



A Study By and About Jerusalem's Children

VIOLENCE & ITS IMPACT ON PALESTINIAN FAMILIES IN JERUSALEM

Research Team

Palestinian Counseling Center

Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights

Child Researchers: Hadeel Adnan Bamia, Youmna Joulani, Ali Khaled al-Taweel, Amjad Abdel Salam Masouda, Maya Muneer al-Dweik, Bara' Mahfouz Derbas, Mohammad Abu Sbeih, Oday Shwaiky, Ihab Abu Sbeih, Mohammad Shkeirat, Bashar Shkeirat

Counselors: Samah Joulani, Hanan Mash'al, Tamara al-Rajabi, Hanan Salim

*Cover photo: An adolescent boy is stopped by Israeli soldiers in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan.
Credit: Wadi Hilweh Information Center*

The Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC) is a nongovernmental organization, established by a group of psychologists, sociologists and educators in 1983 to work towards improving and developing mental health and various other related services in Palestine. The center began its operations on a volunteering basis in schools to increase awareness of the importance of counseling and intervention for children exposed to political abuse and violence; The PCC provides comprehensive services in the field of mental health including: therapy, psychological counseling, socio- educational services to prevent the development of psychological problems, capacity building and consultations to organizations and individuals working in mental health, in addition to lobbying and advocacy to influence legislation and policies that enhance the right to a state of mental well-being in Palestine.

The Secretariat to Support Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law NGOs Operating in the occupied Palestinian territory (hereinafter the Secretariat) is a joint donor program sponsored by Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland. The overall objective of the Secretariat is to contribute to the effective realization of and adherence to human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and to influence the behavior of the relevant duty bearers, including Israel, the Palestinian Authority and governing bodies / authorities in Gaza. The Secretariat primarily works with and supports Palestinian and Israeli human rights (HR) civil society organizations (CSOs) active in the oPt, within the general parameters and context of ending the Israeli occupation of the oPt, and establishing an independent, democratic Palestinian state in which human rights are respected, promoted, protected and fulfilled.

Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights is a Palestinian non-profit organization, founded in 1997 after splitting off from American Friends Service Committee or the "Quakers" with which it had been affiliated since 1974. The Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights is a leading defender of the human rights of Palestinians, providing free legal services to those who face violations, including legal representation and legal counseling against in the occupied Palestinian territories. In addition, the center offers many other services, such as legal defense for issues that affect the public interest, legal reform, awareness-raising, lobbying and advocacy, and other interventions and services. It also undertakes pro-bono legal cases related to house demolition, forced displacement, land confiscation, and more recently settler violence. Without JCLAHR's services, victims would face costly private sector fees compelling them to forfeit their claims.

This study is supported by the HR/IHL Secretariat. The contents of this study can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the Secretariat and/or its Donors' Consortium.

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Foreword

We proudly present you with this report on a qualitative research study completed by a group of young researchers in cooperation with a team from the Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC).

This study collected data from various areas in East Jerusalem on children's psychological, social, and educational welfare and the effects of the brutal policies employed by Israel and its military occupation in their neighborhoods. The study focuses on the following issues: detention and house arrest, displacement and house demolitions, the prohibition on entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard for prayer or play, and night raids on homes.

While documentation of these issues is not new, this research study is groundbreaking in that it involved children at all stages of the study: beginning with topic selection, planning, training in data collection, documentation and summarizing, result analysis, and putting together recommendations based on the findings. All this was done in preparation for presenting the research to the parties involved. The children interviewed were grouped by their areas of residence in four areas in East Jerusalem: the Old City, Silwan, Issawiyah, and Jebel al-Mukkaber.

The study used qualitative methodologies that sought not only to bring forward knowledge and awareness and distribute it but also to encourage scientific discovery among young people. The children in our Jerusalem Palestinian community need to have their cognitive and exploratory skills stimulated and their mental and imaginative abilities fortified.

Also, qualitative research techniques allowed us to understand motives and beliefs in a way that's impossible to discern from bare statistics. We, Palestinian society in East Jerusalem, need this detailed knowledge to educate our young so that they may learn from its effects and consequences.

The Israeli procedures that Jerusalem's children are exposed to seem intended to terrorize them into submission, to discourage them from attempting to accessing their basic rights to protest, and to punish any resistance they might offer. The long-term goal is to squash the spirit of resistance in Palestinians from an early age and make them and their families pay a price for resisting. A child that throws a rock or yells at the occupier is jailed, has his movements restricted, is forbidden from leaving his home, and might even be killed.

Young researchers worked on every aspect of this study, learning research techniques and gaining confidence. Source: PCC



These procedures contravene international and child protection laws and prevent children from practicing the most basic right of protest and the refusal to be subjugated. They aim to “tame” the Jerusalem child to accept the reality of the Israeli colonization of Jerusalem as a fact that cannot be undone. It is therefore only natural that the response to such lawlessness is the creation of protection and advocacy mechanisms for these children so they can stand up to such oppression.

This study, prepared by and in cooperation with children themselves, investigates cases that concern both children and adults and aims to reaffirm our faith in both the children’s ability to influence their environment, and their ability to effect true change in their communities.

Because scholarship shows that advancement and advocacy comes from trial, effort, education, and influence, children gain the will and the strength to seek change with the awareness that they have the needed knowledge and abilities. This study has helped the children who participated gain true knowledge about the issues facing their communities, which will in turn help them to become effective members of society that can achieve positive change.

This study is one of a collection produced by the Palestinian Counseling Center in the field of mental and social health in Palestine that in turn impact planning for the center’s programs and projects, as well as planning by Palestinian governmental and civil society. Another purpose of this research is to raise awareness in the international community about the psychosocial effects that the Israeli occupation has on Palestinian families.

The center believes in the importance and necessity of spreading knowledge in the field of mental health, and circulating it to all stakeholders. This ensures that planning is professional and serves the Palestinian community, nurturing and strengthening it to withstand the difficult living conditions, first of which is the Israeli occupation.

Rana Nashashibi, PCC Director





Executive Summary

Child protection, the right to live with dignity and freedom from violence and exploitation, abuse and inhumane conditions, is one of the most prominent rights addressed in international conventions and human rights treaties. Yet there remain important failures in application and practice, as millions of children around the world suffer every day from violence, exploitation and abuse, and millions of others remain at risk of rights violations.

This study highlights the day-to-day experience of children living under Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem and the psychosocial impact that results from the constant presence of Israeli military and security forces, detention and searches, and other practices. It focuses particularly on violence from the occupation and its impact on violence at home and family relationships, contributing to the large body of material that engages the psychosocial impact of war and armed conflict.

Moreover, the study was implemented with children's input at every stage of the process, providing a critical understanding of these events in children's eyes and putting in the hands of policymakers vivid accounts and examples drawn out by the children themselves.

The PCC's Child Protection program worked with children already engaged in its programs to draft the outlines of the study, choosing the geographical areas and the main areas of focus. The Old City, Silwan, Issawiyah, and Jebel al-Mukkaber were chosen as the neighborhoods for research because they are areas of constant friction between the military, Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents. An initial survey was used to determine the main subjects of concern for the children.

Through interviews, the young people determined that in these geographical regions, detention and house arrest, displacement and house demolitions, the prohibition on entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard to play and pray, and night raids on homes were the main issues facing them and their peers.

Both in-depth interviews and focus groups were used to gather information in the period between May 2016 to December 2016.

Main Findings

Children Who Experienced House Demolitions in Jebel Al-Mukkaber

- Most of the children who experienced house demolitions were exposed to several traumatic events successively, some without long-term resolution.
- Social support in the period surrounding the demolition of private homes, from the extended family, through neighborhood events and community institutions, can play a role in reducing the series of shocks.



The study was implemented with children's input at every stage of the process, providing a critical understanding of these events in children's eyes and putting in the hands of policymakers vivid accounts and examples drawn out by the children themselves.

- Children who have been exposed to demolition face difficulties in adapting to their new circumstances as they are forced into new surroundings (to live with their relatives or neighbors, or into a house in another neighborhood, for example).
- The interviews show that as stress increases within the family, violence is increasingly used as punishment by parents and aggression is used by children. This has magnifying impact for the community in Jebel al-Mukkaber.

Detention and House Arrest of Children in Silwan

- The experience of arrest and home confinement is one of the most difficult endured by children, and in Silwan it has left its marks on their mental health, with children expressing a constant sense of fear and experiencing challenging relationships with family and friends.
- Children continue to be subjected to mistreatment (violence and physical and psychological pressure) rising to the level of torture during interrogation and imprisonment.
- Children leave detention suffering from health problems and physical pain as a result of ill-treatment during the period of detention and interrogation.
- Children in Silwan who were arrested avoided talking with their parents about their feelings and experiences in prison.
- Parents were challenged in interacting with their children after they had completed a period of detention. They said that their children's behavior changed, they became unable to cope with their anger and they experienced bouts of rebellion.
- House arrest transforms the home into a prison for these children, imposing on their caregivers the threat of legal prosecution, actual imprisonment for children, or huge fines if they do not keep their children at home. This situation increases the psychosocial challenges for children, especially adolescents.
- Cases of arrest, interrogation, house arrest, detention and death are no longer limited to children between the ages of 12-18, but are now also impacting children as young as six years old.

Impact on Children of Daily Raids in Issawiyah

- The daily incursions and raids experienced by children living in Issawiyah take a toll on them through a constant sense of fear and insecurity, permanent tension, instability in daily routines, a deprivation of play and exercise, and a loss of childhood.
- Families also show negative outcomes from this instability, anxiety, and the difficulties sleeping.
- Parents experience daily fear for their children due to the ongoing arrests and raids, military presence around schools, and the use of teargas and sound bombs near students to intimidate them.

Restrictions on Play and Worship for Children in the Old City

- Children experience psychosocial challenges due to exposure to constant violence, confinement at home, denial of entry to the al-Aqsa Mosque and its courtyard, and restrictions on accessing the mosque and schools inside the mosque.



- Children witness attacks during physical inspections by the military, prevention of entry into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and the use of tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets, which create in them a sense of fear and result in social isolation.
- There are not enough children's clubs and designated areas to play in the Old City, which negatively affects children, who are confined to their houses due to the presence of military and armed settlers.
- Parents are anxious and worried about their children, reporting that their children are becoming angry towards the occupation and feeling the desire for revenge.
- Parents in the Old City reported psychosocial problems in their children ranging from problems eating and using the bathroom to behavioral problems.

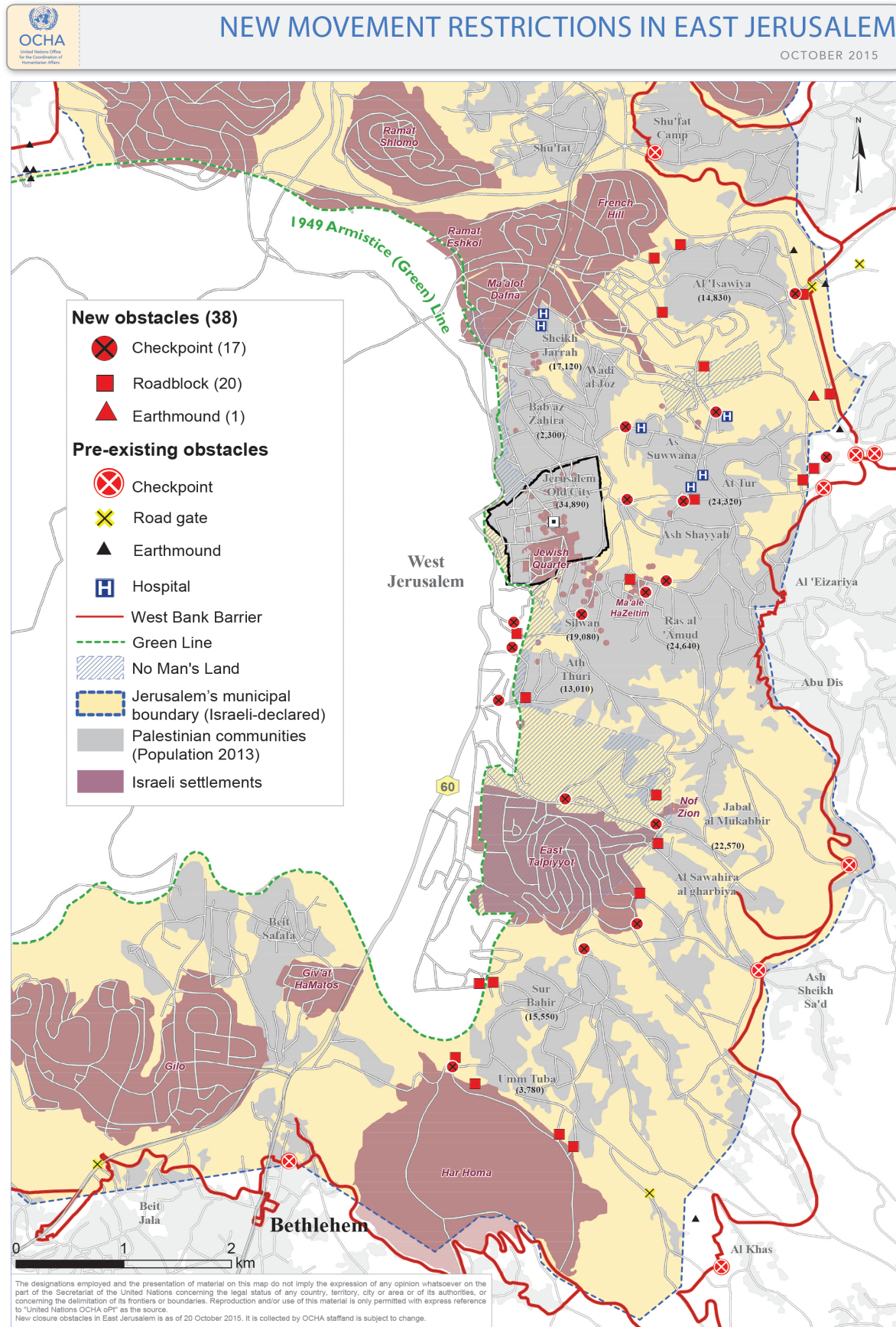
Main Recommendations

- Work to end the occupation as the main cause of violence in Palestinian society with all its negative effects for Palestinian family relationships and society, in particular for women and children.
- Pressure Israel to stop its policies that expose children to violence, especially detention and house arrest, because of their negative effects on children and lasting psychological affects that impede the normal development of their lives, particularly education and employment.
- Stop the policy of collective punishment against Palestinian families through the demolition of homes, which negatively impacts parents and children and the relationship between them.
- Expose the occupation's policies against children in international forums by presenting research results and preparing further studies.
- Provide programs that offer psychosocial support for children who are subjected to detention and house arrest, regular raids, confinement at home and violence, helping parents and children through the most difficult experiences that too often cause social isolation, fear, insecurity, and low achievement or dropping out of school.

More detailed recommendations can be found at the end of the main report.



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This October 2015 map by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs portrays the neighborhoods studied and how they are severed from each other by movement restrictions.



Methodology and Literature Review

The study's theoretical framework reflects the day-to-day life experienced by children living in East Jerusalem, in particular the presence of political violence from the Israeli occupation and its psychosocial impact on the family, family relationships and children in Palestinian society.

These experiences should be viewed through the lens of numerous international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its related protocols and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. As the occupying power, Israel is obliged to adhere to its legal obligations towards children in Jerusalem. In reality, however, Palestinian children are deprived of their rights. The absence of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem in conjunction with the ongoing occupation makes Palestinian children in the city some of the most vulnerable in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).

The young researchers from each geographical area covered in this report chose the main issues they wanted to focus on, as follows:

Jebel al-Mukkaber: The team chose to explore the subject of the demolition of homes, which had occurred recently in the study period, affecting the children's peers and neighbors. According to the statistics available, 38 homes had been demolished in Jebel al-Mukkaber between 2011 and 2015. The Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reports that 63 structures were demolished in all, including agricultural dwellings, temporary barracks and residential homes, affecting 67 children in the neighborhood.

Silwan: The researchers chose to document the subject of child detentions and home confinement in the neighborhood, which affects children's security and freedom of movement. The Wadi al-Helwa information Center based in Silwan found that in 2015 some 450 neighborhood children were stopped and detained by Israeli security forces. Those detained in all of Jerusalem's neighborhoods numbered 850 for that same year, among them 31 girls and 105 children between the ages of 7-12 (under the age of maturity, which in Israel is 13 years old).

Old City: the researchers chose to focus on the increasing numbers of attacks and provocations by Jewish settlers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its open courtyard. These attacks affect children and their parents, at the expense of religious freedom and the ability to access a sanctuary for worship and play, given the tight confines of the Old City. One study indicated that the repeated break-ins by Israeli settlers into the courtyard of the Aqsa Mosque and their armed presence in the Old City under the protection of the Israeli police created a situation of discrimination, preventing children from accessing the mosque and local playgrounds (Rabaia, Giacaman, and Nguyen-Gillham, 2010). According to Wadi Helwa Information Center, in 2015, Israeli authorities imposed restrictions on the entry of Muslims to the Al-Aqsa Mosque 18 times, and banned 297 Palestinians from the mosque for periods ranging from 10 days to six months, on the orders of the Israeli police or intelligence. Among

QUICK FACTS

10,062 Palestinians killed (Sept. 29, 2000-Dec. 31, 2014)

672 Palestinian children killed (2011-2016), 546 of them in 2015 alone (Gaza war)

7,000 Palestinians in Israeli prisons (as of Feb. 2017), including 330 children and 71 girls

750 Palestinians in administrative detention (detention without charges) (2016)

the blocked individuals were 126 women, and nine underage girls, 18 minors, and 12 employees of the Islamic *Waqf*.

Issawiyah: The young researchers from Issawiyah chose to research the frequent incursions and activity by the military and police in their neighborhood. These contraventions of the rights to safety and various freedoms include arrests, exposure to tear gas, and restrictions on movement, especially at the close of the school day when students are going home.

The Experience of Palestinian Children under Occupation

Palestinian children in East Jerusalem, like the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), are exposed to serious protection risks as a result of the Israeli military occupation.

In 2015, Israel adopted several laws targeting children with the most severe punishments. For example, the crime of stone throwing is now punishable by as many as four years in prison. In the contemporary context of social media, children are exposed more directly to reports of attacks and violations to their peers, reading online about house demolitions, harassment, injuries and even loss of life.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), 2015 saw a marked increase in children's exposure to political violence. Arrests of children were up 71.2% from 2014. Thirty-two children were killed that year, and nearly 1,109 children were displaced.

Children exposed to violence related to war and political conditions usually experience a sense of constant threat to their lives, and their feeling of security is disrupted. They may not respond to adult requests, sometimes destroy their own property, fight more than other children as a means of expression, seem depressed or are unable to focus and experience a decline in academic achievement.¹

The Gaza Community Mental Health Programme documented in a 2015 study the impact of war and conflict on children, finding a significant increase in behavioral problems after the attacks on the Gaza Strip. These children exhibited violence and aggressive behavior, excessive stubbornness and verbal abuse.²

A 2005 PCC study, *Broken Homes*, showed that children whose homes had been demolished experienced a decline in their academic performance. Indeed, 38% of children who experienced their homes demolished were forced to leave school in order to work, in part due to the financial shock experienced by the family. These children also scored worse on a range of mental health indicators, including signs of delinquency and violent behavior.

Another study showed that exposure to house demolitions affects children's mental health and well-being, causing nightmares and aggression. The conditions surrounding the demolition of homes and detention of children cause them to feel prolonged fear, boredom, and despair (Giacaman, et al, 2008). Another study (Khamis, 2013) found that children who are exposed to the experience of detention often develop symptoms of PTSD because they are living under constant pressure.

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A 2005 PCC study, *Broken Homes*, showed that children whose homes had been demolished experienced a decline in their academic performance, often left school to work, and exhibited aggressive behaviour and other signs of stress.”

1 Khamis, 2013

2 Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, 2015



Frequent raids and arrests (Cone, 2015) by occupation forces lead to signs of psychological trauma and anxiety, with children showing symptoms of common sleep disorders, anxiety and sadness, difficulties in concentration, violence, and problems with urination.

The feelings of depression and bad mood, irritation, tension and anxiety (Giacaman et al, 2007) effects the relationship of children with their families. Children have a need to get outside and play, with all of its mental health benefits, while parents remain constantly fearful of political and military violence, creating friction between the two. Moreover, just as children are impacted by the constant presence of violence or the effects of home demolitions, family members are also impacted, making it more difficult for parents to provide the support that shocked children need.

In a survey targeting 2,328 Palestinian children between the ages of 12-18 in the West Bank (Sahwil, 2007) a positive correlation was found between exposure to violent political events and between domestic violence and school violence, and that exposure to political violence leads to symptoms of mental health problems in both parents and children.

Legal Context & International Law

Human rights are basic standards ensuring the universal, inalienable and inherent dignity of every individual. The United Nations, in adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, adopted a common standard of human rights giving great importance to the principle of equality and respect for human dignity among all people.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations has also adopted a number of international legally binding instruments to promote those rights, and the use of these treaties and agreements as a framework for discussion and application of human rights principles. These instruments oblige state parties to the implementation of the principles and rights that they cite.

Among the most prominent conventions is the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which ensures special care and protection for persons under 18 years old to enable children to enjoy childhood and be protected for the good of society.

Among the rights guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are special protection and the necessary opportunities for the child's physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development in an atmosphere of freedom and dignity. Each child has the right to adequate food, shelter, recreation and health services. Children have the right to receive an education, and should be protected from all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. Children should be protected from racial, religious or any other form of discrimination as provided for in Article 19. State parties must take every appropriate measure to protect children from all forms of violence, injury or physical or mental abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation .

States Parties shall ensure no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or cruel or inhuman punishment. The death penalty or life imprisonment cannot be imposed for offenses committed by persons under age 18 years so that no child is deprived of his liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. Children should be arrested, detained or imprisoned in accordance with the law, only as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time, in order to treat children deprived of their liberty with humanity and respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. He or she has the right to stay in touch with his/her family through correspondence and visits. Every child deprived of liberty has the right to prompt access to legal and other appropriate assistance, as well as the right to challenge the legality of the deprivation of liberty quickly before a court or other independent and impartial competent authority.

Article 31 of the convention also provides for the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. State Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activity recreational and leisure activities.

Additionally, the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, provides for the right to freedom of religion or belief. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides for four items in this regard, namely: everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes the freedom to condemn religion, freedom to profess any religion or belief of his choice, and freedom to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, individually or in community with others and in public or in private. No one should be subject to coercion that would impair an individual's freedom to condemn or to profess any religion or belief of his choice.

Research Methodology

This study approached its task with the hypothesis that there is a positive correlation between the occupation in all its forms of violence against children in Jerusalem and the increase of domestic and school violence and the emergence of psychosocial effects on children.

Research Goals

1. Identify the impact on children's psychosocial wellbeing and family life resulting from exposure to political violence in Jerusalem, specifically in Jebel al-Mukkaber, Silwan, Issawiyah, and the Old City.
2. Recognize the relationship between exposure to political violence and violence in the family and community.
3. Utilize the findings to advocate for children who are exposed to violations by the occupation forces, exposing practices that contravene human and children's rights.
4. Formulate recommendations to guide professional programs and projects that serve children in the Jerusalem area.
5. Assist children in acquiring research skills and critical thinking, analysis and conclusions, which helps them in their personal development and allows them to participate rather than being only receptacles of information.

Outcomes

One of the study's key outcomes was in-depth analysis of the experiences of children ages 6-18 who live in Jerusalem and are exposed to violence. Qualitative research allows accurate documentation of the life experience and suffering of these children. It also allows the identification of priorities for those working with children who are exposed to daily violations and advocacy strategies that might protect children from repeated attacks and threats.

To prepare the groundwork for the study's child participation approach, several workshops were held with groups of five to six children as part of the PCC's child protection program in the Old City, Silwan, Jebel Mukkaber and Issawiyah. These workshops established the children's analysis as to the most significant violations they face in their respective geographical region. As a result of these work-



shops, the children produced a detailed search plan included an in-depth analysis of the problem, a literature review with statistics to determine the scope of the study, research tools and their design, results and analysis and finally, findings and recommendations.

Each research team not only prepared the literature review, research question, and sample of children interviewed, but was also trained in asking questions in both focus groups and one-on-one interviews with other children and their parents. They were trained in presenting the objectives of the research and also discussed coordinating with partner institutions in the neighborhoods that assisted in arranging appointments with the children and their families. Privacy and confidentiality were emphasized.

Children, their parents, and community activists were interviewed in each of the four geographical areas. While efforts were made to maintain gender parity, the researchers found that the number of males who had personally experienced violence were greater than females, despite that females were over-represented in the focus groups.

- In Jebel al-Mukkaber, children and parents who were living in their homes when the homes were demolished were interviewed. Four mothers were part of a focus group, and ten children participated in another focus group, while one community activist was interviewed.
- In Silwan, three focus groups were conducted. The first was with five children who had been detained or arrested, another with five children (all boys) who were held under house arrest, and a third with nine mothers who children had been detained or arrested. A community council member was also interviewed in a one-on-one session.



The young researchers discuss the research recommendations and train in presenting the research for the launch workshop. Source: PCC



- In Issawiyah, a focus group of 13 children (eight females and five males) was interviewed, alongside a group of parents (six mothers and three fathers) and one community activist, all on the subject of daily political violence and incursions in the neighborhood.
- In the Old City, 11 children (five females and six males) participated in a focus group, along with 15 mothers who were interviewed in another focus group on the experience of accessing the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Interviews were conducted with an Al-Aqsa Mosque *Waqf* official (a guard), and a boy who had experienced house arrest.

About the Research, in the Words of the Young Researchers

Hadeel Adnan

“My experience was fantastic, creating self-confidence and the ability to meet and present without embarrassment. I now have information on the subject of arrest and detention and the pressure that is placed on children while in custody, which leads in many cases to child prisoners admitting to the accusations levied against them, even without a lawyer’s representation.”

Ali Khaled

“My experience of the research was learning about children, minors, who feel helplessness and fear. I now have diverse information and examples of how detention leads to educational decline and negative behavior at home and with friends and neighbors. When conducting the interviews with the children, my questions reminded them of what they suffered during the arrest and some were not able to answer at length without feeling upset.”

Amjad Abdel Salam

“I enjoyed very much this experiment and research, although the results worry us.”

Maya Munir Dweik

“The children were fantastic in their answers, giving us a response without any exaggeration and in their own words. I loved listening to the children and asking them how they feel.”

Bara’ Mahfouz

“The children were unable to focus and found it difficult to concentrate, but this improved with time. Having the questions set helped with this.”





Study Findings

Jebel Al-Mukkaber Research ?

What is the impact of the demolition of homes on psychosocial health and family life in the Jebel al-Mukkaber/Mount Scopus area?

In Jebel al-Mukkaber, children and parents who were living in their homes when the homes were demolished were interviewed. Four mothers were part of a focus group, and ten children participated in another focus group, while one community activist was interviewed.

Most of the younger children interviewed were not present at the time of the demolition of their family's homes, having left the area when it was clear the demolition would be implemented. A few of the older children were present, however, and watched the demolition process.

Immediate Reactions

The children expressed mixed emotions about the demolition, feeling deep sadness, and wishing they could return to their lost homes. In some cases, the demolition was accompanied by other shocks. One child used the saying, "Two bullets to the head hurts," because his family home was destroyed by Israeli authorities swiftly after a family member was killed by security forces, as a kind of punishment meted out for what was deemed an attack.

Other children used a kind of generalization of the trauma to justify their own experience: "This is the occupation, what can we do about it? Our fate is in God's hands." Or "It's normal. They demolish a lot of homes. It's happened to a lot of people, just like us."

The Day of the Demolition

The mothers interviewed said that in their cases, Israeli authorities had warned them in advance that the demolition was to occur so it was not a surprise. Some families were escorted away from the site by the Israeli police and interrogated. The mothers said that when they received the order of demolition, the family emptied the house of all the most critical items. Many of the neighbors offered immense support, they said, and young people helped them remove their belongings before the demolition.

Children reported in some cases being asked by their parents what they wanted to salvage from the home in the short time usually given to evacuate beforehand. "My mother told us to take everything we want, and so I took my games," one child said.



One child was absent for much of the first school semester after his father was killed, and he refused to go to school until his father's corpse was delivered to the family for burial. During this time, his home was demolished.

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Impact on Education

After the demolition, children reported a lack of interest in school and academics. “[I have] no interest in anything.”

One of the children talked about not being able to concentrate at school and how that sets up conflict with his mother, who nags him to keep up with his schoolwork. Another child was absent for much of the first school semester after his father was killed, and he refused to go to school until his father’s corpse was delivered to the family for burial. He did, eventually, return to school in the second semester. Another child spoke of receiving the news at school that both his brother and cousin had been killed by Israeli forces and feeling very angry at the time. “Everything changed in an instant,” he said.

Impact on Social & Family Life

Families in Jebel Mukkaber feel targeted by the authorities for demolitions because many young people from the neighborhood have been involved or accused of attacks on Israelis, said the community representative.

While children reported that their relationships did not change as a result of the demolition, some said that because they had to move, they attended different schools and therefore had to make new friends.

Mothers reported that after the demolition, their children suffered from social isolation and the need to stay close to home. They no longer played as they had before the demolition: “The pain aged them,”

In Jebel al-Mukkaber, the Abu Jamal home was filled with cement by Israeli authorities as a punitive measure. Graffiti on the wall commemorates Alaa Abu Jamal, killed after driving his car into Israelis waiting at a bus stop. Source: Yousef Khanfar





one mother said. The children don't like to go to school, and cling to her, a mother said. One child wakes in the middle of the night, and buys lighters to burn his hands and feet. Another was described as being constantly aggressive, and crying, and refusing to participate with other children in any activity.

Children's responses are aggravated by the overwhelming grief felt by the entire family, mothers said, they themselves finding it difficult to give support because they too miss their home constantly and mourn its loss. "Every child is impacted by these things according to his or her personality and how he or she expresses it; some children become violent and difficult and then this creates problems between them and other children at school or in the neighborhood." Parents and teachers, on the other hand, resort to punishment as a way of handling the psychological difficulties, said the community figure, and have their own failings in helping their children in overcoming the negative shock of home demolition.

Silwan Research



What is the impact of detention and house arrest on psychosocial health and family in the Silwan area?

In Silwan, three focus groups were conducted. The first was with five children who had been detained or arrested, another with five children (all boys) who were held under house arrest, and a third with nine mothers whose children had been detained or arrested. A community council member was also interviewed in a one-on-one session.

At the Time of the Arrest

An interview with a Silwan community activist on home confinement and detention provided background to these issues. Children as young as six have been arrested, the activist reported, and house arrest has been meted out as a punishment to children under the age of 13, which is the age of maturity in Israeli law.

While most detainees were charged with stone-throwing, the activist said that the numerous points of friction in Silwan between Israeli security forces and children invite conflict. "Many Silwan families live close together, with barely a wall separating them," said the activist. "There are heavily armed guards and a continuous presence of occupation forces in areas where kids gather, especially when they are going from and coming to school. Silwan is volatile and there are continuous provocations of the students, never mind the ongoing demolition orders and the frequent incursions."

Most of the children interviewed were at home when Israeli soldiers came to arrest them, although some were summoned to a local police station and detained when they appeared. A few were arrested while in the street.

In Detention & Interrogation

Children described their feelings during detention as helplessness, fear, awe, shocked and even a sense of loss. One child said that he had "lost the ability to feel and think in his body and mind." Another said, "I was terribly shocked—I did not expect [to be detained]." Some of the children talked about

their worry and concern for themselves and their families while in detention. “I remained silent [in interrogation] out of fear for my family,” said one child. “I was terrified and felt incredible unexpected shock.”

While children were able to recall what happened to them in detention, most did not like to remember their experience. The children could recall the smell of the cells, which bothered them, and the ill-treatment they received in detention. “The detention rooms stank and the bathrooms were disgusting and the food was such that animals wouldn’t accept it,” one said. These unlivable conditions were part of the pressure that was placed on the children as they were being interrogated. “It was brutal,” a boy described, “and they did not let me use the bathroom for five hours and did not let me see a lawyer.”

The children spoke about psychological and physical torture that was used against them. Many were threatened using their families: “They threatened to hurt my family if I did not respond to their orders” or “They threatened that I would not be allowed to see my family.” Interrogators told one child he would “rot here in interrogation” if he did not answer their questions. The children were shown others who had been struck. Children were struck “strategically” on the face and on their bodies. “I was beaten on my face and arms while my hands were tied together in a way that did not allow me to defend myself or even move,” said one child.

Under House Arrest

Children who were placed under house arrest talked about the impact on their social relationships, especially with friends from school. They said that their parents became their jailers, the enforcers of this unfair policy. “My house is my prison,” said one child. “It was my family that was keeping me in jail and that made me feel contrary and resistant since my family is supposed to protect and support me in getting free.” The respondents interviewed had all spent more than one month under house arrest.

“I felt alone and isolated from the world and everything that I loved; when I was finally released, I just wanted to have my old life back.” Children expressed malaise and discomfort, many of them achieving less at school and some even going on to drop out as a result.

The activist also noted the impact of detention and house arrest on children apparent through both mental health and physical symptoms. Many children when released from Israeli detention centers continue to have back pain, pain in their limbs, and headaches. In addition, “children develop psychological symptoms and are inclined towards violence, nightmares, and poor eating and drinking.”

The relationship between parents and children also suffers, as “the child feels that his family can’t protect him and then rebels against them.”

Children under house arrest said that their relationship with their parents had become one of anger, anxiety and resentment, as their parents were responsible for preventing them from leaving the house. According to one interviewee, “I became more anxious and screamed at my father due to being confined at home.”

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Once they are able to leave the residence and return to school, these children have difficulty coping. They have trouble reintegrating with their peers and feel lonely as a result. Many are required by law to have their parents chaperone them outside the home. “I feel anger at them for controlling me and I feel that they do not want me to go out.”

In cases where the child is required to have a parent chaperone, children express anger at their parents: “I feel that they do not want me to go out,” said one. “I feel regret that I have made my mother stay at home and give up activities outside the home.”

Mothers of children who were under house arrest reported that their children expressed extreme agitation, anger and the feeling that their home has become a prison with parents as the jailers.

“His incarceration turned the house into a real tragedy for him—he was imprisoned there and his family was the guard, making him very, very angry. The state and sense of oppression at home feels like a betrayal of love,” said one mother. Another mother said that her son was always active before being put under house arrest. Now he sits alone and is upset and refuses to talk to others. Sometimes he is very irritable and screams about small things that annoy him.

Psychosocial Impact on Children & Families

Mothers interviewed said that they saw a change in their children’s vision of the future. The period of absence from school already meant they were behind, and many children became uninterested in educational success. “He used to be one of the first students in his class, but after he was arrested, he wouldn’t go to school without being forced.” Another mother said that her son wasn’t bad in school but after he missed a year due to his detention, he would only attend sporadically and in 11th grade he just dropped out. One boy started lifting weights so that he could feel strong and not weak. Some of the women said that their children’s manners changed but they did not change their perspective on the future and managed to complete their education.

After being arrested and detained, children were more emotional and wanted to be near their parents, the mothers said. “He tries to help me. He feels that I suffered [when he was arrested] and so he tries not to make me upset. He is always telling me that he loves me and wants to be held by me so that he can feel safe.” In one case, a mother said that her son blames her, saying that her divorce from his father is the reason the boy went to prison.

Not only did children’s mental state change, but they experienced real physical harm, in particular beatings in the head, with all of their physical and mental consequences. “He had internal bleeding in his head from the hits he took, and now he only eats food that is ground up. Every time he hears a fight [in the street] he goes out to see what is going on, and tells me ‘I am not afraid of the police.’ He started to tell me that he doesn’t want to get married and he doesn’t want to have children because he doesn’t want anyone close to him to be hurt.” Another mother said of her son: “Sometimes he wakes up abruptly in his sleep. Sometimes he talks in his sleep and you can hear him saying names or that someone struck him. Sometimes he says [to me], ‘Relieve yourself of me; I don’t want to live anymore.’” Another mother said, “Every once in a while he will be sleeping and we wake up to the sound of him counting off like they used to do in the prison. He started to eat all his food because he

“ Sometimes he wakes up abruptly in his sleep,” said a mother of his son. “Sometimes he talks in his sleep and you can hear him saying names or that someone struck him. Sometimes he says [to me], ‘Relieve yourself of me; I don’t want to live anymore.’”

says that in prison he didn't like the food." Another boy started going to the bathroom frequently—ostensibly because in prison he wasn't able to go at will. "He is always telling me he's not afraid, and then he wants to sleep next to me. He needs to feel safe." A mother of an eight year old said, "His face gets bright red and he breaks the chairs every time he gets upset."

Mothers said they also saw physical and emotional changes in their children after house arrest. For example, children displayed chronic anxiety, nightmares, sleep difficulties and sleeplessness, bedwetting, changes in eating habits, and being unable to hold their bladder.

The mothers also spoke about their own feelings when their children were in detention. They worried about their children being hurt, while being exhausted, fatigued, sad and often crying. "I was exhausted," said one mother. "I couldn't move. They were dark days and a lot of the days I would think about what he was eating and what he was drinking. I was crazy. I was crying and crying and I was so depressed. I was afraid for him and I felt that my life had ended. It was a feeling... my God, you can't imagine. I wanted to free him but I couldn't."

Issawiyah Research

What is the impact of Incursions and attacks related to the occupation on mental health, social life, and family in Issawiyah?

In Issawiyah, a focus group of 13 children (eight females and five males) was interviewed, alongside a group of parents (six mothers and three fathers) and one community activist, all on the subject of daily political violence and incursions in the neighborhood.

The frequency of incursions in Issawiyah puts children and their families in a constant state of anticipation and anxiety. The responses describe how the military enters the neighborhood nearly every day, often at times when children are coming to or leaving from school, and sometimes in the middle of the night.

During the incursions, children are exposed to harassment, violence, psychological and verbal abuse and insults from Israeli soldiers. Sometimes they experience raids in the early hours of the morning, the arrest of their siblings, and the resulting destruction at home.

Constant Environmental Violence

The community activist interviewed in Issawiyah reported, "The situation in Issawiyah has gone from bad to worse. Every day the army raids the areas more than once, throwing tear gas and sound grenades at people in their homes, in the street and imposing sanctions with no reason. They arrest people who are not wanted, taking children from the street and from their homes, hitting them and torturing them in order to charge them with something."

The incursions and attacks come day and night. "The army has become permanent guests, constantly present, every day they are there at the entrance to the village. The children don't walk alone, they have to walk in groups. With sticks [security forces] destroy cars, and more than once people have been injured [damaged] by their sticks." Another parent described how families sit by their phones, monitoring the presence of the soldiers until two in the morning. "It has become a mental illness: 'Where are the soldiers?'"



During the incursions, the army has struck residents with rubber-coated metal bullets, hitting and destroying private property of citizens, conducting destructive searches of homes, and even stealing valuables during searches. “They carry out terrorism,” said one parent of the army. “They get together anyone who is present in the home and put them in one room, prevent them from even going to the bathroom. Children wake to the soldiers not their mothers or fathers, and their families are powerless during this terrorism. Sometimes they don’t even take anyone [to detention], even though the earth is lit up from their flares.” Items stolen include money, cameras, TVs, phones, gold (jewelry), but when residents file a complaint they say they are told that the soldiers don’t steal.

During the Incursions

During the raids, the use of tear gas, sound grenades and crowd control techniques are typical. “They throw gas and stun grenades and stop cars, no matter who is in them (only to bother them),” said one child interviewed. “If there are children in the car, it doesn’t matter, the important thing is that [the soldiers] protect themselves. They throw gas even when they see a woman or small girls, and the boys throw rocks [at them]. The soldiers hurl anything at the children to frighten them.”

Children said they experience a range of feelings when encountering the military. Some of them said they felt joy while seeing Israeli soldiers being chased and having rocks being thrown at them by other young people. Still others feel oppressed and provoked while watching youth be beaten and being unable to do something. One child says, “I feel oppressed and tense and I shout ‘Allah Akhbar’ in a loud voice at them [the soldiers].” Children were evidently frightened by the entry of the security forces. One 11-year-old boy said that when he knows the army is coming, he “runs and calls my sisters and puts them in the house and closes the windows and doors, making sure no one leaves so that [the army] doesn’t throw gas or sound grenades.” The children feel acutely the inability to play freely, as they are always forced to stay at home. “We can’t play or learn and we are always cooped up in the house, deprived of the freedom to move and open the windows,” said one child.

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Arrest and Detention

Some of the children described their personal experiences during interrogation. A 12-year-old says, “I was at my grandparents in the morning. My friend came to get me, and said, ‘There are soldiers.’” My friend and I didn’t see the soldiers [right away] but when we started running, I saw them in front of me. They hit me in the face. After that, they grabbed me by my hat and hit me, and took me to their patrol car. They swore at me and took me to be interrogated at the station. They only released me when my mother said she was going to take me to the doctor because of my face. She asked me what they had done to me. I told her there were two that were trying to frighten me but I wasn’t afraid. He was lying to me and I was lying to him. He wanted me to tell on another kid, but I refused. They gave my mother a paper saying that I was under house arrest because I said in the interrogation that I wanted to go to get treatment for my face. I was detained for 10 days. My mom signed an agreement that she would pay NIS 5,000 and they would detain me if she said anything [about my face]. When I was leaving, they said, “Don’t do it again.” I said, “I didn’t do anything anyway.”

One 16-year-old girl from Issawiyah described her arrest, interrogation, and detention for five months: “It was a very difficult physical and psychological experience, especially during interrogation,

which lasted from two o'clock in the afternoon until one in the morning. A whole night in a chair without food or water or [access to] the bathroom, only questions and screaming. There was more than one investigator, in fact almost 15 people in a small room. They ordered me to take off my clothes and if I refused, they said they would shoot me. After this, I felt seriously traumatized and I did not remember anything and every question I answered, 'I do not know.' They would respond by screaming and hitting me on my head. They were asking me to inform on the boys and girls of the village, but I did not say anything. I was transferred to prison and again was strip-searched. When I entered the cells, I found many women and girls both younger and older than me, [and] I started to cry. There was no attention to anything related to health. I fainted three times, but no one cared for me. There was not adequate clothing to protect you from the cold, and there were also 'birds' [informants] trying to get you to confess."

Long-term Effects

The activist warned about the long-term impact of the prolonged mental distress of the children in the community, and the impact of poor school performance, high rates of dropping out from school, and arrests and detentions.

Parents in the Issawiyah community said that the violence that the children are exposed to by the military and security forces is reproduced in their own actions. Said one of the mothers: "They come in and harass the neighborhood, and the children now are violent. They are innocent children going to school. Most of the boys who have been sentenced were not doing anything, but now the children feel like they are being provoked by the army."

In the eyes of children, these raids create a state of fear and anxiety. Their parents report that they play almost entirely inside the house, and usually games of police and soldier. Mothers said that their children feel a lack of security and constant fear. "Young boys now have psychological problems that are going to get more complicated [as they get older]. Their whole lives are 'the soldiers are here' and 'the soldiers are gone'. My son was holding a rock and he was frightened because the soldiers asked him why he was holding it."

A father said, "The children are dominated by violence, and this violence becomes a means of education and is transmitted from generation to generation, in an endless cycle."

Families, too, are impacted by feelings of fear and anxiety in children, and the lack of stability in daily life, the loss of property, and anger from boys towards their parents for imprisoning them indoors. Huge amounts of money are spent to defend and free (through lawyer's fees and fines) children who have been arrested, exhausting the families' financial resources. Parents also have trouble sleeping as a result of the night raids, creating feelings of fear and foreboding. "My son feels that I have become his warden," says one mother. "Families feel helpless, they feel they can't create normalcy for their children. They can't take them on trips and there is no place to play in the neighborhood that is safe. They can't play like other children." This comes on top of financial insecurity aggravated by damage to homes and businesses from the raids.

According to parents, the raids impact children's rights by preventing them from feeling safe in town, interfering with their right to health and education, and rupturing supportive social relationships because they are forced to stay indoors at home. "They start out loving school, but then they mature

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Israeli police manhandle a Palestinian adolescent girl in Issawiyah. Source: Wadi Hilweh Information Center

beyond their years and they stop wanting to go to school at all,” said one parent. Others talked about how children have started to look for someone—“a soldier”—to defend Palestine, and that this interrupts a normal childhood and their developmental growth.

Old City Research ?

What is the impact of restrictions on entering the Al-Aqsa Mosque and restrictions on play in the Old City of Jerusalem?

In the Old City, 11 children (five females and six males) participated in a focus group, along with 15 mothers who were interviewed in another focus group on the experience of accessing the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Interviews were conducted with an Al-Aqsa Mosque waqf official (a guard), and a boy who had experienced house arrest.

Researchers sought to gain an understanding of how children in the Old City spend their leisure time, and what they learned is that there is a dramatic gender gap between boys and girls. Male

children reported spending their leisure time playing outside with their friends, or watching television and using the computer. In contrast, most female children reported playing with their siblings at home.

Available areas of play in the Old City include the school playground, community centers and clubs, or the yard of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which has a large green area that can be used for play or socializing by the public. Said one girl, “I don’t go anywhere, only stay at home. I attend school and last week I went to the Irshad Center, but otherwise, there is nowhere to go.”

Accessing the Al-Aqsa Mosque

The children interviewed said they go to the Al-Aqsa Mosque with their families for prayer time, especially in the holy month of Ramadan or to study Quran, or play with their friends inside the mosque yard. Some of them also attend schools that are actually within the mosque compound. It is important to note that the gates of the mosque are manned by both Israeli soldiers and Islamic Waqf officials who check those seeking entry. These arrangements are part of a delicate status quo arrangement that includes Jordan.

The children interviewed had all seen Israeli soldiers prevent the entry of worshippers to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and some had themselves been prevented from entering to go to school, or been exposed to tear gas or the closing of the mosque’s metal gates to worshippers seeking to enter the mosque. As a result, some families do not allow their children to leave the house to go to the mosque, despite its relative proximity. “One time I saw them [Israeli soldiers] hitting people and then there was shooting. I thought it was fireworks. My little sister and I were visiting my uncle [and on the way home] we breathed in the teargas and collapsed. Someone came and took us to the tent where the EMS workers were, and we stayed there until my uncle came and we were able to take a detour back home through the alleys.”

When the doors of the mosque are closed, the children interviewed are unable to get to school and their Quran lessons. Instead, children play in the streets and in other areas of the Old City. Said one girl, “I am afraid of the soldiers. When we pass a group of them, I stick close to my mom, and I prefer to be with my mother and father.” Another girl said, “No one can breath. Seriously, what is this? These soldiers keep hitting people and frightening them.”

One boy told the researchers, “I am not afraid. Every day [we see them]. I am not afraid of them, but...if we didn’t see them it would be better. Sometimes they search us, and when I am passing they tell me ‘open your bag’. I am not afraid, but I don’t like to do it—it’s too much. They are nasty; they are provoking us.”

Restrictions on Education & Play

The effect of the presence of the occupation forces is that the children of the neighborhood have difficulty going to school without being exposed to searches of their school bags, teargas, and the firing of rubber-coated metal bullets. Some children are afraid to leave their homes alone, while others are defiant, saying they are not afraid but would prefer things be different.

Parents report that the conditions in the Old City are affecting the rights of their children to play and to study freely. They often forbid their children from playing outside of the house, in the neighborhood, or in the Al-Aqsa Mosque courtyard due to the constant presence of the military. Some children remain at home, while others attend clubs in the area. Says one mother, “I find my home small and my children are still young. They can’t go out alone, and I can’t go with them and there are no organizations for their age group. I prefer that they stay at home and for me to play with them, but I feel they get bored. There is nothing I can do.”



They couldn't name very many places for their children to play. Most play in front of their homes or go to the Damascus Gate area (which also has open space), inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound or to a community club. But with the growing presence of armed Israeli settlers and the Israeli military and police, families have started preventing their children from leaving the house. "My house is next to a Jewish [settler] home," said one mother. "There is no way I can send the kids out to play. They would be exposed to hitting, or rock-throwing. I am anxious [about their safety] when they are next to me at home, how could I possibly let them leave the house?"

The Al-Aqsa mosque guard, who is an employee of the Islamic Waqf and stationed at the mosque entrances, said he sees firsthand how children are affected by the restrictions in the Old City. He said that children are sometimes caught inside their classrooms at the mosque and prevented from being taken home by their parents.

"Kids like to take a ball or bike and play in the courtyard of the mosque. They are prevented from doing so by the occupation often, when the doors of the Al-Aqsa mosque are closed, or by the fear that they feel inside themselves from the settlers or after trying to defend themselves from the soldiers and being hit by them, in the head to the point of bleeding, as happened to one 13-year-old boy."

Parents say they accompany their children when they go to the mosque, even to class or the library. They fear their children will be exposed to violence. These fears also affect parents' own access to the mosque, as they are unable to take their children with them to pray or attend classes and must leave them with another caregiver. For women at home, who already have limited options for socializing and outside interaction, this is an additional barrier to breaking their isolation.

Said one mother: "I take my children there every once in a while, but not a lot because they are small. But when they get older, I will still not let them go alone. The last time I went with the kids, there was an incident with the killing of a Jordanian youth and the children became afraid. Here I am, in Allah's house, and I should feel secure but I did not feel safe at all. Since that day, I haven't gone back to Al-Aqsa. The kids have refused to go because of what they saw." Another mother said of her own children, "If they were to go to Al-Aqsa, they would be arrested."

Psychosocial Impacts

Parents say that as a result of the daily interaction with occupation forces and Israeli settlers, they see their children become fearful and anxious, avoiding leaving the home. Older boys, on the other hand, show increasing defiance and rejection and a desire for change, without concern for the risks to themselves. The mother of a 14-year-old boy said, "My home is close to Damascus Gate and when something happens, I find my son in the middle of the events and in the middle of the people. His response is to get involved and to do something. We feel frightened for our children and for our home." She went on, underscoring her fear of her son's fascination: "My son went to the place where someone was martyred [killed by the occupation] and described to us the perfumed smell of the martyr's blood."

The mother of a 16-year-old girl said that just the day prior to the focus group, soldiers responding to an incident fired bullets at her daughter's legs. "She was so frightened and faint when they brought her to us. She is in her last year of school and studying for her tawjihi (matriculation exam). She has started studying in the daytime and early in case anything happens, and we all started sleeping in our clothes so that we can get out of the house if we need to." Another 14-year-old used to go out and engage in the clashes until he was arrested, his mother said. Now he is terrified when he sees a soldier, and has stopped expressing his feelings, hiding himself at home.

Fear & Pressure at Home

Parents say they themselves are afraid and anxious from the events, and they don't know how to engage with their children. One mother said she makes her kids take the phone with them when they go out so she can check on them. Another mother checks her kids' bags every morning to make sure that there is nothing there that could get them in trouble.

"Last night, the kids were sleeping and all of a sudden there were noises on the roof," related another mother. "There were soldiers there and my son woke up and started asking what was going on. I had no idea what to tell him. It was totally unknown what would happen. Everything got light as if it was daytime [from the flares], even though it was 11 at night. We didn't know what was happening and what to tell the kids. I put on my headscarf just in case."

The *Waqf* official stationed inside the mosque that was interviewed spoke of a "racist policy that is unfair to the Palestinian people and the children of Jerusalem. He spoke of a "policy of repression" underway that includes settling the Old City with Jews, the imposition of an Israeli school curriculum that does not mention Palestinian children's national interests, and the politics of fear related to threats to rescind the ID cards of Palestinian residents of the city.

"These children suffer from constant anger; their actions or reactions could cost them their lives or the lives of their families," he said. Also, by denying Palestinians their right to worship and due to the importance of Al-Aqsa Mosque to the people of Jerusalem and Palestinians, the mosque has become a place of struggle and "a battlefield is no place for children to play or worship."

Since the beginning of the last Intifada or uprising, the guard said that children no longer feel safe inside the mosque, even though their presence is encouraged. "We are trying with all that we can to remain steadfast and connected to our land. Some people travelling with children come from far away to spend time in the mosque. Children no longer come to the mosque on their own due to the lack of a sense of security."

Researchers interviewed a 14-year-old boy who studies at Dar il Aytam in the Old City but has not attended school for one month after being sentenced to house arrest. He was picked up in the Old City and interrogated. "The army is always here, and is always filling the place. There is never a time that there are no soldiers or no settlers, and my friends and I are always wondering, where should we go?"

"I was with my friends in a park close to the center," he recalled. "There were soldiers around us but there were no clashes and no confrontations—there was nothing going on. All of a sudden, there was confusion and the soldiers threw a sound grenade, and it came at me. I picked up a stone to hit it, and all of a sudden there were 20 undercover security people on top of me, hitting me, and they took me away. For five hours I waited under the air conditioner, enduring the cold and just waiting for someone to come and talk to me and tell me what's going on. They transferred me to Muscobiyyah [a jail in Jerusalem] and searched me, stripped me and didn't let me go to sleep until one-thirty in the morning. I was on the floor, without a bed, with no blanket, under the air conditioner, only to be woken at five to count the prisoners. Then [after the counting], they took us back to the room, with the light on, making it impossible to sleep. We were sitting on the floor, and were given food that was not food at all—the chicken had feathers on it, and the burghul was gritty. We lived on bread and cucumbers. I stayed there 16 days. We went outside half an hour [every day] and one time they put us against a fence and beat us. They told me I was throwing rocks in Issawiyah. I became a hero in my own mind—why would I go to Issawiyah [far from home] and do that there? Sometimes people in regular clothes would come and interrogate us. They just kept asking us and asking us. I just kept saying that I hadn't done anything. Sometimes 10 would come and strike us and humiliate us."



Conclusions

These accounts reflect the various types of violence that children in these neighborhoods experience due to the ongoing presence of the occupation in Jerusalem, illustrating the denial of their rights to protection, health, education, play and other rights enshrined in the Convention for the Rights of the Child and human rights instruments.

As a result, children feel anger, fear, aggression and insecurity, have problems in eating and drinking and using the bathroom, show signs of social isolation, and the psychosocial symptoms of violence and loss typical of war and armed conflicts.

The results indicate that those children who are exposed to the shocks of detention and loss may have feelings of helplessness and frustration and constant fear. Their parents may face difficulties in preventing their children from going out and confronting the occupation, and as a result of parents' desire to protect their children, their relationship is strained and violence at home becomes more often a way of coping with these differences.

The children interviewed demonstrated an overall ability to describe events, their experience, and the emotions associated with those experiences. It appeared that older children may be somewhat more able to express their feelings and difficulties, while younger children were less able to express their feelings about what had occurred.

There was also some rationalizing and justification used in describing events by children whose homes had been demolished, in a seemingly valiant attempt to rhetorically normalize what had occurred ("What happens to others, happens to us...").

Conclusions from Jebel Al-Mukkaber

- Most of the children who experienced house demolitions were exposed to several traumatic events successively, some without long-term resolution. For example, one child might have had the shock of losing his or her father, but the authorities continue to hold the father's body as a punitive measure, then some time later, the family's house is demolished, also as a punitive measure, which is followed by fines and the legal prosecution of other members of the family. These children and their families endure numerous successive shocks with little ability to support each other.
- Social support in the period surrounding the demolition of private homes, from the extended family, through neighborhood events and community institutions, can likely play a role in reducing these series of shocks, particularly in finding the family shelter.
- Children who have been exposed to demolition face difficulties in adapting to new situations when they move in with their relatives or neighbors, or even when they move to a house in another neighborhood. There is a great deal that they cling to because it is associated with the old home.
- The interviews show that as stress increases within the family, violence is increasingly used as punishment by parents and aggression is used by children. This has magnifying impact for the community in Jebel al-Mukkaber.

Conclusions from Silwan

- The experience of arrest and home confinement is one of the most difficult endured by children, and in Silwan it has left its traces on their mental health, with consequences in a constant sense of fear and challenging relationships with family and friends.
- Children continue to be subjected to mistreatment rising to the level of torture during interrogation and imprisonment. The findings show children being exposed to psychological threats and abuse and physical beatings and intimidation.
- Children in Silwan who were arrested avoided talking with their parents about their feelings and experiences in prison. During the period of incarceration, children and their parents had feelings of longing for family, the desire to see each other, and constant fear for each others' safety, while parents whose children were under house arrest felt helplessness and sadness that they could not allow them to leave the home.
- Parents were challenged in interacting with their children after they had completed a period of detention. They said that their children's behavior changed, they became unable to cope with their anger, and experienced bouts of rebellion. These children resisted social interaction, often faced lower academic achievement and dropped out of school, while experiencing nightmares and other negative psychosocial reflections of their time in prison.
- House arrest transforms the home into a prison for these children, imposing on their caregivers the threat of legal prosecution, actual imprisonment for children, or huge fines if they do not keep their children at home. This situation increases the psychosocial challenges for children, especially adolescents, as it effects their family and other relationships. Children under house arrest are in constant isolation, are unable to exercise a normal life with their peers, and adopt a longterm feeling of fear, as the specter of arrest hovers constantly.
- Cases of arrest, interrogation, house arrest, detention and death are no longer limited to children between the ages of 12-18, but are now also impacting children as young as six years old.
- Children leave detention suffering from health problems and physical pain, as a result of ill-treatment during the period of detention and interrogation.

Conclusions from Issawiyah

- The daily incursions and raids that children living in Issawiyah are exposed to take a toll on them in psychosocial problems ranging from a constant sense of fear and insecurity, permanent tension, instability in daily routines, a deprivation of play and exercise, and a loss of childhood.
- Families also show negative outcomes from this instability, anxiety, and the difficulties sleeping. The desire to shield children from the constant violence creates tension and anxiety and constant fear and frustration. Parents find it difficult to deal with their children, as they become more violent and tense.
- Parents remain in daily fear for their children due to the ongoing arrests and raids, military presence around schools, and the use of teargas and sound bombs near students to intimidate them. Some parents are forced to accompany their children to school and back.



- The compounded problems of daily raids, the destruction of property, detention and violence against children, and the levying of large fines and the resulting financial pressure all contribute to the feeling of insecurity in daily life for residents of Issawiyah.

Conclusions from the Old City

- Children living in the Old City feel fear due to the constant presence of occupation forces as they commute to school and back home, the inspection of their bags by security and soldiers, and attending their schools inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque.
- There are not enough children's clubs and designated areas to play in the Old City, which negatively affects the children, who are confined to their houses due to the presence of military and armed settlers.
- Children experience psychosocial challenges due to exposure to constant violence, confinement at home, denial of entry to the al-Aqsa Mosque and its courtyard, and restrictions on the right to education and worship.
- Children witness commonplace attacks via the physical inspections by the military, prevention of entry into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the use of tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets, which create in them a sense of fear and social isolation. Many children prefer to stay at home with their families rather than leave the home.
- Parents are anxious and worried about their children, forcing them to remain at home rather than playing freely outside the home. Parents prefer to go with their children to the al-Aqsa Mosque because they are fearful that their children will be exposed to violence, but this also has implications for the parents. Parents worry that their children are becoming angry towards the occupation and feeling the desire for revenge.
- Residents and the Al-Aqsa Mosque guard believe that the occupation forces intentionally target children as they are going to and from school in order to disrupt the educational process and encourage them to stay home (out of fear) or to drop out.
- Parents in the Old City reported psychosocial problems in their children ranging from problems eating and using the bathroom to behavioral problems.





Psychosocial Analysis

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes mental health as a state of welfare or “well-being” that helps the individual to cope with the pressures of ordinary life so that he or she can work productively and fruitfully and offer an effective contribution to society. Mental health, in turn, is affected by physical and emotional influences and the ability to maintain a normal healthy balance between social, political, economic and environmental conditions that influence development and natural psychological growth. The greater the number of positive environmental influences, the greater the individual’s chances to enjoy good outcomes and productivity, and visa versa. This study reviews number of political conditions and rights violations against children in Jerusalem, their impact on childrens’ mental health, and the long-term outcomes for the the Palestinian family and the wider community.

This research targets children and adolescents, which are in the most sensitive developmental stages experienced by humans, during which the individual’s psychological shape and self-identity is being formed. This process demands favorable and appropriate conditions for normal psychological growth. The findings here describe the complete opposite: exposure to the loss and shock of house demolitions, arrests and home detention, beatings and attacks, and deprivation of the right to play and enjoy childhood, creating an environment that is inappropriate and unsuitable for normal development.

Moreover, it is important to note that childrens’ exposure to traumatic events, as documented here, is compound and complex, similar to that experienced by individuals in war. One of the children talks about losing his father and brother and then having his home demolished, with all the consequent shocks and traumas (relocating to a new neighborhood and community, having to make new friends, and so on). This kind of complex trauma then results in children developing sadness, loss of energy, a lack of interest in school, and difficulty concentrating, as well as violence and aggressiveness accompanied by physical/psychosomatic symptoms. Children here are documented trying to use defensive strategies to protect themselves from the intensity of the pain that they feel, offering justifications or other explanations. Some parents report that their adolescent children express the desire to carry out revenge, or show signs of looking for personal heroes. They see in their search for someone to identify with that the “martyr” is considered the hero, and “martyrdom” heroism, and this is what draws them to try to participate in resisting the occupation, even adopting the role of adults by doing so.

The exposure of children to detention, house arrest, torture and pressure tactics in interrogation, leaves an important imprint on children’s psychological equilibrium, as described here. After detention, children have difficulties continuing their schooling, and withdraw from the social frameworks important in their lives. They seek social isolation and avoid discussing their experiences with their parents rather than re-encounter the memories of prison. They push away sleep to avoid nightmares. These symptoms appear to be signs of trauma and are consistent with post-traumatic stress. They reflect other research that those who experience detention often develop symptoms of shock (Khamis, 2012). The mental health literature shows that human/children’s repeated exposure to violent or

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The children interviewed here were exposed to numerous successive traumatic events, similar to the experiences of those living through war. For example, the loss of a father, then a child’s home, and then the neighborhood and friendships causes social isolation, lack of energy and interest in school, and aggression and violent behavior.



A Palestinian man contemplates the rubble after part of his home in Jebel al-Mukabber was demolished by Israeli authorities. Source: Yousef Khanfar

traumatic events leads to the constant arousal of the nervous system resulting from the brain's efforts to prepare for danger. This, in turn, weakens the capabilities of the individual to think and analyze life as it passes by. It can result in the individual adopting reactive personality traits, and makes offensive actions (the "fight" response) more common in dealing with ordinary life events. As the individual becomes more violent in dealing with others, he/she also becomes less able to concentrate, sleep and plan for the future, as well as becoming more susceptible to disease, high blood pressure and anxiety and fear of separation. Overall, this impacts children's desire to enjoy life and their ability to learn and study, which is why the study finds that many of the children who report repeated experiences of raids, arrests and demolitions also have withdrawal symptoms and a lack of interest in returning to school.

These results are consistent with the study published by the Palestinian Counseling Center, *Broken Homes*, on the psychological effects associated with exposure to the demolition of homes in Jerusalem. That 2005 study found that house demolitions had a long-term impact on children's academic achievement because they lost interest in attending school. A study carried out in South Africa on the effect of violence on children and adolescents (Govender and Killian, 2001) showed that exposed children developed symptoms of loss of ability to concentrate and problems sleeping due to nightmares and bad dreams, positively correlated with their exposure to violence.

It is important to note that individuals have different levels of coping with violence or shocking events. According to a separate study (Dillenburger K., Fargas M. & Akhonzada, R. 2017), while all of those studied who had been exposed to violence or shocking events had psychological symptoms post-event, only ten percent developed mental disorders such as post-traumatic stress, depression and anxiety or difficulties connecting with others or a positive outlook for the future. As such, the varied individual responses throughout the research is not surprising. Indeed, one might find the extent of the evolution of psychiatric symptoms among the study's respondents higher than ten percent, although the inability to perform a clinical exam on respondents makes it difficult to draw a clear conclusion here.

Some parents of these children reported here that their children are developing reactions such as a desire for revenge against the occupation and the need to be heroic. In adolescence, the study shows that some Palestinian teenagers come to believe that to lose one's life in fighting the occupation is a prized role, and they become more casual about the risks of participating in political life and adopting the roles of adults in defending the homeland.

One of the main resources in assisting children to cope with the symptoms of these shocks are the adults in their lives. Literature indicates that adults are best placed to bring safety and stability to children after exposure to trauma. The most important protective resource appears to be adults or parents with whom children have a strong and positive relationship. This, of course, is negatively impacted when parents themselves are witnesses or victims of violence, and as a result have difficulty in fulfilling their role as a source of love and security. (Osofsky, 1999)

Not only do parents feel tension, anxiety and fear, according to the study findings, but they are even being asked to play the role of the aggressor or "warden" (in the case of house arrest) and prevent their children from exercising their right to play and going about their normal lives. This creates a gap between parents and children and increases the tension within the family, turning the house into a prison and straining their relationship. The study found that parents are becoming more violent out of concern for their children, weakening the family's role as a safe place for these children and even making it a place of tension.

Normally, safe places to play help children in creating a state of psychological and emotional balance, solving the contradictions and dilemmas in life and allowing children to express themselves in an autonomous forum. In Jerusalem, this arena is lacking, and children are often unable to leave the home and play with friends due to fears of arrest and violence. Prayer or worship as a means of coping with the pressure is also restricted in the Old City, as access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque becomes more difficult.

This study shows clearly that the violent policies and practices of the occupation that are aimed at weakening the psychological, social and education foundations of the Palestinian family and society are creating a generation of children whose normal development is hindered, with longterm consequences. These children's rights to play, to learn, to be safe and protected are being negatively impacted. It is critical that Palestinians work to raise awareness about these practices and to provide support that will help children and their families withstand their effects and maintain a harmonious social fabric. Moreover, we must all stand opposed to the suffering of children in Jerusalem; the ongoing trauma and violence they experience has clear negative implications for their future.





Recommendations

As a result of these findings, the PCC makes the following recommendations for the international community and civil society actors:

- Work to end the occupation as the main cause of violence in Palestinian society with all its negative effects for Palestinian family relationships and society, in particular for women and children.
- Pressure Israel to stop its policies that expose children to violence, especially detention and house arrest, because of their negative effects on children and lasting psychological affects that impede the normal development of their lives, particularly education and employment.
- Stop the policy of collective punishment against Palestinian families through the demolition of homes, which negatively impacts parents and children and the relationship between them.
- Expose the occupation's policies against children in international forums by presenting research results and preparing further studies.
- Provide programs that offer psychosocial services for children who are subjected to detention and house arrest, helping parents and children through the most difficult experiences that too often cause social isolation, fear, insecurity and dropping out of school.
- Provide programs in Jerusalem aimed at helping children to protect themselves from the attacks of the occupation and cope with the daily incursions and violence.
- Provide programs for the parents of children who are exposed to violence to help them to manage stress and pressure and reduce its impact on their relationship with their children and family relations.
- Provide programs that help parents positively engage their children after detention rather than expecting their children to return to normal life. Parents need assistance in understanding what their children have experienced and learning how to deal with their children once they return home.
- Provide outreach programs for children who are exposed to house demolitions and help them to cope and adapt to their new situation and new home, since they and their families face great challenges in absorbing and integrating into their new environment.
- Provide support services for all families that have had their homes demolished, with particular attention to coping with successive shocks. These families need legal, financial and psychosocial support in order to overcome the emotional and other challenges of such events.
- Provide programs for children that help them to protect themselves, specifically students that encounter the military and security forces as they arrive at and leave school.
- Work to stop the policy of denying children access to the al-Aqsa mosque and the ability to play there.
- Provide protection for children seeking to reach the schools located within the walls of Al-Aqsa, where the study results show that children face difficulty accessing school, contributing to school attrition.

- Expose policies of ill-treatment and torture of children in Israeli prisons, especially during interrogation, where the interviews showed that children are subjected to beatings, threats, harassment and pressure.

Recommendations by the Young Researchers

Old City

- Protect children's rights in Jerusalem and hold accountable the perpetrators of crimes against Jerusalem children.
- Work to establish centers and clubs that are well-equipped, safe, and large enough to accommodate the number of children in the Old City.
- Support the needs and interests children that are held in house arrest, and help them socially and academically.
- Create public libraries that are equipped with computers and other requirements that allow children to obtain information.
- Ensure the presence of paramedics in playgrounds and schoolyards in order to ensure safe places of play for children.

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- Create a special community committee or designate a person in charge of assisting parents and their children who are exposed to house demolition for whatever reason.
- Offer psychosocial sessions to support children who are exposed to the demolition of their home.
- Offer work meetings and awareness sessions for parents on engaging positively with their children after the difficult period of house demolition.
- Educate the community to enliven social supports for those whose homes are demolished and protest against the policy of house demolitions.
- Engage children in various activities in order to relieve the internal pressure they have.

Issawiyah

- Protect children in Issawiyah from confrontations and arrests with the army, and the closure of roads and house demolitions.
- Provide playgrounds and centers with safe toys for children far from and protected from the occupation's provocations.
- Defend children's rights and allow them to fulfill their childhood.
- Conduct studies and research that allow the voices of children to be heard by all parties.



Silwan

- Follow-up with children detained with academic and psychological support.
- Support the parents of child detainees, providing them with legal advice and educating children in detention according to their rights, such as the need for children to be interviewed in the presence of lawyers.
- Stop the violations of settlers in Silwan.
- Providing lawyers to follow-up with children detained in Silwan, where there is a shortage of lawyers, and mental health professionals that can visit children at home and offer them psychosocial support.
- Provide children with clubs to engage them during their leisure time, and support the future of child detainees, especially children held under house arrest.



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