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The Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development

**Analytical Research**  
**on the Impact of Masculine Culture on Women**  
in Palestine

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# **Analytical Research**

## **on the Impact of Masculine Culture on Women**

### **in Palestine**

(Governorates of Tulkarem, Qalqilya, Salfit, and Tubas)

**Prepared by: Dr. Ayesha AlRifai**

**Research Team: Maysoun Madi and Ranin Obaid**

**Follow-up: Esraa Obaid**

**Research Review: Rawan Ghazzah**

**Arabic Proofreading: Khalid Salim**

**English Translation: Nisreen Kharoufeh**

**English Proofreading and Editing: Hala Morrar**

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This research was conducted within the “Unveil” project, which created a network of Agents of Change to protect the rights of women and youth and counter exclusionary values by improving their capacities and public presence through social transformation training. The project also analysed social values that reinforce gender-based exclusionary behaviours.

The project is part of a wider strategy for the comprehensive protection of the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people under occupation, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, emphasising gender equity and child protection, which ACPP has been developing since 2018, with funding from AEXCID.

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**Dr. Ayesha AlRifai,**  
**Lead Researcher**

## Executive Summary

This research explores the structural gender disparities and examines the prevailing manifestations of masculinity, notions of manhood, and societal attitudes toward gender discrimination. It also investigates their relationship with gender-based violence, particularly against women and girls in the governorates of Qalqilya, Salfit, Tubas, and Tulkarem. It seeks to identify the social and cultural determinants of violence against women and girls, with a focus on the roles of dominant masculine behaviors at personal, familial, and societal levels in fostering such violence. The research further investigates the gender power dynamics within families and the broader Palestinian society, assessing how these dynamics contribute to violence against women and girls. It also aims to highlight the effects of discriminatory practices against women on their rights and freedoms in both public and private domains and to explore the presence of positive masculinity and its potential to mitigate violence against women and girls. The research's significance lies in its illumination of the patriarchal system's hierarchical nature, characterized by dominance and forced submission, which conflicts with human rights values. This system has evolved from historical contexts and circumstances that have shaped the societal framework, reinforcing dominant masculinity.

The focus on the governorates of Qalqilya, Salfit, Tubas, and Tulkarem is due to their ongoing exposure to colonial violence, either because of their proximity to the Israeli apartheid wall or settlements. These areas suffer from human rights abuses, such as land confiscation, displacement, control over work permits, and restrictions on movement and employment. These conditions affect family life and intensify dominant masculinity, as indicated by various statistical studies and this research's findings.

Employing a mixed-methods approach for data collection, the research combines statistical analysis and literature review with quantitative data gathered through preliminary questionnaires and qualitative data from in-depth interviews. It engaged 103 participants, including 79 young individuals in focus group discussions and 24 stakeholders in one-on-one interviews. Data collection was mainly conducted in person and supplemented by remote methods like Zoom or telephone for in-depth interviews, with less than 10% conducted remotely due to mobility concerns caused by occupation procedures and the security and political context in the target areas.

The research revealed that violence against women in Palestine, both generally and specifically in the studied areas, is primarily attributed to the intersectionality between the patriarchal system and its practices and tools, and the Israeli occupation with its practices and tools. These two systems represent models of dominant power characterized by repression, dominance, usurpation, and

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control from one party over another, who is weaker in all cases. Consequently, both systems subject women to complex and multi-level violence as the weaker link in this intricate and complex equation. Women face both patriarchal oppression and the oppression of the occupation simultaneously.

Dominant masculinity predominantly shapes the prevailing culture among men, particularly the older age group, and to a lesser extent among women, albeit with varying degrees across the four targeted governorates. The impact is notably stronger in Tubas and Tulkarem, followed by Qalqilya and Salfit, with discernible differences between rural and urban settings, particularly in villages that are near territories occupied since 1948, where adherence to dominant masculinity is most stringent.

During the research, focus group discussions and individual interviews did not reveal any significant generational differences in men's attitudes toward violence against women and related issues. Particularly in Tulkarem, where young and some older men expressed the most extreme dominant masculine patterns and attitudes compared to all respondents. However, within the youth category specifically, there was a clear contradiction in responses between the initial individual questionnaires, which were mostly gender-positive, and those expressed in focus group discussions. Some young men aligned with each other and with older men in their views. This underscores the phenomenon of social bullying and stigmatization that men face when taking a supportive stance toward women and their rights, whether in front of or with the knowledge of their male counterparts. Traditional forces persist in opposing women's rights agendas through substantial mechanisms aimed at reproducing and perpetuating male dominance, often under the guise of preserving heritage, authenticity, and religion, for which men are held accountable for violating.

The research underscores the formidable challenges women face in both economic and political spheres, where violence is perpetrated in canny, fierce, and aggressive ways. Spaces marked by dispossession, impoverishment, rights deprivation, and inequality are particularly harsh and strategically implemented. Participants across genders and generations show an increased awareness of how upbringing and traditions contribute to prevailing patterns of violence against women, with only a few using religion as justification. Despite entrenched masculinity in the targeted governorates, there are signs of significant transformation, especially in Salfit and occasionally Qalqilya, where positive masculine practices are more accepted and adopted.

The research identified key structural gaps that significantly impact efforts to address and combat violence against women in communities. These gaps are primarily observed in three critical areas: cultural and traditional practices, awareness and education levels, and the educational system.



While laws are undeniably crucial, they are not always the most effective means for promoting positive expressions of masculinity and reducing violence rates or altering aggressive behavior patterns. Some suggest that aligning legal frameworks with cultural influence and awareness-raising efforts is essential to successfully drive desired cultural change, particularly among individuals who may need additional incentives to change their behavior.

**The study's recommendations** to mitigate individual and structural patriarchal violence and its reinforcement of dominant masculinity, underscore the necessity of comprehending the underlying motivations, particularly among men who perpetrate violence against women and other marginalized groups. It emphasizes the importance of dismantling perceived justifications for this violence. Interventions should target this influential group, focusing on promoting the concept of positive masculinity. Efforts should also seek to influence social norms and culture surrounding masculinity by involving men in the theory of change to eliminate dominant and negative forms and foster positive ones. Establishing safe spaces for men to discuss their daily life issues, feelings, emotions, concerns, and fears is crucial. Moreover, integrating women into efforts to reshape masculinity patterns from dominance and negativity to positive forms in upbringing and education is essential. Establishing a strong, unified alliance between youth and women's institutions, along with human rights organizations, is vital for collaborative efforts aimed at achieving significant legislative change, specifically the adoption of the Family Protection Law. Additionally, collaborating with religious institutions and individuals from influential religious leadership of both genders is recommended. The research also suggests that legislative institutions include experts in gender studies in legislative drafting committees to recognize the importance of gender integration and its impact on society. This role can yield several positive effects, including providing better analysis of government or institutional policies to ensure that there is not any discrimination or negative impact on certain groups and proposing policies that promote gender equality and address challenges facing marginalized groups, reflecting the needs and experiences of all segments of society.

## 1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a growing focus within civil society on policies that detail the conditions and rights of women and girls, particularly in relation to masculinity. This interest is in response to the scarcity of studies available in Palestine on this topic. Consequently, The Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development—REFORM has highlighted the importance of establishing gender knowledge through scientific research inquiries. REFORM has issued several studies aimed at addressing the roles and dynamics of gender within Palestinian society, focusing on northern regions of the West Bank. This particular study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of men’s attitudes and behaviors towards women, alongside their perspectives on gender equality.

It is almost superfluous to mention that women in marginalized communities within Arab societies, including Palestine, which are dominated by patriarchal systems, have acquired only a handful of rights. Although there has been some advancement in past decades, this progress remains restricted due to several factors. A primary reason is a pervasive dominance of “masculine mindsets,” which are entrenched in the consciousness of both men and women through socialization processes. Arab societies inherit notions of masculinity that are equated with dominant and authoritarian power, deeply rooted within the cultural fabric. Such dynamics are particularly manifested in the widespread occurrence of violence against women and girls, representing the most prevalent form of gender-based violence.

The patriarchal system, with its formal and informal structures within Palestinian society, intersects with the ramifications of the Israeli occupation, affecting men, women, boys, and girls alike. Some studies suggest that familial restrictions imposed on women and girls are perceived as protective measures in the context of the occupation. Conversely, there is evidence linking the rise in domestic violence to the exposure of men to political violence (UN Women, 2014). Additionally, women and girls in Area C, areas near the apartheid wall in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, and in displacement camps in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, encounter heightened levels of violence and limited access to health, social, and legal services. This is largely due to the control of movement in these areas by the Israeli occupying forces. Resorting to Israeli police for protection can result in a significant loss of rights and exposure to racial discrimination for these women and girls, effectively leaving those subjected to violence without necessary protection.

In her examination of the dynamics between patriarchal and colonial systems and their impact on violence against women in Palestine, Giorgia Baldi (2018) highlights that Palestinian women are subjected to various forms of violence amidst their encounters with the Israeli occupation. This encompasses physical, verbal, and sexual violence, particularly at checkpoints, severely hindering

their freedom of movement. Additionally, arbitrary arrests and house demolitions, leading to limited access to maternal and healthcare services, have worsened the situation of women and intensified the challenges they encounter. A clear correlation has been recognized between the increase in sexual and gender-based violence and violent conflicts, especially within cultures where such acts are widely tolerated and impunity prevails. The societal fabric is continually eroded by instances of sexual harassment and violence, often perpetrated by Israeli soldiers or settler groups. Therefore, the Israeli occupation, through its violent conduct, has fortified patriarchal norms, mechanisms, and supportive practices (Baldi, 2018), significantly hampering the efficacy of development programs focused on gender justice and the advancement of women's rights.

In this intricate and complex context, development efforts, guided by a gender-sensitive approach, seek to dismantle cultural structures entrenched in discrimination and male dominance. The goal is to foster relationships founded upon principles of equality and gender equity between men and women. This ambition extends beyond mere similarity in appearance or status between genders; it is about ensuring their equal rights, access to resources, and the capacity to manage, utilize, and influence these resources with voice and agency<sup>1</sup>.

Dismantling existing structures of discrimination and male dominance and nurturing a generation that embraces positive masculinity are crucial steps in uprooting the foundations of gender inequality across all spheres. This transformation involves forging new relationships based on gender equality. Therefore, incorporating transformative gender analysis into social and development policies can help alleviate gender inequalities. This can be achieved by involving men, women, and youth of both genders in development programs at all stages, including planning, implementation, and evaluation. It also entails ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities, enabling all individuals to realize their full potential, regardless of gender. This approach seeks to prevent one gender from dominating or exerting control over the other, including through various forms of violence, often perpetrated by men against women and girls. However, many programs predominantly target women in interventions aimed at addressing and preventing violence against them, often overlooking the critical need to involve and target men and male youth<sup>2</sup>. This exclusion leaves men on the periphery, unable to benefit from essential services like psychological support and rehabilitation. It also ignores their potential role as advocates and allies, working alongside women to combat and eradicate violence.

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1 Equality in rights encompasses social, economic, political, and legal rights (e.g., the right to land ownership, education, property management, travel, work, etc.), while control over productive resources includes control over resources such as educational resources, land, information, and financial resources. The ability to control and have agency includes the ability to influence resource allocation and investment decisions in the house, community, and on the national level.

2 The term "youth" here refers to the definition used by the International Labour Organization (ILO), which includes individuals aged between 15 – 25 years old.

## 1.1 Background and Rationale

In the Arab Barometer in 2022, including Palestine, a majority of women and men across various countries recognized structural barriers as having a more significant impact on gender equality than cultural barriers (Rouche, 2022). This insight suggests that with necessary political will, governments have the potential to formulate and enforce effective policies to tackle these structural challenges, thereby improving gender equality in both the public and private spheres.

In regional studies involving Palestine, women's institutions unanimously agree that combating violence against women and girls faces significant individual and relational challenges rooted in the intersections of the patriarchal system. These challenges include early and forced marriage, honor crimes, attitudes toward rape, and the diversity of perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. While these intersections may seem cultural on the surface, they are deepened, reinforced, and sustained by various structural tools within the cultural-structural duality. This is especially apparent when considering the challenge of political will, which extends to the public institutional level. According to a consensus among women's rights institutions in the same regional study, which included Iraq, Yemen, and Palestine, the challenge extends beyond sending implicit messages to those opposing or inciting against women's rights. It further solidifies the protective function of tribal communities and their patriarchal systems when activists' safety is threatened by anti-women's rights groups. Paternalistic attitudes within prevailing social norms reinforce rigid gender roles and perpetuate stereotypical patterns across all levels and domains. Consequently, persistent and increasing efforts to silence, along with societal assaults and hostile actions against individual feminist activists and women's rights organizations, compounded by the absence of government protection, continue to pose ongoing social and security concerns in these countries (AlRifai et al., 2021).

To catalyze significant change in these intersections and their associated levels, as well as their support, reinforcement, and consolidation, there is a growing recognition of the necessity for a deeper understanding of masculinity and its identity and cultural expressions among young people of both genders in Palestine. This is crucial for reevaluating power dynamics between men and women to achieve equality and fairness. The main focus is on deconstructing preconceived judgments and gendered social constructs while reconstructing male identity among young people of both genders.

## 1.2 Overall Objective

Examining and comprehending structural gender gaps along evolving expressions of masculinity in diverse manifestations, as well as social attitudes toward gender discrimination and its correlation with gender-based violence, especially targeting women and girls in the governorates of Qalqilya, Salfit, Tubas, and Tulkarem in the northern West Bank of occupied Palestine.

## 1.3 Specific Objectives

1. Identify the social and cultural factors that contribute to violence against women and girls.
2. Outline the dominant male and masculine behaviors that facilitate violence against women and girls across individual, family, and societal levels.
3. Examine the gender power dynamics within the family and the wider Palestinian context and their connection to the prevalence of violence against women and girls.
4. Highlight the impact of discriminatory attitudes against women on their rights and freedoms in both public and private spheres.
5. Detail the manifestations of positive masculinity and their impact on the reality of violence against women and girls.

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## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Previous Studies

In Palestine, the findings from the 2019 violence survey challenge the notion that the rise in incidents of violence against women can be attributed to improved service availability and reduced social stigmatization of such violence, a claim that the data clearly refutes. The survey revealed that over two-thirds of women who experienced violence from their spouses opted to remain silent, with only a marginal 1% to 3% seeking assistance from psychological or legal support centers, the police, or the family protection unit to file complaints or seek protection from their spouses. Meanwhile, 40% of currently married women (aged 18-64) who had encountered some forms of violence were aware of local or governorate institutions offering protection from violence (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Conversely, service providers often refrain from assisting and safeguarding survivors of violence against women, fearing reprisals in a context where they lack legal protection themselves. Furthermore, female activists and advocates for women and girls' rights within women's rights organizations face intimidation and threats, raising concerns about their safety, especially as judicial authorities fail to allay their fears and provide adequate protection, amidst defamation campaigns targeting women's organizations broadly.

Furthermore, instances where women or girls who have faced violence are killed by family members upon leaving safe houses, after seeking temporary shelter, are not uncommon. Moreover, ensuring justice for murdered girls or women in a fair trial for the perpetrator(s) is not guaranteed, especially considering that claiming the killing was in the name of honor is often quickly used as an excuse to exonerate the offenders. This is particularly concerning given the leniency the law often grants to those committing "honor crimes." Additionally, the withholding of information by the family protection prosecution regarding the results of investigations into honor crimes worsens this complex form of structural violence against women and girls by official entities. This is especially troubling considering that these entities are supposed to protect them and ensure justice for them. This ultimately leads to women losing confidence and faith in the law and its enforcement agencies, contributing to their terror and weakening their desire and ability to seek assistance and protection from violence outside the private sphere. Consequently, they are pushed to choose to stay with their abusers in the private space, where their right to safety and security is constantly violated by male family members, most of whom are husbands. The most dangerous aspect of all forms of structural violence is its deep-rootedness in culture, its symbolism in influence, and its shaping of the daily experiences of women and girls affected by it. Hence, we find leading Arab

sociologists like Abdessamad Dialmi (2019) in his study “Towards a New Arab Masculinity” emphasizing the need to realize and recognize that gender-based violence is not just an occasional flaw in the relationship between men and women but a foundational weapon in the hands of men, which they use freely to control and dominate women. Thus, all programs and interventions must be based on addressing this phenomenon.

(REFORM, 2023) carried out a study to explore the underlying reasons for gender-based violence in the Palestinian society. The study aimed to investigate the impact of cultural values, masculine attitudes, and power dynamics on the prevalence of gender-based violence. It identified various factors, including cultural norms that contribute to the normalization of violence. Social norms emerged as a key factor in perpetuating gender inequality. Certain societal expectations, particularly regarding women’s roles, were identified as hindrances to their involvement in the workforce and public sphere, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields, such as politics. The study highlighted a societal preference for men in leadership positions, reflecting a societal perception that confines women to traditional caregiving roles, thus limiting their access to political and leadership roles.

According to Roche’s (2022) analysis of data from the seventh Arab Barometer survey, a clear majority of women and men in most of the eleven surveyed countries, including Palestine, believe that women should not have the same role as men in both the public and private spheres. The survey also indicates a prevailing perception that violence against women is increasing in the region, with a significant gap between the views of men and women. Women’s views were notably higher than men’s when asked whether violence had increased, remained the same, or decreased. The most common response, “increased”, was given in seven out of eleven countries. In fact, in four countries, including Palestine, over half of the respondents (54%) indicated that violence had increased. In the three countries where there was no increase, the most common response was that violence against women remained the same in society. More than a quarter of Palestinians (26%) chose this response, indicating that only 20% of them believe that violence against women has decreased. Furthermore, in all surveyed countries, women were much more likely than men to report an increase in violence (58% - 49%) in Palestine. While men were more likely than women to say that violence had decreased in most cases, which is not surprising. However, the gap in perceptions of violence against women is concerning, as men dominate most government decisions and leadership positions in most private and civil society organizations as well. Therefore, when men downplay the importance or prevalence of violence against women in society or believe that women are lying about it, is unlikely to be properly addressed with the right attitudes and ethical practices from service providers.

These perceptions align with the reality of violence against women in Palestine. According to the latest national survey on gender-based violence conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, approximately two-thirds of Palestinian women (59.3%) experienced some form of violence in 2019, compared to (37%) in 2011. This trend follows years of Palestine's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) under Presidential Decree No. 19 of 2009, which was later acceded to in 2014, although the accession instrument was not published in the Official Gazette, rendering it non-binding.

A regional comparative study focusing on women who were subjected to violence was conducted by Ayesha AlRifai and colleagues in Palestine, Yemen, and Iraq in 2022. A total of 1,167 women who were subjected to violence participated in the survey, with 376 from Palestine, 379 from Yemen, and 409 from Iraq. The findings revealed that participants experienced multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence concurrently. Overall, over three-quarters of them reported experiencing psychological violence, with the highest prevalence observed in Palestine (93.1%), followed by Yemen (79.6%) and Iraq (60.9%). Regarding economic violence, 512 participants (43%) reported experiencing it, with women from Yemen reporting the highest incidence rate (51.6%), followed by Palestine (49.2%), and Iraq with a lower incidence rate (31.8%). Sexual violence was reported by approximately one-fifth of the participants, with the highest rates in Palestine (32.4%), followed by Yemen (14.9%) and Iraq (4.6%), indicating significant differences among the three countries. Participants from all three countries mentioned sexual neglect, although it was not included in the survey tool. It is noteworthy that 31 women (2.7%) of the total participants reported experiencing sexual neglect from their husbands, with similar proportions among participants from Palestine (3.5%) and Iraq (2.9%), and a lower percentage from Yemen (1.6%). Male perpetrators accounted for more than two-thirds, 752 (64.4%), of the participants, with similar proportions across the three countries. Husbands were the primary perpetrators, with (60.1%) of Palestinian participants, (54.2%) of Yemeni participants, and (38.6%) of Iraqi participants reporting violence from their spouses. The latter group also reported violence from a wide range of male family members, in addition to influential women in the family, such as mother-in-laws, aunts, and grandmothers, who play a central role in upholding masculinity and preserving structures of control and dominance (AlRifai et al., 2022).

Women's rights institutions interviewed in the same study reported that the existence of war, colonial occupation, and armed conflict reinforced the already existing patriarchal cultural tolerance towards violence against women and girls in Palestine, Yemen, and Iraq. At the formal system level, the capacities, competencies, attitudes, and mindset of service providers at the sectoral



and intra-sectoral levels were found to pose major challenges, particularly in public institutions. In Palestine, most service providers still need capacity development to be able to work according to the National Referral System for Survivors of Violence against Women and Girls, and the state still lacks procedural provisions to support sufficient commitment. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge the prevailing patriarchal mindset among service providers, with particular sensitivity required for male doctors who serve as primary actors in cases of high-risk violence against women and girls within the health sector, as well as stakeholders within the judiciary sector. Prevailing social norms permeate institutions through their employees and those working within them, shaping their guiding principles, mentalities, values, and beliefs regarding violence against women and girls, and how they program, implement activities, and provide services (Al-Rifai et al., 2022).

There is an increasing international consensus on the importance of involving men and boys in programs and interventions aimed at achieving gender equality, both as individuals and as partners and members of families and communities. This comes especially after the exclusion of men contributed significantly to the failure of gender equality programs in achieving their objectives, due to men's resistance and lack of cooperation, considering them as the abusive party and perpetrators of violence against women and girls, who are almost always survivors or potential victims.

Furthermore, Eileen Kuttub et al. (2017), in the seminal study examining the concept of manhood in Palestine as part of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey in the MENA Region (IMAGES), suggested initiating social change through parenthood, empowering youth as agents of change, promoting positive models of masculinity, and establishing a research agenda on masculinity within research programs capable of generating significant and novel insights into manhood and masculinity. This entails a focus on implementing or producing research that supports policies aimed at promoting justice and gender equality.

There is a growing interest in studying men and youths' understanding of violence against women and girls, including the factors and ideologies that legitimize and accept violence as a behavior and practice. Some studies delve into the perspective of men who commit violence against women, their motives, justifications, and understanding of how they engage in violent acts and rationalize them. For example, in a study conducted by Sikweyiya et al. (2020) in the central region of Ghana, the research team sought to explore the perspectives of men who practiced violence against their partners, particularly focusing on their views of intimate partner violence, the norms and sexual attitudes they adopt, their definitions of manhood, and how these cultural components can drive men to commit violence against women, which aligns closely with our

research. The data revealed how a combination of social, cultural, and religious factors, emanating from the patriarchal system, collectively form the dominant traditional structure of masculinity. These factors encompass the notion that decision-making within the household is a privilege reserved for men rather than women, the endorsement of rigid and distinct gender roles, men's beliefs in ownership of their partners and entitlement to engage in sexual activity with them at will, and the acceptance of wife-beating as a legitimate and tolerable means of discipline. The results indicate that adopting and performing this form of dominant masculinity, or aspiring to achieve it, drives men to use various forms of violence against their female partners. This use of violence is a tactic to control women, assert their power and strength over them on the one hand, and reinforce their inferior status on the other hand (Sikweyiya et al., 2020).

In a survey of youths' attitudes towards violence against women and girls, a total of 180 university students participated, with equal numbers of male and female students enrolled in health, legal, and social disciplines, in three Arab countries including Palestine. These disciplines were chosen considering that their graduates are expected to work in sectors providing services to those who were exposed to violence. Therefore, it might be useful to predict their potential future attitudes towards violence cases. The survey included a tool comprising 11 items to measure youths' attitudes towards rape specifically, considering it as an extremely violent act against victims, with all items in this scale being myths and/or misconceptions about rape. The results showed that the majority of participants held negative attitudes towards the concept of violence in relationships and rape. There was widespread acceptance of rape myths and misconceptions, especially regarding what they considered rape. Palestinian respondents performed the worst in this regard, followed by Iraqis and Yemenis. These supportive attitudes towards violence are part of a rape culture described as an expression of excessive dominant masculinity, defined as a complex set of beliefs that encourage sexual assault by males and support violence against women. The underlying assumption of this concept is that rape does not occur just because someone chooses to rape another person, but because there are attitudes and standards that allow it to happen (Al-Rifai et al., 2022).

In fact, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) regional study on masculinities, which includes Palestine, confirmed that one of the roots of gender-based violence is supportive attitudes towards violence (El Feki et al., 2017), including those related to rape and other forms of sexual violence. The study also stated that unfair gender attitudes are still prevalent in Palestine, for example, about (80%) of surveyed men and (60%) of women agreed that the most important role for women is managing household affairs. Similarly, (77%) of men and (68%) of women agreed that "changing diapers, bathing, and feeding children should be the mother's responsibility". At the same time, (19%) of

men and (14%) of women agreed that “it is shameful for men to participate in childcare or other household chores” (Kuttab et al., 2017).

However, data from Palestine in the international survey conducted as part of the same study revealed significant shifts in attitudes and practices concerning gender among certain men who have expressed recognition for women’s capabilities and equal status. Men, including those who have experienced political detainment, have acknowledged women’s capacity to shoulder all responsibilities, including economic ones, within the family. In the qualitative part of the study, they demonstrated a notable willingness to acknowledge their biases against women. This suggests that change emanates from daily struggles and the experiences of ordinary individuals, rather than solely through interventions by higher authorities in the form of laws or state policies, especially when such interventions are vague and lack legitimacy, as observed in Palestine (Kuttab et al., 2017).

At another level, a study on masculinity identity in Gaza, the data, both quantitative and qualitative, revealed, through the perspectives of some participating men, that they lack a space to seek support and assistance, or even to express themselves. Following two consecutive focus group sessions with male participants, one in Khan Younis and the other in northern Gaza, separately conducted, the men expressed gratitude to the research team for dedicating time to listen to them, inquire about their thoughts and feelings, and discuss how they navigate and respond to various crises in Gaza. They all noted that nobody had ever asked them about any of this before. The research team suggested that this might stem from the feminization of projects and interventions addressing violence against women and recommended the need to target both genders in such programs, which evidently concern both genders, to achieve the desired impact in combating violence comprehensively rather than piecemeal (Swan, 2018).

Thus, the scope of the phenomenon of violence against women extends beyond men and their understanding and interpretations of its perpetration. It also encompasses internalized sexism, which involves behaviors and attitudes practiced by women towards themselves or other women and girls, treating them as established and immutable facts. This represents a deeper social dimension of the violence against women phenomenon, highlighting women’s role in perpetuating, legitimizing, and sustaining it. In a diagnostic study on the reality of women in Jenin from a gender perspective, some women justified certain issues, such as gender wage discrimination, by arguing that men have more responsibilities and greater capabilities to contribute in the workplace. Despite acknowledging that some women produce more than men, their participation reflects both conscious and unconscious involvement in reproducing the patriarchal upbringing they were raised in. This underscores their urgent

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need to break free from these societal constraints to analyze their circumstances more justly and compassionately, contrasting with the learned self-restraint and adaptation to these constraints (Owaida, 2008).

Internalization/introspection of gender bias is a prominent form of psychological and social brainwashing of women, wherein they are manipulated using psychological tactics to undermine their intellect, capabilities, and logical competence, convincing them that they are less than what they truly are. This manipulation aims to solidify their inferior status within the framework of gender socialization and stereotypical molds (Saidani, 2020). For example, regulating the ethical behavior of girls and young women is a clear example of internalized gender bias, wherein independent and assertive women are classified as “too outspoken”, “dominant”, and “masculine” by women who adhere to traditional gender roles and their associated subordination and inferiority. This reinforces biased attitudes against women in society. Consequently, mothers are often seen not encouraging their daughters to be ambitious, independent, aware of their rights, and aspiring to achieve them. Instead, they are asked to “adapt”, “conform”, “be patient”, and “stay at home” when they experience domestic violence, all in order to preserve the marriage and “avoid scandal”. This is reflected in opinion polls, which show that both genders hold parental views on women’s roles and their “legitimate” capabilities (World Values Survey, 2014).

In the wide-ranging regional study previously mentioned about masculinity, involving participants from Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Western Asia and North Africa examined public safety and the effects of conflict, exploring the specific ways these realities impacted women, men, and gender relations. More than half of the men and women surveyed in all four countries expressed high levels of fear for the well-being, safety, and lives of their families. This was disclosed by nearly equal proportions of male and female participants. In Palestine, for instance, (65%) of men and (55%) of women reported experiencing one or more of the 12 forms of violence associated with occupation and other related experiences in the past five years (El Feki et al., 2017).

In a recent Egyptian study, researcher Noha El-Sayed sought to uncover the mechanisms of constructing and challenging male dominance, according to Connell’s theory, through a field study in the Faiyum governorate. The study found that various mechanisms reinforce male dominance, which are determined by the nature of the relationship between men and women, in light of the cultural construction of society, the unfair gender division of labor, and the cultural heritage passed down through generations regarding the status of both men and women. On the other hand, there are several factors that lead to the exclusion or reduction of male dominance in society, including a man’s loss of his source of income, his migration or travel, as well as empowering women

with education and job opportunities, and the family's support for them, especially after marriage (El-Sayed, 2020).

In Egypt, researcher Rasha Abu Shaqra focused on exploring and monitoring the changes in gender roles during COVID-19, especially with the imposition of home quarantine and adherence to preventive measures. The study adopted a theoretical framework combining Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and symbolic interactionism to provide a deeper understanding of the social and symbolic effects of these exceptional circumstances. Data was collected through a variety of tools, including online interviews to adapt to the conditions of home quarantine. The sample included 50 men and 50 women, and the study focused on analyzing the formations of gender roles and their impact on social dynamics. The study's results confirmed the continued dominance of patriarchal masculinity, despite some shifts in productive roles, with some men withdrawing from the primary breadwinner role in families due to unemployment, negatively impacting women and subjecting many to additional pressures and increased domestic violence (Abu Shaqra, 2020).

Researcher Wasilah Baruqi examined the authority and legitimacy of masculinity in Algerian women's consciousness through an analysis of the heritage of folk proverbs, using a content analysis approach. The study found that the folk proverb heritage reveals a binary in cultural discourse, depicting the relationship between masculinity and femininity in favor of males. It also shows a corresponding authority that women possess, which allows them to thwart male strategies by successfully employing what is termed as "dodge," meaning cunning or evasion. The study concluded that the low status of women in Arab societies is associated with their biological sex, i.e., their gender as female (Baruqi, 2014).

As for researcher Uhood Jabbar, she investigated the male-dominated society and its impact on the developmental role of women through a field study conducted at the University of Baghdad. The study aimed to uncover the influence of customs and traditions in the male-dominated society on women's marginalized roles in development and their deprived rights, as a result of the prevalence of male culture. The study concluded that (42%) of the sample affirmed that society's demeaning view of women affects their inability to occupy roles commensurate with their aspirations. Additionally, about (30%) indicated that the cultural inheritance of society is one of the main reasons for marginalizing women's roles. Moreover, approximately (38%) of respondents stated that women's subordination to men has led to a reduction in the developmental roles assigned to them. Furthermore, about (74%) of them pointed out that the misconstrued understanding of religious texts has negatively impacted women's participation in the workforce (Jabbar, 2017).

In a societal context that emphasizes masculinity for men and discourages the expression of emotions, while also expecting them to acknowledge vulnerability and display tenderness, men in Eastern cultures often feel pressured to conform to these societal norms. This framework is enforced upon them through the cultural construction of emotional norms and expectations that align with stereotypical behaviors of masculinity, creating a tension between notions of strength and vulnerability. As a result, repressing a man's emotions and denying him the opportunity to express them increases the risk of developing organic diseases and impacts his mental health, thereby increasing the likelihood of mood disorders, such as depression and anxiety. In a related study on the health service needs of youth in the West Bank, some mothers expressed concern regarding the prevalence a culture of shame, characterized by suppression, and the lack of sexual education, which they believed led their children to engage in risky sexual behaviors endangering their health. (United Nations Population Fund, 2011). Consequently, reevaluating the dominant masculinity model is not only beneficial for women but also for men, as it can help alleviate the pressures they encounter regarding societal expectations and the considerable and draining demands placed upon them.

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This research's theoretical foundation is rooted in the broader context of understanding the social system that shapes masculinity and various forms of masculinities. According to this framework, males are endowed with authority and domination. Masculinity is tied to specific qualities and behaviors that men are expected to exhibit as expressions of their gender identity. Therefore, the exploration of masculinity, its various forms, and its manifestation in the identities and cultures of young people is essential for understanding the dynamics of power between men and women within the framework of equality and fairness. Research on masculinity is a critical component of gender studies, which focuses on the analysis and comprehension of power relations between genders. Additionally, initiatives to challenge essentialist views of masculinity offer optimism, indicating that men's attitudes and behaviors can change, and the current gender system is mutable. It is important to view masculinity not as divergent from feminist efforts but as complementary to them (Ghassoub & Sankirweb, 2002). An examination of masculinity broadens the understanding of power relations, even within groups of men, by acknowledging the diversity of masculinities and the concepts of masculinity developed through social and cultural experiences. This perspective reinforces the presence of masculinity in their consciousness, identities, thought processes, and behaviors.

At the onset of the third millennium, there has been increasing attention to men's issues and the emergence of social movements aimed at reforming or

redefining masculinity. This interest coincides with concerns in areas such as education and health, understanding the reasons behind children's academic underperformance, and the necessity for targeted educational programs. These developments have led to the creation and spread of critical and reformative studies addressing masculinity-related issues, including men's health, relationships, sexual health, self-identity, and more (Connell, 2013). The field of masculinity studies is relatively new, not only in Arab societies, as observed by Abdessamad Dialmy in "Towards a New Arab Masculinity," but also in Western academia, where studies on men are less common compared to women's studies. Masculinity studies have emerged as an extension of men's rights movements, serving as a critical response to the advancements made by women through feminist political movements in the US, leading to the establishment of 100 departments dedicated to masculinity studies in American universities (Dialmy, 2019).

The study of masculinity offers a deep analysis of men's socialization within specific sociocultural contexts, aiming to transform the unequal "polarity of gender-based binary" to foster a more equitable understanding of gender relations. This transformative approach involves examining the varied socialization processes that men and boys experience, including the roles, behaviors, and attitudes that contribute to the prevailing concept of masculinity. This necessitates a conversation about the ways in which men are socialized, encompassing influences from peers, family, media, games, role models, and the effects of violence and bureaucratic systems, among others. The goal is to foster more equitable perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors within the context of gender power dynamics.

The existence of various expressions of masculinity challenges the notion of a single, uniform version of masculinity, highlighting its nature as a societal and cultural construct. Hence, the term "masculinities" is preferred over the singular "masculinity" to reflect this variety. The concept of masculinity is not static but varies significantly across cultures, social and economic classes, ethnic backgrounds, and even shifts within an individual's personality over their lifetime. This variation underscores the idea that individuals are not inherently born with fixed gender roles; rather they learn and embody these roles through the influences of their surrounding social environments and cultural norms. Consequently, masculinity is constantly evolving, often incorporating elements traditionally seen as masculine, as well as aspects considered to be feminine. This evolution signifies a departure from the notion that masculinity must exclude all that is feminine to affirm itself. Today, masculinity is understood as a complex social construct, shaped through interactions among individuals. It is not merely about being male but involves the roles, behaviors, positions and social identities men navigate and adopt within societal structures. This perspective highlights masculinity as a dynamic and multifaceted social relation-



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ship within the fabric of society. (Dialmy, 2019).

From this perspective, the main objective of studying masculinity is to reconsider a set of stereotypes associated with masculinity and masculinities, including social entitlements, status, and wide-ranging privileges enjoyed by men compared to women—such as a sense of male superiority, spaces of freedom, power, influence, access to and control over resources, and the use of violence—which make them more satisfied, prosperous, and happy. However, this perspective overlooks several critical aspects: firstly, that male behavior is largely shaped by socialization rather than being an innate trait tied to biological males; secondly, that men do not form a homogenous group, but rather encompass a variety of identities and experiences; and thirdly, that prevailing patterns of masculinity often have detrimental effects on men themselves. These harmful norms can foster destructive lifestyles, adversely affecting men’s relationships with themselves and contributing to issues like addiction and suicide among men (Kadi and Yaghi, 2017). According to Dialmy (2019), the challenge of thinking about masculinity lies in three realms and areas of action: the realm of cognitive action that deconstructs masculinity as a historical construct, the realm of militant action that challenges the notion of masculinity as a form of dominance, and the realm of educational action that seeks to raise future generations on the concept of equality. I believe this research falls into the first of these three realms; the realm of cognitive action.

The analytical framework in this research is based on an integrative perspective that combines Connell’s theory of the gender system with the positive masculinity approach to analyze gender.

Connell’s theory is based on the concept of “hegemonic masculinity,” which she introduced through two of her works: “Gender and Power” in 1987 and “Masculinities” in 1995, presenting one of the most comprehensive and integrated theories on gender. In her initial work, Connell outlined three mechanisms underlying the unfair gender relations between men and women: the gender division of labor, the nature of the relationship between men and women through the cultural intellectual construction of society, and the gendered division of power. It has been customary in many societies to divide labor based on gender, where men are responsible for work outside the home, while women’s work is confined to domestic chores and childcare. Even if women work outside the home, they are often paid less than men, and there are job opportunities and economic resources denied to women that are readily available to men. Patterns of power relations between masculinity and femininity prevalent in society seem to be characterized by control, violence, and dominant ideologies in institutions and the state as well. Connell argues that the toughness possessed by men in society is fundamental to the existence and durability of gender inequality (Connell, 2003 and Connell, 2013).



Connell characterizes hegemonic masculinity through several definitions, encompassing practices that validate the prevailing authenticity of patriarchal legitimacy, thereby securing men's dominant status and women's subordination. Additionally, she describes it as a constellation of practices informed by structural relationships within society, which can evolve along diverse historical paths (Connell, 2003). Thus, hegemonic masculinity represents an amalgamation of biological, social, cultural, and economic practices that empower men to exert control over women within the dichotomy of dominance and subordination.

In contrast to the traditional view of hegemonic masculinity, marked by violence and aggression, there is a significant discussion surrounding an alternative model known as positive masculinity. This model is characterized by non-violence, democratic values, and a commitment to equality, positioning it as a viable alternative that promotes gender equality.

Positive masculinity reconsiders traditional methods of raising male children, emphasizing that men who are able to recognize their weaknesses, seek help, and express their feelings are more likely to break free from societal constraints and enjoy life. Since men and women can learn from each other, the positive masculinity model enables men to freely explore their emotions and enhance communication with women, devoid of any psychological or behavioral obstacles (UN Women, 2020). For instance, scientific studies have shown that men who actively and positively engage in their children's lives are less likely to suffer from mental health issues and are less prone to exhibit violent behavior towards their partners. Additionally, such men are more engaged in their children's educational and social activities (Morrell, 2005). This implies that re-evaluating traditional societal norms of masculinity, which have been predominantly shaped by male-centric views, can lead to fatherhood having beneficial impacts on children, women, and the men themselves (UNFPA, 2010).

Positive masculinity, as a socio-cultural approach, focuses on how violence affects masculine norms, also referred to as hegemonic masculinity in other theories, and the normalization of violence by men and boys in conflict resolution. Hegemonic masculinity is embodied in behaviors, attitudes, and values expected of men and boys by society. This approach acknowledges that violence or violent conflict, including sexual violence and gender-based violence, primarily against women and girls, causes long-term harm to men and boys as well, not only to women or girls, and therefore must be addressed.

The positive masculinity approach challenges the notion that men's involvement in violence is inevitable and stresses the importance of understanding masculinity as a social construct that can embrace peace and domestic harmony. It critically examines the acceptance of violence as a component of

men's masculinity, aiming to disentangle the association between violence and notions of masculinity and manhood. This approach primarily seeks to highlight constructive and positive interpretations of masculinity, doing so without shaming men and boys. It encourages reflection on issues such as why men and boys might hesitate to seek support from family and friends during difficult times, or how vulnerability affects them. By questioning these and other issues, the approach addresses the stereotypes that contribute to gender bias and inequality. Ultimately, it seeks to empower men to advocate for a positive understanding of masculinity and to promote gender equality (Connolly et al., 2018).

### 2.3 Definition of Key Concepts

- **The patriarchal system:** A social structure that arises from distinct cultural, social, and historical backgrounds, shaping societal norms and practices. It manifests in the economic and social organization that promotes male dominance within family hierarchies, thereby directing the course of society. Consequently, relationships in various contexts are characterized by a hierarchy that systematically oppresses and deprives women of their rights. This hierarchical structure is perpetuated through interactions among men, further consolidating their dominance over women.
- **Gender bias:** A set of individual or collective behaviors that justify male dominance over women, frequently by relying on stereotypical images, roles, and contrasting positions between men and women.
- **Gender-based violence:** This term encompasses all forms of violence committed against someone's will (physical, psychological, economic, verbal, sexual, symbolic) resulting from gender-based inequalities, whether between men and women, within groups of women, or those concerning men.
- **Gender equality, or equality between genders:** This does not suggest that men and women are identical, but rather emphasizes that all individuals, regardless of their sex and social status, hold equal value and deserve equal treatment. Gender equality is achieved when men and women enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and access to the same positions and decision-making roles in both the public and private sectors.
- **Masculinities:** Refers to a set of attitudes, behaviors, and practices associated with the ideal way boys and men should behave and their stance regarding gender relations within traditional society.
- **Dominant or controlling masculinity:** This term refers to the manifestation of male authority and power, exerted over women and men perceived as possessing inferior gender traits. It is a widely recognized and legitimized

model, tied to contexts of privilege and power that solidify male dominance and gender inequality. This concept stands as an authentic representation of the patriarchal system, emphasizing the preeminence of the dominant male and the subordination of women.

- **Complicit masculinity:** This term refers to individuals who support hegemonic values even when they do not directly benefit from doing so, such as those belonging to a dominated social class. Given that hegemonic masculinity is fully embodied by only a few men, complicit masculinity applies to the majority of men who endorse and uphold hegemonic masculinity because they derive partial benefits from the subordination of women. For example, they may oppose women attaining high positions and may express resistance in their discourse, even though they lack the authority to enact significant change.
- **Marginalized masculinity:** It refers to individuals who occupy positions of inferiority and marginalization, subjected to dominance while simultaneously being socially deprived of any authority that this dominance might confer, whether because of their race, class, or social status. This group includes the poor, foreigners, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and others.
- **Submissive or marginalized masculinity:** Refers to individuals who are deemed undesirable and considered less significant due to perceived shortcomings in their adherence to traditional masculine traits. Examples encompass men whose behavior, attire, mannerisms, or speech are perceived as feminine, homosexual men, or more broadly, those who do not conform to the values of dominant masculinity.
- **Positive masculinity:** This term refers to attitudes and practices associated with masculinity that emphasize a commitment to gender equality and rejection of gender-based violence. Men who exhibit positive masculinity acknowledge the privileges bestowed upon them by a patriarchal society and take responsibility for the negative consequences these privileges and male entitlement may have on others.
- **Harmful and toxic masculinity:** Arises from dominant masculinity as a form of imposing this model on everyone, manifested in a set of traits and characteristics such as physical strength, suppression of emotions, aggression, intellectual rigidity, risk-taking, etc. The most prominent aspect of this model is violence in general, and gender-based violence in particular, which serve to strengthen and maintain male dominance over women across both formal and informal societal institutions. (Media and Culture Association & Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2020).

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- **Femininity:** A set of behaviors and practices existing in a specific culture and typically associated with females, thereby culturally defined as non-masculine (Whitehead & Barrett, 2001). It signifies the qualities or characteristics that a female is expected to exhibit in certain contexts, essentially embodying the notion of “being a lady.” These generalizations are primarily founded on societal beliefs rather than on empirical observation or evidence. The specific qualities and characteristics attributed to femininity can vary across locations, over time, and depending on the age of the female (UNFPA).
  - **Behavior:** This term refers to how a living being interacts with its environment. It is predominantly learned, or “acquired,” through observation, education, and training, encompassing both simple and complex behaviors. The more disciplined, functional, and socially acceptable the behavior, the more positive the learning process is considered. With continuous repetition, such behavior becomes ingrained, transforming into a “behavioral habit” that is carried out effortlessly, smoothly, and automatically.
  - **Social interaction:** A reciprocal relationship between two or more individuals where the behavior of one depends on the behavior of the other, or is contingent upon the behavior of the others. This dynamic process of social interaction is continuous and ubiquitous, taking place in various settings such as homes, schools, streets, and any location where individuals congregate, fostering a process of contact and interaction. An interaction is deemed positive when it fosters feelings of love, affection, empathy, and compassion, alongside mutual acceptance among the parties involved. Conversely, it is considered negative when feelings of aversion dominate, and material considerations overshadow human emotions (Al-Khatib, 2003).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Methodology Design

This research employs a descriptive-analytical methodology to explore its objectives. Its design leans on the principles of gender analysis to ensure that power dynamics between genders at individual, societal, and structural levels are thoroughly examined through a participatory rights-based approach. By incorporating structural violence into our analytical framework, we assess how social structures negatively impact the issue of violence against women and girls, from the perspectives of both male and female respondents, across conceptual, ideological, behavioral, and practical dimensions. Additionally, the investigation delves deeper by examining how social norms, influenced by the patriarchal system and definitions of masculinity and its diverse expressions, shape the perceptions and stances of individuals, including young men and women in roles as supporters, activists, service providers, and potential survivors of violence. Furthermore, this research explores how the concepts of peaceful masculinity and positive masculinity have the potential to transform power dynamics between men and women, thereby positively influencing individuals' perspectives, ideologies, and visions regarding their roles as genuine partners in relationships characterized by equality, fairness, and justice, as opposed to dominance, control, and subjugation.

### 3.2 Participatory Approach

The research methodology is grounded in a comprehensive and participatory approach that attentively considers gender dynamics. It involves a wide array of stakeholders, encompassing relevant youth groups of both genders, youth councils, women's rights organizations, NGOs that engage with youth, and other significant entities within the social system at various levels.

### 3.3 Mixed Methods Approach

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach for data collection, combining quantitative techniques that include statistics and information derived from literature, documents, REFORM's publications and relevant institutions. It also incorporates qualitative methodologies, such as focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews with stakeholders and youth groups, employing various tools and techniques in accordance with the current context. Primarily, the research depends on in-person data collection methods, supplemented by remote techniques such as Zoom, particularly for conducting in-depth interviews. However, these remote methods account for less than 10% of the interviews due to safety concerns related to field mobility, which are influenced by the security and political conditions in the targeted areas.

### 3.4 Study Sample

The research employs a purposive non-random sampling method in its fieldwork conducted in the four targeted governorates of Tubas, Qalqilya, Tulkarem, and Salfit encompassing:

- Eight focus group discussions involving a total of 79 participants (41 women, 38 men), representing stakeholders and interested parties, with two discussions in each governorate.
- Twenty-four in-depth interviews, with an average of six interviews per governorate, evenly distributed between sexes where possible. These interviews involve relevant stakeholders such as activists, civil society representatives, and official entities at both the governorate and ministry levels, recognized for their presence and influence in the concerned governorates.

### 3.5 Challenges and Constraints

- **Restricted access and difficult mobility between and within the targeted governorates** result from policies imposed by the Israeli occupying army and settlers across the West Bank, particularly in the northern areas. These conditions, marked by road closures and impediments to inter-governorate travel, have collectively impeded the implementation of fieldwork activities as initially planned, prompting recurrent postponements in response to the prevailing field conditions.
- **The target groups' reluctance to cooperate with the researcher attributed to cultural sensitivity surrounding the research topic and its questions.** The fieldwork revealed that the research topic was perceived, albeit symbolically, as a challenge to the patriarchal structures of male domination that are intended to be sustained. This perception led to a significant number of invited men feeling provoked, leading to their reluctance to participate.
- **During the research's implementation, the prevalence of anti-feminist and anti-gender discourse and narratives was notable, particularly in the context of demonizing the CEDAW and Women's Rights Agenda.** Efforts to combat violence against women were especially targeted, portrayed as Western agendas that are hostile to national culture and family cohesion. Concurrently, there was a strong resistance to the adoption of the Family Protection Law, which has been under discussion and debate for over 18 years.

## 4. Data Analysis and Key Findings

This research employs a qualitative analysis of the primary data collected in the field. It incorporates quotations to elucidate and allocate results as described by the participants. Both qualitative and quantitative data are interpreted through a thematic analysis, where they are organized into themes to simplify exploration and highlight significant patterns. The analysis is based on recorded observations and recordings, with participants' consent, along with notes from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

The research provides an analysis based on its specific objectives at the level of each governorate individually, taking into account gender, actors, and stakeholders. Moreover, the analysis enriches the research's findings by aligning them with previous studies that either corroborate or challenge the findings regarding masculinity, new masculinities, gender issues, and their challenges within the current Palestinian social and cultural context. Ultimately, the research provides recommendations for policies, programs, and interventions aimed at supporting gender equality and fostering positive masculinity.

### 4.1 Selected Background Data

The subsequent sections present and analyze the quantitative and qualitative data collected through primary data collection methods during focus group discussions and individual interviews conducted across the four governorates. These analyses were designed to gather insights into the research's questions from young individuals of both sexes, as well as from relevant experts, opinion leaders, local officials, and other influential stakeholders.

In the beginning, participants in the focus group discussions, most of whom were young, were asked to respond to several initial questions. These questions included personal information, such as age, gender, governorate, and the type of residential area each individual lived in. Additionally, the questions encompassed quantitative inquiries designed to explore prevalent expressions of masculinity and masculinities, along with the social attitudes and stances of the participants regarding gender discrimination and its impact on violence against women and girls in the targeted governorates.

**The questions were structured around four main themes: gender roles and decision-making, attitudes towards violence, perceptions of masculinity and femininity, and attitudes towards relationships, sexuality, and reproduction.**

Seventy-eight (78) individuals participated in filling out the quantitative data form, all of whom had participated in the discussion groups. Two-thirds (66%) of them were involved. However, a significant number of young men abstained

from participating in this part. Furthermore, there was a noticeable resistance from male participants towards the research topic during the in-depth individual interviews. The interviews included a total of (14) women and (10) men out of a total of (24) individuals interviewed, who were experts, officials, and activists. These interviews were either conducted face-to-face (90%) or through other means (10%), such as by phone or email.

These findings are consistent with the challenges and constraints previously discussed. The reluctance and sensitivity of men towards discussing masculinity and its connection to gender-based violence indicate their adherence to dominant masculinity and resistance to change. This reluctance poses a significant challenge for this research, as it undermines its foundation or even raises indirect questions about it. Similar studies conducted in the region suggest that there is limited engagement with men through comprehensive and representative surveys at the national level to understand their current positions and practices related to gender equality. This entails the need for targeted dialogues to address aspects of dominant masculinity and accelerate progress towards gender equality and the prevention of violence against women (UN Women, 2022).

Upon reviewing the age data of survey respondents, it is evident that (59%) belonged to the youth category, aged between (18-29) years. Additionally, (25%) fell within the (30-44) age group, while (16%) were (45) years old or older.

Approximately half of the participants came from the governorates of Salfit, Tulkarem, Qalqilya, and Tubas, respectively. Despite refugees comprising a substantial majority in Qalqilya, and with camps serving as residential clusters in Tubas and Tulkarem, the question focused on residential clustering over refugee status. As a result, the information was confined to residential cluster categories without disclosing the refugee status of the respondents. This affected the distribution of respondents, where participants from villages comprised nearly two-thirds (62%), while participants from cities slightly exceeded one-third (37%), and participants from camps did not exceed (1%).

## **4.2 Cultural and Social Factors Contributing to the Reality of Violence Against Women and Girls**

### **4.2.1 Settler-colonial Violence**

The results unequivocally demonstrate the consensus among participants regarding the profound impact of the prolonged Israeli occupation on the lives of Palestinians. This impact extends to gender relations and gender dynamics, with the occupation serving as the fundamental structural framework and central context for analyzing all aspects of political, economic,



and social life. This finding corroborates a study conducted by Kuttab and other colleagues (2017) on the concept of masculinity in Palestine, as part of a broader regional investigation. However, it is worth noting that the manifestations, expressions, and severity of violence, as well as its introspection, may vary depending on the specific circumstances and available or unavailable resources within different areas and their corresponding population centers. This variability is further compounded by the diverse and evolving nature of the violence perpetrated by the occupying forces, which affects all Palestinians. Moreover, the impact of settler-colonial practices on certain communities plays a significant role in shaping and intensifying violence across Palestine.

The occupation significantly contributes to the escalation of violence, particularly impacting women and girls in conflict-affected and displaced populations. They face increased rates of gender-based violence, including more frequent incidents of intimate partner violence, assault, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. This situation is intensified by factors, such as limited access to protective services. Thus, the rates of gender-based violence in Area C have reached 38.8% (OCHA, 2022).

The dynamics of violence are influenced by various economic and social factors, as well as social and political upheavals, creating an unstable environment that leads to an increase in violence within society. These challenging conditions can further increase violence against women.

**Within the context of the profound impact of the Israeli occupation on the generation and perpetuation of violence in Palestinian society, a woman activist from Qalqilya expressed:**

*“The Israeli occupation has a significant impact on generating and reinforcing violence in Palestinian society, especially in areas adjacent to territories occupied since 1948. The community suffers from oppression stemming from the occupation and its instances of violence and torture inflicted upon both male and female prisoners, as well as against the families of prisoners, martyrs, and those affected by home demolitions and displacement. This tightens the noose on everyone, amplifying poverty, unemployment, and bleak prospects, especially among the youth who are filled with anger and frustration. Consequently, some may resort to violence in response to these hardships. All of this fuels the dominant patterns of masculinity and violence. The Palestinian society is a traditional, patriarchal society that allows for the practice of violence against women within families by men. This is further entrenched in the collective mindset through upbringing and education that normalize violence. I attribute the main factor behind these practices to moving away from the teachings of religion, which enjoined men to treat women well, while they often do the opposite.”*

#### 4.2.2 Misinterpretations of religious teachings

The study sample highlighted the cultural consensus regarding gender-based violence, as evidenced and experienced in practical fieldwork and professional settings. The prevailing culture still tends to promote and cultivate violence, including through the misinterpretation of religious texts. The dominant masculine mindset continues to shape social concepts and attitudes, particularly regarding violence. This is consistent with the findings of Sikweyiya et al. (2020), who suggests that embracing or aspiring to dominant masculinity leads men to use various forms of violence against their female partners to assert control and power, reinforcing women's subordinate positions. Previous studies also confirm that one of the main roots of gender-based violence is supportive attitudes towards violence (Faqih et al., 2017). A recent Jordanian study found that poverty, unemployment, drug abuse, and lack of religiosity, all contribute to exacerbating masculinity and, consequently, increasing violence against women (UN Women, 2022).

Many participants from various governorates, representing both genders, emphasized the significant role of religious elements in shaping awareness and attitudes. They pointed out the substantial failure of religious institutions in community education and in correcting distorted interpretations of religious texts used to justify discrimination against women and the legitimization of violence against them. There was a consensus that religious institutions must fulfill their responsibilities in this regard, as their lax approach to the issue of violence against women continues to send signals of its acceptability and religious legitimacy. Another participant from Salfit governorate emphasized the impact of upbringing, where customs are intertwined with religion, leading to a perception of "shame and forbidden." This blending creates a non-innocent dichotomy, asserting that both aspects are equally valuable and mandatory to adhere to. As a result, young boys are encouraged from an early age to resort to violence instead of seeking peaceful solutions, which contributes significantly to violence against women.

**One of the respondents pointed out that:**

***"The upbringing of girls in society from a young age revolves around the concepts of shame and forbidden acts (al-ayb and al-haram), often treating them as an integrated binary without distinction. This approach tends to prioritize customs over religious teachings, particularly concerning women's issues. Conversely, boys are raised not to resort to peaceful solutions but to violence. For instance, they might be told by their parents [You're a boy, you shouldn't let anyone step on you. You can't come back home beaten up by anyone.***

*You're not allowed to cry, you're a man]. Thus, despite their education and awareness of concepts like equality and justice, they tend to ignore these principles, adopting a stance of [knowing but pretending not to know]. This behavior serves their interests and reinforces their sense of superiority over women, thereby maintaining women's subordinate status."*

Another participant from Qalqilya governorate emphasizes that:

*"The social and cultural factors that produce current levels and patterns of violence against women and girls in Palestine are primarily due to the weak religious restraint among men, which has led to a misunderstanding of the supposed right of men to punish and discipline women."*

This highlights the intricate and interconnected nature of social taboos associated with religion and dominant masculinity, which are highly sensitive topics. Some individuals exploit religion to justify particular forms of dominant masculinity and control over women by emphasizing gender role disparities and promoting behaviors that reinforce male dominance. When social taboos concerning women are linked specifically to religion, they enhance and perpetuate control and oppression, thereby reinforcing dominant masculinity and negatively affecting gender equality. In the context of violence against women, societal taboos and dominant masculinity often deflect accountability away from individuals who commit such acts. This is perpetuated by cultural and religious rationalizations, exemplified by the dichotomy of shame and forbidden, which complicates efforts to address this issue effectively.

#### **4.2.3 Educational curricula**

Several scholars have underscored the imperative of not overlooking the fragility and masculinization of the education system, along with the inadequacy of concepts of justice and equality within its curricula. They highlight its role in entrenching the dominant gender stereotype through the cultural intellectual society structure across generations, in a way that supports the production of generations that embrace hegemonic masculinity and its violent practices.

This assertion is in line with the General Arab Women Federation 2015 policy paper on societal culture and its impact on women, which emphasized the role of educational institutions, including their curricula, schools, teaching, and administrative staff, in shaping a socialization process that reinforces the dominant male perspective towards women. The paper argued that

curricula, in particular, play a central and deeply ingrained role in perpetuating discrimination and the hierarchical relationship between women and men. It highlighted how curricula depict women in textbooks primarily as mothers, wives, and sisters subordinate to men, failing to recognize them as independent entities. Additionally, the paper noted that these curricula present women with social descriptions that entrench their image as weak and fragile as opposed to presenting men as strong and brave. These are all tools of systematic, continuous and strategic institutional structural violence against women that play a major role in the process of encircling women with an indirect but deep and shackled symbolism.

#### **4.2.4 Social upbringing**

While circumstances may vary within the same governorate, house and extended family due to individual differences, participants agree that violence persists and is perpetuated within the community through various methods and practices. These include a preference for male children over females, early and forced marriage of girls, depriving women of inheritance, and other deeply entrenched patriarchal practices within societal structures. These practices and behaviors are essentially part of a social system that relies on dominant masculinity and gendered power dynamics, according to Connell's theory. This system must be supported by social perceptions and expectations that enhance the role of men as authority figures and diminish the rights and opportunities of women. In this context, there are social and cultural pressures that compel individuals to adhere to these behaviors. The belief that boys are the legitimate heirs and carriers of the family name leads to a preference for male children, while gender discrimination and inequality in rights contribute to an increase in early and forced marriage of girls.

In the Tubas governorate, significant challenges exist in addressing violence against women. These challenges stem from a heavy reliance on rural councils and tribal committees, which serve as social, familial, and leadership structures that perpetuate masculine norms. These spaces demonstrate clear gendered divisions of labor and power, leading to the marginalization of women's voices and needs. Dominant patriarchal practices control decision-making on all issues, especially social and cultural matters, thus fostering spaces that perpetuate structural violence against women, both materially and symbolically.

The findings strongly indicate that one of the primary contributing factors to violence and the obstacles hindering progress toward gender equality in Tubas is the socialization and entrenched traditional culture that favors

male dominance. This culture perpetuates customs and traditions that unfairly differentiate between genders, promoting male control and power consolidation in both private and public spheres. It imposes traditional, undermining roles on women, often prioritizing male interests. This pattern of upbringing significantly contributes to gender disparity and the promotion of a culture of violence. It teaches men that they have the right to dominate and exert their will over those perceived as weaker, including women and men with submissive or weak masculinity. Additionally, women are socialized to be obedient and to accept violence as a natural aspect of their daily lives. Consequently, society systematically and continuously sends messages to women, coercing them into accepting and tolerating violence, often legitimizing it through flimsy justifications and excuses rooted in a culture of blame. Women frequently find themselves under suspicion and subject to blame from society, including their immediate environment. They are implicitly or explicitly accused of shortcomings related to entrenched customs and traditions that serve patriarchal legitimacy and its symbolic and material tools of domination. This is evident in the following excerpt from an interview with a female activist in Tubas:

***“Everyone tells the woman: [Your husband is under pressure, why didn’t you cook for him? If you’re feeling tired, why didn’t you take medication and cook?] We don’t give women their rights or support them. If she’s hit and complains, we’re the first to fight her; [Bear it and go back to your husband’s house. What if every woman got upset because her husband shouted at her or hit her and her children? Then there wouldn’t be a single woman left in her husband’s house or in society.]”***

Furthermore, violence manifests as resistance to gender equality and as aggression stemming from dominant masculinity seeking to maintain the current state of inequality and oppression against women. This is evident in instances where women’s education and awareness are used as reasons to justify violence against them, as expressed by the head of one of the active women’s institutions in Tubas:

***“Awareness and education have opened our eyes to our rights. We used to remain silent about them and did not know how to demand our rights to inheritance and education. Without awareness, we were unaware of our rights and felt ashamed to demand them. However, after receiving education through awareness-raising workshops, we gained the ability to demand and obtain them. With awareness, I’ve become more aware of my rights and strongly advocate for them. This created resistance in obtaining rights, leading to domestic and societal violence.”***

#### 4.2.5 Economic conditions

Increasing economic pressures and demands contribute to the escalation of violence against women. These pressures include the rising need for clothing, food, entertainment, and education, alongside the soaring prices of essential goods, amidst a clear limitation in income across the targeted governorates. This compels many families to resort to loans, amplifying pressure and tension within households. Some participants noted that challenging economic conditions have compelled men to seek additional job opportunities, while women have also been forced to work, either outside the home or in manual and professional roles within the home, to supplement the family's income. This increase in responsibilities adds further pressure on women, contributing to an increase in violence against them.

**These factors and findings** align with the results of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in the MENA region, which was conducted in Palestine in 2017, and surveyed a total of 2,399 respondents. Both male and female participants acknowledged the influence of the previously mentioned factors on women's freedom of movement, a pattern that starts in childhood. Boys are granted greater mobility and more leisure time compared to girls. Consequently, 56% of male respondents claimed to have the final say on whether a wife can leave the house, in contrast to 42% of female respondents. Furthermore, 29% and 25% of women, respectively, expressed having exclusive authority over decisions regarding freedom of movement, such as spending time with friends or family members. These restrictions on women's freedom reflect a fundamental imbalance of power in the household, with men having significant control over women's movement, as acknowledged by the women themselves (Kuttab et al., 2017). Similar findings were observed in a subsequent survey conducted in Jordan, not deviating significantly from those in Palestine but rather closely resembling them (UN Women, 2022).

Undoubtedly, controlling and restricting women's movements represent profound and pervasive forms of marginalization, exclusion, and social oppression within the context of male hegemonic structures. It is important to note that the limitation of movement is a tool extensively employed by the Zionist colonialist entity against the Palestinian population, highlighting the significant harm inflicted by such infringements upon a fundamental human right, irrespective of gender or background. Among many other consequences, the restriction of women's movement and the constraints on their right to freedom of movement have significant effects on their mental and psychological health. Such limitations can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness due to the loss of opportunities for social interactions with others in society. The needs to adapt to the restrictions imposed on their

movement can increase levels of stress and anxiety among women, increasing their sense of loss of control over their lives. If movement is restricted outside of official working hours for working women, such as participating in conferences and training workshops, it limits their opportunities for personal and professional advancement, affects self-esteem, and undermines self-confidence. This can significantly impact family and social relationships due to the resulting familial tension arising from feelings of injustice, restricted freedom, and diminished self-control among these women and girls. They may face violence from men as a means to compel compliance and uphold the norms of male dominance.

The participants from the Salbit governorate highlighted influential factors contributing to violence against women, primarily the male society's view of women and the role of women themselves in shaping this view. They agreed that a significant portion of violence against women originates from social upbringing that supports and reinforces the dominant male perspective of women, leading to interactions characterized by dominance, coercion, and the infringement of rights. Many, especially female participants, emphasized that men understand how to treat women based on this view but consider it necessary to serve their interests and maintain power balances, including economic ones. Consequently, the reinforcement of masculinity from an early age involves differentiating between males and females, with males seen as providers for their families, creators of wealth, and protectors of the so-called "family honor". This perception allows males to commit crimes under the pretext of preserving family reputation and honor. Meanwhile, unpaid caregiving roles are exclusively assigned to women, significantly limiting their economic role. These beliefs stem from a set of values and social expectations influenced by factors such as culture, history, religion, and other social constructs.

On the other hand, some participants view women themselves as partners in shaping this view. They argue that women play a significant role in influencing how society views them, particularly through their role in raising children and shaping their concepts and opinions about women. Additionally, women's role in educating girls and preparing them to accept violence and submit to it as a natural and unavoidable occurrence is highlighted. Discussions within focus groups indicate that women's acceptance of violence and their submission to it are integral parts of the problem of domestic and societal violence against women in both private and public spheres.

***“Women in society receive messages to accept violence through concepts, attitudes, and behaviors instilled by their families from a young age, encouraging them to be submissive and silent. Later on, there is often a lack of support from the woman's family if she tries***



***to leave a violent marriage, with attempts to blackmail her into giving up her children. For example, her mother might say in front of everyone [You need to maintain your home, your voice should not outweigh your husband's, listen to your husband. I accept my husband hitting me or humiliating me, and I will not accept my home being destroyed.]” (Director of a women’s association in Salfit).***

This is what Connell refers to as the nature and construction of the relationship between men and women through the cultural and intellectual framework of society, encompassing both genders. It represents one of three mechanisms that contribute to unjust gender dynamics, reinforcing inequality through various tools in the social upbringing processes experienced by boys, men, girls, and women. These mechanisms legitimize, normalize, and institutionalize the use of oppression and violence against women, perpetuating their subordination in order to uphold dominant forms of masculinity (Connell, 2013).

Despite the incontrovertible national scientific data confirming the prevalence of violence against women in Palestinian society across all its regions, a government employee from Tulkarem expressed an extreme and vehemently opposing view on this matter. He adamantly argued that there is no violence against women in Palestinian society, dismissing the entire issue as artificial and alien to our culture. This perspective was evident in his statements during the interview, as the following:

***“...I am convinced that there are no social or cultural factors in our society that support violence against women as a methodology. Women may experience violence in society just like men, but this violence is the result of individual behavior and not a systematic or theoretical approach against women. What I see is that social media has facilitated access to Western cultures, CEDAW, and others, in addition to the policies of the occupation and their impact on the psyche of the citizens, leading to an increase in violence... For me, women are not oppressed for us to defend them, and if there are cases of injustice, they do not represent the general society. Men also experience injustice. The issue is not related to one gender over the other. Violence against women is a foreign Western concept and individual behavior that is not systematic in Palestinian society, and our society is more united against the injustices faced by women than against those faced by men.”***

This excerpt suggests that the interviewee exhibits gender bias, apparent in both vocabulary and content. This bias is reflected in a complete denial of issues related to violence against women. There is a fear of change, leading



the speaker to be hesitant in acknowledging or addressing the potential social or political consequences of recognizing violence against women. The speaker disregards women's personal experiences, refusing to assign any value or significance to the reality of violence they endure, and thus demonstrates an unwillingness to take action to confront it. These attitudes epitomize the core of harmful and aggressive dominant masculinity, which actively obstructs any progress in acknowledging and addressing violence.

### **4.3 Patriarchal Practices and Dominant Masculinities: Their Relationship to Violence Against Women and Girls**

The gendered division of labor based on social gender roles is one of the most intricate and deeply rooted areas of prevailing stereotypes in Palestinian society as a whole, and particularly in the studied governorates. Table 1 below illustrates respondents' perceptions regarding gender roles and decision-making within families in the surveyed governorates, including four negatively formulated gender-biased statements. In particular, two phrases address the caregiving role of women, which includes caring for children, cooking, and the mother's responsibility for childcare. The table shows that a small majority agree that the most important role for women is home care and cooking for the family, indicating participants' belief in the possibility and acceptability of men sharing caregiving tasks to a significant degree. However, one-third of respondents believe that changing diapers, bathing children, and feeding them should be the mother's responsibility. This percentage represents a positive deviation, but it also indicates that adherence to traditional gender roles in family caregiving is still prevalent. These findings indicate a gradual shift in understanding household roles and accepting the nurturing role of fathers, with a greater recognition of the importance of men's involvement and responsibility in carrying the burden of family care. Perhaps this form of positive masculinity is one of the promising pathways for interventions and programs toward gender equality and justice.

The data suggests that a minority believes that men should have the final word in decision-making at home. This relative rejection of the notion that men should be the ultimate arbiters in household decisions reflects a gradual decline in the acceptance of concepts of control and absolute authority by men, as well as their dominance. It indicates a trend towards power sharing and equal participation in decision-making processes.

The data further suggests that the vast majority believe that women are not incapable of making sound decisions. This viewpoint can be interpreted as an indication of increasing social awareness regarding women's rights and their significant contributions to economic, political, and social spheres. This trend signifies an improved general perception of women's decision-making capabili-

ties, highlighting the influence of education and increased awareness of gender equality issues. It also underscores a growing recognition of the importance of women's involvement in decision-making processes.

Overall, these findings suggest minor positive shifts in attitudes toward gender roles in society, highlighting the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality and a better understanding of social and cultural changes. These shifts are expected to contribute to the reduction of violence against women.

**Table 1: Respondents' Perceptions of Gender Roles and Decision-Making**

<b>Axis 1: Gender Roles and Decision-Making</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total*</b>
Women's most important role is household care and cooking for the family.	36	46	78
Men should have the final say in decision-making at home.	64	13	77
Changing diapers, bathing, and feeding children should all be the mother's responsibility.	54	22	76
Women are incapable of making sound decisions, so they should suffice with implementing the decisions made by men.	67	9	76

\* Differences in totals are attributed to participants not answering all questions and leaving some unanswered.

The data indicates that a minority of respondents support the notion that the most important role of women is household care and cooking for the family. This viewpoint suggests adherence to traditional gender roles, with some considering domestic care as a fundamental responsibility of women.

Based on established gender roles, prevailing notions of femininity and masculinity uphold masculine practices and dominant masculinities with considerable persistence. Youth responses included in Table 2 below appear to exhibit less consensus compared to those concerning gender roles and decision-making. The data reveals varied opinions on the presented issues, with a positive inclination towards gender equality in certain aspects. Regarding whether "toughness is a prerequisite for manhood" as per prevailing stereotypes and traditional perceptions of dominant masculinities linked to violence and physical prowess, the data indicates that the majority of respondents rejected the notion that toughness is a prerequisite within the criteria of manhood. This rejection can be understood as a shift in the traditional understanding of masculinity based on toughness and violence for some individuals, as they begin to

perceive greater complexity and diversity in the concept of masculinity.

Regarding participation in caregiving within the household, the vast majority of respondents do not consider it shameful for men to participate in child-rearing or other household tasks. This suggests a gradual shift in social attitudes toward gender roles, with some seeing equality in caregiving roles and household responsibilities as part of achieving gender equality.

**Table 2: Respondents' Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity**

Axis 2: Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity	No	Yes	Total*
Toughness is a prerequisite for manhood.	54	22	86
It is shameful for men to participate in childcare or other household chores.	61	7	78
Boys are responsible for their sisters' behaviors, even if the boy is younger than his sister.	51	22	73
It is the duty of men to exercise guardianship over their female relatives.	35	43	77
Single women should have the same right to live independently as single men.	35	43	78
Women should have the same freedom to access online platforms as men.	16	60	76

\* Differences in totals are attributed to participants not answering all questions and leaving some unanswered.

In the context of guardianship and masculinity, a majority of participants agreed with the statement that "boys are responsible for their sisters' behaviors, even if the boy is younger than his sister." This statement implies a notion of protection intertwined with authority and control. More than half of the participants agreed that it is the duty of men to exercise guardianship over their female relatives. These responses reflect expressions of dominant masculinities, emphasizing male superiority and suggesting a traditional conceptualization of power and social roles.

Regarding equality in rights, the collective responses concerning statements addressing gender equality indicate a positive inclination in the attitudes and perspectives of the surveyed individuals. The majority concurred on the necessity for unmarried women to have the same rights as unmarried men, as well as the importance of women having equal access to online platforms. This underscores the occurrence of positive transformations in societal perceptions toward gender equality across time and generations.

In general, these data demonstrate a significant diversity and development in individuals' perceptions of masculinity, femininity, and gender roles. They suggest gradual shifts towards positive masculinity in certain aspects, which create opportunities for educational interventions aimed at cultivating future generations with an ethos of equality (Dialmy, 2019). Nevertheless, they also underscore the continued presence of some reservations and biases favoring dominant masculinity in certain areas. Addressing these challenges will necessitate more time, practical strategies, and substantial experiences to advance towards gender equality.

Within the framework of the gender-based division of labor, men perceive their compliance with their socially assigned roles according to the norms and objectives of dominant masculinity. They often view themselves as the providers for the family, the primary source of income, and the decision-makers. In contrast, women's adherence to their assigned roles involves serving and obeying, as well as bearing the full burden of reproductive and caregiving responsibilities, along with all associated duties within the household and its vicinity. Even when women engage in productive income-generating activities, whether through work inside or outside the home, they are not recognized for their role as providers, regardless of their earnings. This prerogative is reserved for men in social culture, constituting one of the key pillars of power and dominance that enforce women's subordination and compliance with men's decisions. In this regard, the head of a women's association in Tubas states:

***“Women perform numerous roles within the household, such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, teaching, and managing all household affairs, in contrast to men who typically have one job. Despite this, men consider themselves the leaders who give instructions and assess the quality and form of women's performance, whether they are neglectful or not. In most cases, there is no appreciation for her role. For example, if she falls ill, her husband might tell her [Don't pretend to be sick]. Thus, acknowledging a woman's effort is seen as a diminishment of a man's masculinity in our society. This contributes to the issue of violence, as each person has a tolerance limit. If a woman fails to perform one of her assigned tasks one day or simply when she speaks to him at a time that he deems inappropriate, he might hit her and damage the house; such as breaking the doors or tables, and she is expected to accept this. Men believe that the women should bear the burden and responsibility of their emotions”.***

Six women interviewed individually and in group discussions in Salfit spoke about men's behaviors and practices that conform to the cultural and intellectual framework of society, aligning with community expectations even if men themselves are not satisfied or convinced by them. They highlighted how the pressures of

the surrounding social environment and its direct and implicit dictates compel men to engage in these practices to gain patriarchal legitimacy, prove their masculinity, and assert control, even by force if necessary. Consequently, men adhere to behavioral norms imposed by these societies and families, including the use of violence against women as a means of control and dominance to ensure the superiority of dominant masculinity. This perspective was shared by an activist who heads a prominent women's association in Tubas, stating:

***“One of the key aspects of men’s compliance with societal norms and the embodiment of their masculinity is their practice of violence against women. This is seen as one of the main ways to assert dominance, control, and power over women. A manifestation of this compliance is the embodiment of masculinity through ostentatious behavior in public spaces, such as walking ahead of their wives rather than beside them, and certainly not behind them. To this extent, they are keen to embody their presumed superiority”.***

The preceding quotations reveal the extent of societal rejection and resistance towards non-dominant expressions of masculinity. They highlight how society, encompassing both public and private spheres, holds men accountable and reprimands them if they show any positive inclination towards promoting equality with women, irrespective of the women's roles. Such actions are seen as a threat to accepted behavioral norms of masculinity and a challenge to men's status in the social hierarchy. Therefore, there exists a social penalty for men who exhibit any form of non-dominant masculinity. This penalty includes being stigmatized as unmanly, lacking in character, and yielding to female authority, among other labels, all of which serve to undermine their masculinity according to the prevailing dominant definition. Consequently, most of these men are careful not to openly display or even acknowledge their positive and democratic masculine practices.

In a different context, numerous activist participants, including women interviewed individually and young women who participated in focus group discussions, affirm that men within the institution of marriage have transformed women's work from a blessing to a burden. On one hand, men tend to prefer women who work and contribute to the household income, but this preference is contingent upon it not affecting the level of services associated with traditional gender roles imposed on women. These roles require women to shoulder the full burden of their reproductive responsibilities and the endless tasks that come with them. Despite their economic contributions, women are still expected to fulfill their traditional roles as caregivers to their husbands and children, as well as perform all household tasks. Additionally, women are expected to express gratitude to their husbands for allowing them to work outside the home. As a result, most female participants and some male participants, including youth, agreed that working women in the governorates of Tubas and Tulkarem,

for instance, do not have the right to control their income. Men consider it their right to control their wife's income in exchange for allowing her to work outside the home. **An activist from Tubas expressed this sentiment as follows:**

*“In a large proportion of cases, women’s ATM cards and bank account details are held by their husbands. Moreover, if a working woman receives a bonus or reward, for instance, she makes some purchases and informs her husband that these purchases are gifts from a friend, fearing to admit to her husband that she is spending from her own income. To such an extent, men exert control and encroach upon women’s rights. Furthermore, more than 80% of women do not have the right to move freely and travel outside the scope of their routine tasks, including within the boundaries of the governorate in which they reside.”*

One of the young male participants in the focus group discussion in Tulkarem articulated a striking example of deeply rooted dominant masculinity in both individuals and society.

*“We, in the Tulkarem governorate, all know that women do not have control over their salaries, and men believe that merely allowing their wives to work is sufficient, considering it as a favor bestowed upon them rather than the opposite. This is because they perceive her absence from home as encroaching upon their time and the time of their children, even though most of them do not contribute anything to household chores.”*

The situation is not different for women in Salfit, as explained by a woman activist:

*“The concept of partnership among men is distorted and skewed, measured by male standards. Men perceive women as partners in duties but not in rights. The vast majority of women do not have the right to control their own bank accounts, as they are controlled by men. Men accept women’s work in exchange for controlling them and their finances. This is linked to the societal measure of masculinity, which is based on income, economic status, and the ability to impose the husband’s will and control over the woman, including her income if she has any. Unfortunately, women internalize this male-centric mindset and pass it on in their upbringing of their children, sons, and daughters, which greatly diminishes awareness.”*

In the broader context of societal culture, women are still constrained from exercising their full economic rights and are deprived of accessing economic resources that are rightfully theirs, as sanctioned by both religion and law. Among the 24

individuals interviewed across four governorates, 14 participants highlighted the prevalent practice of male family members appropriating women's inheritance shares. This practice persists despite some women receiving only minimal portions of their rightful inheritance. The reluctance of some women to contest this practice stems from feelings of shame, fear of disrupting family harmony among siblings, and the societal perception of them as disruptive to family unity. When women are compelled to pursue legal action to claim their rightful inheritance, they are often confronted with exorbitant legal fees, which they are unable to afford. Moreover, their pursuit of inheritance rights can be stigmatized, with society viewing them as greedy or troublemakers, rather than defenders of their legitimate rights. Additionally, husbands sometimes exploit the situation by seizing the inheritance, even when women receive only a portion of it. Consequently, some women choose to waive their inheritance, believing that their husbands will ultimately appropriate it.

***“Sometimes, some women choose not to claim their inheritance rights because they anticipate that they will not benefit from it and that their husbands will control and seize it. They prefer to leave their inheritance with their families and siblings and maintain a good relationship with them, knowing that in either case, they will not benefit from it and will not be able to control it.”***

Five activists from Qalqilya, Tubas, and Tulkarem governorates affirm that even adult sons strip their mothers of their inheritance to meet their own needs, such as marriage, building houses, or paying off personal debts. This leaves the mother without a source of income subject to their will, commitment, or lack thereof, towards her. This possessive and confiscatory behavior by men towards women, regardless of their status, lasts a lifetime, keeping women in a state of dependence and poverty, and thus, under permanent control, dominance, and hegemony by men, whether they are brothers, husbands, or sons.

Regarding the issue of women's right to inheritance, one of the participants from Qalqilya revealed:

***“There is variation in the Qalqilya governorate, where some deprive women of their inheritance while others grant them their legal rights. Some may satisfy them with money, but they do not inherit lands or properties. In cases where women do inherit, their sons use their money for marriage or other needs. This means that money is never left for them, and they are stripped of it by their sons and husbands without leaving any for them, even for their circumstances or until they need it, because men generally do not believe in women's economic rights and consider themselves responsible for their sustenance, and that's enough”.***



## 4.4 Gender Power Dynamics Linked to Violence Against Women and Girls

The term “dynamics” refers to the forms and patterns of interaction between genders, which can be interpreted and understood through a variety of factors, such as culture, history, economy, education, and social values. Understanding these dynamics helps in comprehending how patterns of interaction between genders are formed and diversified. In the context of dominant masculinity, this indicates a system of hierarchical social values and beliefs in which the dominant man occupies the highest position, especially concerning women, as the system grants him authority and control over various aspects of life. Male dominance is embodied in institutions, laws, customs, and traditions that reinforce male superiority through the use of tools, behaviors, and practices necessary to maintain gender-based binary polarity, based on a principle of dominance and subservience. This includes the subjugation, intimidation, silencing, and systematic violation of women’s rights, often employing various forms of violence against them. Therefore, understanding these dynamics is crucial for combating violence against women and achieving gender equality.

During in-depth interviews, a man from Tubas highlighted the societal acceptance of men participating in caregiving tasks at home alongside their working wives. He clarified that this acceptance does not extend to non-working women who do not contribute financially to the family, indicating that this acceptance is begrudgingly given due to the need to balance the power dynamics resulting from the working woman’s economic contribution by involving the man in caregiving roles. This sentiment was echoed by a woman activist from Qalqilya who stated:

***“There’s a significant number of men who help their wives with some caregiving tasks, such as farming, irrigation, gardening, cooking, and childcare (bathing, feeding, and changing diapers). This is due to the necessity arising from the wife’s need to work outside the home due to the poor economic situation. However, we are also witnessing a social change and acceptance among men regarding the principle of assistance in these tasks, even though they may face bullying and mockery from their friends and surroundings.”***

In the same context, a young man participating in the focus group discussion in Tulkarem went further, reinforcing the previous argument and generalizing that:

***“All men help their wives with domestic and caregiving tasks, but they do not have the courage to admit it for fear of society’s perception of them and of it diminishing their masculinity.”***



A different young man from the same group expressed a perspective rooted in the concept of equality, emphasizing the involvement of men in household caregiving tasks only when women work outside the home. This view aligns with what the woman activist from Qalqilya mentioned earlier.

***“The man is compelled to assist with caregiving duties at home because his wife works outside the home and helps with the economic burdens. When she goes out to work to help bear an additional burden that is not inherently hers, he is compelled to share in carrying the burdens at home.”***

Another woman activist from Qalqilya employs a discourse that suggests empowerment over men regarding what she deems necessary to achieve justice for women.

***“To improve men’s acceptance of policies that promote and protect women from violence, there must be a synergistic approach to laws and culture. A large segment of men is indifferent and unresponsive to interventions at the cultural and informational levels, so working on both law and culture as parallel lines is necessary.”***

Additionally, societal pressure to embody the “breadwinner” model for men, given that the capacity to provide, and consequently to work, is viewed as a precondition for marriage, constitutes a source of stress and strain among young men. Unemployment and poverty are perceived as incongruent with masculinity and the closely associated traits of dominance within the prevailing model of masculinities. While some women serve as actual providers for their families, often through informal sector employment, a significant number of young and generally educated women lack formal employment opportunities. This lack of opportunities restricts their physical, social, and economic mobility, further constricting the available scope for their freedom. However, a prevalent belief among many men is the legitimacy of downplaying the financial contributions of working women towards supporting their families and trivializing their expenditures. This attitude fosters another form of dominant and appropriative behavior, where men retain control over the bank card of their working wives, seizing their salaries and depriving them of even the most basic economic rights. In this context, a participant from Tubas governorate states:

***“When it comes to gender equality in employment opportunities, I tend to lean towards the male side. I believe that a young man is more entitled to a job because he will establish a household, support a family, and spend his money on them, while women mostly spend their money and salaries on luxuries.”***

He adds:

***“The Tubas governorate is still a very male-dominated region. For example, the head of the engineering department in the governorate is a competent female engineer. However, men have not accepted or accommodated her, expressing their dissatisfaction by saying [they’ve appointed a woman for us.] Despite her intelligence, high academic qualifications, understanding, and professionalism in her work, she is socially unacceptable and faces difficulties as a result.”***

Across various contexts, the study findings reveal persistent gender biases in the studied governorates, particularly among male respondents. A predominant view among men, whether interviewed individually or in group discussions, is that women’s primary role revolves around managing household affairs and childcare, a perspective less commonly shared by women. While many men acknowledge the idea of men assisting in these caregiving responsibilities, they still perceive this burden as primarily falling on women, viewing it as their foremost responsibility. This is in contrast with the quantitative data presented in Table 1 regarding gender roles and decision-making. Furthermore, there are no discernible differences in gender-related positions and social roles between younger and older men, particularly concerning economic aspects and financial earnings. In fact, young men participating in the focus group discussion in the Tulkarem governorate expressed views that might be the most stringent and male-dominant regarding women’s work as one of the areas of interplay of forces between both genders. The following quotes illustrate some of the expressions participants made in this regard:

- **Participant 1:** *“Women enjoy equality and have more job opportunities than men. The vast majority of men reluctantly accept women’s work due to difficult economic conditions.”*
- **Participant 2:** *“There is no acceptance of women in the work market, and from my point of view, I see that women are taking away part of male youths’ job opportunities. I have been employed for years, and when a new female employee arrives, there is competition between us. In any matter, she takes away rights from me just because she is female.”*
- **Participant 3:** *“The working woman leaves her home and goes to her job, facing psychological pressure, which, in my opinion, is wrong. Also, when she leaves home for work, who will take care of the house and raise the children? This is her role.”*
- **Participant 4:** *“I am against women working outside the home, but they should study at university so they can teach their children and raise engineers and doctors.”*
- **Participant 5:** *“The man’s role is to work outside the home and provide for the family, while the woman’s role is to raise and teach the children and take care of household chores. This is our upbringing and our customs.”*

This robustly underscores that one of the principal impediments to gender equality lies in the upbringing process and the prevailing cultural norms that perpetuate dominant masculinity. These norms manifest in customs and traditions that inequitably distinguish between genders, promoting male authority and power in both societal and domestic spheres, while relegating women to traditionally subordinate roles, predominantly oriented towards catering to male interests. Such patterns of socialization serve to worsen gender disparities and cultivate a culture conducive to violence. Consequently, men internalize notions of entitlement to dominance and imposition, often resorting to violent means. Conversely, women are socialized to adopt a submissive stance and normalize experiences of violence within their lives.

The discussion in a focus group in Salfit among young female participants revealed divergent perspectives regarding the societal role of dowries in either reinforcing or undermining women's agency and dignity. Some argue that men, as fathers and husbands, use dowries and associated wedding expenses as a means to assert financial dominance, both within familial dynamics and broader societal contexts, portraying their daughters as valuable assets not easily relinquished. Additionally, this practice is seen as signaling the groom's capability and willingness to invest significantly in his bride, underpinning the cultural narrative of fulfilling his financial obligations as a symbolic gesture rather than a transactional exchange. This is often employed to justify the cultural norm that a man "pays her due," which is meant to be a symbolic gift rather than the price of purchasing a life partner. Conversely, others argue that a low dowry reflects poorly on the woman's value, indicating her family's eagerness to offload her. This places her in a position of vulnerability and fragility before her husband and his family. In both scenarios, women are not in a favorable position, as they bear the brunt of this social norm that serves as a space for showcasing men's power, with women being the subject of this display.

***"There is a perception among both men and women that if a husband does not provide financial support, he considers his wife cheap and enslaves her, as whoever funds, controls, and decides."***

In Salfit, young men participating in focus groups discussed the issue of dowry and the exorbitant costs of marriage as spaces where significant social discrimination against men is practiced. Falling short in meeting these costs affects their manhood and relegates them to a position of inferiority, less esteemed than their male counterparts. As a result, they either refrain from marriage or choose to incur expenses that often exceed their capabilities, entering into marriage burdened with debts and harboring resentment towards their wives or "brides" as a consequence. This often leads to them committing violence against their wives later on. However, women remain within the realm of male control and dominance, adhering to a prevailing masculinity that holds them

accountable for their actions regardless of their age. The provision for women in exchange for not working outside the home serves to control and regulate their daily lives. This practice of dominant masculinity is one from which women do not free themselves throughout their lives, as highlighted by one of the active women activists in Salfit.

#### **4.5 The Impact of Discriminatory Attitudes Towards Women on their Rights, Freedoms, and Opportunities**

The findings unequivocally illustrate that the imposition of gendered power structures and their mechanisms for controlling economic and political resources, largely dominated by men in the studied regions, represents one of the most discriminatory, exclusionary, and marginalizing aspects for women. This domain encapsulates structural violence, alongside multifaceted and compound structural disparities. Moreover, it encompasses overt forms of violence against women, aimed at hindering their access to available and potential opportunities within these spheres. The findings also underscore that women in leadership roles across the studied regions pose a significant concern for men and the prevailing dominant masculinity they rely on to secure power, influence, and control over resources. These women are viewed as a threat because they educate and mobilize other women to assert their rights, leading men to openly, fiercely, and aggressively resist and reject cooperation with them. This resistance is driven by a fear that these women could undermine male interests and oppressive male-centric laws they seek to perpetuate in society. This sentiment is reflected in the statement of a man interviewed in Tubas, representing a structural and societal violence against women and their rights and opportunities.

*“Problems occur when women become overly assertive at the expense of men, adopting masculine traits. In many women’s meetings, the majority of women leaders do not truly represent women; their methods, mechanisms, and work foundations are inaccurate. Not long ago, there was a meeting of women’s committees where most attending women did so out of shame due to kinship or neighborhood ties. Those who speak on behalf of women in these meetings do not truly represent them and are not convinced by their own words. Additionally, most women leaders have unconventional social circumstances, as many of them are unmarried and have missed the time for marriage.”*

### 4.5.1 Restricting women's status within and outside the family based on religious misinterpretations and misguided social beliefs

There was nearly unanimous consent among the participants, both male and female, that most men of all ages, levels, job positions, and social statuses view any call for women's justice in the following way:

***“Men perceive messages and policies advocating for women's justice as corruptive, leading to intense resistance within society against any measures aimed at achieving fairness and rights for women.” (Chair-woman of an association – Tubas)***

Furthermore, the findings unveiled variations between male and female respondents in our study concerning their comprehension of equality. Concealed behind a misinterpreted religious notion of the concept, one of the interviewed men in Tulkarm states:

***“We derive our stances on equality from Islamic creed and legal perspectives. Islamic law does not equate between men and women, and true equality between them would be unjust to women due to the physiological differences between them.”***

Regarding the forms and levels of possible support for women, and thus their opportunities in the public sphere, one of the individuals interviewed in Salfit states:

***“The mayor of Salfit can support women in marches demanding their rights either personally or in his capacity as mayor. However, I do not expect male municipal employees to support these marches even if they believe in them because they would feel ashamed to participate, as it might diminish their masculinity in the eyes of others. Furthermore, we see that men might participate in protests demanding general rights, but when the issue is related to women, even if they personally believe in the validity of the cause and its goals, they do not like to openly support it, as this could expose them to bullying, such as [You're controlled by your wife; yesterday you were the first one to support women.]”***

A substantial majority of participants from all governorates in the study concur that women's integration into the labor market is generally unwelcomed and constitutes a significant sphere of discrimination against them. This sentiment is particularly pronounced due to the scarcity of opportunities and the limited scope of available employment in the studied governorates. Additionally, available opportunities are primarily reserved for men

on the basis that they are the ones responsible for providing and financially supporting their families. Despite the limited avenues for women to enter the labor market, their symbolic presence within the official system does not align with their actual presence. Women encounter enduring structural and cultural challenges in their quest for participation and advancement in the labor market, notably due to perceptions within society viewing them as a threat to male employment opportunities. Working women are often perceived as adding extra effort and cost compared to men, attributed to additional social costs and maternity leave. In discussing this matter, a woman activist in the governorate of Salfit explains it as the following:

***“Governmental departments are filled with women, yet they are not in decision-making positions but rather in lower or middle levels of institutional hierarchy, often in service-oriented roles, such as secretarial and assistant positions. Certain conditions and requirements govern a woman’s presence in a significant position, including support and prevailing familial, tribal, political, and dominant masculine concepts, regardless of competence. Conversely, a highly competent woman may be deprived of a specific position due to tribal or political reasons. Male dominance still controls women’s access to important positions, and in any case, their presence in senior positions is unwelcome, as these are considered the domain of men deemed most qualified for various reasons, all of which are far from professional or competency-based.”***

#### **4.5.2 Restricting working women’s access to senior positions**

Moreover, one of the study’s participants, who works in the Tubas governorate, asserts that:

***“There is violence against women by men in government jobs, where they are marginalized and mistreated in several ways.”***

In the Qalqilya governorate, women seem to have a better position compared to other governorates regarding job opportunities. However, there are indications that some of these opportunities have been made available under pressure from external parties, as indicated by the following quote:

***“There are offices of government directorates in Qalqilya headed by women, such as the Land and Property Department and the Environment Department, in addition to the appointment of two women to the board of directors of Al-Ahli Qalqilya Club, a youth club for football and sports. This was the first intervention and it occurred about 7 years ago at the request of donor countries.”***

In his discourse on equal job opportunities, a retired government employee contends that women in Salfit Municipality have equal employment opportunities. He elucidates that while 15 women hold office positions like public relations, there are no female department heads except for the mayor's office manager. He notes that the upper echelon of the municipality's leadership comprises solely men. He views this as indicative of equality. To illustrate further, he posits a scenario where both a male and a female engineer apply for a job vacancy, and the female engineer demonstrates her competence. In such a case, she would be hired. He cites an instance where 22 engineers, including both men and women, vied for a job opening, with the top scores achieved by a male and a female engineer, both of whom were hired based on merit, implying that she was not discriminated against. His remarks suggest a perception of differing standards of professional qualification between genders, leading him to conclude:

***“In my personal opinion, some jobs have tasks that are nearly impossible for females socially, physically, and in all aspects. Therefore, I lean towards selecting males for these positions. However, we are bound by the exam and committee selection process; the law prohibits specifying gender. Therefore, if a woman undergoes these procedures and proves her competence, she should be appointed regardless of personal beliefs.”***

Similarly, a female government employee from Qalqilya mentioned:

***“Some village councils in the governorate prohibit women from attending meetings. The meeting minutes are sent to their homes for signature without their attendance and participation. However, at the same time, there are some active female members in local bodies who play an important role in meetings”.***

She adds about the glass ceiling that governs women's advancement opportunities in higher-level positions, especially at the gateway to leadership positions:

***“From my personal experience in Qalqilya governorate, we, as women, are supported in the governor's office. The governor supports me, my colleagues support me, my husband supports me, the surrounding community supports me, but not with full authority and at all levels. I was a member of the municipality council and I was present in all committees. However, when I reached a stage where I aspired to a leadership role such as aiming to be a deputy mayor, everyone resisted, and the ceiling was placed over my head. Being a member only is acceptable, but anything beyond that is not.”***



### 4.5.3 Restricting women's access to decision-making positions

The participants unanimously agreed that the vast majority of women do not have the right to make decisions or hold leadership positions, as expressed by one of the participants engaged in academic work in the Tulkarem governorate, who acknowledged that:

***“In the Tulkarem governorate, women do not have equal opportunities with men in official and unofficial leadership positions. They may be the president of a cooperative or the director of a department, but they rarely head any high-level leadership institution.”***

If a woman attempts to make decisions and seek a leadership position on her own, she faces conflicts, draining processes, and pressures from various sources to give up, step back, and halt her progress. In an interview with one of the former female candidates in the municipal elections in Tubas, she reflects on her personal experience:

***“When I was nominated for the municipal elections, I found support from my family (husband and brothers), but due to their fear of society and the extensive pressures from our family, which were mainly expressed by male members who did not want to be represented by a woman in the council, my husband and brothers asked me to withdraw, so I did.”***

In Salfit, there is a prevailing consensus that the tribal framework strongly influences the allocation of quotas. For instance, during the previous municipal elections in Kafr Al-Dik two years ago, a complete women's quota was presented but encountered substantial resistance that prevented their continued participation. Furthermore, all reform, arbitration, and civil peace committees are exclusively male-dominated, devoid of any female representation. Consequently, when women confront specific issues and turn to these committees, they find no female presence to listen, comprehend, and assist them in resolving their concerns in an unmasculine manner that acknowledges their unique circumstances. Nevertheless, requests for female leadership roles in reform committees are consistently met with firm rejection, despite the presence of active women in the advisory council of the Salfit Municipality. This rejection is not driven by a desire among men to involve women in these leadership positions for managing community affairs. Instead, it stems from a centrally imposed decision by the General Union of Palestinian Women, which mandates that the head of the union branch must be a member of the advisory council.

During an individual interview, a women's rights activist highlighted a practice in the village of Qarawat Bani Hassan where female teachers are com-



pelled to serve as nominal members of the local council. She described how male council members prohibit women from even sitting at the discussion table in the municipal building, effectively excluding them from active participation. Instead, women are coerced into merely signing the meeting minutes. The woman activist comments on this, saying:

***“I personally approached the Ministry of Women’s Affairs’ representative and discussed women’s issues in local governance. We listened to the opinions of female council members about their reality. They complained that they are not even allowed to enter the municipal building or participate in the council meetings. After the meetings end, the female members go to another building to sign the meeting minutes they were excluded from. In turn, I raised this issue with the governor, but I faced resistance from tribal committees and interventions that influenced the governor, preventing me from speaking about the matter under the pretext that we cannot discuss this in the media.”***

#### **4.6 Positive Masculinity Expressions and Their Impact on the Reality of Violence Against Women and Girls**

Men embodying positive masculinity acknowledge the privileges afforded to them by patriarchal society, thus assuming responsibility for the negative consequences of these privileges and male entitlement on others. Positive masculinity, a relatively new concept, transcends tangible expressions of behavior and practices, encompassing attitudes and stances that lay the groundwork and influence subsequent behavior. This is exemplified in the statements of some of the women activists interviewed in Qalqilya:

***“There is a significant gap between the qualities of young people and the expectations prevalent in society today. The expectations are that [You should be a man. You should handle yourself, fulfill your role in the family, at home, and work, carry out your duties as required, cooperate with your family, environment, friends, and neighbors, and collaborate in the workplace.] It’s not necessary that being a MAN means exercising power and authority; on the contrary, you should be a beloved and respected person by everyone, accepted and respected, and could be a reference for others in morals, religion, and how you deal with your family, spouse, and surroundings. It’s not about being a man who’s like [Well done, this man controls his household, controls his colleagues, controls his neighbors, and causes problems.]”***

In another context, the same interviewee continues and says:

***“The messages directed at young men about getting married fall into two categories: messages from men that include advice, such as [Respect your wife; she is a daughter of a family and people. You must respect her just as your brother-in-law must respect your sister. You need to fulfill your duties as required. Don’t oppress her, don’t wrong her, don’t be violent towards her, and don’t hit her], and messages from men that impose obedience, control, dominance, and suppression, like [Control her, don’t let her family interfere. Give her the evil eye. Your word is the one that rules the house.]”***

The content of these statements delves into multiple expressions of positive masculinity, which are characterized by the pursuit of equilibrium between social roles, ethical values, and constructive social interactions. Additionally, it entails contributing to individual development and fostering collaboration within the community, including social roles that endorse the adoption of responsible societal roles. For instance, a positive male figure actively shoulders his responsibilities within both familial and societal contexts, while also endeavoring to provide support and make meaningful contributions to all those involved. Moreover, he prioritizes the cultivation of positive values, such as integrity, respect, and collaboration, particularly within his familial and immediate social spheres. He also relies on ethical principles that embody equilibrium and empathy within his marital relationship. This is complemented by the establishment of constructive and respectful social ties with others. He consistently endeavors to garner affection and esteem within his environment, thereby fostering collaboration and mutual understanding. In every instance, he encompasses all individuals, irrespective of gender, within his moral and material framework.

Similarly, the quantitative data collected from predominantly young participants of both genders indicate their embrace of concepts and ideas of positive masculinity that are grounded in commitment to gender equality and opposition to violence against women. As shown in Table 3 below, the majority of their responses to all listed statements were positively oriented from a gender perspective, indicating significant positive developments in individuals’ attitudes towards violence and its normalization. This is particularly noteworthy when considering the results of the recent national survey on violence conducted in 2019, which revealed high levels of violence against women in Palestine.

Regarding physical violence, only (3 out of 73 participants) agreed with the statement, “There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten,” accounting for (4%) compared to (30%) of respondents in a study by Kuttab et al. (2017), where 57% of them supported the idea that women should tolerate violence to preserve the family. This is in comparison to only (9 out of 78,) or

(11%,) who answered the same question in this study. This reflects either positive attitudes or limited support for the idea of tolerating violence, which aligns with the concept of positive masculinity. Additionally, a few participants in this study (6 out of 76) believe that some women enjoy being beaten and do not complain to anyone, while an even smaller number (2 out of 76) believe that men should retain the entire inheritance because women are not responsible for supporting their families. Thus, the positions reflected in these results contradict the findings of focus group discussions, which showed a clear tendency among young men and women to accept violence against women and to favor women's compliance with it, according to the dominant social system labeled as hegemonic masculinity and its tools.

**Table 3: Young People's Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women**

Axis 3: Attitudes towards violence against women	No	Yes	Total*
There are times when women deserve to be beaten.	70	3	73
Women should tolerate violence to preserve the family.	69	9	78
Some women enjoy being beaten, which is why they endure it and do not complain to anyone.	70	6	76
It is acceptable for men to retain the entire inheritance because women are not financially responsible for their families.	74	2	76

\* Differences in totals are attributed to participants not answering all questions and leaving some unanswered.

The aggregate data in the above table suggests a recognition among participants of women's rights. The high proportion of young individuals who believe that women should not tolerate violence to maintain family cohesion reflects a positive shift in awareness regarding women's rights and a rejection of violence against them. Furthermore, the significant number of respondents refuting the notion that some women derive pleasure from and endure beatings without complaint indicates a positive change in the culture of silence towards violence against women, signifying a liberation of youth from traditional, biased perspectives. Additionally, the substantial percentage of young people rejecting the idea of men retaining the entire inheritance signifies progress in awareness of women's economic rights and equality in inheritance, suggesting a positive shift in male-centric cultural norms and masculinity ideals.

On the other hand, regarding the shifts toward positive masculinity, a partici-

pant from Salfit states:

***“Culture and education are more important than the law, and they do not necessarily align. For example, in cases of murder, the murderer knows in advance that he will be legally accountable and imprisoned, yet he commits the act because his upbringing and culture have allowed and justified it for him. Therefore, there is no meaning to the existence of laws without a corresponding culture and education.”***

Another young man, of those who participated in the focus group discussion in Tulkarem, believes that:

***“There should be concerted efforts to raise social awareness and enact laws simultaneously to improve the situation in the Palestinian society, particularly in reducing violence in general and violence against women in particular. It is essential to focus on young men, not just young women, in awareness-raising programs because this is often neglected and does more harm than good, as it simply widens the cognitive and awareness gap between genders.”***

These fundamental recommendations, articulated by two men from different generations and governorates, represent positive masculinity expressions that indicate advanced levels of awareness and shifts in mindset and stances among the interviewees themselves.

As for men and women, including young men and women in Salfit specifically, they have expressed more positive attitudes. They consider that men are accepting messages and policies advocating for fairness towards girls, especially in education. They believe that men now accept the idea of gender equality much more than before or currently in other areas. The division of labor in terms of men’s involvement in childcare responsibilities within the family, such as raising and caring for children, has become a common and acceptable practice for them. They also accept the idea of participating in household work with their wives, especially if their wives are working women. A male participant stated in an individual interview conducted with him that:

***“It has become acceptable for a man to return home before his wife, take the children from daycare, prepare food for them, bathe them, and perform some household chores, such as laundry and cleaning, without feeling that his masculinity is diminished.”***

These examples illustrate that there are varied expressions of masculinity practiced by some men in the studied communities, and these expressions are not dominant. This is evidenced by the fact that some men adopt positive forms of masculinity, in which they take on non-traditional tasks and nurturing roles that

have traditionally been assigned to women. Specifically, the positive masculinity illustrated in the previous quote acknowledges the importance of shared and loving parenthood and supports men in their roles as active participants in providing caregiving services at home.

From another perspective, a man from Qalqilya governorate highlighted a nuanced and obscured understanding of equality among men. He noted a belief that equality implies a call for insubordination, exemplified by the notion that women “want to have multiple husbands just like polygamy.” This perspective reflects a complete misunderstanding of the essence of the desired equality, which revolves around equal rights, opportunities, and participation in decision-making, rather than the immorality wrongly associated with it. This statement indicates an awareness among some men of the passive forms of resistance employed by dominant masculinity against women’s pursuit of their rights. Such awareness represents a form of positive masculinity that can serve as a foundation for further constructive action.

There is also a conviction among some women participants that equality does not mean similarity, which is often impossible between both genders. They highlighted that equality should be seen as a key aspect of positive masculinity, requiring men to possess the capability and willingness to practice positive masculine behaviors that serve him as much as they serve women, if not more:

***“Equality between women and men improves the life of the man himself, as the position of giving is more comforting to the human psyche. Cruelty has a very negative psychological impact on the individual. A flexible and gentle person, whose health, psyche, and contribution are better, will be a better person. I believe that if a man accepts equality, he will be a better human being, and if this feeling reflects on society, the reality will become better for everyone”. – A female social activist from Salfit.***

In another interview with a female activist from Salfit, she stated:

***“If men adopt the idea of equality with women, men’s lives will improve. Equality is not only for the benefit of women; it will hold women to greater responsibility and place a heavier burden on them, relieving men and changing their perspective. Instead of being responsible for everything, managing and overseeing it, you lighten your load and give it to her. This reduces your responsibility and gives it to her, because life is collaborative. This is the life of a working woman, even if it is not explicitly recognized. A man feels comfortable when his wife buys her needs and the household’s needs and pays the bills while he is at work. This is a simple example.” – Chairwoman of a woman’s association in Salfit.***

As for a young woman who expressed her realization of a truth she believes in, she says:

*“Equality comforts men but pulls the rug out from under them. This is the threat that men face from equality. It is reflected, for example, in the issue of dowry, which young men complain about and consider excessive. However, at the same time, they invest it to the fullest extent in controlling and dominating women, sometimes humiliating them.”*  
 – A young woman who participated in focus group discussion in Salfit.

**Table 4: Respondents’ perceptions towards relationships and sexual and reproductive life**

<b>Axis 4: Attitudes towards relationships and sexual and reproductive Life</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Total*</b>
It’s the woman’s responsibility to avoid pregnancy.	70	8	78
Men need to have intercourse more than women do.	46	24	70
Men should protect themselves and their wives from sexually transmitted diseases by controlling their sexual behavior.	9	69	78
Husbands should not have friends of the opposite sex.	26	51	78
Wives should not have friends of the opposite sex.	24	54	78

\* Differences in totals are attributed to participants not answering all questions and leaving some unanswered.

Regarding reproductive roles, including sexual rights, the data presented in Table 4 above highlights compelling and promising expressions of positive masculinity, particularly among young people. These expressions have a significant impact on the reality of individual and structural violence experienced by women, primarily in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. This impact is especially pronounced when considering the wide array of mechanisms and spaces where women’s reproductive and sexual rights are flagrantly violated. These violations include constraints on women’s ability to control their bodies and determine the number of children they wish to have, either through prevention or coercion to use family planning methods. Moreover, women may contract sexually transmitted diseases or infections from their partners, yet lack the ability to demand treatment or ensure their partners seek treatment. Women are left to bear this burden alone, with no corresponding responsibility

placed on their partners. Additionally, abortion is criminalized, even in cases of pregnancy resulting from rape or incest, forcing women to resort to unsafe abortions or give birth to unwanted children.

A national study revealed that (12.4%) of Palestinian women resort to unsafe induced abortions to terminate unwanted pregnancies or due to their inability to continue them (Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association, 2019). All of these instances constitute forms of psychological, physical, and sexual violence experienced by women within the framework of their reproductive roles. These manifestations are often a result of dominant masculine expressions, characterized by men's control over decisions concerning women's bodies, especially wives, within the prevailing patriarchal system. Therefore, any shifts in men's attitudes and behaviors in this realm strongly impact gender justice and equality, helping to eliminate the violence experienced by women within this role and its contexts characterized by intense dominant masculinity. The data presented in Table 4 reflects a clear pattern of positive masculinity and provides an important space to promote this pattern of masculinity through appropriate programmatic interventions. The responses to all the statements in the table show a positive bias towards women's reproductive and sexual rights, as the majority do not agree to place the responsibility of avoiding pregnancy solely on women. Although only a minority agreed to hold women responsible for pregnancy, this agreement represents an expression and affirmation of the social belief that places the full burden of reproduction, its consequences, and ramifications on women, exempting men from any reproductive responsibility, including the responsibility to avoid pregnancy or family planning. The manifestations of this belief include sexual control over women, their need to deal with significant health and social pressures, the lack of information about family planning methods and their costs, as well as the challenges of accessing healthcare fairly and appropriately.

A majority also believe that it is the man's responsibility to protect himself and his wife from sexually transmitted diseases by adjusting his sexual behavior. This indicates a widespread awareness of the importance of preventing sexually transmitted diseases among respondents, and it means that they acknowledge the man's responsibility and role in maintaining his and his wife's sexual health. Additionally, almost an equal majority agree that husbands and wives should not have friends of the opposite sex, with no difference between young men and women in this regard. While this aligns with the conservative nature of the study environment and community, it also undermines the inevitability of men adhering to dominant masculine norms.

The majority, albeit a smaller one, agree that men need to engage in sexual activity more than women. However, this statement does not go beyond being a widely spread assumption lacking any scientific basis; instead, it is deeply

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rooted in the culture and ideology of dominant masculinity. Masculinity is often reduced to sexual activity, where virility, popularly known as “machismo,” becomes one of its criteria. Here, masculinity is equated with sexual performance, emphasizing the frequency of sexual activity for men and their dominant and controlling position during sexual encounters. This aspect of sexual activity is considered an important characteristic of masculinity and a fundamental reference for defining masculinities (Dialmy, 2019), aligning perfectly with the idea presented in the statement.



## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusions

Before drawing conclusions, it's crucial to note that male dominance in modern societies isn't solely reliant on physical violence but also on symbolic violence. This type of dominance hinges on the power of symbols, knowledge, communication, and culture. It primarily operates through symbolic dominance, which doesn't always manifest as intentional or conscious male control, but rather as a subtle, imperceptible, and invisible form of violence that impacts its victims through discourses of perception, appreciation, and action. This type of violence is carried out through symbolic means of communication and knowledge, or more precisely, through mechanisms of ignorance, acknowledgment, and to some extent, feeling. Its effectiveness relies on everyone's participation in its production, especially women. One of the conditions for the legitimacy and perpetuation of patriarchal relationships is the victims' participation in believing them to be natural, which allows for the unconscious production of submissiveness. This is why various forms of physical and symbolic violence against women are often surrounded by silence, as community beliefs justify their use, and victims internalize them.

It is evident that the principle of perpetuating patriarchal control is not confined to its most visible manifestations within the family but extends to various societal, productive, and political institutions. These include schools, mosques, television, political parties, and, more broadly, the state, as all these institutions serve as arenas for the preparation and imposition of hegemonic principles. These principles are exercised within the private sphere and are reinforced in the public sphere. This research strongly reaffirms this notion, forming the basis for the following recommendations.

#### **The research concludes that:**

- Violence against women in Palestine, both generally and in the studied governorates specifically, is attributed to the intersection between two coercive contexts. These contexts are the patriarchal system with its practices and tools, and the Israeli occupation and with its practices and tools. Both represent models of dominant power based on repression, domination, seizure, aggression, and control from one party towards another, particularly targeting the weaker party. As a result, women experience complex and multi-level violence, being the most vulnerable in this intricate equation. Women endure both patriarchal oppression and occupation suppression simultaneously.

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- Primarily, the prevailing culture among men, particularly older demographics, is heavily influenced by the dominant model of masculinity. This influence is observed to a lesser extent among women, with varying degrees of intensity across the four studied governorates. The influence is most pronounced in Tubas and Tulkarem, followed by Qalqilya and Salfit. In the latter, distinct differences were noted between rural and urban areas within the governorate, with villages, located near areas occupied since 1948, displaying the highest levels of rigidity and dominant masculinity.
  - In both focus group discussions and individual interviews, there was no disparity observed across generations of men regarding their perspectives on issues related to violence against women. Notably, young men and some older counterparts in Tulkarem governorate demonstrated consistent adherence to dominant masculinities and attitudes. However, there was a noticeable discrepancy in responses among the youth group, particularly between the first survey questions filled out individually, which often showed gender-specific differences, and those expressed within the focus group discussions. In the discussions, responses aligned more with each other and with those of older men. This discrepancy may be attributed to the social pressure and stigmatization that men face when they take a supportive stance towards women and their rights, especially in the presence of, or with the knowledge of, their male peers. Traditional forces continue to combat and resist women's rights agendas, employing significant mechanisms to reproduce and perpetuate male dominance under the guise of heritage, authenticity, and religion, for which men are often held accountable for violating.
  - The social and cultural pressures that women face regarding their control over family formation and family planning are significant. Achieving equality in this context is crucial, ensuring the provision of information and health services to women in order to enable them to make informed decisions about pregnancy and family planning.
  - In the economic and political spheres, women face complex and challenging environments where various forms of violence are perpetrated against them. Violence in these spheres is often practiced with cunning, ferocity, and aggression, as they are spaces where deprivation, impoverishment, and denial of rights are most deeply entrenched, strategic, and severe.
  - The findings indicate a high level of awareness among participants of all genders and age groups regarding the role of upbringing and cultural norms in shaping prevalent patterns of violence against women. Only a few individuals attributed these patterns to religion.

- Despite the widespread prevalence of dominant masculinity and masculinities in the studied governorates, there are discernible and significant indications of noteworthy transformations. Instances of acceptance and adoption of positive masculine behaviors have surfaced across various governorates, with Salfit city, and at times Qalqilya, exhibiting more pronounced advancements in this regard.
- Structural gaps exist in the studied communities where expressions of positive masculinity could have the greatest impact in addressing and combating violence against women. These gaps are primarily evident in the areas of: 1) culture and traditions, 2) awareness and education, and 3) the educational system.
- Laws, while important, are not the most crucial tool or the most effective approach for expressions of positive masculinity to influence the reduction of violence rates or the change in individuals' aggressive behavior patterns. Some argue for the necessity of aligning laws with broader efforts aimed at cultural transformation and raising awareness. This alignment can enhance the effectiveness of legislative measures, particularly in instances where some degree of pressure may be necessary to elicit a response.
- The reinforcing dynamics of violence encompass various elements rooted in culture and tradition, which cannot be generally interpreted. Agreement and rejection within this context often manifest as part of the specific social values and expectations of each society and culture.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Working towards influencing social norms and cultures impacting masculinities

Working towards changing social norms in the targeted governorates, with a special focus on hotspots of dominant male masculinities and most negative attitudes towards women's rights, specifically in Tubas and Tulkarem, and the conservative countryside of Salfit governorate. The aim is to facilitate change by altering individuals' perceptions of normative behavior. In the most conservative governorates, it is recommended to implement several approaches through groups comprising youth, human rights, and women's rights activists of both genders, in institutions and society. Special focus should be placed on young people of both genders in schools and universities.

Additionally, targeting girls, boys, and children within the school framework, as well as young men and women within the university framework, through non-curricular programs, summer camps, or educational festivals could be effective. These programs could incorporate short personal interviews or group discussions about aspects and practices of dominant masculinities, followed by a series of discussions aimed at correcting misconceptions of perceived social standards. Building on the Social Norms Theory, individuals tend to overestimate the frequency of conventional behavior within society. Thus, it is recommended to provide corrective information by facilitators about positive masculinity, including undermining and refuting the legitimacy of dominant masculinity practices, and elucidating their negative and enduring impact on individuals' lives of both genders. This shifts the angle or perspective through which they perceive dominant masculinity practices as natural and acceptable, facilitating the substitution of positive masculinity in their place.

### 1. Working with men using the theory of change to eliminate the pervasiveness of dominant masculinity

To effectively combat individual and structural patriarchal violence, it is imperative to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations behind such violence, particularly within the mindset of men who engage in violence against women and other vulnerable groups. It is crucial for community and individual-based interventions to specifically target this group, with a focus on introducing and instilling the concept of positive masculinity to influence their behaviors and practices, and to work on unraveling the perceived justifications for this violence. It is important to note that due to the current scarcity of understanding of masculinities and their various forms, especially the positive ones, and to preemptively counter potential attempts to distort and misguide, it is necessary from the outset to explain that positive

masculinity does not involve denying or suppressing traditional masculine traits such as strength or determination. Instead, it involves directing them in respectful, healthy, and constructive ways. This comprehensive concept recognizes that individuals have diverse expressions of masculinity and that positive masculinity contributes to creating a more just and compassionate society by challenging harmful gender patterns and promoting healthier ways of defining manhood. To this end, it is recommended to leverage positive masculinity models that the research has shown to be accepted and endorsed by respondents, indicating support for certain aspects of equality. Where participants already demonstrate positive attitudes supporting gender equality, program organizers and awareness-raising campaigns in this constructive field should heavily build upon and reinforce these ideas through persistence, repetition, and across various channels of influence, to the point where these positive models become integrated into social norms.

It is advised to implement qualitative and quantitative studies to measure the progress achieved over time due to the precise and comprehensive implementation of the interventions. These studies should aim to identify the areas where this group, and other men, face the most prevalent problems. Additionally, they should diagnose areas of achievement, strength, and weakness, in order to work according to a data-driven planning principle.

## **2. Establishing a safe space for men**

It is essential to create safe spaces for both men and women to explore gender equality and the significance of positive masculinity in its realization, enabling them to ask questions without fear of judgment. Institutions working in this field play a crucial role in providing these safe spaces. Additionally, there is a need to establish safe spaces for men to discuss their daily life issues, feelings, emotions, concerns, and fears, allowing for open dialogue and exploration of these topics. Involving men of different ages, consulting with them, and integrating them into program interventions within age groups, with a particular focus on youth, is an additional advantage in addressing the phenomenon of violence against women from a comprehensive perspective and from the angle of interrogating dominant masculinities to promote positive masculinity. Conversely, working exclusively with women or men intensifies tensions between the genders and encourages individualism and even competitiveness instead of integration between them. This not only leads to the isolation of men but may also tarnish the reputation of interventions in the eyes of beneficiaries, thereby diminishing and undermining their impact. In this regard, guidance can be sought from successful models of existing safe spaces for women, particularly regarding reproductive and sexual health.

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### **3. Influencing upbringing and education by integrating women in shifting dominant masculinity to positive masculinity**

When addressing processes of change, it is crucial to recognize that both men and women – including mothers, mothers-in-law, wives, sisters, and daughters – shape the thoughts and attitudes of men and prepare young boys to adhere to the norms of patriarchy and masculinity. Both genders play vital roles in supporting and perpetuating dominant masculinity by raising the next generation according to it. Because gender is a relational and binary concept, both men and women are involved in perpetuating gender norms in the way they are intended to be according to prevailing and inherited culture. Wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters all play a pivotal role in shaping, teaching, and reinforcing certain behaviors and beliefs. Therefore, it is essential to target women as well as men of all generations simultaneously in programs and interventions related to this issue, otherwise the work will be incomplete and fragmented.

### **4. Establishing a strong and cohesive coalition comprising women and youth institutions and human rights organizations**

It is essential to work collaboratively to achieve significant legislative change, particularly the enactment of the Family Protection Law, and ensure its realistic, decisive, and enforceable implementation. This law is a crucial instrument in combating not only violence against women but also against other marginalized and vulnerable groups in society, including the elderly and people with disabilities. To achieve this objective, concerted efforts are needed, with determination and a specific focus on targeting sectors that present significant challenges to legislative change, such as the judiciary and religious institutions in general. There should be substantial changes in the dialogue format and style, emphasizing the importance of a non-defensive dialogue that ultimately leads to the enactment and enforcement of the law.

### **5. Working with religious institutions and influential religious leaders of both genders (imams and preachers)**

Religion constitutes a cornerstone of the social fabric in the studied governorates and throughout Palestine. It is widely acknowledged that Islam strongly influences all aspects of life, particularly social issues, including those concerning women. Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend how religion is utilized to confer legitimacy upon women's rights and gender equality. This is especially crucial given that many daily religious practices are shaped by local, regional, and political factors, diverging from the orig-

inal religious texts. Instead, they rely on strategically transferable interpretations historically and presently employed to perpetuate male authority over women and maintain inequality in their access to power, leadership positions, and decision-making.

Many feminist scholars, such as Fatima Mernissi from Morocco and Asma Barlas from Pakistan, along with some male religious scholars like Dr. Khaled Abou El-Fadl and Dr. Mohammad Shahrour, strongly advocate for interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith in a gender-just manner. They have produced authoritative academic materials on equality and justice in Islam, such as Dr. Mohammad Shahrour's book "Towards New Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence with Regards to Women" in 2000. Therefore, it is possible and important to consult such references and enlightened local scholars of both genders to discover culturally and religiously appropriate messages for awareness and advocacy on gender equality, which is a cornerstone of the concept of positive masculinity and its enhancement.

## **6. Enhancing awareness and education**

It is essential to continue efforts in education and awareness-raising about the concept of positive masculinity and its contribution to reducing violence against women. This can be achieved through media campaigns and awareness-raising programs targeting the community as a whole, with a particular focus on youth.

## **7. Working towards changing prevailing cultural values**

To enhance efforts aimed at changing cultural values that promote dominant masculinity and justify violence against women, community and youth training should focus on appreciating diversity, respecting human rights, and promoting gender equality.

## **8. Supporting women's participation and economic empowerment**

To enhance women's role in economic, political, and social life, there should be support for programs that promote their participation and economic empowerment. Effective participation of women in the economy and decision-making can contribute to reducing dependence on violence against them.

## **9. Empowering youth through education**

It is important to provide educational and training opportunities for youth, encouraging them to embrace positive masculinity and respect for human rights and gender equality.

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