

Women Against Violence

**Attitudes Towards the Status of Palestinian  
Women and their Rights in Israel**

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## **Introduction**

This report is a summary of the findings of a comprehensive research, conducted in 2004/05 under the auspices of the Women's Rights Project of the Women Against Violence (WAV) Association. The goal of the research was to examine the attitudes of Palestinian society in Israel towards status of Palestinian women and Palestinian women's rights.

The research utilized a combination of three different research tools, which were quantitative and qualitative, and included a comprehensive survey, such that 1,200 questionnaires were distributed among various Palestinian localities in Israel; in-depth interviews were conducted with 36 men and women from different social backgrounds; and discussions were organized within 9 focus groups.

## Abstract

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive research that was conducted to examine society's attitudes towards the status of Palestinian women and their rights in Israel, and to reveal the various modes of social control and the obstacles that confront a significant transformation in their status. The research focused on five principal questions:

1. What modes of social control are used within society to maintain existing power relationships, and so maintain women's inferior status; what factors prevent their active participation in political, social and economic spheres; and what factors prevent them from attaining their rights?
2. What are the prevailing attitudes in society towards specific women's rights such as the right to employment, the right to education, the right to be protected from violence and the right to participate in political and public life?
3. In what spheres is society willing to countenance change? In what spheres does society refuse to countenance any change whatsoever? What type of change is demanded? And what are the best means to bring about this change?
4. What is the attitude of society towards violence against women? How socially legitimate is violence as a means of "educating" and "solving conflicts"? What solutions does society consider to be effective in assisting women to escape from the cycle of violence?
5. How aware are people of the services available offering assistance to victims of violence, whether governmental or community services (including those operated by the various feminist organizations)? What are people's attitudes towards the benefits of contacting these services? Which kind of services are more socially acceptable? What is the general public opinion towards the discourse and methods of the feminist organizations?

The present research derives from the understanding that Palestinian women in Israel are part of a patriarchal society, which lives in a State where it is discriminated against as an indigenous national minority. The research hypothesizes that Palestinian women in Israel encounter discrimination on three levels: discrimination on a national basis, as part of the Palestinian minority; discrimination on a gender basis within the Palestinian society to which they belong; and discrimination as part of the population of women living in a macho, militaristic state. In order to understand the status of Palestinian women in Israel, the research combined three different research tools, which included both quantitative and qualitative methods, to conduct in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a quantitative survey. The findings from each of the three tools were analyzed, combined and compared. The aim of utilizing quantitative tools along with qualitative ones, was to achieve results that were as precise and comprehensive as possible of Palestinian women's reality.

#### **The research utilized three quantitative and qualitative research methods:**

**Focus groups:** Nine focus groups were convened, such that each focus group had between 8 - 14 participants. The groups included: 1) politicians and political activists; 2) religious leaders and lawyers who specialize in *Shari'a* law and human and civil rights; 3) social workers and those employed in the fields of social services, social welfare and education; 4) journalists and those working in newspapers and various radio stations, including local radio and television stations; 5) activists in women's and feminist organizations representing different approaches; 6) students studying at institutions of higher education; 7) housewives and unemployed women; 8) women factory workers; and 9) girl high school students.

**Open in-depth interviews:** Thirty-six interviews were conducted with men and women from various sectors including: a Knesset member from the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality; a Knesset member from the United Arab List; religious leaders from the three faiths (Muslim, Christian and Druze); community, political and women's activists; academics; university students; independent professionals; workers and housewives.

**Survey:** The survey encompassed 1,200 men and women aged 18 and over, living in 30 Arab communities, rural and urban, as well as in mixed (Jewish and Arab) cities. The sample of localities was chosen according to a number of factors: geographic location, religious differences, size of locality, its location and proximity to non-Arab communities, and the locality's socio-economic status. The respondents were all Palestinian citizens of Israel, and were randomly sampled in each locality from among those who had the right to vote in the Knesset elections. The survey was conducted by interviewing each person in the sample group individually and face to face at home, with no third party present, except when it was unavoidable. (For example, when interviews were conducted with young women from families who required the presence of another family member during the interview. In such cases it was made absolutely clear that he would not be given any opportunity to interfere in the answers given to the survey's questions or exert any influence on the respondent). The survey was conducted by researchers over the period between December 2004 and January 2005. Maximum standard deviation was 3.7%.

## **Principal Findings of the Study**

The research found that in Palestinian society in Israel, many different views are held concerning the status of women, their role in society, the dynamics of the relationships between the sexes, the best ways to promote the status of women, and people's perspectives on various modes of social control. It was found that attitudes towards the rights of women are affected by a number of independent variables, such as the level of formal education, geographic location, socio-economic status and gender. The results of the quantitative research found that statistical differences exist, such that attitudes towards women's rights are positively correlated with educational achievement and with rises in the individual's monthly income. More accepting and positive attitudes towards women's rights were found among residents of the North and Centre than among those of the South. Similarly, more positive attitudes exist among the younger cohorts in the sample group, and less positive attitudes among those older. In addition, statistical and qualitative differences exist

between men and women. Women respondents expressed more liberal attitudes towards women's issues than men did.

The study also found that attitudes towards women could be split into two categories: attitudes towards women's rights, and attitudes towards the respect due to women. It was found that respect for women did not contradict the wish to continue controlling them. The study also found that attitudes concerning women's rights can be divided into two categories: attitudes to specific rights and attitudes to strategic rights. "Specific rights" are considered to be in response to the social changes and demands of modernity. "Strategic rights" relate to the relationship between the two sexes in the patriarchal structure manifested in the control of women by means of cultural values and codes, such as family honour, reputation, and the division of labour within the home. The research found that while society demonstrates a high degree of willingness to recognize specific rights, such as the right to education and to employment, it is still not ready to recognize these rights unconditionally, or without linking them to a number of demands that *de facto* reinforce the existing patriarchal structure of society, such as not recognizing women's right to freedom of movement, or to control over her own body, or to forming relations built on complete equality between man and woman. Accordingly, patriarchal concepts such as reputation, family honour and its tolerance of the use of violence against women (and even murder, in certain cases) remain a kind of insurance policy, guaranteeing the reproduction of relations of domination between the two sexes.

### **The Right to Education: A Conditional Right**

It was found that women's right to education is the most widely and even enthusiastically accepted women's right in Palestinian society: More than 95% of those surveyed saw the need for women to have equality or complete equality in the right to education, and saw acquiring an education as important for improving women's status. When asked for factors that would improve women's status, 91.7% of the sample identified the need to change the general concepts of society which harm women's status. 84.7% felt that whether a woman is educated is the most positive factor affecting women's status. After education came the woman's personality: 79.5% said that a woman's strength of personality positively affects her

status in society. At the same time, 70.4% affirmed the importance of women's right to employment outside of the home.

The discussions in the focus groups and the interviews found that formal education constitutes a "weapon" in the hands of women, which they can use to defend themselves from misfortune and to guarantee a respectable position and income in the future. However, education for women was not regarded as an unconditional right, but rather, as a right bounded by a network of patriarchal patronage, such as the need for young women to maintain accepted patterns of behaviour at university, or sometimes, the condition that she does not sleep outside the home, requiring her to travel daily to and from the university. This notwithstanding, acquiring a formal education remains the only right that received a widespread consensus of legitimacy.

### **The Right to Employment: On the Condition that the Division of Labour is not Disrupted**

The woman's right to work was widely perceived as legitimate: 89.9% of the survey respondents said that the creation of places of employment for women improves the status of Arab women; 82.6% of the sample recognized women's right to work if they so desire; 77.8% of the sample agreed to a large extent or agreed that a married woman's employment contributes to improving the family's situation. A few interviewees also noted that women's employment is the key to strategic change, and that it will contribute in the long run to changes in the cultural and social values that discriminate against them. As was noted in attitudes to education, at first glance it seems that recognition of women's right to employment is unconditional. However, this recognition is conditioned by a number of factors that do not always depend on the woman or society, but on the State, such as the creation of nearby places of employment, the establishment of pre-school care for young children, the provision of good working conditions, or the provision of organized transportation to places of employment when they are not adjacent to residential areas.

Moreover, women's right to work is acceptable on the condition that she does not challenge the gendered structure of the workplace. Some types of work, like truck driving, trading or directing a company remain types of employment that are considered inappropriate for women: 84.7% of respondents noted that driving buses

was more appropriate for men, and 48.9% said that directing companies was more appropriate for men; only 1% considered it more appropriate for women.

According to the results of the survey, women do very well in work and professions that do not demand managerial skills or decision-making, like work in textile factories or food preservation plants and canneries (39.4%). 11.2% of those surveyed said that the teaching profession is more appropriate for women than for men, while 5.7% considered the opposite to be true. 83% felt that the profession is equally appropriate for both sexes. Similarly, 21.8% suggested that the nursing profession is more appropriate for women than for men, while 8.3% suggested the opposite; 69.7% stated that it is equally appropriate for both sexes.

Occupations that are considered more appropriate for women, like teaching, nursing, and working in textile and food preparation factories and canneries do not threaten male authority. Men remain the decision makers and power holders in the public sphere. Women are placed in positions where they do not have the authority to make decisions, but only receive orders. The types of employment involving decision-making, like directing a company, ability to control transactions, as in trade, or controlling large machinery, such as a truck, are considered to be more appropriate for men. They are jobs that involve a high degree of control, rationalism and the ability to compete in the marketplace.

Moreover, these types of job also involve interaction with male social groups, without the laws of surveillance that apply in formal institutions such as in schools, health clinics or factories. A woman who works in trade, or who drives a bus or taxi is forced to go into "the street" and to deal not only with men from all social classes, but also with male strangers whose behaviour towards women is unpredictable in a world which considers "the street" a male domain. The findings from the interviews and the discussions in the focus groups indicate that women who work in independent professions which demand unconventional hours, such as in journalism and politics, face social pressures that make them feel guilty for not fulfilling their primary obligations, i.e. as "mothers and housewives".

In addition, accepting that a woman works outside of the home does not automatically imply a redistribution of domestic duties. The reason is that specific tasks, such as preparing meals or cleaning the home, are still considered to be women's work, even if the woman is employed outside the home. In practical terms this means that women who go out to work double their workload, since they become a worker, as well as being a housewife.

The attitudes of the survey respondents towards working women correlated with their gender and level of education. It was found that 83.8% of the women agreed or agreed to a great extent that the work of a married woman contributes to improving the family's situation, while the proportion of male respondents who agreed fell to 72.4%. Statistical differences were also evident according to the respondents' level of education: 88.7% of those with academic degrees said that women who work contribute to improving their family's situation, while the proportion who agreed among those with high school education was 76.2%, and the proportion among those with only primary education dropped to 73.8%.

Similarly, statistical differences exist between the two sexes over the division of domestic duties. These attitudes were also affected by the respondents' level of education. The attitudes of the participants in the sample divided by gender: While 75.7% of the men said that the task of cleaning the home was the mother's role, that figure fell to 63.4% among women. Among female respondents, 35.8% considered that housecleaning was the responsibility of both spouses, while the proportion of men who agreed was 22%. Those with university education expressed more liberal attitudes towards men sharing the domestic burden vis-à-vis the more conservative attitudes among those with only elementary education: 84% of those with elementary education only believed that the task of housecleaning is the wife's responsibility, while the proportion among those with high school education was 71.6%, and that figure dropped to 50.7% among those with university education. Similarly, 87.4% of those with elementary education only said that the task of preparing meals at home was the wife's responsibility, while the proportion of those with high school education who agreed was 73.9%, and only 48.6% amongst university graduates.

## **Recognition of Equality in Political and Public Life: On the Condition that It Does Not Threaten Male Control**

73.2% of those surveyed expressed a willingness to vote for a list headed by a woman, and 86.2% stated that the Arab political parties should place the issue of promoting the status of women at the top of their political agendas. 78.1% supported women's involvement in political and social activism on an equal footing with men. According to the results of the survey, it seems that society is willing to see a woman Knesset Member or women in the local councils: 85.2% of the sample felt that allocating a quota of guaranteed seats for women on each political party's list of candidates would help raise the proportion of women active in Arab politics, at both the local and national levels, and including their representation in the Knesset. A very high proportion of survey participants (88%) agreed to the need to increase social awareness of women's right to appropriate political representation. However, a threat by women to boycott the elections was considered the least effective tool at raising their representation (37.5%).

Respondents expressed a variety of opinions on the political participation of women, which correlated with gender and socio-economic status. While 70.2% of the men support or support to a great extent the active participation of women in politics and public life, the proportion among women who agreed stood at 86%. Similarly, those with higher incomes expressed more liberal opinions towards women's active involvement in politics than did those with lower incomes: 58.8% of respondents with above average monthly incomes (6,500+ NIS) expressed opposition or strong opposition towards political leadership remaining in the hands of men. This figure among those with average incomes stood at 61.7%, and the percentage went down to 50% among those who described their income as below average.

## **Attitudes Regarding Marriage Issues**

98.1% of the sample group members indicated that mutual respect between the husband and wife was the factor that affected or that most affected the success of a marriage. 95% stated that giving women freedom of choice in choosing their life partner is one of the most important factors in the success of a marriage. A similar proportion (94.9%) pointed to similar levels of education for the husband and wife as a factor contributing to marital success. 54.6% stated that the most appropriate

woman's age at which to get married was between 22 and 25 years old, and 35.8% indicated that 18-21 was most appropriate. The survey discovered a clear difference between the most appropriate marital age for men and women: 72% of the sample said that the ideal age for men to get married was 26, while the proportion that said that 26 was the ideal age for women was only 8%.

It was also found that the attitude of the respondents towards marriage between relatives correlated positively with age. Far more of the youngest cohort of survey participants expressed very strong opposition to marriage between relatives than did those in the older groups. While 32.8% of those aged 18-28 years old supported or strongly supported marriage between relatives, among 51-61 year olds 38.8% agreed. This figure rose to 54.7% among those aged 62 and over. Thus, there was a gap of 22% between the youngest group in the sample and the oldest group. 77.3% of the participants in the sample identified the notion of protection as the principle factor in the widespread phenomenon of early marriage among girls. 75.2% indicated that the fear by family members of the possibility that their daughter might not marry affects this phenomenon to a very great extent or to a great extent. 68.7% of the sample participants indicated the preference of men for marrying younger girls as affecting to a great extent or to a very great extent this phenomenon.

65.1% of those surveyed expressed understanding for a man who marries more than one wife in situations where the woman cannot have children, while 49.1% showed understanding in cases where the wife becomes chronically ill. 13.3% expressed an understanding in cases in the case where the husband is wealthy, and 10.6% expressed understanding in the case where the "wife" only gives birth to female babies.

### **Attitudes Towards Divorce**

The attitudes of the respondents were split on the question of legitimacy of women demanding divorce: 56.7% expressed understanding or great understanding in cases where the husband becomes mentally ill, and the rest (42.3%) did not show any such understanding. In the case of a husband using violence against his wife, the proportion of those who showed understanding or great understanding of the wife demanding divorce was 79.7%, and 67.1% expressed understanding in the

case of a husband marrying a second wife. 39.5% expressed understanding or great understanding if the husband is sexually impotent, while 60.5% showed little or very little understanding in this case.

In the event of a divorce, it was found that the vast majority of the participants in the sample preferred to turn to religious rather than civil courts. 77% preferred that the case be heard by a religious court, while 23% preferred following the civil code. It should be noted these legal preferences correlated with level of education: Only 14.8% of those with elementary education only preferred civil courts over religious courts, while this proportion among those with high school education rose to 20.9%, and among those with university education reached 36.7%. The survey also revealed that these preferences depended on age. Those in the youngest and middle cohorts showed greater willingness to turn to a civil court: 26% of the group 18-28 years old expressed such willingness, and this percent among those 40-50 years old rose to 28%, while the proportion fell to 18.7% among those aged 51-61, and reached a low of 11.5% amongst those aged 62 and older.

### **Behavioural Codes**

Positive attitudes towards women's right to education, to employment and to defend herself from violence do not necessarily indicate that Palestinian women in Israel have already overcome all the obstacles and stereotypical social roles expected of the two sexes. On the contrary, the present research indicates how deep-rooted a large number of social values, beliefs and norms are, which prevent women from realising their full humanity or enjoying their rights. The research reveals that notions related to behavioural codes, such as family honour, respect and reputation, are still fundamental codes that are widely supported, and are red lines that cannot be crossed. Accordingly, social acceptance of women's rights is not possible, except within the boundaries and not outside of the hegemony of established patriarchal thought. In other words, society's acceptance of women's rights should be understood as a reformist perspective within the boundaries of patriarchy, rather than acting against it. This can be seen clearly in the near unanimous positive attitudes towards the rights of women to education; and the simultaneous variety of attitudes that exist towards granting women complete freedom.

## **Customs and Traditions**

The research found that society sees the following factors as the principal obstacles standing in the way of achieving equality between the sexes: Customs and traditions (47.1%), men's mentality (47.7%), and the absence of women's economic independence (37.1%). It is important to note that the participants in the survey distinguished between customs and traditions, and religious values: 31.1% listed religious values as an obstacle to achieving full equality between the sexes. A similar proportion (32%) recorded biological differences as an obstacle. Contrary to the claims of traditionalist and fundamentalist circles, society does not see women's biology or religious values as the principal obstacle to full equality between the sexes, but rather culture and all its values and customs, and men's mentality which has been crystallised in the shadow of this culture. Yet this recognition is problematic in itself, since it presumes the possibility of a neat separation between religious values and cultural values. Such a separation is impossible, due to the intertwining of the two. Furthermore, recognition that Arab culture hinders equality does not necessarily mean a rejection of that culture. We find the best evidence for this in the complex attitudes revealed during the focus groups and in-depth interviews: on the one hand, there was a focus on the importance of respecting our culture, and on the other hand, the imperative of being bound by the culture's red lines. This was expressed by emphasis on the uniqueness of Arab culture, which attaches utmost importance to honour, reputation and behavioural discipline, in contrast to other cultures.

Attitudes towards customs and tradition are influenced by geography: 61.6% of the participants from the Negev said that customs and tradition have a great impact on not granting full equality to women and men in Israel; the proportion of those living in the Galilee who felt the same way was 48.4%; the proportion was 45.1% for those who live in mixed cities; and 36.1% for those living in the Triangle. It should be observed here that the acknowledgement by residents of the Negev that customs and tradition are the principal negative factor on women's status was not accompanied by a sense of the need to change that culture. The acknowledgement is simply of this objective reality, that customs and traditions are the principal tools producing and reproducing unequal relationships between the sexes.

The research found that attitudes towards customs and tradition are also influenced by the economic status of the respondents. Those with the highest incomes were more likely to see customs and tradition as an obstacle to granting equality to women and their realizing equality. 57.5% of those with the highest monthly incomes (more than 6,500 NIS) agreed that customs and tradition constitute to a great extent an obstacle to equality. The proportion of those with average incomes who agreed stood at 49.1%; while the proportion of those agreeing with lower than average incomes was 43.1%. The research also highlighted differences in attitude according to level of education: 37.2% of those with elementary education only thought that customs and tradition greatly impeded equality between the sexes; 48.8% of those with high school education thought so; while the proportion among university-educated respondents reached 54.8%.

### **Attitudes To Violence: Inconsistent Attitudes**

Among the things most indicative of the paradoxical attitudes towards women's issues, whether connected to specific rights and respect or to preferential relations between the two sexes, is the emphasis on women's rights to employment, to education and to develop a strong personality, and the tolerance and affirmation of women's rights this implies on one hand; and on the other, the deep roots of values derived from customs and tradition, such as showing an understanding of murder in the name of so-called "family honour", and the imperative to maintain the cultural values related to "family honour", respect and reputation, which contribute to oppressing the woman. This paradox cropped up repeatedly in interview. In the survey society seemed to support protecting women from violence; and seemed to show an understanding for violence on some occasions.

93.8% of the survey respondents expressed the need for action to overcome violence, including physical, verbal and sexual violence directed against girls and women, because this problem is considered to be a social one. 79% of the sample expressed understanding for a woman's request for a divorce when she suffers from violence at the hands of her spouse. However, a not insignificant proportion still show an understanding for men beating women: 36.8% expressed understanding at hitting women who do not take care of their children; a similar proportion (37.9%) showed understanding, or understanding in certain cases, for beating women who

leave the house without informing their husbands; 26.6% expressed understanding, or conditional understanding of hitting a woman when differences of opinion between the couple flared up; and 22.3% understood such beatings when differences of opinion flared up between the wife and the husband's family.

It is important to note here, that a contradiction exists between not showing understanding for beating a woman who refuses to have sexual relations with her husband (76.3% of respondents), and the attitude that society takes in refusing to define a situation in which the husband forces his wife to have sex with him as rape. 23.4% of respondents refused to describe such force as rape, because in their opinion, having sexual relations with one's wife is a right granted to the husband. 35.4% felt that even though the husband does not have the right to force his wife to have sexual relations with him, it is still not considered rape when it does happen. Thus 58.8% of all the participants in the sample refuse to describe forcing one's wife to have sexual relations with her husband as rape. It must be noted here that differences exist in the viewpoints of men and women on this issue. 28.5% of the men felt that having sexual relations with her husband is one of the wife's obligations; while 18.3% of women thought similarly. At the same time, while 35% of the men see such forced sexual relations as rape, while 47% of the women do.

In attitudes towards crimes of honour crimes, 30.5% of all the participants in the sample expressed an understanding of murders based on so-called "family honour". Again there were differences in the responses by the two sexes: 37.9% of the men showed understanding or great understanding of "honour killings", while among women this dropped to 22.1%. Attitudes towards crimes of honour also correlated positively with respondents' level of education, geographic location and economic status. While 43.3% of those with only elementary education expressed understanding or a great deal of understanding of this type of crime, 29.1% of those with high school education showed similar understanding. This proportion went down to 20.5% of those with university education. The research also found that those with high monthly incomes showed less understanding of murder based on family honour. 22.1% of those with above average monthly incomes (6,500 NIS) showed understanding or a great understanding for crimes of honour. A similar proportion,

(21.4%) of those with average incomes showed such understanding. The proportion went up to 36% among those with below average monthly incomes.

The research showed that no great differences exist in attitudes towards honour crimes between respondents from the Triangle, the Galilee or mixed cities. However, there was a marked difference among Negev residents: 52.7% showed understanding or great understanding of murder based on so-called “family honour”. By contrast, the proportion of those showing such understanding who live in the Galilee was 29.4%; in the Triangle, 28.3%; and those living in mixed cities who showed a similar level of understanding was only 23%.

The research showed that a Palestinian woman’s preservation of her virginity before marriage is still considered to be a very important element in a marriage. Indeed were a husband to leave his wife upon discovering that she is not a virgin at their marriage, then this is still considered acceptable, and society shows understanding of such a separation. Participants from the different geographical areas showed an understanding of a husband's separation if he discovers that his wife is not a virgin: 76.8% of those living in the Negev expressed understanding or great understanding for a husband who separates from his wife in such a case. The comparable proportion of those living in the Galilee was 68.6%, and 62.9% for residents of mixed cities. This proportion dropped among residents of the Triangle to 55.7%.

Attitudes towards the issue of virginity or non-virginity of young women were also divided by age group. The younger cohorts showed much less understanding for separation from a wife who was not a virgin. The proportion of those in the 18-28 year old group who showed no understanding of such cases was 37.5%, with a similar figure (38.9%) among those aged 29 to 39. This fell to 30.6% in the 40-50 year old age group, and reached 27.5% among the 51-61 year olds. For the oldest group, the proportion descended even further, reaching 16.3% among those aged 62 and older. These figures enable us to clearly distinguish the large gap in attitudes between the youngest cohorts and the older generations towards the imperative of virginity.

## **Coping With Violence**

Opinions differ on the viable means that women can use to cope with domestic violence. Obtaining assistance from someone within the family or a respected figure is perceived as the most preferable means, and received the most support (87.9%), while leaving the home received the least support (22.3%). Many of those interviewed emphasized the importance of taking gradual steps in dealing with domestic violence against women. It was clear that the option of contacting the police in the case of physical violence within the family does not get significant support, with only 33% seeing this step as a viable option for the woman. However, the research found that differences in attitudes exist when the woman is the victim of physical violence or of sexual violence. In contrast to the hesitation respondents expressed towards contacting the police in the event of physical violence, they expressed a great deal of understanding (53.6%) for police intervention in a case of sexual abuse within the family; for approaching a social worker (56%), and for turning to feminist organizations (49.1%). Moreover, in the case of a woman being sexually assaulted by an outsider, the proportion of those advising that she go to the police rose to 70.9%, while 63.1% suggested contacting a social worker, and 58.9% suggested turning to feminist organizations.

### **Women's Organizations**

Regarding the women's organizations and society's awareness of existing services that provide assistance to the victims of violence, participants in the focus groups and those interviewed in-depth made a number of suggestions that might positively contribute to improving the professional work of these centres and women's non-profit organizations. The suggestions made were both specific and structural.

The specific suggestions encompassed the need to work on raising awareness among those of both sexes, and not limit such activities to women only. The reason for this suggestion is that focusing on work among women only creates an estrangement between the two genders and increases the gap between them. A few individuals suggested organizing courses for men on women's rights and on supporting women's education. Day-care centres for young children should be opened; and employment opportunities should be created for women. At the structural level, participants emphasized that the women's organizations need to distinguish between practical, strategic goals, and feminist and women's goals.

Furthermore, they also stressed the need for the women's organizations to set a strategic vision for the women's movement and then coordinate work amongst the various organizations.

62.6% of survey participants showed knowledge of the existence of community women's organizations, while 53.8% observed that these organizations are active or sometimes active in their localities.

### **Between a Fraudulent State and a Patriarchal Society**

If we were to make a comparison between society's agreement in principle to women's employment, as we saw in this research, and the reality of women's employment of women, it would become clear that there are a number of impediments standing in the way of actually implementing the desire to work. These are a group of political and structural factors, which do not see Palestinian women as a legitimate target group for their plans. Since Palestinian women are members of an oppressed minority, they are primarily harmed by the oppressive policies of the State and its fraudulent practices towards this minority. The majority of Arab villages and towns still suffer from the lack of appropriate places of employment, of public services such as organized public transportation from villages to neighbouring towns, and of pre-school centres which could provide safe educational environments for small children while their mothers are at work. Thus, Arab women in Israel do not only suffer from a social heritage which treats them as though they were lower than males, and that their behavior needs to be supervised so that they do not deviate from their gendered roles. They also experience personally and physically what it means to belong to the oppressed Palestinian minority. That is, Arab women are prevented from working, because the State does not provide places of employment in their localities.

They can also be prevented from studying at all, if they live in an unrecognized village, without a school. Society views the right to education as an important value, but education is not accessible to all women. This means that they are denied the chance to significantly transform the course of their life. The fact that the State has not created places of employment in Palestinian villages and cities in Israel, and the State's pointed intervention in not recognizing a number of villages, thereby denying

these villages any public institutions, *de facto* leads to a postponement of the chance to change the status of Arab women to an unknown date in the future, and contributes to sustaining the phenomenon of girls' early marriage, because a woman who lives in the shadow of no opportunities to study or work, and who is thus limited to her narrow home life, finds herself caught between only two options: to marry or to wait for marriage.

The State's absence in this situation is not a passive one, but rather an active dereliction of duty, via the expropriation of the possibilities to change women's social status. Preventing women from getting an education is an active intervention, designed to bar women from acquiring a higher education, and instead pushing her down the road towards an early marriage. The State's active dereliction of its duties creates a vicious circle of discrimination against women, and accelerates and aggravates the factors determining women's inferiority. The combination of the conservative patriarchal society and the racist State contribute to intensify the structural obstacles standing in the way of women's emancipation, and leave them trapped within a fraudulent reality.