

Information Paper

A Statistical Report on Violence within the Palestinian Arab Community in Israel

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This report presents detailed and stark statistics about the extent to which violence and crime have spread within the Palestinian Arab community in the country. It also examines the rate of criminalization of Arabs in criminal cases, including serious cases, and compares it to the rate of criminalization among Jews in such cases, as well as the rate of reporting to the police among Arabs.

The harsh data contained in the report raise a number of questions, and alert us to problematic issues that call for immediate attention in order to prevent the situation from deteriorating further and to reduce crime.

Rates of crime and criminalization among Arabs

The past three years have witnessed a continuous rise in the crime rate within the Arab community. The increase in 2009 was the largest of all, up 8.4% compared with the previous year.¹ According to data for the year 2009:

- Close to 50% of criminal prisoners and detainees were Arabs,² as were 40% of prisoners and detainees held on offenses related to domestic violence (as of the beginning of November).³
- Arabs accounted for 41% of suspects in murder cases, 36% in cases of attempted murder, and 36% in cases of aggravated assault.⁴
- There were a total of 121 murder cases, 71 of which occurred within the Arab community.⁵ Of the 12 women who were murdered, nine were Arab women.⁶

¹ Y.Ronen. (February 23, 2010). *Crime statistics in Arab society in Israel*. Knesset Research and Information Center. It should be noted that this report relied on information from the Ministry of Internal Security, which is responsible for the police. Information was requested on crime within the Arab sector differentiated according to type of assault and in comparison with Israeli society as a whole. However, the ministry elected not to release the all the information on the distribution of crime due to the sensitive nature of the issue and because the information concerns “classified materials” (2).

² Ibid., 4. It should be noted that the report employed the phrase “non-Jews” to refer to Arabs.

³ Ibid., 4.

⁴ Ibid, 3.

- Around 41% of criminal cases against minors in 2008 were against Arabs.⁷ 2008 saw a drop in offenses involving physical violence among Jewish minors, in contrast to a rise among Arab minors.

Violence against women and girls

Various forms of violence are carried out against women. Recent years have seen an increase in the total number of battered women who turn to shelters (there are 13 shelters, two of which are designated for Arab women and one of which is mixed). In 2009 these shelters took in a total of 748 women, of whom 254 were Arab women (33%),⁸ compared with a total of 692 women in 2008.⁹ Despite the rise in the total number of women turning to shelters, “66% of Arab women were not taken in due to a lack of sufficient shelters or vacant places” when they approached a shelter.¹⁰

Emergency hotlines for Arab women and girls who are victims of sexual and physical assault – run by organizations Assiwar and Women Against Violence (WAV) – receive around 1,400 new calls a year. They have seen a continual increase in calls from Arab women and girls. In 2009, Assiwar received 747 calls and WAV received 638, compared with 720 and 626 calls respectively in 2008. Conversely, general centers in the country that assist victims of sexual assault have witnessed a decline in the number of women approaching them (7,793 in 2008 compared to 8,729 in 2007).¹¹

Early marriages among female minors – which result in girls becoming underage mothers – may also be regarded as a form of violence against girls. In 2007,

⁵ The Arabs48 website, news article dated February 24, 2010.

⁶ The website of Women Against Violence, article dated December 30, 2009.

⁷ National Council for the Child (2009). *Children in Israel – 2009*, 23. Available in Hebrew at: <http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/Leket%20Shnaton2009.doc>. Significantly, this report also used the term “non-Jews” to refer to Arabs in many instances.

⁸ It should be noted that official reports break down information in a way that does not create an accurate picture of the numbers of Arab women concerned. The report referred to here – a report drafted by the Ministry of Social Welfare from 2009 and published in 2010 – did not include either Druze women or Bedouin women within its definition of Arab women, but placed them in other categories. As a result, the report states that Arab women make up 28% (instead of 33%) of all women living in shelters. See pp. 5-6.

⁹ O. Almagor-Loten. (November 23, 2009). *Violence against women – Statistical survey 2009 and comparative perspective on response to the problem*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 8.

¹⁰ Women Against Violence. (December 30, 2009). *Knesset committee for the advancement of women's status recommends the establishment of a special committee to investigate Arab women's status, types of violence against women and women's participation in the workforce*. Available in Arabic at: <http://www.wavo.org/?LanguageId=2&System=Item&MenuId=8&PMenuId=8&CategoryId=2&ItemId=213>

¹¹ O. Almagor-Loten. (November 23, 2009). *Violence against women – Statistical survey 2009 and comparative perspective on response to the problem*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 9.

3,843 girls under the age of 18 got married. The number of female Muslim minors who married was over twice that of Jewish female minors; among those aged 16 to 17 years, the gap increased to approximately four to one. In the same year there were 1,665 births to girls below the age of 18, 74.7% to Muslim girls.¹²

Violence against children

During the years 2005-2008, the number of criminal cases opened for offenses committed against children increased by 715.4%, from 26 to 212.¹³ Between 1998 and 2008 there was a rise of roughly 72% in the number of cases opened for sexual offenses committed against children within the family (an increase from 283 to 487).¹⁴

The number of children admitted to hospitals and health clinics and classified as victims of physical or sexual abuse within families increased from 1,989 children in 2000 to 2,716 children in 2008 (an increase of 36.6%). The attacker was one of the parents in 51% of these cases. Also among these cases, 36.3% of the children were victims of neglect, 36% suffered from physical assault, and 11.8% suffered from sexual assault.¹⁵

In 2009, many of the victims of sexual assault whose complaints reached help centers were under the age of 18 at the time of the assault: of those who approached WAV 36% were under 18, as were 50% of those who approached Assiwar, and 45% of those who approached general centers.¹⁶

Violence against the elderly

There are similar rates of reporting among Jews and Arabs in cases of assault and neglect of the elderly.¹⁷ On average one in five Arab and Jewish elderly persons has been exposed to one or another form of assault, and one in four suffers from neglect. Assaults against the elderly rose by 30% in 2007 as compared with previous years.¹⁸ The majority of abusers were family members¹⁹ and Arab women were the most affected group among all elderly persons.

¹² National Council for the Child. (2009). *Children in Israel – 2009*, 5. Available in Hebrew at: <http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/Leket%20Shnaton2009.doc>.

¹³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶ O. Almagor-Loten. (November 23, 2009). *Violence against women – Statistical survey 2009 and comparative perspective on response to the problem*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 9.

¹⁷ D. Sides-Cohen and S. Hizkiya. (June 17, 2008). *Violence and abuse against the elderly: Statistical report in commemoration of the international day of awareness of prevention of elderly abuse*. Knesset Research and Information Center.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁹ Ibid., 2.

Violence in schools

Data for the 2008 school year indicate that violence in its various forms is present in schools and across all grades. However, there are disparities among Arabs and Jews: physical violence (including serious cases) and sexual violence are more prevalent in Arab schools, as opposed to the verbal and social violence that can be found in Jewish schools.²⁰ A research project conducted during the 2002/2003 school year revealed that in some cases there were also internal discrepancies within the Arab community, which stem from gaps that exist between Arab Bedouin students and other Arab students.²¹ The likelihood of being exposed to a serious physical assault is greater among Bedouin students, a fact that can be attributed to the convergence of several “risk factors” for this group, which in turn explain the prevalence of violence in schools. This group suffers from poverty and social and economic exclusion, in addition to a lack of accessible services.

This report also points to other disparities among different groups. For instance, boys are more exposed to violence than girls, and pupils in elementary school are more vulnerable to violence than those in middle school and high school.²²

We consider the increase in school dropout rates among Arab students (as compared to their Jewish counterparts) and the decrease in the percentage of Arab students who obtain a Bagrut (matriculation) certificate to be two further indications that this group is facing significant hardships. In the 2008-2009 school year the dropout rate among Arab students (in grades 9-11) stood at 8%, compared with a figure of 4.2% among Jewish students.²³ Regarding students who fail to obtain a Bagrut certificate in grade 12, 67.6% of all Arab students and 73.4% of Bedouin students fail to matriculate, compared with 49.5% of Jewish students.²⁴

Police violence against Arab citizens

On average 7.3% of the criminal acts Palestinian families in Israel were subjected during 2007 were committed by police officers, a figure that rises to 18% in the center of the country. An examination of the various forms of criminal assault reveals that 46.5% of these victims were exposed to harassment and assault by the police on one occasion, 17.6% on two occasions, 18.4% three times, and

²⁰ National Council for the Child. (2009). *Children in Israel – 2009*, 11. Available in Hebrew at: <http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/Leket%20Shnaton2009.doc>

²¹ M. Khouri-Kassabri and S. Atar-Schwarz (2008, June-September), Violence among students in Arab schools in Israel. *Society and Welfare*, 32, 204.

²² *Ibid.*, 219.

²³ National Council for the Child. (2009). *Children in Israel – 2009*, 8. Available in Hebrew at: <http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/Leket%20Shnaton2009.doc>

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

17.5% were subjected to police harassment and assault on four or more occasions.²⁵

Reporting of violence and crime to the police among Arabs

The rate at which Arabs submit complaints to the police about various crimes and incidents of violence has remained low in recent years. In 2007, no report was made to the police in 58.2% of cases of assault perpetrated within the home.²⁶ Elderly Arab people made only 5% of all complaints filed by the elderly themselves in cases of assault committed against them (including incidents of theft and violence within the family).²⁷ The rate of complaints made by Arab women to the police in cases of violence within the family has dropped substantially from 38% since the Al-Aqsa uprising in 2000²⁸. For example, in the period between January and September 2009 Arab women submitted only 11.8% of all complaints against violence that occurs within the family.²⁹ This figure was similar to that in periods immediately prior.³⁰ In the same period, Arab women submitted 8.2% of all complaints for sexual offenses and assaults.³¹

Data analysis and summary

The data presented in this report reveal that crime and violence – in their various forms – are present within the Arab Palestinian community, as they are in the Israeli/Jewish community in the country, and that they occur in different places and victimize different groups. It has also been apparent that the crime rate within our society is on the rise.

Furthermore it is clear that, despite the need among various groups of Arab victims for support and protection, as in the case of battered women, for example, there is an acute lack of protective services available to them, including a shortage of shelters and available space in existing shelters for those who seek help. As a result, Arab women are put directly at risk, which reflects a delinquency in the duties of the state and Ministry of Welfare, raising questions over the priorities of this ministry and the distribution of its budget.

²⁵ N. Bashir, A.S. Muhammad & A. Rohana (Eds.) (2008, December). *The Palestinians in Israel – Socio Economic Survey 2007, Main Findings*. Shefa-Amr: The Galilee Society, Al-Ahali, 332, 333.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 334.

²⁷ D. Sides-Cohen and S. Hizkiya. (17 June 2008). *Violence and Abuse Against the Elderly, Statistical Report in Commemoration of the International Day of Awareness of Prevention of Elderly Abuse*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 3.

²⁸ *Report by the Help Center for Victims of Sexual and Physical Violence*. (October 2009). Sawt al-Nisaa Bulletin, 17.

²⁹ Y.Ronen. (February 23, 2010). *Crime Statistics in Arab Society in Israel*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³¹ O. Almagor-Loten. (November 23, 2009). *Violence against women – Statistical survey 2009 and comparative perspective on response to the problem*. Knesset Research and Information Center, 3.

In contrast to the rise in awareness and recourse to the various institutions that provide protection and support (such as shelters and emergency hotlines in Arabic) among Arab women and girls, the rate at which they report to the police is low. This is particularly true in cases of violence within the family and assaults that take place in the home. The rate of reporting to the police fell sharply in the aftermath of certain political events, including the Al-Aqsa uprising, during which thirteen Palestinian citizens were shot dead by the police; to date, no indictments have been issued for these deaths. The drop in reporting can therefore be attributed to a lack of faith in the police in how they deal with our cases, as well as to the violence practiced by the police against us, as indicated by reports issued by community-based organizations.³² This explanation is also supported by the information provided in this report, which indicates that the Ministry of Internal Security and the police deal with information about crime in the Arab community as “classified information.” This approach raises numerous questions about the policies pursued by these institutions towards our community.

This report also raises another issue, namely the rise in the incidence of violence in schools, and the discrepancies among types of violence between Arabs and Jews, and among Arabs themselves. It has discussed the relationship of violence to the harsh conditions in which Arabs live, in particular the Bedouin in the Naqab, which stem from the government’s policies of exclusion, marginalization and discrimination.

Taken together, all of these issues lead us to question the role of the state and its institutions (including the police, the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance) in maintaining the status quo and failing to take serious action to reduce violence and crime within the Arab Palestinian community. The solution does not lie in sporadic budget allocations and projects (which are also inadequate), since the state is responsible for the difficult economic, social and political conditions under which Arabs live in general in this country, and specific groups in particular. The remedy lies in the state altering its policies; however, it is doubtful that it would wish to do so.

On the other hand, we do not deny that it may be the intention of a patriarchal society – and some of the social practices and customs that allow, for example, discrimination on the basis of sex and age – to create a situation of inequality among various groups and segments of society, which also constitutes a greenhouse for breeding violence. Nevertheless, the bleak statistics on the spread of violence and the role of the state therein compel us to urge our society

³² For example, the report by The Rape and Physical Assault Crisis Center. (2009, October). “Thirteen Percent of Sexual Attacks are Committed Against Children Under 20,” *Sawt a-Nisaa*, 8, 15-17 states that, “The report submitted by the Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women in Israel in 2005, as well as the report of the State Comptroller... state that 60% of the Arab public in Israel had lost trust in the police” (17).

– individuals, institutions and leaders alike – to work together to make the issue a priority, to study it, and endeavor to reduce violence in Palestinian society.

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