

Association between exposure to political violence and intimate-partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory: a cross-sectional study

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Summary

Background Intimate-partner violence might increase during and after exposure to collective violence. We assessed whether political violence was associated with male-to-female intimate-partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Methods A nationally representative, cross-sectional survey was done between Dec 18, 2005, and Jan 18, 2006, by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. 4156 households were randomly selected with a multistage random cluster design, from which 3815 ever-married women aged 15–64 years were identified. We restricted our analysis to presently married women (n=3510, 92% participation rate), who completed a short version of the revised conflict tactics scales and exposure to political violence inventory. Exposure to political violence was characterised as the husband's direct exposure, his indirect exposure via his family's experiences, and economic effects of exposure on the household. We used adjusted multinomial logistic regression models to estimate odds ratios (ORs) for association between political violence and intimate-partner violence.

Findings Political violence was significantly related to higher odds of intimate-partner violence. ORs were 1·89 (95% CI 1·29–2·76) for physical and 2·23 (1·49–3·35) for sexual intimate-partner violence in respondents whose husbands were directly exposed to political violence compared with those whose husbands were not directly exposed. For women whose husbands were indirectly exposed, ORs were 1·61 (1·25–2·07) for physical and 1·97 (1·49–2·60) for sexual violence, compared with those whose husbands were not indirectly exposed. Economic effects of exposure were associated with increased odds of intimate-partner violence in the Gaza Strip only.

Interpretation Because exposure to political violence is associated with increased odds of intimate-partner violence, and exposure to many traumas is associated with poor health, a range of violent exposures should be assessed when establishing the need for psychosocial interventions in conflict settings.

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Introduction

Collective violence, such as war, state repression, torture, and violent political conflicts,¹ increases risk of various forms of gender-based violence.^{2,3} UN Security Council Resolution 1325⁴ calls for protection of women and girls from such violence in conflict settings. Humanitarian guidelines⁵ have been developed to address this issue; however, such guidelines frequently focus on gender-based violence perpetrated by individuals outside the family, often with a particular emphasis on sexual violence. This focus neglects the potentially heightened risk of other forms of gender-based violence to which women might be more exposed, such as intimate-partner violence. Anecdotal evidence² suggests that perpetration of intimate-partner violence might increase during episodes of collective violence and its aftermath. Collective and intimate-partner violence have well documented mental and physical health consequences,^{1,6} and exposure to both might raise the risk of deleterious health consequences attributable to cumulative effects of exposure to many traumas.⁷ Hence, further

examination of the relation between these types of violence is warranted.

Empirical research about the association between collective violence and intimate-partner violence has mainly been of military personnel. Prevalence estimates for perpetration of physical intimate-partner violence are up to three times higher for veterans and active-duty servicemen than for the general population.⁸ For military personnel, exposure to war-zone stressors has been associated with perpetration of intimate-partner violence, a relation that is largely mediated by presence of post-traumatic stress disorder.⁸ Few studies have investigated the link between intimate-partner violence and forms of collective violence in civilian populations, but evidence mostly supports this association.

Results of studies^{9–14} undertaken in Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and the West Bank showed that exposure to violent conflict was associated with intimate-partner violence and other forms of domestic violence. In a recent study¹⁵ of immigrant men attending health clinics in Boston, MA, USA, men who reported

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	Total respondents (n=3510)	Exposure to political violence								
		Exposure of husband			Exposure of family			Economic effect of exposure		
		No (n=3221)	Yes (n=289)	p value	No (n=2791)	Yes (n=719)	p value	No (n=1815)	Yes (n=1695)	p value
Age (years)										
Wife	35.3 (10.9)	35.4 (11.0)	33.7 (9.7)	0.004	34.9 (10.9)	36.9 (10.7)	<0.0001	34.4 (11.2)	36.3 (10.4)	<0.0001
Husband	40.8 (11.7)	41.0 (11.8)	38.7 (10.0)	0.0002	40.4 (11.6)	42.3 (11.7)	<0.0001	40.1 (11.9)	41.6 (11.3)	0.0001
Educational level										
Wife				0.85			<0.0001			<0.0001
Elementary or less*	1212 (35%)	1115 (35%)	97 (34%)	..	909 (33%)	303 (42%)	..	536 (30%)	676 (40%)	..
Preparatory†	1066 (30%)	974 (30%)	92 (32%)	..	857 (31%)	209 (29%)	..	554 (31%)	512 (30%)	..
Secondary or higher‡	1232 (35%)	1132 (35%)	100 (35%)	..	1025 (37%)	207 (29%)	..	725 (40%)	507 (30%)	..
Husband				0.0006			0.11			<0.0001
Elementary or less*	1202 (34%)	1112 (35%)	90 (31%)	..	935 (34%)	267 (37%)	..	523 (29%)	679 (40%)	..
Preparatory†	896 (26%)	795 (25%)	101 (35%)	..	711 (25%)	185 (26%)	..	419 (23%)	477 (28%)	..
Secondary or higher‡	1412 (40%)	1314 (41%)	98 (34%)	..	1145 (41%)	267 (37%)	..	873 (48%)	539 (32%)	..
Employment status										
Wife employed	261 (7%)	233 (7%)	28 (10%)	0.13	204 (7%)	57 (8%)	0.57	151 (8%)	110 (6%)	0.04
Husband employed	2568 (73%)	2346 (73%)	222 (77%)	0.14	2063 (74%)	505 (70%)	0.05	1460 (80%)	1108 (65%)	<0.0001
Locality of residence				0.01			<0.0001			<0.0001
Urban	1918 (55%)	1773 (55%)	145 (50%)	..	1561 (56%)	357 (50%)	..	1002 (55%)	916 (54%)	..
Rural	1029 (29%)	923 (29%)	106 (37%)	..	757 (27%)	272 (38%)	..	451 (25%)	578 (34%)	..
Camp	563 (16%)	525 (16%)	38 (13%)	..	473 (17%)	90 (13%)	..	362 (20%)	201 (12%)	..
Region				<0.0001			<0.0001			<0.0001
West Bank	2263 (64%)	2008 (62%)	255 (88%)	..	1700 (61%)	563 (78%)	..	1019 (56%)	1244 (73%)	..
Gaza Strip	1247 (36%)	1213 (38%)	34 (12%)	..	1091 (39%)	156 (22%)	..	796 (44%)	451 (27%)	..

Data are mean (SD), or n (%). *6 years of education or less. †7 or 8 years of education. ‡9–12 years of education.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of sample according to exposure to political violence in 2005

exposure to preimmigration political violence had much higher rates of past-year perpetration for both physical and sexual intimate-partner violence than did those who were not exposed to such violence. By contrast, results of a multicountry study^{16,17} of women affected by violent conflict showed no association between collective and intimate-partner violence, or an inverse association,¹⁸ dependent on the setting. Limitations of these studies were the study methods used, including an inability to ascertain temporality, non-representative or immigrant population samples; poor response rates; or an absence of adjustment for potential confounding factors. Our analysis attempted to overcome many of these shortcomings.

2005 was a time of political turmoil, instability, and continuing violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. Although Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip ceased with Israeli disengagement, the West Bank continued to host several hundred thousand settlers.¹⁹ Occupation policies restricting movement of Palestinian people and goods were a defining factor of everyday life,²⁰ and negatively affected the Palestinian economy.²¹ The economic situation in the occupied territory was characterised by widespread poverty and increasing need for development assistance.²² Exposures to these factors represent forms of political violence that directly

(eg, injury and death) and indirectly (eg, economic ramification of policies restricting movement of goods and people) affect human security.²³ Within this context of sustained insecurity, we assessed whether exposure to political violence was associated with increased risk of male-to-female intimate-partner violence on the basis of reports of presently married women.

Methods

Sample selection

A cross-sectional national survey of domestic violence was undertaken by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in the occupied Palestinian territory between December, 2005, and January, 2006.²⁴ Population projections based on the 1997 Population, Housing, and Establishment census were used to estimate the Palestinian population in 2005. To achieve a representative sample, PCBS selected a stratified random sample of 234 enumeration areas used in the census. 18 households were systematically selected from every area with maps compiled by PCBS, resulting in a sample of 4212 households, of which 4156 participated (99% response).

Within every household, eligible participants were ever-married women aged 15–64 years, unmarried

	None (n=1299)	Psychological IPV only (n=1302)	Physical IPV (n=538)	Sexual IPV (n=371)	p value
Age (years)					
Wife	36.4(11.6)	35.6 (10.7)	34.0 (9.7)	32.3 (9.5)	<0.0001
Husband	42.2 (12.3)	40.9 (11.2)	39.2 (10.9)	37.9(10.9)	<0.0001
Education level					
Wife					0.0001
Elementary or less*	438 (34%)	428 (33%)	197 (37%)	149 (40%)	..
Preparatory†	364 (28%)	398 (31%)	180 (33%)	124 (33%)	..
Secondary or higher‡	497 (38%)	476 (37%)	161 (30%)	98 (26%)	..
Husband					<0.0001
Elementary or less*	413 (32%)	399 (31%)	230 (43%)	160 (43%)	..
Preparatory†	307 (24%)	360 (28%)	130 (24%)	99 (27%)	..
Secondary or higher‡	579 (45%)	543 (42%)	178 (33%)	112 (30%)	..
Employment status					
Wife	99 (8%)	116 (9%)	28 (5%)	18 (5%)	0.009
Husband	930 (72%)	994 (76%)	379 (70%)	265 (71%)	0.01
Locality of residence					
Urban	691 (53%)	736 (57%)	285 (53%)	205 (56%)	..
Rural	355 (27%)	400 (31%)	167 (31%)	107 (29%)	..
Camp	253 (19%)	166 (13%)	86 (16%)	58 (16%)	..
Region					
West Bank	697 (54%)	965 (74%)	347 (65%)	254 (68%)	..
Gaza Strip	602 (46%)	337 (26%)	191 (36%)	117 (32%)	..
Exposure to political violence					
Husband	66 (5%)	120 (9%)	56 (10%)	47 (13%)	<0.0001
Family	217 (17%)	262 (20%)	134 (25%)	106 (29%)	<0.0001
Economic consequences	531 (41%)	674 (52%)	288 (54%)	202 (54%)	<0.0001

Data are mean (SD) or n (%). *6 years of education or less. †7 or 8 years of education. ‡9–12 years of education.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample according to intimate partner violence in 2005 (n=3510)

women aged 18 years and older, and women and men older than 65 years. We restricted this analysis to ever-married respondents because intimate relations in Palestinian culture typically take place only within a marital relationship. Of the 3815 ever-married women identified for the study, 3787 participated (3774 completed and 13 partly completed interviews). We restricted our analysis to presently married women because demographic information was available for their husbands (n=3547); of these participants, we analysed data only from those with complete information for variables of interest (n=3510, 92% participation).

We undertook secondary data analysis of pre-existing, de-identified data. PCBS internally reviewed the study protocol, and the study was approved (including ethics approval for protection of human participants) by a consulting committee that was formed by PCBS.

MMH-Y was the lead consultant for the study and undertook intensive 6-day training with interviewers on how to ethically and sensitively administer interviews, including how to manage any emotional reaction to the study (eg, debriefing and providing support) that participants might experience. Written informed consent was sought and obtained for all participants

and the interview was done in a private room in the house to ensure privacy. Information about family violence services was provided when a participant revealed explicitly that she had been a victim of any type of family violence or when the interviewer perceived a potential risk of violence on the basis of the interview and the home environment. The survey was administered in Arabic.

Outcome measures

PCBS measured the main independent variable, exposure to political violence in 2005, with the exposure to political violence inventory (EPVI). The EPVI measured individual and household exposures to interactions with the occupation forces or settlers that directly (eg, injury, death, or home demolition) and indirectly (economic ramifications of occupation policies) threatened human security as reported by the participant. MMH-Y developed this inventory for the study, with ten focus-group discussions with community members (seven groups of adults aged 19–29 years and three groups of young people aged 14–18 years) and an expert panel of nine researchers and practitioners from the specialties of social, behavioural, and mental health sciences.

Relevant items of the EPVI were used to form three variables that related to exposure to political violence: the husband's direct exposure to political violence (four items); the husband's indirect exposure, characterised as exposures his wife (respondent), children, and close family members had had (ten items); and the economic effect of the occupation policies on the household (two items). Few women reported exposure to several items within these three variables; therefore, each variable was characterised as exposed if the respondent answered yes to any of the relevant items, or as unexposed if they answered no. Sensitivity analyses showed that modelling the exposures as ordinal variables did not change the findings (data not shown); thus, only results based on the dichotomised variables are reported.

For the outcome variable, male-to-female intimate-partner violence in 2005, PCBS used 19 items from the revised conflict tactics scales (CTS2)²⁵ to measure the frequency of psychological aggression, physical assault, and sexual coercion as reported by respondents. An affirmative response to at least one item within a component scale (psychological, physical, or sexual) constituted exposure to that form of intimate-partner violence.²⁵ We then created a categorical variable, representing different types of such violence: no intimate-partner violence of any type (0), psychological violence only (1), physical violence (2), and sexual violence (3).

The physical and sexual violence categories included respondents who had also been subjected to psychological violence, because almost all participants who reported physical (96%, n=516) or sexual (94%, 350) intimate-partner violence also reported psychological violence

(96% and 94%, respectively). The physical violence category excluded participants who reported sexual violence. However, 64% (236) of women who reported sexual violence also reported physical violence, leaving too few respondents for a meaningful analysis of the category of sexual violence only. Covariate characteristics of the respondents and their husbands, including educational level, employment status in the week before the study (employed at least part time or temporarily absent from job but will return), location (urban, rural, or refugee camp), and region (West Bank or Gaza Strip).

Statistical analysis

We calculated descriptive statistics to examine covariates by exposure and outcome. Separate adjusted multinomial logistic regression models were constructed to test the relation between exposure to every type of political violence and intimate-partner violence, with no exposure to political and intimate-partner violence as reference categories. A multinomial logistic regression model was created that simultaneously included all three types of political violence exposure, with adjustment for potential confounders. We did tests for multiplicative interaction in the relation between political violence and intimate-partner violence by region. We used χ^2 and t tests to examine associations between exposure to political violence and covariates, and χ^2 and ANOVA tests to measure associations between intimate-partner violence and covariates. Sampling weights were not used because the study had very low non-response rates—this decision was supported by a sensitivity analysis showing that the weights had no effect on results. All analyses were done with SAS version 9.2.

Role of the funding source

Sponsors funded the design and data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, and preparation of the report. The corresponding authors had full access to all data in the study and had final responsibility for the decision to submit for publication.

Results

On average, women in the sample for analysis were younger, more educated, less likely to be employed, and more likely to be from Gaza than women excluded from the analysis. Differences were mostly attributable to exclusion of women who were widowed, divorced, and separated. Table 1 shows sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample by political violence measure. All covariates were significantly associated with at least one measure of political violence. Generally, characteristics associated with increased exposure to political violence included lower education levels than for those not exposed, unemployment, and residence in the West Bank or a rural area. Direct exposure of husbands was associated with younger age (of respondent and husband) than that of those not exposed, whereas

	n (%)
Husband's exposure	
Insulted or cursed	237 (7%)
Detained	55 (2%)
Hit or wounded	42 (1%)
Made a fugitive	35 (1%)
Any exposure	289 (8%)
Family exposure	
House broken into	272 (8%)
Land confiscated	204 (6%)
Household member attacked	179 (5%)
Children, wife's parents or brothers arrested	144 (4%)
Home (or part of it) demolished	99 (3%)
Wife beaten, insulted, or cursed	62 (2%)
Children, wife's parents or brothers killed	38 (1%)
Husband's parents or brothers killed	32 (<1%)
Wife hit or wounded	18 (<1%)
Wife arrested	18 (<1%)
Any exposure	719 (20%)
Economic effect on household	
Economic situation of household deteriorated*	1511 (43%)
Husband lost job*	782 (22%)
Any exposure	1695 (48%)

n=3510. *Because of measures taken by the occupying forces.

Table 3: Exposure to violence perpetrated by occupation forces or settlers in 2005

older age was associated with familial and economic political violence exposures.

Table 2 shows sociodemographic characteristics by exposure to intimate-partner violence. 1299 (37%) respondents reported no violence, 1302 (37%) psychological violence, 538 (15%) physical (but not sexual) violence, and 371 (11%) sexual violence only. Overall, women reporting intimate-partner violence were more likely to be younger, less educated, and more likely to live in the West Bank than were those not reporting such violence. Additionally, their husbands were younger and less educated than were husbands of those not reporting violence. Association of this type of violence with employment status and locality (urban, rural, or refugee camp) differed by violence type.

Table 3 summarises exposure to political violence by type. 289 (8%) respondents reported that their husbands were directly exposed to political violence. Being insulted or cursed was most frequently reported and being made a fugitive (ie, being sought by Israeli military forces for alleged political, military, or civil resistance against Israel) the least frequently reported. Overall, 719 (20%) respondents reported personal exposure or exposure of a household or close family member. Of family exposure, home break-ins were most frequent and the respondent being arrested was least frequent. Almost half of respondents reported that their household was negatively financially affected by occupation.

	Psychological IPV only	Physical IPV	Sexual IPV
Husband's exposure			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.47 (1.07–2.02) p=0.0184	1.89 (1.29–2.76) p=0.0011	2.23 (1.49–3.35) p=0.0001
Family exposure			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.11 (0.90–1.36) p=0.3337	1.61 (1.25–2.07) p=0.0002	1.97 (1.49–2.60) p<0.0001
Economic effect of exposure			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.40 (1.19–1.65) p<0.0001	1.51 (1.22–1.87) p=0.0002	1.55 (1.21–1.99) p=0.0005

n=3510. IPV=intimate partner violence. *Adjusted for age, educational level, and employment status (of respondent and her husband), location (urban, rural, or camp), and region (West Bank or Gaza Strip).

Table 4: Odds ratios (95% CIs) of intimate partner violence by type of political violence exposure in separate adjusted* multinomial regression models

	Psychological IPV only	Physical IPV	Sexual IPV
Husband's exposure			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.32 (0.95–1.84) p=0.0977	1.50 (1.01–2.23) p=0.0452	1.67 (1.09–2.55) p=0.0181
Family exposure			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.00 (0.81–1.24) p=0.9871	1.42 (1.09–1.84) p=0.0089	1.70 (1.27–2.27) p=0.0004
Economic effect of exposure*			
No	1.00	1.00	1.00
Yes	1.37 (1.16–1.62) p=0.0002	1.39 (1.12–1.73) p=0.0033	1.37 (1.07–1.77) p=0.0142

n=3510. IPV=intimate partner violence. *Analysis indicated a significant interaction by region (p value for interaction <0.0001). †Adjusted for age, educational level, and employment status (of respondent and her husband), location (urban, rural, or camp), and region (West Bank or Gaza Strip).

Table 5: Odds ratios (95% CIs) of intimate partner violence by political violence exposures modelled simultaneously in adjusted† multinomial regression model

Table 4 shows results of multinomial multivariate logistic regression models examining the relation between each type of political violence exposure and intimate-partner violence. Respondents whose husbands were directly exposed to political violence had 47% higher odds of reporting psychological violence only, 89% for physical violence, and 123% for sexual violence compared with those whose husbands were not personally exposed to political violence. Women whose husbands were indirectly exposed through exposure of their family had 61% increased odds of reporting physical intimate-partner violence and 97% for sexual violence compared with those whose husbands were not indirectly exposed to political violence. Reported psychological violence was not associated with indirect exposure of husbands.

Respondents whose households were financially affected by measures taken by the occupying forces were

40% more likely to report psychological violence, 51% to report physical violence, and 55% to report sexual violence compared with those whose households were not financially affected (table 4). When all three political violence exposures were modelled together, the findings were similar although attenuated (table 5). Association between economic effects of political violence and intimate-partner violence were present in the Gaza Strip but not the West Bank (p value <0.0001). In the Gaza Strip, women whose households were financially affected by the occupation were at 139% increased odds of reporting psychological intimate-partner violence (OR 2.39, 95% CI 1.76–3.24), 93% for physical violence (1.93, 1.34–2.80), and 83% for sexual violence (1.83, 1.16–2.87) compared with those whose households were not financially affected. No differences by region were identified for exposure of husbands (p=0.88) or families (p=0.51) to political violence.

Discussion

We have shown that exposure to political violence is associated with increased odds of psychological, physical, and sexual intimate-partner violence in a sample of presently married women in the occupied Palestinian territory. Our findings are consistent with those from other studies,^{9–11,14,15} including research from the occupied Palestinian territory. Results of survey research^{12,13} of Palestinian adolescents has shown associations between exposure to political violence and reports of spousal, child, and sibling abuse. In previous bivariate analyses²⁶ with variables consisting of the economic effect measure used in our analysis, researchers identified associations between both the husband's job loss and deterioration of the economic situation of the household with psychological, physical, and sexual intimate-partner violence. These findings raise the issue of how political violence might contribute to violence towards intimate partners. Results of research²⁷ in the occupied Palestinian territory have shown the relevance of integration of several theoretical perspectives to explain the occurrence of such violence.

The feminist perspective is relevant to understanding the occurrence of intimate-partner violence because patriarchal ideologies and institutional practices underpin violence against women.²⁸ Pre-existing gender inequalities are exacerbated and traditional gender roles are challenged in environments in which forms of collective violence persist.³ Occupation policies and interactions with occupation forces entail continuous humiliation for men and renders them unable to protect and provide for their families, potentially leading to frustration and violence against people with less power—namely, women and children.^{26,29} From a resource-theory perspective, violence might be used to reassert men's socially established position of power in the family.³⁰

From a psychological perspective, the frustration encountered in living under the control of the Israeli

occupation could lead to aggression via negative affect.³¹ Various negative mental health sequelae have been associated with exposure to political violence in the occupied Palestinian territory³² that are also associated with an increased risk of perpetrating intimate-partner violence, such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.³³ Humiliation, which takes place frequently in the occupied territories,^{32,34} is associated with depression;³⁵ hence, it might also be a mediator of the relation between exposure to political violence and intimate-partner violence.

Exposure to political violence, its attendant economic consequences, and mobility constraints also negatively affect family functioning¹³ and increase household stress and interpersonal conflict,²⁶ which are risk factors for intimate-partner violence.^{33,36} Intense financial stress is noteworthy, and the economic situation in the Gaza Strip, which is worse than that in the West Bank, could account for the significant association between economic effects of exposure to political violence and intimate-partner violence in Gaza only. Occupation policies, including a separation barrier that is being erected in various parts of the West Bank, affect family connectedness, depriving women of regular contact with their families^{26,29} who might otherwise intervene to prevent intimate-partner violence.

Finally, from a social learning perspective,³⁷ exposure to violence in childhood is a risk factor for future perpetration of intimate-partner violence.⁶ In a study of Palestinian men, researchers reported an increased risk of perpetration of intimate-partner violence associated with childhood exposure to family violence. Results of other research¹² have shown a raised risk of perpetration of child abuse associated with exposure to political violence. Hence, family violence is both cyclical and intertwined with political violence, creating a vicious cycle.

Interpretation of our findings must be tempered by the study's limitations. First, we restricted our analysis to presently married women. Although the frequency of intimate-partner violence is probably higher for divorced and separated women than for married women, since such violence is associated with marriage dissolution, the relation between political violence and intimate-partner violence is not expected to differ by marital status. Second, both exposure and outcomes were measured at the same time, suggesting that exposure to one might have affected recall of the other—the effect of which would most likely be to inflate the association between intimate-partner violence and political violence. Additionally, respondent's reports of her husband's direct exposures might have underestimated their actual occurrence, with poor relationships characterised by poor communication.

Third, we adjusted for several sociodemographic characteristics, but low socioeconomic status, a correlate of both exposure to political violence and intimate-partner violence, was not fully captured by the study variables,

and presence of potentially other unmeasured confounders is a concern. Fourth, use of ever versus never measures for intimate-partner and political violence gather together experiences that range in severity. Scoring techniques that account for severity of exposures could provide an examination of the association with greater nuances than could the categorisation of variables used. Finally, PCBS assessed only exposure to political violence perpetrated by occupation forces or settlers. Other internal sources of political violence exist in the Palestinian territory. Thus, political violence from all sources needs to be investigated to improve characterisation of exposure to political violence and its effect on intimate-partner violence.

The relation we have shown between intimate-partner violence and exposure to political violence draws attention to the wide-ranging ramifications of political violence towards women and men. Investigation is needed into the potential pathways leading from political to intimate-partner violence, taking into account a range of explanations and their interactions, because any one explanation is insufficient to explain the relation. Our findings also suggest the importance of assessment of different types of violence exposures when considering potential need for psychosocial interventions, since exposure to many traumatic events is associated with increased mental and physical health symptoms. Finally, our findings reinforce the relevance of UN Security Council Resolution 1325—especially the call for all parties to the conflict to protect women and girls from violence and to respect international law.

Contributors

MMH-Y contributed to the overall study design and data access; CJC and MMH-Y contributed to design and analysis of secondary data; SAE-R, AA, RB, SFS, and MMH-Y contributed to analysis and interpretation of data; CJC drafted the report; CJC, SAE-R, AA, RB, SFS, and MMH-Y contributed to critical revision of the report for important intellectual content; CJC, AA, and SFS contributed to statistical analysis; RB provided administrative, technical, and material support; and SAE-R and MMH-Y provided supervision.

Conflicts of interest

We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

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Domestic and political violence: the Palestinian predicament

In *The Lancet* today, Cari Clark and colleagues¹ present a cluster survey in which they investigated whether political violence was associated with male-to-female intimate-partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. They found that political violence was significantly related to higher odds of intimate-partner violence. Their report is a welcome addition to the scant literature that focuses on the sociopolitical context of intimate-partner violence, a subject that is under-researched, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory. The authors question the approach of isolating intimate-partner violence from political, economic, and social influences, and the assumption that domestic violence is about individuals and families, rather than also about the collective and the national. They link intimate-partner violence to chronic exposure to institutionalised structural violence, and thus contribute to a conceptual reframing of violence in terms of the inseparability of domestic and public spaces.²

In taking this approach, Clark and colleagues offer a rebuttal to the fixation on demonising Palestinian men and society with the use of a simple frequency to represent gender oppression in the occupied Palestinian territory.² When the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics first published their initial survey findings on intimate-partner violence,³ the media, including human rights organisations, concluded that “23% of Palestinian women experience domestic violence”. A misrepresentation of both the severity and the frequency of domestic violence were pointed out in later analyses.²

In the occupied Palestinian territory, violence is everywhere, existing in the “weave of life”.⁴ People face violence, brutality, and life chaos every day. Despite its pervasiveness, men are overwhelmingly the direct victims of political violence. By linking intimate-partner violence with exposure to direct and indirect forms of political violence, Clark and colleagues highlight some of

the complexities entailed in the occurrence of intimate-partner violence. Their paper simultaneously destabilises the facile and problematic dichotomy in which men are seen automatically as perpetrators, with women as victims.

Today’s Article supports a public health approach to understanding intimate-partner violence by inquiring about the interactions of psychological and social factors affecting the perpetration of violence between individuals.⁵ The study acknowledges that family violence might be the result of multidimensional processes, with poverty as an associated factor,⁶ and with poverty itself seen as a lethal form of violence.⁷ In addition to poverty, the findings also point to Palestinian men’s exposure to political violence and its social effect, which in turn can lead to violence. That is, a cycle of violence can be associated with the violation of everyday life under Israeli military occupation and colonisation. In this sense, today’s Article raises the notion that intimate-partner violence might be the tip of the iceberg of violation and social suffering. Fanon⁸ reminds us that when colonial aggression turns

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Reuters

inward into terror, “the fury inside”, among natives, victimisation leaves scars, in the form of violation of others. This victimisation leading to violation of others does not deny that within the Palestinian women are also the cultural practices and norms.

Clark and colleagues’ report raise the question of the effectiveness of frameworks in addressing violent situations of prolonged political violence. The Palestinian Authority has not sufficiently addressed the problem, the constraints are many. The Authority is “non-sovereign, fragmented and under attack”.² The absence of the Authority’s criminal jurisdiction beyond area A, the only area it controls on the West Bank, and amounting to 3% of the land, is an additional impediment.⁹ The Palestinian Authority is also unable to establish a constitutional court, because of the dual governments of the Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas Government in the Gaza Strip. The failure of the Palestinian Authority together with its restricted powers makes it difficult, if not impossible, to adequately address the problem of intimate-partner violence. The specificity of Israeli military occupation and siege in the occupied Palestinian territory is a double-edged sword. On one hand, Israeli military occupation’s violence against the population as a whole is associated with the occurrence of intimate-partner violence; on the

other, it weakens the Palestinian Authority’s power to deal with social problems like intimate partner violence. These constraints show that the effective enforcement and implementation of law depends on resolution of the political crisis and establishment of democratic governance.

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Provision of secondary care in fragile state contexts

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Despite the current focus on the health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the renewed emphasis on comprehensive primary health care,¹ the need for secondary level care is rarely acknowledged in policy statements or supported to a level that is adequate, not only in acute emergency responses but also in longer-term postconflict recovery and transition contexts.² Yet the delivery of secondary level care (defined as health care provided at primary, secondary, and tertiary hospitals and referral) is fundamental to achieving the reductions in maternal, neonatal, and child mortality which are central to the MDGs.³

At the heart of this crucial oversight is confusion over the definition of secondary care and misconceptions over its role in the overall provision of comprehensive

care. There are two main reasons for this situation: first, the lack of an explicit reference to inpatient care as an integral aspect of primary health care in the Alma Ata Declaration; and second, the continuing debate on the cost efficiency of secondary and tertiary level hospitals which has also had a bearing on the views applied to primary level inpatient facilities. For many international non-governmental organisations that support health in crisis contexts, secondary care is often under-represented in both policy and programme terms. Most programmes rarely go beyond specifically targeted interventions to provide a more comprehensive package of support to hospitals within an overall strategy for primary health care, for which a comprehensive package of care consists of a full-hospital package across all