



مركز شؤون المرأة - غزة
Women's Affairs Center - Gaza



**Research Paper on:
The Impact of the 2023/2024 War on the Gaza Strip
on Divorced and Abandoned Women**



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2024

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The Impact of the 2023/2024 War on the Gaza Strip on Divorced and Abandoned Women

Introduction:

Since October 7, 2023, the Gaza Strip has been undergoing an extensive war that not only obstructed every aspect of life but also resulted in a large-scale humanitarian catastrophe affecting all segments of the Palestinian population, including men, the elderly, children, and women. For decades, Palestinian women have faced multi-layered adversities, including discrimination, violence, and violations of their dignity and rights, which have now intensified to add new and terrifying dimensions to their suffering during the ongoing war. Thousands of women have subsequently become victims of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and acts of genocide.¹

Data on casualties among women since the onset of the war indicate that women are seemingly being systematically targeted, with the apparent aim of suppressing reproductive potential within Palestinian society. Women constitute approximately 49% of the Palestinian population, with (1.63) million in the West Bank and (1.13) million in Gaza.² Around (9,000) women have been killed, accounting for 29% of the total death toll of (30,717) persons; (72,156) women have sustained injuries, representing 75% of the overall injured population.³

Displaced women are estimated to comprise nearly half of the (2) million displaced persons, most of whom are taking refuge in displacement camps and shelters lacking essential living conditions. According to UN Women, the ongoing war kills approximately (37) mothers each day, severely impacting their families' lives and reducing the available protection for their children.⁴

Israel has not only resorted to killing, terrorizing, and displacing Palestinian citizens but has also imposed policies that aim at starving and depriving them of basic resources.⁵ Intensive bombardment has targeted all components of the infrastructure and economy, leading to the destruction of factories, bakeries, and restaurants that are essential for providing food to citizens. The Israeli occupation forces have deliberately attacked vital service systems, destroying all capabilities of municipalities, which adversely impacted the provision of water, sewage services, and waste collection. Furthermore, hospitals and health centers, along with healthcare professionals, have been particularly targeted, which has undermined their capacity to deliver healthcare and exacerbated issues of famine and malnutrition, ultimately increasing mortality rates due to hunger.⁶

1. United Nation: Women bearing the brunt of Israel-Gaza conflict: UN expert, 20th November, 2023. Available at: [un.org](https://www.un.org)

2. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Awad on Conditions of Palestinian Women on International Women's Day Eve, 8th March, 2023. Available at: pcbs.gov.ps

3. Same reference above (2)

4. United Nation: UN Women Raises Concerns of 'War on Women' in the Gaza Strip, 1st March, 2024. Available at: [un.org](https://www.un.org)

5. On World Water Day: When Thirst Is Used as Weapon to Kill Gazans, 22/03/2024. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2024/3/22>.

6. (Palestinian Association for Human Rights: Shahid): Starvation Policy Imposed by the Occupation Constitute a War Crime and Security Council's Call to Compel Israel to Implement the Decisions of the International Court of Justice

During the (2023-2024) war against the Gaza Strip, women have encountered significant challenges in accessing basic needs in light of severe shortages of food, water, and medicine, compounded by a sharp increase in commodity prices.

The Israeli violations against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip have severely affected women and marginalized groups. Divorced women have been particularly targeted, with their homes subjected to missile strikes and artillery fire without prior warnings. In some instances, warnings were issued; however, these were often described as formal and did not meet international law standards, which underscore the necessity of protecting lives and property. One divorced woman, who had been living in her brother's house, recounted, "My brother's house was bombed, so we moved to the family house, but then we were forcibly displaced several times due to repeated incursions into our area. Each time, we miraculously survived, and on some occasions, we had to break down the neighbors' wall to escape the intensity and horror of the bombardment."⁷

Background:

Divorce is influenced by multiple causes and has significant implications for families and society in general, as well as direct consequences for divorced women themselves. Under existing legal frameworks in Palestine, divorce is primarily a right reserved for men, while women can only request separation without the formal right to initiate divorce. As per statistics on marriage and divorce in Palestine, a total of (43,430) marriage contracts were registered in 2022 across Sharia courts and churches, including (24,263) contracts in the West Bank and (19,167) contracts in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the number of registered divorced women for the same year at Sharia courts and churches in Palestine was (9,564), of which (5,302) were in the West Bank and (4,262) in the Gaza Strip.⁸ Analyzing divorce rates to marriage rates over the past five years reveals that 2022 witnessed the highest rates of divorce, indicating a significant increase in the overall divorce rate in Palestine, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Specifically, the data shows that there are (220) divorce cases for every (1,000) marriages.

The recorded cases of divorce in Palestine include (3,850) cases of irrevocable divorce before consummation, (4,427) cases of irrevocable divorce after consummation, and (1,287) cases of revocable divorce.⁹

7. FGD no. (1) – Shelter at a government School – Gaza Strip – June, 2024

8. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Dr. Awad on Conditions of Palestinian Women on International Women's Day Eve, 8th March, 2023. Available at: pcbs.gov.ps

9. Palestinian Information Center: Marriage and Divorce in Palestine. Available at (wafa.ps)

According to Hassan Al-Joujou, Head of the Supreme Council of Sharia Judiciary in the Gaza Strip, marriage cases in Gaza declined by 6.3% in 2022 compared to 2021, while the divorce rate increased by approximately 0.9%. The total number of divorce cases recorded in 2022 amounted to about (4,319) cases.¹⁰

Paper Terminology¹¹ :

1- **Revocable Divorce:** This type of divorce allows the husband to revoke the divorce and reconcile his divorced wife in his life without a new marriage contract, provided she is still within her waiting period. This reinstatement can occur with or without the wife's consent.

2- **Irrevocable Divorce:** This type of divorce results in a permanent separation between the wife and husband. It is divided into two types:

- **Minor Irrevocable Divorce:** This type of divorce occurs when the husband loses the right to reconcile with his former wife, except through the establishment of a new marriage contract.

- **Major Irrevocable Divorce:** This type of divorce occurs when a husband divorces his wife three times. In such cases, reconciliation is not possible until the wife completes her waiting period and enters into a permanent, non-temporary marriage with another man. Only after this new husband initiates the divorce of his own accord can the wife's first husband reinstate her, provided she has completed her waiting period following the divorce from her second husband.

Divorce entails specific legal rights and entitlements for divorced women. The Palestinian Personal Status Law and the Palestinian Family Rights Law of 1954 regulate personal status matters for Muslims, including marriage, divorce, alimony, and separation. These laws outline the mechanisms for terminating marital life. In Palestine, a husband has the unilateral right to terminate the marriage at any time by pronouncing or verbally declaring the word of divorce to his wife. Conversely, if a woman wishes to end the marital relationship, she may file a petition for separation. This process involves the termination of the marriage through a judicial ruling issued by the Sharia court, based on a lawsuit filed by the wife. This process allows the woman to retain her financial rights, which include her immediate dowry for household furniture and deferred dowry.¹²

- Deferred Dowry:

The term deferred dowry refers to a situation in which a specific period for the dowry has been established. In such cases, the wife is prohibited from demanding the dowry before the specified due date, even if a divorce occurs. However, if the husband dies, the specified due date becomes null and void. In instances where no specific due date has been determined, the dowry is considered deferred until either divorce takes place or one of the spouses passes away.¹³

10. Anadolu Network: Gaza Decline in Marriage Rates and Increase in Divorce Cases in 2022. Available at: <https://2u.pw/nQXHae>

11. Sanaa Al-Kholi: Marriage and Familial Relations, Al-Nahda Publishing House, Beirut, 1949

12. Divorce and Separation at Sharia Courts of the Gaza Strip: Between Imposed Complexities and the Pursuit of Justice (masarat.ps)

13. Shadi Abdel-Fatah: Texts and Provisions of the Family Rights Law in Palestine, May 2024. Available at: (mohamah.net)

- Alimony During the Waiting Period:

According to Article 134 of the Personal Status Law of 1976, if a husband unjustly divorces his wife without valid grounds, and she seeks compensation from the Sharia court, she may be entitled to compensation as deemed appropriate by the judge, provided that it does not exceed her alimony amount for one year.

This compensation may be awarded as a lump sum or in installments, contingent upon the circumstances of the case. The financial situation of the husband, whether he is affluent or facing hardship, is taken into account, and such considerations do not affect the wife's other marital rights, including her entitlement to alimony during the waiting period.¹⁴

- Visitation and Hosting:

Circular No. 22/2010, issued by the Supreme Council of Sharia Judiciary, addresses claims for visitation rights concerning minors. It stipulates that both parents are entitled to visit their minor child once a week. In the absence of the father, whether due to death or incapacity, the paternal grandfather assumes this visitation right. If there are no living parents or paternal grandfathers, then those entitled to custody, even if there are multiple claimants, have the right to visit the minor once every two weeks at a designated time. The circular also specifies that other relatives are not prohibited from visiting the minor along with those who have the right to visitation. Furthermore, if the minor is under three years of age, visitation must not exceed two hours.

For minors aged three years and older, visitation should last a minimum of three hours, scheduled between 9:00 AM and 7:00 PM, ensuring that it aligns with the best interests of the child.¹⁵

- Custody:

Custody is regarded as an obligatory duty in Islamic law, as neglecting a child's care may lead to their loss or harm. This obligation also extends to individuals unable to manage their affairs independently, such as incapacitated elderly persons and those with severe mental illnesses. Both groups fall under the category of collective obligations. Islamic scholars have reached a consensus that women possess a greater right than men in matters of custody and the upbringing of minors. The mother is at the forefront of those entitled to custody, provided she meets the stipulated conditions, placing her ahead of other female relatives of the child in this regard.

According to Article 380 of the Personal Status Law, the mother has the right to the custody of her children and their upbringing during marriage and after separation; then after the mother, the right of custody reverts to the next eligible woman in accordance with the order established in the school of thought of Imam Abu Hanifa. Article 384 further emphasizes that the right to custody is granted to the mother's side.¹⁶ The Personal Status Law governing the Gaza Strip defines the duration of custody, specifically, Article 391 states, "The duration of custody for a boy concludes when he reaches independence from the care of women, which is considered to occur at the age of seven years.

14. Article 134 of the Personal Status Law of 1976 (najah.edu)

15. Khalil Bakri: Right to Visitation of Children According to Palestinian Law, May 2024: Available at: (mohamah.net)

16. Fatima Hamdan: Sufficient Information on Custody in Palestinian Law, May 2024. Available at: (mohamah.net)

Conversely, the duration of custody for a girl ends upon her reaching the age of nine years. At that point, the father is granted the right to select one of the custodians." Furthermore, the judge possesses discretionary authority to extend the custody period by an additional two years for both male and female children, should it be determined that they require continued care from women.¹⁷

Wage of the Caregiver:

The wage of the caregiver is distinct from the wage for breastfeeding and alimony. Article 389 of the Personal Status Law stipulates that if the child's mother is the caregiver and is either married or in her waiting period following a revocable divorce, she is not entitled to a wage for caregiving. However, if she is irrevocably divorced, married to a prohibited relative of the child, or in a waiting period for such a divorce, she is entitled to a wage, even if she is compelled to provide care. Furthermore, if the caregiver does not have suitable housing for the child, the child's father is obligated to provide accommodation for both the caregiver and the child. If the child requires a servant and the father is financially capable, he is also obligated to provide one, and caregivers, excluding the mother, are entitled to receive a wage for their services. Moreover, governments provide financial assistance to divorced and abandoned women as women are classified among the groups most eligible for social security benefits, whether they are widows, divorced women, abandoned women, or married but without a provider or to an imprisoned husband.¹⁸

Objectives of the Paper:

- 1- Identifying the implications of the war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 on the legal status and rights of divorced and abandoned women.
- 2- Evaluating the economic consequences of the war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 on divorced and abandoned women.
- 3- Underscoring the social repercussions of the war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 on divorced and abandoned women.
- 4- Identifying the psychological effects of the war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 on divorced and abandoned women.

Methodology:

This paper employs a qualitative analytical approach to examine the impact of the war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 on divorced and abandoned women from their perspectives rather than using statistical analysis. Ten in-depth individual interviews were conducted, both face-to-face and via telephone, with divorced and abandoned women. The divorce cases among the respondents varied, including instances of minor irrevocable divorce as well as cases of revocable divorce, with differences in the timing of the divorces; some women were divorced after October 7, 2023, while others had been divorced prior to this date. Additionally, two interviews were conducted with service providers: the first with a legal service provider for divorced and abandoned women, and the second with a psychological support provider serving the same demographic. Furthermore, four FGDs were conducted in various shelters located in the Gaza and Middle Governorates. The researcher also conducted an analysis of relevant reports and studies.

17. Same Reference Above (3)

18. Al-Haqi, Mamdouh Allah: The Economic and Social Costs of Divorce from the Perspective of Social Development Committee Workers in Riyadh, 2023

Findings:

The war against the Gaza Strip 2023–2024 has exerted momentous implications for divorced and abandoned women across multiple aspects. The most notable include:

First: Legal Impacts

The disruption of Sharia courts in the Gaza Strip, especially in the northern region due to the ongoing war, has intensified the hardships divorced and abandoned women face. This situation has posed significant challenges for them, hindering their ability to obtain their legal and financial rights. Below are the key rights that many divorced and abandoned women have been deprived of:

1- Financial Rights and Alimony:

Abandoned women have faced significant hardships in receiving their financial rights, particularly the stipulated alimony, during the war due to the disruption of Sharia courts. Many have been unable to complete their divorce proceedings so as to receive their financial entitlements, including deferred dowry, immediate dowry for household goods, and accumulated debts.

One abandoned woman (Participant A) stated, "The courts are dysfunctional, so we can neither receive alimony nor recover debts or any of our rights."¹⁹

Another divorced woman confirmed this, explaining, "My husband evades paying alimony and financial support for raising the children."

The situation for these abandoned women has worsened due to the prolonged duration of the war, displacement, and separation from their families.

The lack of an official document confirming their divorce has deprived them of numerous legal and financial rights.

One abandoned woman (Participant B) remarked, "The courts are disrupted, and I am neither married nor divorced. I do not have any official documents to prove my social status and claim my legal rights."²⁰

The conditions for divorced and abandoned women, particularly younger ones, have further deteriorated, especially for those displaced outside displacement camps and shelters.

A service provider and humanitarian aid worker confirmed, "There are specific criteria and conditions required for beneficiaries to be able to receive aid in the shelters, including that the beneficiary must be among the displaced persons residing inside the shelter. Each displaced family is entitled to aid, and an abandoned wife with children receives assistance; however, if she and her family are living in the same shelter as her husband's family, the aid is distributed among them to prevent conflicts. Any displaced woman outside the shelters who has not documented her social status is denied assistance."²¹

Likewise, the suffering of suspended women has intensified, especially younger ones who have filed for divorce during the war. The absence of official documentation confirming their divorce hinders their ability to lead normal lives and diminishes their chances of remarriage.

One suspended woman expressed, "I am still young; my dream is to have a family."²²

19. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine – June 2024

20. In-depth individual interview over the phone with a recently abandoned woman (Participant B), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

21. Interview with a Shelter Manager, Gaza Strip, Palestine – June, 2024

22. FGD no. (3), held at a shelter in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

2- Hosting and Visitation:

The hardships faced by abandoned and divorced women have intensified due to the separation of families across the northern and southern regions of the Gaza Strip, which prevents them from visiting or hosting their children.

One divorcee (Participant D) shared, "My ex-husband denies me visitation rights and refuses to allow me to host my children, under the pretext of security concerns. He argues that traveling around poses a serious risk to them due to the severity of the war."²³

Another divorced woman stated, "We live in an overcrowded tent, sleeping on the bare ground and sand; we are attacked by insects all the time. These conditions have deprived me of seeing my children."²⁴

Abandoned women also have reported facing coercion and exploitation by their husbands during the war. In this regard, an abandoned woman said, "My husband was unyielding and used the war as a pretext to deny me of seeing my children."²⁵

Another divorced woman (Participant H) mentioned, "I do not want to lose my daughter. Death lurks everywhere, and danger follows us like a shadow. So, to protect her, I agreed for her to travel with her grandparents. Yet, I am deeply pained, as I was deprived of bidding her farewell and now I will not be able to visit or host her due to the war."²⁶

3- Custody:

Child custody is a central issue that frequently intensifies conflicts between separated parents; particularly, the current war represented an opportunity for some husbands to evade responsibilities or exploit the situation to exert control, retaliate, or undermine the rights of their ex-wives by denying custody and manipulating children against their mothers.

For example, one woman, recently divorced in a revocable divorce, shared, "Since October 7th, my ex-husband has turned my children against me, using the war as a pretext to estrange them from me and deny me custody of my youngest daughter, who is just a few months old. He tells them that I had abandoned them to face the war alone."²⁷

Another abandoned woman, reported, "My husband took our children from me and withheld custody to prevent me from traveling, using this as a means of coercion."²⁸

Due to the deteriorating living conditions and widespread poverty, many families have also refused to assume custody of their daughters' children. A divorced mother confirmed, "My ex-husband avoids paying alimony and childcare expenses, and thus my family refused to take care of my children. So, I have been deprived of their custody."²⁹

23. Interview with one of the displaced divorced women (Participant D), Deir Al-Balah, Palestine, conducted on 07/07/2024.

24. FGD no. (3), held at a shelter in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine - 2024

25. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine - June 2024

26. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant H), Gaza Strip, Palestine - on 15/07/2024

27. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant W), Gaza Strip, Palestine - on 08/07/2024

28. FGD no. (2), held at a shelter in a school, northern region of the Gaza Strip, Palestine - 2024

29. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant J), Gaza Strip, Palestine - June, 2024

The compromise of the children's welfare is perhaps the most significant tragedy in such custody conflicts, as they are often the most vulnerable party. Deprived of a stable environment with both parents, they are sometimes left in the care of relatives who may lack the resources to provide adequate support in such adverse conditions. This often leads to psychological instability and resentment due to separation from their mothers. Many of these children develop psychological disorders and experience diminished well-being.³⁰ Furthermore, legal protections fail to do justice for those children most of the time, enabling fathers to evade court orders and retain custody. Consequently, children may end up in the care of strangers, be placed with stepmothers, or live with relatives who may lack the resources or ability to meet their needs.

Second: Economic Impacts:

The severe economic corrosion resulting from the current war has led to profound disruptions in the social fabric of society. It has undermined the stability of family structures, affecting both married couples and divorced and abandoned women. Below are the key economic consequences of the war on this vulnerable population:

1- Insufficient Financial Support and Heightened Economic Need

The economic hardship encountered by divorced and abandoned women has intensified due to the disruptions in daily life triggered by the war. This situation is sometimes further exacerbated by husbands' evasion of financial alimony obligations.

This challenge is highlighted by a recently abandoned woman, stating, "I have no stable income, no educational qualifications that would enable me to secure a job in the future, and I am over fifty years old. I feel like a burden on my family."³¹

Another divorced woman confirmed this, expressing, "My financial situation has worsened because banks have stopped their operations, and I no longer receive the financial assistance designated to me from the Ministry of Social Development, making it extremely challenging for me to secure my essential needs like food, water, and medicine."³²

2- Loss of Livelihood

The war has significantly disrupted all facets of life, including the economic sector. It has resulted in the closure of numerous companies and businesses in both the private and public sectors within the Gaza Strip, leaving countless people without a means of livelihood. This has also impacted women employed in the private sector who lost their jobs due to business closures, forcing them to rely on charitable donations and food aid to support their families.

A displaced divorced woman responsible for seven children reported, "I lost my job with a cleaning company because of the war, and my financial situation is dreadful. I cannot secure even basic needs, and I have had to cut back on expenses; I depend on food aid to feed my children."³³

30. Phenomenon of Divorce: A Study of Causes and Consequences – A Field Social Study in the City of Diwaniya. Available at: (researchgate.net)

31. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine – June 2024

32. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant T), Gaza Strip, Palestine – 2024

33. In-depth individual interview over the phone with an abandoned woman (Participant H), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

3- Increased Financial Burdens and Monthly Expenses Due to Mass Displacement and Excessive Inflation

The frequent displacement, intense bombardment, enforced starvation policies, and skyrocketing prices of essential commodities have significantly increased the economic burdens on divorced and abandoned women. One respondent stated, "The war has increased my financial burdens due to recurring displacement as we search for safe shelter amid intense bombardment and destruction. This situation has created a substantial financial burden that makes me feel helpless and has profoundly affected my mental health."³⁴

Another abandoned woman remarked, "Each instance of displacement costs us nearly \$1,000, and transportation expenses have exceeded \$200."³⁵

The lives of divorced women have become increasingly complicated due to the suspension of operations of most government institutions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private companies. Securing stable employment that ensures financial sustainability has become a momentous challenge for these women. Furthermore, the allocations of social financial aid mandated by the state through the Ministry of Social Development have been halted.

Divorce entails substantial financial implications, particularly for women who already face precarious financial situations and lack the skills or academic qualifications necessary for employment.

These challenges aggravate the pressures they struggle with and reduce their ability to fulfill positive roles in society due to their limited resources.

One of the most prominent weights of divorce is the financial deprivation resulting from the loss of support that the husband previously provided during the marriage, leading to a decline in the living standards of divorced women, particularly given that many of these women struggle to obtain alimony from their former husbands. The financial situation of divorced women worsens owing to the costs associated with legal proceedings they are forced to pay to secure alimony, which often results in further financial losses.³⁶

This financial strain has intensified due to the ongoing war on the Gaza Strip, which has led to the disruption of operations of Sharia courts, banking services, and other state institutions, all while essential goods and commodities have seen drastic price increases.

Third: Social Impacts:

Divorce poses significant social consequences that adversely impact divorced women; the intensity of these repercussions has heightened for divorced and abandoned women due to the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip 2023-2024. The most prominent consequences include:

1- Isolation, Social Withdrawal, and Restricted Mobility Due to Stigma

Divorced and abandoned women have encountered increasingly adverse social conditions during the war that have negatively impacted them, limiting their mobility and hindering their ability to move freely.

34. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine – June 2024

35. In-depth individual interview over the phone with a recently abandoned woman (Participant B), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

36. Al-Haqi, Mamdouh Allah: The Economic and Social Costs of Divorce from the Perspective of Social Development Committee Workers in Riyadh, 2023

The heightened levels of interaction and overcrowding within displacement camps and shelters have particularly affected recently divorced women.

A respondent noted, "My brothers refuse to let me leave the house alone and prefer that one of their children accompany me when I go out while I prefer solitude and avoid interaction with others."³⁷

Many divorced women keenly choose isolation to avoid social complications. This tendency has been further exacerbated by the increasing number of displaced persons taking refuge in their households. One recently abandoned woman stated, "I live in isolation to escape from people's negative perceptions."³⁸

The distress of divorced and suspended women in displacement camps and shelters has been exacerbated, leading some to choose isolation to avoid embarrassment. One divorced woman shared, "I am extremely sensitive, which negatively affects my well-being, so I find comfort in withdrawing and distancing myself from people, which in turn helps me avoid the need to justify myself and being regretful at times."³⁹

2- Increased Social Problems Due to Displacement

The overcrowding and frequency of displacement, combined with the primitive and challenging living conditions, have significantly increased the societal roles of divorced women and exacerbated the social problems among couples, leading to a higher incidence of divorces.

A recently divorced woman stressed this point, stating, "My husband verbally divorced me because I refused to flee and live in a tent."⁴⁰

Feelings of instability and insecurity, alongside heightened household burdens, such as fetching water and enduring long waits to obtain cooking gas refills or purchase bread from bakeries, have compounded the psychological stress that exceeds normal human tolerance.

This strain has led to an increase in quarrels and disputes, as well as the emergence of behaviors that diverge from established social values of the Palestinian society, creating substantial rifts that foster feelings of hatred and hostility. A divorced woman confirmed this, saying, "Our hatred and resentment toward each other have deepened owing to the frequent quarrels and severe psychological stress."⁴¹ Additionally, another woman noted that the ongoing war on Gaza has strained social interactions and significantly diminished altruistic and social solidarity values. She remarked, "My son is selfish; he only cares about himself and his children. He hid the humanitarian aid from me and sold it without my knowledge."⁴²

37. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant W), Gaza Strip, Palestine – on 08/07/2024

38. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine – June 2024

39. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant Y), North of Gaza Strip, Palestine – on 20/07/2024

40. FGD no. (3), held at a shelter in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine - 2024

41. FGD no. (4) – Held at an URWA School, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – June 2024

42. In-depth individual interview over the phone with an abandoned woman (Participant H), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

3- Rise in Family Disintegration and Fragmentation:

Divorce poses negative social repercussions that have intensified during the war, the most severe of which is the disintegration and fragmentation of families. One recently abandoned woman noted, "We have been scattered and displaced, and our social problems have multiplied. Half of my children are under my custody, and the other half are with their father."⁴³

The deterioration of familial relationships, coupled with crises and family fragmentation, has adversely affected the mental health of women. This was evident in the personal testimony of a divorced woman who stated, "My mental state is shattered. I am in the northern region while my children are in the south. I live in constant tension and anxiety; the thought of losing one of them deeply disturbs and worries me. I think about them constantly; I cannot remember the last time I slept soundly. I am afraid of the thought that I would die before I see them again."⁴⁴

4 - Expansion of Circle of Violence:

The amplification of the genocide in Gaza and the deteriorating living conditions have led to a marked increase in gender-based violence (GBV) rates. A legal service provider underscored the issue, noting, "The war, coupled with severe economic conditions, including men's inability to secure employment, and increased psychological pressures among couples, has led to significant social challenges for women. These limitations have exposed women to various forms of violence, including psychological, verbal, physical, moral, and domestic abuse by their husbands.

This situation adversely impacts women, contributing to a rise in cases of abandonment and divorce."⁴⁵

The following outlines the forms of violence experienced by abandoned and divorced women during the war on the Gaza Strip:

Verbal and Physical Abuse:

A divorced woman (Participant W) recounted her experiences during the war, stating, "From the beginning of our marriage, I have endured multiple forms of violence from my husband, including verbal, emotional, physical, and psychological abuse, which I concealed from my family. However, his abuse escalated during the war, resulting in injuries that affected my balance and vision. He frequently threatened to prevent me from seeing my children if I disclosed his abuse to my family. Also, during the war, he prevented me from contacting my family or answering their calls. When my brothers knew that he had verbally divorced me, which he later denied, they insisted on taking me to their home."⁴⁶

Domestic Violence:

An abandoned woman (Participant H) shared, "My husband forcibly takes all the aid allocated for me, using it for himself and his children from his other marriage. Also, I have not received any financial support from him for the past ten years."⁴⁷

43. FGD no. (4) – Held at an URWA School, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – June 2024

44. FGD no. (2), held at a shelter in a school, northern region of the Gaza Strip, Palestine - 2024

45. In-depth individual interview with Lawyer Mohammed Soubaih

46. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant W), Gaza Strip, Palestine – on 08/07/2024

47. In-depth individual interview over the phone with an abandoned woman (Participant H), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

Social Violence:

A divorced and displaced woman living in a shelter reported experiencing a significant lack of privacy and an increase in social behaviors that contradict established societal norms. She noted, "Young men lurk everywhere, often using abusive language, whether intentional or not. Widespread verbal and visual harassment is becoming more common."⁴⁸ Another divorced and displaced woman described experiencing social violence, stating, "Following my divorce, I assumed sole responsibility for my children, a burden that has intensified with the onset of the ongoing war. We are suffering due to the lack of privacy and the verbal harassment we have to endure while waiting in line to obtain water, purchase bread, or receive food from community kitchens."⁴⁹

The challenges encountered by divorced women are exacerbated in displacement and shelter settings, where their lives become significantly more difficult due to the deteriorating social environment, persistent lack of privacy, frequent conflicts, and the growing burden of household responsibilities.

5- Social Alienation Among Family Members

A displaced divorced woman, currently residing in her sister's home, expressed her feelings of isolation, saying, "The war is cruel; I cannot find a safe place. I have been forced to live in my sister's house, confined to a room made of metal plates on the roof. I feel alienated in her home, as though I am a burden to her and her children. She mistreats me.

I wish to find another place to take shelter, but the prospect of living alone in a different place is socially unacceptable because I am divorced."⁵⁰

A psychosocial support expert observed, "Divorced women who have lost both parents and reside in their brothers' homes often experience profound social alienation within their siblings' families. They frequently report feelings of helplessness and a lack of independence, perceiving themselves as burdensome to their siblings."⁵¹

Participant responses varied regarding the extent of family support and protection. One participant stated, "It is unrealistic, given the economic hardships and complexities of life, for my family to assume the financial burden of raising my children. Owing to my family's inability to support me economically, I chose to work to provide a livelihood for my children."⁵²

Meanwhile, divorced women anonymously agreed that family serves as their primary refuge and support; one participant noted, "My mother has provided every form of support and protection for me and my young daughter. I draw strength from her, as she has never withheld anything from me."⁵³

These findings indicated that the war has intensified the social challenges divorced women face, particularly within displacement centers and shelters. Conditions of overcrowding heightened interpersonal tension, and loss of privacy compounded feelings of social marginalization and reinforced existing negative societal stigmas.

48. FGD no. (2), held at a shelter in a school, northern region of the Gaza Strip, Palestine - 2024

49. FGD no. (4) - Held at an URWA School, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine - June 2024

50. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant T), Gaza Strip, Palestine - 2024

51. Suhail Mattar, Psychosocial Support Expert at UNRWA Shelters, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine - 24/07/2024

52. FGD no. (2), held at a shelter in a school, northern region of the Gaza Strip, Palestine - 2024

53. FGD no. (4) - Held at an URWA School, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine - June 2024

Consequently, many of these women prefer not to disclose their marital status to avoid potential exposure to social and psychological violence, including offensive remarks or intrusive looks. In response, some women opt for self-isolation, minimizing social interactions, and limiting their movement to only essential activities.

Fourth: Psychological Impacts:

The war on the Gaza Strip 2023-2024 has exerted significant psychological impacts on divorced and abandoned women; the most prominent effects include:

1- Increased Anxiety, Fear, Terror, and Overthinking

Most participants have reported heightened psychological distress associated with the war, manifesting as increased anxiety, fear, distrust of others, regret, self-blame, and pervasive overthinking. One of the abandoned women (Participant A) described her psychological suffering, stating, "I cannot sleep at night due to excessive worry over my children. I try to contact them and inquire about them through a mutual acquaintance. My fear and anxiety intensify whenever I hear that one of them has gone to the Al-Kuwait or Al-Nablusi roundabouts to secure a bag of flour for their siblings. I am kept awake by overwhelming thoughts and fear for them, haunted by the constant threat of death that follows us everywhere and could strike at any moment."⁵⁴

2- Increased Psychological Stress

The ongoing genocidal war on the Gaza Strip has markedly escalated psychological stress among divorced women, largely due to their lack of independence and support systems. One divorced woman expressed a desire to have a tent of her own beside her brothers' tents, to experience a sense of independence and psychological relief. Another woman is undergoing major mental strain caused by being separated from her children, who remain in the north while she has been displaced to the south.⁵⁵

Psychological pressures are particularly severe for displaced divorced women with adolescent children. One respondent shared, "I do not receive any assistance although I am the sole provider for my three children. So, I had to start working to support my family after my former husband passed away in 2014. Now, with my children in early adolescence, I constantly worry about their safety and well-being, especially due to the lack of restroom facilities near our tent. The inadequate sanitation conditions in the shelters exacerbate my psychological burden, as we endure long waits in unsanitary facilities, which is particularly concerning with my daughters now being adolescents."⁵⁶

3- Increased Feelings of Tension and Despair

Divorced and abandoned women have anonymously reported intensified feelings of despair and tension due to the ongoing war and the repeated displacements it has entailed. A respondent shared, "I feel deep despair and extreme tension. We are simply waiting for death, living in a state of homelessness."

54. In-depth individual interview with a recently abandoned woman (Participant A) in the Gaza Strip, Palestine – June 2024

55. Suhail Mattar, Psychosocial Support Expert at UNRWA Shelters, Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 24/07/2024

56. FGD no. (3), held at a shelter in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

My growing sense of hopelessness compounds my tension and despair each day, as I fear we will never return to our homes. We have lost the peace and warmth that once defined our lives.”⁵⁷

4- Sleep Disorders:

Divorced women reported experiencing significant sleep disturbances during the war, primarily due to psychological strains. One participant described her experience, “I do not get any sleep; I fear for my children from the bombardment while I am far from them. Communication with them was often interrupted, especially at the beginning of the war, which heightened my anxiety about their safety and prevented me from sleeping at night.” Another divorced woman confirmed this, stating, “I do not sleep since I have been deprived of custody of my children, including my five-month-old daughter.”⁵⁸ A third woman conveyed her distress, saying, “My heart aches and this prevents me from enjoying sleep due to my deep longing for my daughter... She is in the south and I am in the north... I long to see her, hold her, and smell her scent.”⁵⁹

Abstract:

The cohesion of families and the institution of marriage are witnessing an unparalleled crisis due to the ongoing genocide against the Gaza Strip. The practice of reconciliation has become increasingly challenging due to the sudden and unprecedented societal changes, particularly given the collapse of judicial, tribal, and familial systems, as well as family instability, repeated displacements, and the daily struggle for scarce resources available to displaced populations. Living in tents that lack the essentials for a dignified life has severely impacted divorced and abandoned women, depriving them of legal and financial rights, alimony, and the ability to see or host their children. These women are often subjected to exploitation and retaliation from their former husbands, who hinder their efforts to gain custody and incite the children against them, taking advantage of the dysfunctional court system that further separates them from their children. Additionally, the war has led to economic repercussions, resulting in the loss of livelihoods, increased poverty, and heightened vulnerability to fraud, theft, and financial extortion, exacerbated by rising expenses due to frequent displacement and soaring prices amidst widespread poverty and unemployment. Socially, the war has contributed to heightened introversion, social isolation, and frequent disputes among the displaced, as well as the fragmentation of families and couples.

57. In-depth individual interview over the phone with a recently abandoned woman (Participant B), displaced in Deir Al-Balah, Palestine – 2024

58. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant W), Gaza Strip, Palestine – on 08/07/2024

59. In-depth individual interview with a divorced woman (Participant Z), North of Gaza Strip, Palestine – on 20/07/2024

These issues stem from the bearings of displacement, which has resulted in overcrowding and a lack of privacy. The social fabric that existed prior to the conflict has been disrupted, leading to increased exposure to verbal, physical, and social violence, along with feelings of social alienation, discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation. Divorced women, in particular, have faced prevailing societal stigmas that exacerbate their situation. The psychological pressures these women have been facing are immense, as they live in constant fear and terror, worry excessively about their children, and endure persistent anxiety, tension, and frustration. Sleep disorders arising from ongoing bombardment and displacement have been compounded by the deprivation of seeing, maintaining custody of, or visiting their children. These factors have contributed to feelings of loss and the experience of unhealthy, unsafe, and undignified living conditions, including residing in tents that are inadequate for accommodating all family members, particularly in extended families.

Recommendations:

- 1- Ensure comprehensive support for divorced and abandoned women by providing adequate psychological, legal, social, and financial services through relevant organizations in the Gaza Strip.
- 2- Establish a dedicated social fund for divorced women to guarantee a regular monthly income, enabling them to navigate the volatile political and economic landscape in Palestine. This fund should also safeguard the rights of their children and offer financial assistance for the development of projects that generate sustainable economic income.
- 3- Mobilize community efforts to advocate for the recommencement of judicial court operations that have been suspended due to the ongoing war.
- 4- Develop community awareness programs aimed at educating women about their legal and economic rights, thereby enhancing their social status.
- 5- Conduct in-depth research studies to inform the development of guidance programs designed for divorced women.
- 6- Formulate a comprehensive national policy to address the effects and repercussions of the war on divorced and abandoned women.
- 7- Establish family clinics in displacement camps and shelters and implement training programs for family and community physicians, targeting specialists in psychology, sociology, and education to effectively address familial issues and the psychological impacts of the war.
- 8- Create legal clinics in displacement camps and shelters to address familial issues arising from the war and to provide divorced women with information regarding their legal rights and entitlements.