report are representative of the hundreds of voices we heard throughout our visits to the camps and gatherings, but they remain modest in comparison to the reality on the ground and the huge needs expressed by each individual we spoke to. The situation in all the locations we visited was very disturbing but more so in the gatherings than in camps for a number of reasons which we will attempt to highlight throughout this report.

3 Key Groups at Risk

"He who has no country has no dignity,"⁸

Being refugees in a country where they feel deprived of their main basic rights has turned the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon into an extremely vulnerable and marginalised group and the target of numerous risks whether from within their own communities or from outside forces.

Restrictions on the ability to work deprives potential breadwinners of a respectable income forcing them to take any available job. In many cases this results in potential earners accepting positions that are paid a minimal wage as a result of their status as Palestinian refugees. They are also deprived of social security and of any compensation at the end of their services simply because they are not Lebanese. The scarce income of the family affects all members of the family making it tough on the parents because they are unable to meet their children's needs and desires which in return creates tense relations between different members of the family. Children and youth often resort to dropping out of school in order to work to either help their families or to fulfil their own needs. This was certainly obvious in gatherings such as Jal El Baher, Shebriha and Qasmiyeh. Many of the children there didn't even see the point of staying in school, for the majority it was

⁸ Elderly man in Wadi Zeina

seen as a waste of time and effort. *"Why study when you will not be able to work in your own specialisation later on,"* was a phrase we often heard.

This vicious cycle also touches groups such as the elderly who largely depend on their children to support them and the disabled whose carers are unable to pay their medical bills and fulfil their other needs. Based on this reality, in addition to other factors, all groups in the Palestinian camps and gatherings are considered at risk, some more than others, namely the disabled, elderly and youth.

3.1 Children (7-13 Years)

Children in all the places we visited are deprived of their childhood due to the difficult situation under which they are living. As Palestinian refugees they are exposed from an early age to the hardship of their parents' daily lives which in return affects them directly. Consequently, many of the children miss out on their childhood either because they are quickly immersed into life's hardships or because they drop out of school at an early age to help out their families.

During our sessions many of the children spoke of their fear of war and conflict. Many remember the 2006 war with Israel and have vivid memories of the latest conflict in Gaza which they were exposed to through the media. In one of the children's sessions in Ein El Helweh, a child drew a beach massacre scene from the Gaza conflict of early 2009, in which a whole family was killed with the exception of a little girl who was left to mourn them. When we asked the child to tell us what he had drawn he said that his drawing represents his utmost fear, that of losing his family.

Many children, especially in camps like Ein El Helweh and Burj El Shemali, expressed fear of the street fighting that often takes place in their camps. They said that when this happens they run home to hide. Many of them voiced this concern during our conversations and in their different drawings. *"What scares me the most is when they start fighting and kill innocent people. One time when we were just going out of school they started shooting, Two of the girls in the school got injured and three of my friends came home with me because they could not reach their houses,"* a young girl from Ein el Helweh said. A boy from Ein El Helweh, told us *"Once while I was at home I heard explosions in the camp so I hid under the covers,"* The tense situation especially in places like Ein El Helweh forces parents at times to restrict their children's movement out of fear for their safety.

It is important to note here that children in the gatherings express a different kind of fear in regard to the streets. In Jal El Baher, for example, which is awkwardly located between the sea shore and the highway, the street represents a road safety threat for children. Many children and even adults have been run over by passing cars, and many were either killed, badly injured or disabled for life. We were told of an incident that took place seven years ago when a man with his truck hit and killed a boy. Two years later, the same man hit the boy's sister leaving her with multiple injuries including kidney damage. Another car crashed into one of the houses and injured six children. According to a number of residents, the Popular Committee and a number of the local people installed speed bumps to reduce the risks and increase road safety but they were removed by the

local government. This issue was also raised by DRC with the local Tyr municipality who reported that it was not a problem as *"nothing had happened recently"*⁹.

A significant number of children in the camps and gatherings spoke negatively of schools, saying that they don't like to go to school because their teachers hit them or treat them unkindly. In many places, but more so in Shebriha gathering, children spoke openly of running away from school and skipping classes. In many of the drawings children sketched their schools as the place they dislike or mostly feel unsafe in. The majority of the children we met at Jal El Baher were unable to write their names because they had left school before learning to read and write.

Most children we met spoke of their need for playgrounds because they have no place to play. A lack of recreation areas forces them to play in front of their houses or in the passageway of camps and gatherings which creates problems within the community. Many boys also spoke of their need for proper football grounds because the ones they currently use are improvised. A common interest between girls and boys was access to the internet. *"Some children prefer not to eat at schools to save up the money to go to internet cafes,"* one mother in El Buss said.

3.2 Youth (14-24 Years)

During our field work and numerous encounters with the youth three categories stood out:

3.2.1 Youth who are in schools and universities

The Palestinian camps and gatherings are home to many young men and women who are extremely ambitious, focused and determined to succeed in life. This optimism is in contrast to their uncertain future and the difficulties they face in finding jobs in the Lebanese market. These young men and women hope that they will be able to find a respectably paying job that is related to their field of specialisation in order not to join the ranks of educated but unemployed Palestinian refugees.

Many of the male youths we met work while studying in order to pay their university fees. One woman in Old Saida told us that her son works every day till 2am to save up for his university fees. An 18-year old boy in Shebriha told us that while studying for his baccalaureate certificate, he applied to a university in Italy and was accepted but had to take basic Italian language courses before getting there. His family was unable to help him, so the young man was preparing for his baccalaureate and working to save some money. *"It took me a year to save for the Italian language courses but I did get the money and took the courses and now all I am waiting for is my visa to Italy,"* he explained. When asked if he will come back to Lebanon, he said that if he finds a decent job there after finishing his university degree then he would rather stay in Italy because *"my chances are better there."*

3.2.2 Youth who have completed secondary school or university

This category of youth seems lost. With a diploma in hand but unable to move forward in their lives they feel they are at a dead end. When asked how they manage, none of them gave a clear answer. Some of the answers we got were *"With God's help"* or *"With the help of family members"*

⁹ Meeting with Tyr Municipality June 16 2009

and friends and so on." It was noticeable, however, that a good number of youth in Rachidye camps are on the payroll of the PLO and receive a small monthly salary which keeps them going. This category of youth spends a lot of their time in coffee shops or in the streets smoking cigarettes or nargileh.

In Ein El Helweh camp some of the youth told us that factions have approached the youth, particularly those who are not employed, encouraging them to join their ranks in return for privileges and a monthly salary. Young women and children according to the youth in Ein El Helweh are also approached by these factions. *"Our Palestinian factions got our youth used to receiving 200 thousand Lebanese Pounds or 200 dollars a month and end up not working or obeying their parents,"* one father in Ein El Helweh complained.

This category of youth is frustrated and speaks often of the injustice of their situation in Lebanon and the discrimination practiced against them simply because they are Palestinian refugees. Many told us that they were almost hired for a job before the employers found out they were Palestinians refugees and rejected them at the last minute. It has to be noted here that this group of youth is more prevalent in the camps than in the gatherings.

3.2.3 Youth who have dropped out of school

"Look at him, he has a university degree and he's unemployed, you want the same thing to happen to me," a young man in Shebriha told us to justify why he dropped out of school. This group of youth is prevalent in gatherings and was especially numerous in Qasmiyeh, Shebriha and Jal El Baher. Their future seems uncertain due to the limited opportunities they have. Most of them spoke of emigrating to other countries where there are other Palestinian refugees. They claim that they might have a better chance at finding a job in these countries than in Lebanon. Many of the youth in Shebriha told us that their ticket out might be to get married to girls in these countries who are originally from Shebriha.

Many of the young men in this category are heavy smokers and drinkers and they admit that they practice these habits, especially drinking, *"in order to forget"*. One teenager in Shebriha jokingly asked *"Why is a Lebanese able to release his stress by talking to his wife while a Palestinian can only do that with drinking?"* A young man in Shebriha told us that one night he was really drunk and went up the nearby hill and started screaming at God requesting to know why he did this to Palestinian refugees. *"A Palestinian is prohibited to live, he is born to be searched and be discriminated against,"* another youth in Shebriha said.

Most of the youth in this category said they spend their time smoking, drinking, playing cards and sitting in coffee shops. On numerous occasions and in different places we were told that drugs are also consumed by the youth. However none admitted to using drugs themselves, although they did not deny smoking or drinking. The majority of youth spoke of drug use as a rising phenomenon and claimed that to get them addicted, drugs were often added to nargileh or juices without their knowledge. This was often blamed on 'outside forces' but the perpetrators were not specified.

Young Palestinian refugees appear to be extremely anxious about what the future holds for them. And as with other groups we sat with, the youth, whether in the camps or the in gatherings, believe

that change is not coming in the foreseeable future. A limited number of positive role models was mentioned as a factor contributing to their scepticism and a lack of hope for the future. Their fathers, male relatives and friends are mostly unemployed, work for minimum wages or work in specialisations not related to their field of study.

Young women in the camps and the gatherings also face considerable challenges. On the social level, young women, whether in the camps or gatherings, are very much restricted due to community conservatism and tradition. Rarely is a young woman allowed to go out alone without an escort. *"It is summer vacation now and all the girls will be confined to their houses because they are not allowed to go out alone and even if they allow them there is no place to go,"* a young girl told us in Wadi Zeina. In absence of any facilities to cater to their needs girls and young women suffer from extreme boredom. *"People gossip because they are bored and have nothing to do but in the process they hurt many persons,"* one young woman told us at El Buss camp.

Most girls and young women who attend schools and universities head back home straight after their courses are over. Many of the young women we met complained about the freedom young men enjoy, although generally speaking they agree to a certain extent that women should abide by tradition. We also came to understand through our numerous encounters that parents tend to take girls out of schools or universities when they face financial problems because the primary preference remains the male in the family. This happens often despite the fact that we were told that many of the girls that were taken out of schools were better academically than their brothers. Parents tend to do this because they believe that their sons will support them at a later stage while their daughters will eventually get married and leave the family.

Besides their urgent need for appropriate employment, the majority of youth spoke of the need for sports clubs or gymnasiums which they viewed as good places to release stress and keep them busy and fit. Many also raised the issue of encouraging and supporting the numerous musical and artistic talents in the camps and gatherings. And, as it is the case with children, several youth mentioned the importance of having access to the internet whether for educational or entertainment reasons.

3.3 Women

Wherever we went our efforts almost always were in vain to get women to talk about their own issues and needs. They always seemed preoccupied by their children, husbands and society at large. Identifying the aspirations and needs of women alone was therefore very difficult. The living conditions in the camps and gatherings always took up the bulk of the conversation. Issues such as the unemployment of their husbands and grown-up kids, the scarce wages they are getting in cases where they are working, the disturbing situation in schools (as they describe it) and its consequences including school drop-outs, limitations on health services and medication, construction in the camps and gatherings and violence in the society were all issues raised during our sessions.

In places like Jal El Baher, Shebriha and Qasmiyeh women mainly spoke of road safety and their concern over the wellbeing of their children, the ban on construction and the absence of locally placed UNRWA services¹⁰. A number of women, particularly in Rachidye camp, brought up the issue of documentation, given their marriage to non-ID men which leaves their children also without identification¹¹. Living without identification results in limited access to basic services and longer term challenges in realising freedom of movement and gaining employment outside of the camps.

But despite the hardship under which these women live and the huge responsibility they hold on their shoulders to keep things going for their families, women in general seem strong and in control. In many cases women appear to be the rock of the family, managing with the tiniest of resources. Many deprive themselves to buy things for their children *"My husband gave me some money and told me to go out and buy myself a new dress since it has been a while since I bought anything for myself. I simply could not because I thought of all the things my kids need, so I went out and bought the children a few things instead,"* a woman in Ein El Helweh told us. However, several women admitted that although they have to remain strong for the sake of their families, the difficult conditions under which they live does affect them one way or another. *"The hard financial conditions and the unstable security situation under which we live affect the health of a woman,"* one woman in Old Saida told us. Many women spoke of young women in their twenties and thirties who have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, nervous breakdowns and so on.

Amongst all the places we visited we found that a good number of women in Ein El Helweh work outside the home, and this also applies to a certain extent to Burj El Shemali. In Ein El Helweh, particularly, a number of the women we met were the main breadwinners for their families, as their husbands were unemployed¹².

As discussed earlier, it was extremely hard to get women to speak about their own needs. However, those who did speak out voiced the need for sports facilities for women as a means of social interaction and recreation, and as an effective way to release stress. Many women also raised the real necessity for women to contribute to the family income. They believe that this could happen through small projects that would teach and employ women.

3.4 Men

Men in the camps and gatherings who attended discussions were open to addressing problems directly and suggested a number of solutions. Many of the men we met during our sessions had completed higher education¹³. Some were fully employed and others were part-timers; however, few of the men we met work in their field of specialisation. Many spoke of the discrimination practiced against them by Lebanese employers because they are Palestinian refugees. *"Once, one of the men was working in the orange fields and suddenly he died, they brought him back but only*

¹⁰ "Local residents in these locations often have to travel to nearby camps to access health clinics and schools – although a school and clinic are present in Qasmiyeh gathering given its larger size" UNRWA August 2009

¹¹ Current Lebanese law states that nationality is inherited from the father

¹² The unemployment rate among camp residents exceeds 60 per cent, according to UNRWA <http://www.cipmo.org/1501-indice-rassegna/lebanonspalestinianrefugee.html> Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps a time bomb' (Jordan Times) 20/02/2009

¹³ N.B. This could be a reflection of the selection of participants by local NGOs, popular committees etc.

paid his family a half day wage. They did not even have the courtesy to pay him a full day," a man in Burj El Shemali told us.

Their sense of responsibility towards their families is overwhelming and therefore these men's greatest fear is being unable to work. Many feel besieged by the huge responsibilities and sometimes feel frustrated at falling short of meeting the needs of their family members. *"I sleep and wake up worrying about how I will manage to feed my family,"* one man in Ein El Helweh said. *"My wife had surgery but I could not give her money to go and remove the stitches, so I ended up removing them for her myself,"* a man in Rachidye told us. We were also told in Rachidye camp that one of the men committed suicide because he was unable to deal with all the responsibilities on his shoulders.

While hardly any of the men we met requested assistance they all demanded to be granted their civil rights in order to live their lives in a dignified manner. Like the youth in the gatherings, many men spoke of emigration as the solution to their problems. *"Get us a boat and ship us to Denmark, this is the best solution. We will be done with the Arab nation; at least there they treat people when they are sick. Here if is someone falls sick they leave him to die. Even the PLO does not help you if you don't have a wasta"*¹⁴, a man in Jal El Baher said.

As with many of the other respondent groups, men did not have many kind words for UNRWA. The majority strongly criticised the agency for falling short in fulfilling the needs of the Palestinian refugees. They all spoke negatively of the perceived reduction of the agency's services¹⁵, especially in regard to medication and covering surgical operations. *"All they give us is Panadol,"* was commonly repeated by many of the groups we sat with.

As expected, decent employment was the first priority for men. However, in addition many of them spoke of the need for recreation facilities including public libraries. Some as well spoke of the need for vocational training for middle-aged men, since existing training is usually designated for young men.

3.5 Elderly

"We have lived all our lives in humiliation and contempt," is how an elderly man in Ein El Helweh described his life and that of others in this age group. This was the general feeling amongst the elderly we met with. They perhaps feel the injustice more than other groups because they have lived with it longer. They discussed many issues but their greatest concern in all the places we visited was the lack of medication and medical services. Having reached old age many of the elderly suffer from chronic and increasing health problems and most cannot afford to pay for their medication or necessary surgeries. They strongly criticised UNRWA for falling short in meeting their medical needs. *"If you reach 60, then you are considered dead by the UNRWA, they don't want anything to do with you and therefore they don't pay for your medication or surgeries,"* was a

¹⁴ Influence or connections, often used to gain access to services, employment etc.

¹⁵ "UNRWA has recognised this criticism and is committed to working to improve current service provision with the current resources available" UNRWA August 2009

phrase we continuously heard¹⁶. The majority of individuals in this age group came to our sessions with their prescription papers in the hope that we would be able to help them buy medications or pay for a surgery.

Many of the elderly told us that they have been working all their lives and still cannot rest after reaching old age. Accordingly, they feel that the only time they will get some rest is when they pass away. *"One has to work at least for a year before he dies so he can purchase a grave he can be buried in,"* one elderly person in Wadi Zeina told us.

However, pride has remained high amongst this group, and many feel they still have a vital role to play in the society. This was particularly apparent in places like Ein El Helweh, Burj El Shemali and Mieh Mieh. *"I don't want anything from anyone, all I want, is when I die, to be buried in Palestine,"* one old lady in Mieh Mieh told us. We were told in Ein El Helweh that the elderly have formed groups in the different areas of the camp, and when clashes occur they intervene by going out in the streets and standing between the different fighting factions. According to them, their action has stopped the fighting numerous times. As for Burj El Shemali many of the elderly in an effort to conserve the history of Palestine have resorted to writing down and recording memories of their home towns on paper. Thanks to the efforts of local NGOs in the camp, some of these memoirs have been published¹⁷.

The lack of facilities to cater to their needs, especially in the gatherings, made almost all the elderly we met complain of extreme boredom. When asked about what they need, one elderly person in Ein El Helweh said *"take us on trips, we need to smell the air outside the camp."*

Negligence of the elderly was mentioned by some of the elderly people we spoke to but none said that this was happening to them. One man in Wadi Zeina reportedly deserted his mother by the beach and when they brought her back he told them that he does not want to keep her. Apparently, with the help of an independent benefactor the woman has been placed in a shelter for the remainder of the year but no one knows what will happen afterwards because her son is reportedly unable (or unwilling) to raise the money necessary to maintain her there. Another young man in Old Saida spoke of his elderly mother who suffers from Alzheimer's disease: *"I live alone with her and every day before I go to work I lock her in the house because if I don't she will wander around and get lost."* Stating he was unable to pay the fees himself, he requested help to place his mother in an institution where she can be taken good care. *"I have been contacted by the police on numerous occasions because my mother has managed to run away. One time they called me from El Jmeizeh in Beirut to tell me that my mother is there and to come and pick her up,"* he added. However, these cases were said to be few due to the strong family ties that still exist within the Palestinian community.

Some of the elderly persons we met in all the camps and gatherings admitted to feeling like financial burdens on their children. *"If an elderly person gets sick they don't have money to pay for*

¹⁶ "UNRWA's focus, with its resources, is on providing primary health care. With the rest of the funds at our disposal we offer limited assistance on hospitalisation, tertiary care" UNRWA August 2009

¹⁷ Documentation of individual and family histories has been carried out by Caritas, Women's Humanitarian Organisation and Al Houla Association.

their medicine. UNRWA does not pay and neither does the PLO, nor can their children help because they can barely fulfil the needs of their families. Elderly people have become a burden," a man in Ein El Helweh said.

3.6 Disabled

This section of the population is primarily dependent on families who already struggle to support the day-to-day needs of their healthy children. The lack of appropriate facilities or services complicates their lives even further. (It is important to point out here that the gatherings lack these facilities and services more than the camps).

Many of the disabled complained of not being able to leave their homes for days on end because there is no one to help them get in and out of their houses. Most Palestinian homes are not easily accessible for people with mobility difficulties. Others spoke of having to leave school, even if they have been doing well, because the schools are not equipped to receive disabled individuals. Many of the disabled and their families spoke of the scarcity of financial resources for their medication, medical equipments and surgeries. Many also mentioned the continuous need for diapers, which most cannot afford to buy. One woman said that at one point she was using newspapers for her child because she was unable to buy diapers.

Despite their numerous difficulties some of the disabled people we met, like the 28-year-old woman from El Buss camp who suffers from several health problems and is paralysed from the waist down, showed much pride. She told us that she does not want anything but to get an education to enable her to support herself in a dignified manner because she does not wish to depend on anyone, even her family. *"One has to dream to be able to live,"* she said. However, an elderly lady in Wadi Zeina gathering who told us, while crying, of her forty-something-year-old son whom she has been forced to shackle for long years because if she does not he will hurt himself. *"I came all the way from El Jieh to Wadi Zeina with my disabled son to tell you his story,"* another old lady said. Her son, who suffers from multiple disabilities, has given the family no choice but to work on land adjacent to the house where they live because, as the woman put it *"no neighbour can tolerate with his nervous fits when he starts hitting and swearing at people"*. The family has been forced to move multiple times due to the condition of her son.

Some of the disabled informed us that they have disability cards from different NGOs working with disabled persons but have seen few advantages or benefits as a result of this registration process.

4 Community Perspectives on Safety and Violence

4.1 Violence within the Home

In all camps and gatherings violence within the home was largely seen as a means of releasing stress and frustration caused by the tough living conditions and not as a mean of discipline (mother or father against children, man against woman, child against child and so on). Most of those with whom we spoke recognised the existence of the problem and did not deny using violence. However, those who admitted to using violence – particularly parents against their children – understood that this was the wrong way of handling things. Most said they lose control and

behave in such a manner due to the tremendous pressure they are living under and the violence they feel in their daily lives.

Many, and especially men, blamed the mounting violence within the household on the Lebanese state, UNRWA and the PLO who are seen to be responsible for the situation of Palestinian refugees. A few frankly admitted that they have no one to blame but themselves for the existing situation. *"We don't have the time or effort to properly raise our children, so it is easier to just hit them,"* one woman in Shebriha said. Children on the other hand did not openly protest against their parents' beating them, with a significant majority believing that 'their parents would not do it unless it was for their own good.' *"My mother's beating does not hurt because I know that at the end of the day she does not want to hurt me,"* one girl in Ein El Helweh explained.

Some parents said that they felt guilty afterwards but did not admit this guilt to their children. *"I sit and cry my heart out after I hit my kids but I don't let them see me because that will not let them take me seriously if it happens again,"* a woman in Ein El Helweh said. Very few people with whom we spoke apologise to their children after beating them, and when they do, it is usually the women and not the men that apologise. Some of the women and men we met mentioned that they use violence to discipline their children because, as they said, *"a child needs this kind of discipline once in a while."* Only a few voices were raised against the use of violence, expressing that violence is not a good form of discipline or of releasing stress because, according to them, violence does not solve the problem but aggravates it.

Despite the fact that the use of violence was never denied, almost none of the women admitted to being hit by their husbands and no men admitted to hitting their wives. However, in a number of women sessions, it was jokingly raised that women have started hitting their husbands, and this was largely attributed to the change in power relations between the two, since many women are now working and men are sitting at home. This was reiterated by some of the men, who when asked if they had ever hit their wives stated, *"we don't dare to hit her, women hit men these days"*. There were, however, a few men who avoided answering this question altogether.

Forms of violence used against children – primarily inflicted by parents – varied from a slap on the face to more violent use of implements including using sharp home utensils. One boy in Rachidye told us that when his father gets really angry with him and his siblings, he heats up kitchen utensils and burns their legs. A woman in Ein El Helweh who is taking medication for her nerves told us that she once stabbed her teenage son with a knife. *"I was doing the dishes and he was standing behind me nagging about wanting this and that and I kept telling him that we can't afford it but he kept on going. I could not take it any more, so I just threw the knife I was cleaning at him with my back to him. The knife ended up on his shoulder,"* she said. For the most part men and women said the most common used implements for beating their family members, particularly children, include belts and hose pipes.

4.1.1 Community Recommendations

- Parents expressed the wish to have information and tools to find alternative ways to discipline their children. A woman in Ein El Helweh told us that she used to hit her son regularly before

she got a pamphlet from school telling her how to talk to her children instead of hitting them. She claimed that she now resorts to dialogue more often.

- Women spoke of using dancing or exercise i.e. going out for a walk, to release stress and prevent them from losing their temper.

4.2 Violence within Schools

The large majority of parents interviewed were strongly against UNRWA's efforts to forbid teachers from using physical punishment on children¹⁸. Many described the policy as being 'designed for foreign countries but alien to their culture and traditions'. Parents felt that the UNRWA policy was responsible for the illiteracy of students and the large number of school drop outs. A further conspiracy theory was often raised, which stated that removing corporal punishment was an attempt by UNRWA and western countries to turn the Palestinian people into illiterate individuals who would relinquish their right to return as education without physical discipline was not possible.

The majority of parents interviewed told us that teachers beating students in a reasonable manner was an effective form of discipline. During the sessions we were unable to determine exactly what a reasonable form of hitting children was understood to be, as parents were never precise on the issue when asked. We were also unable to determine if, according to these parents, their children performed better in school when beaten by their teachers; however, many women and men did speak of how education at UNRWA schools was much better 'in their days' or 'a few years back'. A few individuals did, however, support the new policy on the grounds that a teacher should not resort to beating but dialogue or other non-violent forms of punishment to discipline students.

Many parents spoke about children beating teachers, and some of the children and youth confirmed this in a joking manner. *"Students stopped respecting the teacher and the school,"* was a phrase we heard repeatedly. *"When I was a child and saw my teacher coming from far, I used to tremble from fear, nowadays students don't care a bit,"* was another phrase we continuously heard from parents. A number of UNRWA teachers who happened to participate in our sessions denied beating students. An UNRWA teacher in Wadi Zeina explained that he feels cornered by the new law. *"It is not only that we are not allowed to beat students but we don't have the right to even speak to them in a strict manner because it could be mistaken for threatening. Even if a student is eating in class, the teacher has no right to ask him to stop,"* he explained. The UNRWA teacher added that he manages to find other ways to discipline his younger students, but said that his authority as a teacher with older children, whom he described as being uncontrollable, has become very limited.

Children, on the other hand, spoke fervently on the topic, stating that the UNRWA policy is not appropriately applied, mentioning numerous incidents of teachers hitting students. *"It is OK if my mother or father beats me up because it's for my own benefit but it is not OK if my teacher hits me,"* a number of children said. Some of the children spoke of severe cases of beating, particularly

¹⁸ 'Safe Schools Happy Schools' an initiative designed to govern relations between teachers and students as well as parents, in order to promote disciplined and violence-free schools
http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/Documents/public_policy/pal_camps/pubs/IRIN_dailystar171208.pdf

those we spoke to in Old Saida. *"Our teacher slaps us on one cheek and turns us and then slaps us and turns us again until we can no longer stand,"* one of the children in Old Saida said. Students in this particular location spoke to us of a classroom in one of the schools which is designated by teachers as some sort of a detention room. Children are sent to this room and left there as a punishment. A woman in Ein El Helweh told us that one time while she was visiting the school she saw one of the female students standing in the corner of the classroom with a garbage bin on her head. Almost all the children we spoke to were opposed to being beaten by teachers, saying that its affects are negative. Many of the students we spoke to, especially those who have dropped out of school, said that they hated school because their teachers treat them badly.

Verbal violence particularly in the schools was seen by the majority of parents with whom we spoke as being worse than physical violence. Harsh examples of verbal violence were cited during our meetings. Parents and children continuously said that teachers swore at students using words that are inappropriate to be used by anyone and even less so by an educator. *"If the teacher uses such a language then the child will think it is OK to use it as well,"* a man in El Buss said. Cases of school drop outs were also attributed to this phenomenon. The majority of children seemed to agree with their parents that verbal violence is worse than physical violence. *"Verbal violence hurts more than physical violence."*

4.2.1 Community Recommendations

- UNRWA needs to explain the benefits of the new UNRWA policy and address any misunderstandings that might have developed in relation to the implementation of this policy. In general miscommunication between UNRWA and the community on a range of issues was regularly raised as a concern.
- Awareness campaigns could also be carried out by local NGOs working in the camps and gatherings in the field of education, targeting both parents and children to explain to them that non-violent approaches to discipline do not have to undermine the authority of the teacher.

4.3 Violence within the Community

Just as they admitted to the existence of violence within the household, the majority of people we met acknowledged the problem of violence in their local community. *"Violence and terrorism are the direct result of the unbearable living conditions under which we are living,"* was a commonly repeated sentiment. One of the youth in Burj El Shemali described the Palestinian camps as time bombs because of the miserable situation there.

Some participants, especially in camps such as Ein El Helweh and Burj El Shemali, spoke of violence inflicted by the different factional militias. Many, particularly in these two camps and more so in Ein El Helweh, were concerned about street fighting and how this affects their immediate security. The heavy presence of factions was blamed for creating more problems than resolving them. A significant shift was noted in the way people talked about armed factions. In comparison to previous years when assessments presented strong support for the presence of factions because they were considered to protect them against outside forces, at present many see them as more of a problem than a solution within the camps. *"All they do is fight with each other, they forgot about Palestine,"* one man in Burj El Shemali said.

A significant number of children showed genuine fear of factional fighting and this was expressed in their drawings. Some of the youth, especially in Ein El Helweh, also spoke of the direct interference by the militias to either resolve a problem or to scare people off so as not to repeat certain actions. One student in Ein El Helweh told us that their head teacher calls on certain militia men to discipline students and prevent them, through scare tactics, from behaving badly.

Violence instigated by factions was seen by participants as too complex an issue to be addressed effectively, especially within Ein el Helweh. Given the intricate connection between factional violence and maintenance of power and influence, the reasons behind such problems were seen to be too deep to be able to change. The prevalence of weapons was seen as vital to overall Palestinian security and as such both a negative and a positive influence within society.

However, it would be unfair not to mention that a few participants defended factions, saying that the media exaggerate news of the violence caused by them. *"Have you ever heard a piece of good news coming out of the camps, all coverage is negative,"* one man in Ein El Helweh said. *"TV stations only come to the camps when there is a security problem. We have many good things happening in the camps, do they ever come to cover that? Of course not,"* another man in the same camp said.

Some of the children and youth we met spoke of using violence in the streets as a mean to release the stress they feel and to enforce power relations. A few children, especially in Ein El Helweh, spoke of their fathers going out in the streets with a gun to shoot in order to release some stress. We also came across incidents where children spoke of using knives against their peers. Many people in the camps and gatherings also explained that on numerous occasions minor problems between children or youth in certain neighbourhoods have aggravated into violent fighting between families. There was a general consensus that linked physical violence with being powerful. Many parents said if someone hits their children they would not discourage their children from hitting back because otherwise they would be labelled as being weak. In places like Ein El Helweh or Jal El Baher, parents were adamant that their children should not be seen as weak, because according to them they will become the target of outside aggression. In contrast, other parents stated that they oppose such behaviour and encourage their children to resort to dialogue to solve problems.

None of the people we interviewed said they feel safe in their respective communities, largely due to: a) the fact of being Palestinian refugees deprived of all their civil rights in Lebanon and b) the complex Palestinian mosaic in the camps and gatherings which results in multiple players in the form of factions and few real authority figures.

Independent, or non-factionally aligned support systems to address violence were non-existent for all population groups included in this analysis. People tended to be hesitant to report any violent behaviour inflicted upon them so as not to deepen the problem. However, many of the parents confirmed that in cases of physical or verbal violence against their children whether in the schools or in the streets they themselves will interfere to solve the problem.

4.3.1 Community Recommendations

- Some communities recommended having a single armed faction that would protect all Palestinians instead of multiple factions fighting against one another.

5 Community Perspectives on Dignity and Discrimination

Palestinian refugees are a very proud people. Despite all the hardship they have experienced and are still facing, Palestinians in the camps and gatherings are very attached to their identity and homeland. Young children when asked where they come from name their original hometowns in Palestine. Ironically, this same affiliation with their identity and country has caused them many challenges in Lebanon. The large majority strongly feels the injustice inflicted on them by the world at large and the Lebanese state in particular is due to their status as refugees.

In most places we visited men criticised the Lebanese government for not granting them their civil rights after over sixty years of presence in Lebanon. There was a perception amongst some of the community surveyed that the Lebanese treat animals better than they treat the Palestinian refugees. *"The least we want is to be treated like animals we will surely live in more dignity than we are living now,"* one man in Rachidye camp said. Many, especially in camps like Ein El Helweh and Rachidye, spoke of the strict security measures imposed on them by the Lebanese state and how these measures make their life even harder. *"If I have an appointment at eight in the morning I have to take into consideration that I will be spending on the check point 45 minutes on the way out and 45 minutes on the way back,"* another man in Ein El Helweh said.

A young man from Shebriha said that sometimes he hates being Palestinian in Lebanon because if he had been of another nationality the whole world would respect and dignify him. A similar feeling was voiced in Wadi Zeina where a group of youth said that they should not have to wait until their return to Palestine to live in dignity, *"we should be able to live in dignity in this country, we are no less than anyone else in Lebanon,"* they affirmed.

And while many strongly identify with their camps and gatherings, some saw them as *"killers of ambitions."* One of the youth bluntly said that he hates living in El Buss camp and prefers to live with his Lebanese grandparents because he sees no ambition in the camp. He explained that the youth in the camps spend their time in the streets harassing girls, drinking, smoking and taking drugs, or in coffee shops. He believes that if he stays in the camp himself, he will have no chance to grow as a human being.

The majority of residents in the gatherings spoke to us about their ordeals with the Lebanese government in regard to construction and renovation of their houses. In gatherings like Jal El Baher and Shebriha land ownership is more problematic than in the camps. Fundamentally all the land on which Palestinians live is the property of private owners or the Lebanese state, but in gatherings UNRWA 'jurisdiction' or 'influence' is not acknowledged, and many families live illegally on privately owned land. As a result the Lebanese legal frameworks restricting Palestinian's basic land rights are more of an issue. However, in Qasmiyeh gathering, a Palestinian refugee is reportedly allowed to build if he pays the municipality of the village of Burj Rahhal the sum of \$5000. According to a man from Qasmiyeh the municipality of Burj Rahhal charges a Lebanese citizen living in the same

village \$2 per meter while it charges a Palestinian refugee \$6 per meter if he wants to build his house in Qasmiyeh.

All six groups, including children, with whom discussions were held spoke emotionally of the discrimination they have experienced in Lebanon. Numerous examples were given of both social and professional discrimination. They primarily complained of the treatment by Lebanese employers and the discrimination practiced against them in relation to wages, social security, retirement pensions or end of service compensation. All confirm that they are taken advantage of because they are non-Lebanese and more so because they are Palestinian refugees. *"A Syrian worker is preferred by Lebanese employers because they can pay him less. And all Syrian workers send all their money to their country while we spend all our money here in Lebanon,"* a man in Qasmiyeh complained. This sentiment was voiced in most places we visited. Palestinians feel that they are huge contributors to the Lebanese economy but are not treated as such.

Youth in particular seemed very much concerned with the perceptions the Lebanese people have of them, their communities and their camps. This is particularly true in places like Ein El Helweh. Many young women and men spoke emotionally to us of the prejudice they face from Lebanese people. They said that this is due to their ignorance of the reality of the camps. *"A Lebanese has no idea how we live, they think we are all criminals because that is how we are portrayed in the news,"* a young woman in Ein El Helweh said. They think dialogue with the Lebanese youth is limited and should be developed to change that image.

Youth also raised their feelings of imprisonment due to the omnipresence of checkpoints surrounding the camps and the tough security measures imposed by the Lebanese Armed Forces. Youth in gatherings, although they don't suffer from this particular issue as there are no external checkpoints in gatherings, did mention that they have to endure the same treatment at other army checkpoints around Lebanon. *"If I am riding a van, and there is a checkpoint because something has happened in Lebanon, they always ask the Palestinians to step down and stand aside as if we are criminals,"* a young man in Wadi Zeina said. Many of the youth told us that contrary to the general rule that says *"a person is innocent until proven guilty; the Lebanese state treats Palestinians as guilty until proven innocent."*

A 15-year old non-ID girl got very emotional during our youth session at Rachidye camp. The young girl started crying while speaking about her life as a non-ID individual and that of her family. She described the hardship they have to go through on daily basis. She explained that no one is helping the non-IDs including the NGOs and concluded by saying that she and people like her are just *"mice for NGOs' experiments."*

The discrimination that is felt by the majority of Palestinians is doubly felt by the disabled. Many of the disabled spoke of the discrimination practiced against them in the employment market. *"Even if you have education your chances of getting a job are next to nil,"* a disabled person from El Buss camp said. *"A healthy Palestinian can hardly find a job, you think a disabled Palestinian can?"* one man in El Buss told us.

A number of disabled individuals talked to us about the discrimination and prejudice the society at large practices against them. Many gave examples of how people treat them differently because

of their disability and criticised the ignorance of some members of the society in this regard. *"People need awareness campaigns in order to know how to treat disabled people,"* a mother of a disabled boy living in Qasmiyeh said. *"They look at my daughter as if she has dropped from the sky or something,"* another woman from Shebriha said. However, some said that people are very helpful when they feel that a disabled individual needs help.

All spoke of the lack of facilities such as proper roads in their camps and gatherings or some form of assistance to reach their places of residence since many live in high floors which as they said complicates their lives even further. Many requested NGOs working with the disabled to help them find jobs instead of only giving them aid.

The elderly are another group that also faces challenges in upholding their dignity and the problem of discrimination. This is particularly true because after reaching this age some are still working when they should be retired and enjoying their end of service pension while others depend entirely on their children for their day to day needs. Some of the elderly we have met sadly said that their *"life of misery will not end until they pass away."* The majority said that, although their immediate families and communities respect them, they still feel they are a burden. Only in Ein El Helweh and Burj El Shemali camps do modest facilities exist for this age group but in all the other places facilities were reportedly non-existent.

Harsh living conditions amongst children and youth were reported as reasons for the increase in the smoking (both cigarettes and nargileh), alcohol consumption, drug abuse, sexual abuse, street harassments and gossiping. These growing phenomena were believed by many communities to be encouraged by 'outside forces' who want the Palestinians to become submissive and give up their right to return. A man in Burj El Shemali told us that a spying network recently arrested by the Lebanese authorities had been blamed for drug trafficking in the camps.

It was noticed that women in Rachidye camp, contrary to other camps or gatherings, smoke openly. They consider this an effective stress release tool. Many spoke of numerous illnesses occurring among residents in the camps and gatherings due to harsh living conditions and not being able to properly deal with them. Diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels, heart problems and so on were frequently mentioned as being the immediate result of these tough living conditions. The high incidence of children's diabetes was often brought up. It was also reported that divorce cases are on the increase due to stress and frustration. During the sessions some women mentioned that men had left their families without divorcing their wives. This was further explained as an example where men had abandoned their responsibilities.

Over-crowdedness and the proximity of houses were mentioned in all the camps. *"You'll be in your bedroom and your neighbour can see you,"* one woman in Burj El Shemali told us. Another woman in Burj El Shemali said that they had to talk to their newlywed neighbours because everything that was happening in their bedroom was being heard in their house. It is worth mentioning that men also spoke frequently on this particular issue. One man in Ein El Helweh said that due to the proximity of his house with that of his neighbour he can physically hand his neighbour his sponge when he is taking a bath. According to many of the women we met in the camps the proximity of

the houses also prevents children from playing outside. Fights often take place amongst neighbours because children are playing outside of the houses and other residents are disturbed.

5.1.1 Community Recommendations:

- Many of the youth in the camps and gatherings don't feel there are enough opportunities in their places of residence. Such opportunities included employment, decent living conditions, recreational activities etc. They felt that whilst children were well catered for the youth were often ignored. Many of the youth in serious need of assistance (i.e. drug addicts, drop outs etc.) were also neglected in favour of easily achievable objectives working with less problematic youth.
- Exchange programs between the Palestinian and Lebanese youth were highlighted as an opportunity to help ease the tension between the two groups and change their negative views of each other.
- The elderly spoke of their need for proper medication and medical care. Many also mentioned the necessity for a residential home that can care for those who do not have anyone to look after them. Additionally, several people in this age group said that they are in need of recreational centres where they can meet and organise various activities to fight boredom and find ways to cope positively with the daily stress they experience.
- The elderly want to feel useful and a part of their community. They believe that they still have a role in this life and skills and knowledge to contribute. Many of them are experienced carpenters, seamstresses or possess other skills and are keen to share these with others, particularly the youth.
- As with the elderly, the majority of the disabled or those who represented them spoke to us about their desperate need for medical care, medical equipments, medication and diapers. They also spoke of the need for a rehabilitation centre that would teach them skills and offer them employment.
- Livelihoods and income generation activities should be a priority to enable people to manage their financial and material needs and provide them with dignity and independence. Additional income would also help them to fill the gaps in service provision.
- It was suggested to establish playgrounds for children, gyms for women and gardens for families to address tensions expressed by these groups and provide positive spaces for community activities.

6 Community Perspectives on Governance and Responsibility

Communities were clear in laying responsibility for their situation of displacement in the hands of Israel and the international community. This was reflected in the issue of the 'right to return', the achievement of which remains a priority goal but was viewed pessimistically by many participants.

In the absence of a long term solution that enables them to return home, Palestinian refugees in the camps and gatherings feel that three main groups are responsible for their well-being: a)

UNRWA, b) the Lebanese state and c) the PLO (although not necessarily in that order as opinions vary).

Holding these groups responsible for their well-being does not mean, however, that the Palestinian refugees feel that they are doing a good job. The majority of those we met strongly feel that all three and some more than others have fallen short of fulfilling their duties towards the Palestinians. Consequently, much criticism has been voiced towards these three different duty bearers for what has been described as their failure to meet the needs of Palestinian refugees.

Palestinian refugees in both the camps and gatherings openly and strongly criticised UNRWA for drastically reducing its services. *"There is corruption within the ranks of UNRWA and it is responsible for the current situation of Palestinian refugees. We always try to change things and confront them by holding sit-ins and demonstrations but they don't care. It is as if they are trying to make Palestinian refugees desperate or force them to emigrate or drive them to become extremists,"* a man in Old Saida told us.

Refugees spoke of a huge reduction in medications and medical services *"Medications for chronic diseases are not available these days. When someone gets sick we sadly hope he dies because that would spare us the humiliation of begging from this person or that to get him the necessary medicine,"* a woman in Old Saida said. Others explained that they are not treated with respect in UNRWA clinics. *"When we go to the UNRWA clinic, the doctor examines us while showing extreme disgust. We are not locusts, we are humans who belong to the best of families,"* another in Wadi Zeina said. Some spoke as well of the 'wasta' or corruption within the UNRWA influences eligibility for social hardship assistance. *"The UNRWA employee did not accept my application for social hardship cases because he saw Abu Ammar's (Yasser Arafat) photo in my house,"* a woman in Wadi Zeina told us, claiming that this UNRWA employee was affiliated with Hamas.

Many parents spoke of what they consider to be the deteriorating level of education at UNRWA schools. They believe that their children are not getting the education they deserve because the number of students in the classrooms is too large¹⁹. We were told that the number of students in a single classroom reaches sixty at times. Some also said that teachers are very old and don't have the patience to teach anymore. *"Some of the UNRWA schools are very bad. The actual duration of the lesson is 20 minutes and not an hour, the teacher doesn't have time to teach anything,"* one woman in Wadi Zeina said. However some parents did blame themselves because they don't follow up on their children's performance in schools.

As for the Lebanese state, almost everyone we spoke to held it responsible for not granting them their civil rights. They all believe that if the Lebanese state does grant them these rights they will be able to live in dignity and become independent like their compatriots in Jordan and Syria. Wherever we went there was always a comparison between how Palestinian refugees live in Jordan and Syria in contrast to how refugees live in Lebanon. *"The Lebanese laws deprive the Palestinian of all*

¹⁹ "UNRWA is hopeful of making substantial improvements to the number of available classrooms during Autumn 2009, however the scope of this response is donor dependent". UNRWA August 2009

his rights. They speak of human rights but none of the articles of the Human Rights Declaration are applied when it comes to Palestinians in Lebanon," a man in Ein El Helweh said.

However, a few stated that if the Palestinian refugees had a strong representative that would stand up for their rights then no one would be able to do what they are doing to them, not even the Lebanese state. *"We are victims of injustice by the Lebanese state because those in charge of us left us all alone, we have no one to represent us these days,"* said one man in Old Saida.

This representative that the majority of refugees referred to was generally understood to be the PLO, an organisation that also received its share of criticism during sessions. Previous assessments have shown that Palestinian refugees were timid in expressing their opinions openly in front of outsiders regarding the PLO or other Palestinian factions. Previously the PLO was always regarded as the authority that would both liberate Palestine and address the social needs of Palestinians in exile. In recent years the perceived relevance of the PLO as a leader in both of these roles has declined. Many feel that the PLO has drastically reduced its aid to the camps and gatherings. Some believe that this due to shortage of funds while others said that it is due to corruption within the ranks of the PLO where the money is not going where it is supposed to go. Some accused the PLO of only giving money to those who have 'wasta'.

However, affiliation with the PLO is much stronger in the camps than in the gatherings. In camps such as Rachidye men generally spoke positively of the PLO and particularly of the Fatah movement. However, it should be noted that this comment was presented during sessions held in an area where there was a large amount of political homogeneity.

In the absence of any overarching Palestinian authority, factions have become the main means of security and social support for most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Where UNRWA does not provide, factions are seen as the next source of support. If families face difficulties in paying for medical bills or resolving conflicts the factional leadership to which they are aligned is often the first point of contact. Despite this, factions are not always popular. They lack resources and according to one man in Burj El Shemali *"the source of all problems is the factions, each of them says it is the authority and none of all these factions are in touch with the people."* In addition factions have also been accused of exploiting their position, *"a PLO leader pays 40 thousand dollars for his car and the people can't even find money to buy food,"* another man in Wadi Zeina said.

Many don't consider the popular committees as representative of them or their needs, complaining that the popular committees do nothing to improve their situation. Popular committees remain unelected and as such were not always recognised as relevant in representing the needs of the people. Criticism was also voiced in most of the camps we visited regarding the negative role of the different factions in their immediate community. Men in the camps blamed factions for the unstable security situation. However, some, and particularly those in Ein El Helweh, said that the overall political situation in Lebanon also strongly affects the camp security and political situation. Some even went as far as to accuse Lebanese political parties of using factions in the camps for their own influence and gain.

NGOs, although they are not seen by refugees as being responsible for their well-being, were highlighted as a key actor within the Palestinian communities. People in the camps spoke of the

hesitancy of NGOs when it comes to funding projects not related to children. They requested that NGOs get involved with other needy population groups. NGOs were also requested to give tangible aid if they decide to work in camps and gatherings and not just “theoretical” aid. *“Instead of coming and giving us a pack of bread, let the NGOs open a bakery for us, this way we will be employed and won’t need other packs of bread from anyone anymore,”* a man in Jal El Baher said.

Refugees in the gatherings widely complained that NGOs do not like to work in gatherings and prefer the easier and more accessible camps, leaving them feeling neglected and discriminated. *“All NGOs prefer to work in the camps; no one comes to the gatherings.”*

There was also much talk in both the camps and the gatherings of what is believed to be a waste of NGOs money on irrelevant things, *“an NGO spends the big bulk of a project’s money on the employees of the project and the rented cars and leaves very little money for the refugees.”*

6.1.1 Community Recommendations

- UNRWA needs to be more responsive to needs and to address the corruption that is suspected at many levels. UNRWA services needs to be clearly outlined and communicated to its beneficiaries and other stakeholders. There are a lot of misunderstanding about what people are entitled to and as a result many ‘conspiracy theories’ and ‘myths’ are prevalent that could be addressed through better communication.
- Communities do not feel adequately represented by the popular committees. They criticised the fact that members are appointed rather than elected.
- NGOs should provide tangible ‘hard’ interventions rather than repeated surveys and talking.
- Wasta’ across all duty bearers was raised as a concern that needs to be addressed.
- With regard to the Lebanese state they demanded that basic civil rights be granted to them and that the provision of such rights would not negate their desire to return. They criticised the Lebanese state of using this pretext to deny them such rights.

7 Comparing Camps and Gatherings

Although all Palestinian refugees suffer from numerous hardships, the reality in the gatherings is in many cases one of greater neglect and limitation in ability to meet basic needs. It was noticeable that refugees in the gatherings felt strongly that their conditions are much worse than those in the camps, while none in the camps made this comparison. There was almost a kind of jealousy amongst those who live in the gatherings towards their compatriots living in the camps. *“They have everything in the camps, while we are deprived of everything,”* a man from Qasmiyeh said.

The majority complained about having to pay electricity and water bills to local municipalities whilst refugees in the camps either did not have to pay any of these bills or paid reduced rates to UNRWA. The comparative difference in cost is high, with camp contributions estimated at 5000LBP per month and municipality contributions ranging from 30-150,000 LBP per month depending on usage.

Residents of the gatherings also complained about not being able to build or renovate their homes whilst those in the camps were able to make home improvements. *"I once built a flower container in front of the house, the next day, the Lebanese soldiers came and destroyed it under the pretext that we are not allowed to build anything on a land that is not ours,"* a man in Jal El Baher said. Another man from the same gathering told us that if they need to carry out home repair or add on rooms they have to do it at night so as no one sees them. It is worth mentioning that whilst shelter rehabilitation and construction is more of a problem in the gatherings, refugees in the camps also raised this issue saying that they are not allowed by the Lebanese authorities to build anything or enter any construction material into their camps unless they acquire a permit.

Many in the gatherings spoke with envy about the proximity of schools, hospitals and other facilities in the camps. *"Our kids have to walk long distances under the pouring rain in the winter or under the burning sun in the summer to reach their schools,"* was a phrase repeated in places like Jal El Baher, Qasmiyeh, and Shebriha. Many parents in Jal El Baher and Shebriha said that children had stopped going to school because their parents were unable to pay for their transportation expenses from the gatherings to schools in El Buss or Rachidyeh.

Several spoke of the lack of any UNRWA services in the gatherings. *"We are not recognised as camps, thus UNRWA does not feel responsible for us,"* a woman in Wadi Zeina said. In Wadi Zeina for instance, according to the residents, the UNRWA clinic only opened following continuous lobbying efforts by the locals there. The clinic has been now open for over a year but sees patients only three days a week. *"We Palestinians can only get sick on certain days,"* one woman jokingly said.

The only thing that refugees in the gatherings saw as an advantage over their compatriots in the camps was better security. They all feel that living in the gatherings is safer and much quieter than in the camps, which they described as always having security problems. Interestingly, and with the exception of Jal El Baher, none of the residents in the gatherings would trade places to live somewhere else in Lebanon. Despite all the hardship they are facing, they seem to all agree that the locations of their gatherings are good.

Refugees in Jal El Baher, on the other hand, all prefer to move to another location. They feel that their gathering is awkwardly located between the sea and the highway and they face regular discrimination by police and local authorities as the land is seen as economically viable due to its beach location. Refugees in Jal El Baher strongly believe that the solution to their problems should start by moving the gathering to another location because, as they said, *"any other form of help would be a waste of time since the root problem is still there."* Local Palestinian leaders we spoke to, however, felt this could set a dangerous precedent and said they would not allow the residents to be moved, instead preferring that they stay where they are despite their obvious desire to leave.

7.1.1 Community Recommendations

- Increased NGOs involvement in gatherings to address needs - One man in Jal el Baher suggested that the NGOs help them pay their electricity and water bills, given that these costs are significantly higher when compared to refugees resident in the camps.

- Changes to the current (2001) legal framework for land and property to enable Palestinians residents in gatherings to improve the condition of their shelters
- Social and recreational activities currently offered in camps should be expanded to gatherings.
- UNRWA should extend services ensuring fair coverage of clinics and schools for the gatherings or offer assistance in accessing services that require transportation to reach.

8 Conclusions:

Palestinian communities in Lebanon are significantly denied their basic human rights. They are subject to restrictions on their right to work and to earn a decent living, their rights to adequate shelter are dependent on where they live, and their freedom of movement can be curtailed at any time. These protections threats exist against a backdrop of widespread and ingrained denial of civil and political rights. The camps themselves are characterised by high levels of poverty and overcrowding, with a critical lack of economic opportunities for youth and adults and limited organised social and recreational opportunities for all age groups. Gatherings, although less crowded, suffer from extreme poverty and limitations in access to basic services.

Whilst there are numerous sources of information on the civil and political rights violations attributed to the Lebanese state against Palestinian refugees²⁰, few analyses exist of rights violations that occur within Palestinian communities, perpetrated within communities. In addition there exist few community perspectives on protection which provide an understanding of people's own interpretations of problems or potential solutions. It is hoped that this analysis goes some way towards filling that gap by presenting the voices of communities living daily with threats to their safety and dignity.

Key protections concerns raised across all camps and gatherings included (in no specific order):

- Safety concerns and exposure to violence both on the street, within the home and in schools.
- High level of tolerance towards violence in homes, communities and community institutions (e.g. schools)
- Negative experiences within the education system, including concerns over quality
- Unemployment, workplace discrimination and limited livelihoods opportunities with consequent effects on family unity, living conditions and access to quality services
- Limited health care services, chronic health problems, discriminatory policies toward health care access for the elderly, lack of services for the disabled
- Drug abuse, heavy smoking habits, alcohol consumption, stress and limited recreational opportunities

²⁰ See *Exiled and Suffering Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon* Amnesty International 2007

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/MDE18/010/2007> ,

Insight on the Legal Status Governing Daily Lives of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon Human Development Center Mr. Souheil El-

Natour and Ms. Dalal Yassine 2005 – 2007 <http://www.badii.org/e-library/PalestinianRefugeesInLebanon.pdf>

FMO Research Guide: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon Sherifa Shafie 2007 <http://www.forcedmigration.org/guides/fmo018/>

- Civil and political rights restrictions and denial by the Lebanese state
- Perceived poor service provision and failure by UNRWA and NGOs to fulfil responsibility of care towards Palestinian Refugees.
- Limited community level representation and opportunities to raise voices due to unrepresentative nature of popular committees and lack of other forums for being heard
- Criticism towards the PLO for no longer fulfilling its political and social role and towards factions for internal fighting which has divided communities.

The KAP analysis conducted in all of the Palestinian camps and a sample of gatherings in southern Lebanon proved to be a challenge on many levels. The hardship under which refugees in the Palestinian camps and gatherings are living is of such significant impact that it made it impossible at times to discuss rights issues as openly as we had wished. Protection concerns were at times regarded as of less pressing importance when compared to unmet basic needs. As a result engaging on rights discussions alone was not always well received in communities which see day to day concerns such as shelter, education and health care as more of a priority, and do not always make the connection between rights and access to these services.

When confronted with concerns related to violence, respondents were well aware that the problem exists in their respective communities. The majority of those interviewed stated that frustration and stress resulting from their overall environment causes them to react negatively and turn to violent behaviours more quickly. There was a general consensus that the lack of decent livelihoods opportunities, good education and social and recreational facilities were key issues in this regard.

In practice people tend to be hesitant to report violent or discriminatory behaviours inflicted upon them by other community members, on the grounds that this might deepen the problem. In contrast people were open and vocal when discussing violence inflicted upon them by the Lebanese state. Lack of reaction seems to be the more common response to disputes between adults, as many of the parents confirmed that in cases of physical or verbal violence against their children, whether in the schools or in the streets, they do intervene to solve the problem. Details of how these problems were solved were not always easy to uncover. Regularised mechanisms for dispute resolution are lacking and many problems are solved on a one to one rather than an institutional level. In many cases, a rule of law environment has developed that functions based on alliances and allegiances which can result in impunity for abuses based on the connections of the perpetrator.

With a lack of regularised mechanisms for authority across Palestinian communities, clarifying current practices towards rule of law can be difficult. Working with people themselves to develop solutions and effectively implement relevant protection interventions, is therefore a key challenge that must be addressed by communities themselves and other protection actors. Responsibility must be accepted by all groups, including individuals, for positive change to occur. In the long term addressing protection violations will require both direct intervention to meet basic needs and extensive policy and advocacy action. In this regard the perspectives and voices of those affected should be prominent in both speaking out and taking action. We hope this report is a step in this direction.

ANNEX 1: Group Discussion Questions

Children 7-13 years

1. How do you describe your life? Do you think it is a good life, an ok life, or not good at all and why?
2. Do you feel safe in your immediate environment?
3. What are the main risks to your safety?
4. How do you deal with your problems?
5. Do you argue with your friends and family? How do you usually handle your differences? Do you shout at each other or physically fight?
6. Do you feel that it's OK for your parents use physical or verbal violence against you?
7. Have you ever beaten up someone following an argument? How do you feel after that, good about yourself or guilty for beating up someone?
8. Have you parents (mother or father) ever beaten you up? If so how do you feel when he/she does that?
9. Have any of your teachers used verbal or physical violence on you or any of your friends? If so can you explain? If this happened with you do you tell your parents or anyone else about the incident?
10. Where do you go when you are bored or frustrated?
11. What are the things that you think should be available to you to release some of the pressure you feel?

Youth 14-24 years

1. How do you describe your life?
2. Do you feel safe where you live?
3. What are the main risks threatening your safety?
4. Do you feel you are under a lot of stress? If so what causes this stress?
5. How do you deal with your stress?
6. What do you do when you are bored or stressed out?
7. Have you ever been beaten anyone? If so who and do you feel guilty afterwards?
8. Have you ever been beaten yourself and by whom?
9. Do you feel that it's OK for your parents or teachers to use physical or verbal violence against you?
10. What does physical and verbal violence means to you?
11. Are these two forms of violence justifiable to you? If so in what cases?
12. If you are subjected to any form of violence do you feel that there is anyone or any place you can resort to?
13. What kind of facilities you think should be available to release some of the stress you feel?

Women

1. How do you describe your life?
2. Do you feel safe in your immediate environment?

3. What are the main risks to your safety?
4. Do you feel you are under a lot pressure? If so what causes you to be under so much pressure?
5. How do you release the stress under which you are living?
6. Have you ever beaten up your kids? If so why?
7. Do you feel that beating up your kids is a good form of discipline?
8. Do you try to speak to your kids instead of beating them up?
9. How do you feel about physical or verbal violence in schools?
10. Which form is worst in your opinion?
11. Have you ever been beaten yourself? If so by whom?
12. What do you do if you are beaten?
13. In your opinion what kind of facilities should be available for you to release some of the stress?

Men

1. How do you describe your life in your place of residence?
2. Do you feel safe where you live?
3. What are the main risks that threaten your safety?
4. Do you feel you are under a lot of stress? If so what causes you to be so stressed out?
5. How do you handle the stress you undergo?
6. Have you ever beaten up someone if so whom and for what reason?
7. How do you feel after beating up someone, guilty or relieved?
8. Do you apologise after you have calmed down to the person you have beaten up?
9. Do you feel beating up your kids is a good form of discipline?
10. How do you feel about teachers hitting up kids?
11. What is your opinion of verbal violence?
12. What kind of facilities do you think should exist in your communities to help you release some of the stress you undergo?

Elderly

1. How can you describe your life?
2. Do you feel safe in your place of residence?
3. What are the main threats to your safety?
4. How do you deal with the daily pressure?
5. Do you feel you are treated in a respectful manner in your community?
6. How do you spend your free time?
7. Are there any places you can go to for recreational time?
8. Have you ever been the subject of verbal or physical violence? If so by whom and for what reason?
9. Do you still feel that can contribute to your society or do you feel as a burden to others?
10. Are you or any one you know in your age category neglected by their families or the society at large?

11. Do elderly people have any facilities to cater to their needs?
12. What would make your life easier?

Disabled

1. How would you describe your life?
2. Do you feel safe in your immediate society?
3. What do you suffer from the most?
4. Do you feel discriminated against by your community?
5. Do people treat you with respect or with pity?
6. Do you think disabled people have equal rights in your community?
7. Do you get angry? If so what makes you angry?
8. How do usually manage your anger?
9. Have you ever been beaten by someone? If so by whom?
10. Are you able to access the services and places you need such as schools, health centres and recreational activities?
11. Do you consider that disabled people in the camps/gatherings have any facilities that meet their needs? If not which facilities would you like to have?

ANNEX 2: Map of Camps and Gatherings in Southern Lebanon

