

حملة - المركز العربي
لتطوير الإعلام الاجتماعي
Zamleh - The Arab Center for
the Advancement of Social Media



WAR AND DIGITAL SHADOWS

Palestinian Women Between Voice Confiscation
and Body Exposure in Digital Space

July 2025

7amleh- Arab Center For the Advancement of Social Media
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1. Executive Summary

The political landscape in the region changed after October 7th, and the world witnessed—through sound and image—the brutality of war crimes committed by Israel in Gaza. While these blatant attacks affected all segments of Gazan and Palestinian society, they naturally had a disproportionate impact on marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women. A war of such bloodiness contributes to stripping women of their humanity and all their rights, even those partial rights they were accustomed to obtaining during «normal» periods.

Information and communication technologies have contributed to transforming gender-based violence into a common and intensified practice in women's daily experiences. In contexts where gender intersects with political and social dimensions, digital gender-based violence may manifest in new forms, serve diverse purposes, and occur with greater frequency. From this premise, the current study aimed to analyze patterns of digital gender-based violence against Palestinian women in wartime contexts, exploring its underlying objectives (political, social, economic), the conditions facilitating its perpetration, responsible parties, impacts on women, and available protection mechanisms.

To address these questions, the study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies through opinion surveys conducted in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and within Israel; supplemented by focus groups and in-depth interviews with Palestinian women and feminist activists from these three regions. The research revealed that digital gender-based violence functions either as an Israeli warfare tool against Palestinians—aimed at destabilizing the values and moral systems underpinning Palestinian societal cohesion—or as an opportunistic practice exploiting women's heightened vulnerability amid difficult humanitarian conditions, or as a social practice concealed by war-induced chaos, or as routine patriarchal behavior unashamed of its consequences.

The study concluded that digital gender-based violence constitutes a complex instrument of social and political oppression, perpetuated by multiple intersecting oppressive systems that force women out of digital spaces by reducing zones of freedom and safety. This digital exclusion subsequently reinforces marginalization and control over women's voices, bodies, consciousness, and participation in public, private, political, and social spheres. Rather than technology opening pathways toward freedom and discovery for women, it has created an environment where surveillance, punishment, and assault are facilitated with ease.

This dynamic is manifested throughout the study chapters as follows: Chapter One illustrates how technology serves various political and social actors in imposing surveillance over women's voices. Chapter Two discusses the discursive tools and mechanisms these actors employ to undermine the legitimacy and credibility of women's voices. Chapter Three follows by revealing the punitive measures targeting women as a reaction to female voices that challenge censorship and exclusion. Chapter Four examines digital gender-based attacks resulting from online social interactions. Chapter Five exposes the effects and consequences of this oppression. The study's findings conclude with Chapter Six, which addresses the available protection tools to confront this oppression and their limitations. The study concludes by affirming that digital safety for women is not a luxury, but rather a necessary and binding condition for achieving justice and human dignity.

Key Survey Results

The main findings indicate the following, where the first percentage represents results among Palestinian women from the West Bank and Jerusalem, and the second represents results among female Palestinian citizens of Israel:

Digital Safety and Usage



Average feeling of digital safety among respondents: 45% versus 56%



20.4% of West Bank respondents feel monitored by the Palestinian Authority



Digital platform usage decreased after October 7 by 51% across all geographic areas



16.9% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel feel monitored by Israeli users



Women's psychological health was negatively impacted at rates of 45% and 35% following digital assaults.



39.3% and 47.3% of respondents avoid sharing personal information on social media



67% and 57% of respondents feel monitored on social media platforms



27.7% and 45.4% of respondents avoid sharing opinions on socially sensitive issues



Only 18% versus 3.4% of respondents feel comfortable posting anything on social media

Political Attacks



40% and 16% of respondents experienced politically-motivated digital attacks



17.8% and 3.4% of respondents and their families received pressure calls from authorities



22.6% and 9.3% faced social pressure to delete political posts



11.8% and 4.4% were threatened with harm to themselves or family members



20% and 3.9% experienced phone searches or confiscation



Israeli authorities were responsible for 43.7% and 17.7% of digital attacks (highest in West Bank)



Israeli users were responsible for 6.1% and 44.1% of attacks (highest among Palestinian women citizens of Israel)



The Palestinian Authority was responsible for 17.4% of West Bank cases



37.9% and 6.3% faced legal questioning or physical attacks based on political posts



23.9% and 2.9% were detained or interrogated



22.2% and 2.4% faced terrorism support or incitement charges



11.2% and 1.5% were arrested for digital posts and interactions



Israeli authorities were responsible for 63.2% and 92.3% of legal/physical attacks

Social Attacks



42.7% and 32.9% feel monitored by family and social circles



20.6% and 14% are typically asked to delete socially sensitive posts



18.6% and 13.5% experienced digital stalking (most common behavioral attack)



11.4% and 16.4% received sexual comments or messages (most common verbal attack)



6.2% and 4.4% experienced sexual extortion (most common visual attack)



13.7% and 12% of digital attacks escalated to physical attacks



In 42.3% and 46.7% of cases, the attacker's identity remained unknown

Protection and Reporting



63.4% and 57.6% use deletion/blocking as primary protection (most common method)



36.9% and 60% took no action following digital attacks



26.1% and 12% sought family help after attacks (highest in West Bank)



Satisfaction with family assistance: 71% and 68% (highest across all regions)



16% and 17% reported attacks to digital platforms (highest among palestinian women citizens of Israel)



43.8% and 33.3% believe reporting won't change anything (highest in West Bank/Jerusalem)



17.8% and 14.7% sought help from cybercrime units and Israeli cyber unit



25.8% and 37.8% don't report due to lack of trust in police (highest among palestinian women citizens of Israel)



Satisfaction with police assistance: 69% versus only 38%

2. Theoretical Background

‘Gender-based violence’ is defined as any violent act committed predominantly against women due to an individual’s sexual orientation, characteristics, or socially attributed gender identity.¹ The term ‘Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence’ refers to gender-based violence involving electronic devices intended to inflict harm and amplify the impact of violence against victims² based on their gender. Like other forms of gender-based violence, digital gender-based violence is rooted in the inequality between men and women in social and political life and the profound disparity in access to power and authority³. Individuals often replicate these inequalities, violence, and gender disparities in digital spaces to reinforce male dominance and authority⁴.

Despite similarities in objectives and causes between digital and non-digital gender-based violence, the digital form is characterized by several distinctive risks: First, the rapid spread of information beyond control due to the ease of copying, saving, and sharing information in digital spaces. Second, digital spaces allow for the permanent retention of offensive content, as authorities cannot monitor and delete content from all devices that have downloaded it⁵. Third, technology is characterized by its transboundary nature (borderless). Fourth, digital technologies enable immediate and constant contact with victims, transcending temporal boundaries⁶. Fifth, technology facilitates cross-jurisdictional abuse across different countries and geographical regions, complicating legal prosecution⁷. Finally, digital technologies provide perpetrators with identity-shielding capabilities, allowing offenders to escape punishment and limiting opportunities for legal pursuit⁸.

Amnesty International and the United Nations define women’s rights as human rights, asserting that women must enjoy the same fundamental rights and freedoms granted to men in international human rights conventions and agreements. These instruments position the achievement of equal rights and women’s empowerment as essential prerequisites for sustainable development, economic growth, peace, and security⁹. Although no separate declaration for women’s digital rights has been established, the Digital Rights Charter (2021)¹⁰, the European Union Declaration of Digital Principles and Rights¹¹, and the UN Human Rights Council resolution on promoting and protecting human rights on the internet (2012)¹² have affirmed that individuals and groups should enjoy all

1 Amnesty International (n.d.). **Women’s Rights are Human Rights**. Retrieved from: [\[Click here\]](#).

2 Dunn, Suzie. (2020, March). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: An overview. **Centre for International Governance Innovation**. Retrieved in (10-04-2025), from: Click.

3 de Silva de Alwis, Rangita. (2024). A rapidly shifting landscape: why digitized violence is the newest category of gender-based violence. **La Revue des Juristes de Sciences Po**, 25, pp. 62–75.

4 Harris, Bridget, and Laura Vitis. (2020). Digital intrusions: technology, spatiality and violence against women. **Journal of Gender-Based Violence**, 4(3), pp. 325–341.

5 Dunn, Suzie. Ibid.

6 Harris, Bridget. Ibid.

7 Dunn, Suzie. Ibid.

8 Harris, Bridget. Ibid.

9 United Nations. (1995). **Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women**. Retrieved from: [\[Click here\]](#).

10 Derechos Digitales. (2021). **Charter of digital rights**. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

11 European Union. (2023). **European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade**. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

12 United Nations Human Rights Council. (2012). **Resolution 20/8: The Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet**. Retrieved from: [\[Click here\]](#).

fundamental rights granted by international conventions in the digital space as well. These include the right to privacy, freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly, non-discrimination, gender equality and inclusivity, among others.

This human rights framework, which is supposed to provide protective coverage for women, erodes in the context of wars and conflicts. While wars indeed inflict tremendous destruction on all population groups in armed conflict zones, they do not affect all individuals equally—the magnitude and impact of resulting damage typically falls more heavily on marginalized groups such as women. Numerous contexts have demonstrated that wars contribute to deepening and multiplying gender gaps and negatively affecting women’s rights and their position in society¹³. Indeed, on March 13, 2025, the UN Commission of Inquiry issued a report on Israel’s systematic use of sexual and reproductive violence, and other forms of gender-based violence during the aggression on Gaza. The following highlights the report’s key findings regarding gender-based violence against Palestinian women:

Palestinian women exposed to Israeli bombing and military operations face difficulties securing basic necessities including food, water, and fuel, and are forced to live in temporary tents, shelters, or homes with strangers that lack the minimum safety and privacy necessary to preserve their dignity¹⁴. This has affected their ability to manage menstruation in a healthy and dignified manner, especially given the absence of water in refugee centers and the lack of menstrual health care products¹⁵.

Furthermore, the Commission of Inquiry found that Israel partially destroyed the reproductive healthcare infrastructure and capacity of Palestinians in Gaza as a group, which is classified as a crime against humanity constituting genocide. For example, the territory witnessed an increase in maternal and newborn mortality rates and in-utero fetal deaths, in addition to cases where mothers underwent premature deliveries or cesarean sections without anesthesia¹⁶, with the rate of miscarriages in Gaza rising by 300%¹⁷.

Additionally, Israel deliberately employed sexual and reproductive violence systematically, with the Commission of Inquiry documenting numerous cases of rape, sexual torture, forced stripping in public places, sexual harassment, and threats of rape or sexual assault. This increasing use of sexual violence as a weapon of war aimed not only at revenge, suppression, and punishment of Palestinians following the events of October 7, 2023, but also at affirming Israeli dominance, ensuring Palestinian subjugation, and denying individuals the right to self-determination over their bodies and lives. Furthermore, it served to instill fear, humiliate and defile Palestinian dignity, destabilize and destroy Palestinian society, and ultimately expel Palestinians from their lands¹⁸.

13 San Pedro, Paula. (2019, March). Women in Conflict Zones. **Oxfam Intermón**. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

14 Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. (2025). **Dr. Awad reviews the situation of Palestinian women on the eve of International Women's Day 08/03/2025**. Retrieved from: [\[Click here\]](#).

15 UN Women. (2024, September). **Gender Alert: Gaza: A War on Women's Health**. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

UN Women. (2024, September). **Gender Alert: Gaza: A War on Women's Health**. Retrieved from: [Click](#).

Al-Haq. (2024). **Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Warn of Escalating Occupation Violence and Its Impact on Women and Girls and Demand an Immediate Ceasefire and Protection for the Palestinian People**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

16 UN Women. Ibid. Al-haq same source.

17 Arab48. (March 8, 2025). **On «Their International Day».. Gaza's Women Between the Ruins of War and the Battle for Survival**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

18 UN Women. Ibid.

This scenario is repeated in northern West Bank as a result of Israeli attacks and violations in the governorates of Tulkarm, Jenin, Nablus, and Tubas, where women experience forced displacement, exodus, and destruction of infrastructure in their towns, along with the besiegement of these areas and the imposition of curfews on their residents¹⁹.

This reality compels us to return to intersectional theory to understand the complexities facing Palestinian women. Kimberlé Crenshaw indicates that what shapes the nature and intensity of violence against women, as well as the depth of its consequences, is not gender alone, but the other dimensions that compose women's identities. She refers to dimensions such as: race, age, indigenous status, sexual orientation, economic class, religion, disability, and others. Within these intersecting systems of oppression and subjugation, women of color suffer more than white women²⁰.

In recent years, a similar perspective has emerged in studies of technology-facilitated gender-based violence, which have demonstrated how women's intersecting social positions influence the nature and frequency of digital violence they experience in ways inseparable from their gender identity²¹. This was indeed the conclusion of two previous studies by the 7amleh on Palestinian women's experiences with digital gender-based violence, finding that digital space has become a mirror of the public sphere, where women are subject to both patriarchal authority and occupation authority, which interact with and reinforce each other, thereby multiplying women's deprivation of freedoms and restricting their use of digital space²².

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to examine Palestinian women's experiences with digital gender-based violence, focusing on changes in patterns, intensity, and prevalence of these attacks during Israel's genocidal war on Gaza. The study investigated digital gender violations on two levels:

Political gender violence - How gender-based violence becomes a weapon of war and a tool of political repression, and for what purposes.

Social gender violence - Revealing the digital gender-based abuse that women experience in their daily and routine lives, and how perpetrators exploited the absence of law and chaos produced by the war as cover for these acts of abuse.

At all levels, the study attempted to identify the parties responsible for digital gender-based violence across three regions: the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza. Additionally, the study focused on technology's role in enabling these practices and producing new patterns of gender-based violence, thereby deepening the impact of resulting harms.

19 The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Ibid.

20 Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. (2016). «Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color.» Translated by: Tamer Mowafi. Reviewed by: Knowledge Production Unit at Ikhtiyar. **Ikhtiyar**. Retrieved from: [\[Click here\]](#)..

21 Dunn, Suzie. Ibid.

Harris, Bridget. Ibid. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. Same source.

22 Ali, Najma. (November 2022). A Violated Network: Gender-Based Violence Against Palestinian Women in Digital Space. **7amleh – The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

4. Research Methodology

To answer the research questions and examine the phenomenon of gender-based violence in the digital sphere—which is an intersectional, complex, and interconnected phenomenon, particularly in the context of war—the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. On one hand, the quantitative approach enables the measurement of the prevalence of various patterns of gender-based violence, identification of victim percentages, and their geographical distribution. On the other hand, the qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of women's experiences and attitudes regarding gender-based violence from their personal perspectives, while examining their interpretations of the social and political context that shapes these experiences. Additionally, it reveals the meanings and significance that women attribute to digital gender-based violence and the role technology plays in shaping and crystallizing their lives and security.

To develop a more comprehensive understanding and analysis of the phenomenon of digital gender-based violence in the Palestinian context, the study employed diverse mechanisms for information gathering from multiple sources, using the following methods:

1. **Opinion Polls/Surveys:** The center collected data through a 23-question opinion poll, which included 500 Palestinian women from the West Bank and Jerusalem, and 200 female Palestinian citizens of Israel. The survey sample was representative across governorates and geographical divisions (such as the Naqab [also called Negev in Hebrew]), the Galilee, the Triangle²³, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Al-Kahlil (Hebron), Bethlehem, etc.), while participants were randomly selected within each governorate. In the West Bank, information was gathered through field researchers deployed to central areas in towns and refugee camps, distributing paper questionnaires in the streets. Within Israel, the questionnaire was distributed electronically.
2. **Focus Groups:** Six focus groups were conducted, each consisting of 4 to 8 participants, totaling 30 participants overall, whose ages ranged from 20 to 60. The groups included women from all geographical areas: northern, central, and southern West Bank; Jerusalem; and from the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Naqab (Al-Naqab). Diversity in residential and living environments was taken into account, including major cities, villages, unrecognized villages, remote communities, and refugee camps. Additionally, the groups included activists from various fields and domains: feminist activists, social activists, political activists, human rights advocates, journalists, academics, etc. The groups ensured the greatest possible diversity among women to avoid limiting the study's findings to dominant female voices in Palestinian society, thus capturing the broadest possible spectrum of different voices and distinctive experiences of women from various groups.
3. **In-depth Interviews:** Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with activists and employees in feminist organizations and institutions concerned with women's rights and services, ensuring diversity across geographical areas and different governorates as mentioned above. The interviews lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes, covering a survey of types of digital attacks that activists encounter through their work with women in the field, or through inquiries received on the organization's support and emergency hotline/chat. In addition to how they handle these inquiries and the main difficulties they face,

23 The Triangle is an Arab-Majority region in central Israel, located between the West Bank and the Mediterranean coast. Some of the Major Towns forming the Triangle are: Umm Al-Fahm, Kafr Qara, Baqa Al-Gharbiyye, Qalansawe, Tayibe and Tira.

the interviews concluded by understanding their personal experiences with digital feminist activism and how the public responds to it.

All interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom to enable participation for women from all geographical areas and to overcome movement restrictions imposed by checkpoints and barriers. Unfortunately, the study did not include Palestinian women from Gaza due to communication blackouts and continuous bombardment, which poses direct danger to their safety. Nevertheless, some examples of Gazan women's experiences were mentioned in narratives by Palestinian women and activists from other areas.

The study maintained the confidentiality of participants' identities and information, including anonymity of names, ages, places of residence, workplaces, and obscuring details of their personal stories to protect them from any consequences that might result from their participation. We also followed this protocol with feminist and women's organizations that participated in the in-depth interviews, especially since some had themselves been subjected to attacks on social media, but also to exclude any possibility of linking stories about attacks to specific geographical areas or to the identities of Palestinian women receiving services from the association. After transcribing the interviews, I used Atlasti.com to analyze the data into shared themes and topics, which formed the basis for the chapters of this study.



CHAPTER ONE

Overlapping Prisons – Surveillance Between Individualistic and Organizational Control

Surveillance is defined as the process of collecting, storing, processing, evaluating, and sometimes using information, which may lead to potential or actual harm to individuals as a result of unequal power relations between the surveillant and the surveilled. This surveillance process relies on the dialectic of visibility and invisibility, where social actors with power seek to keep marginalized groups visible and exposed to them, while ensuring their own information remains confidential and invisible²⁴. This sense of exposure is reflected in the participants' statements: «We've become like we're on the street on social media,» and «Why should I be this publicly available to people?» and «I'm not comfortable with the idea that my life is like this, on display. That people are watching it.»

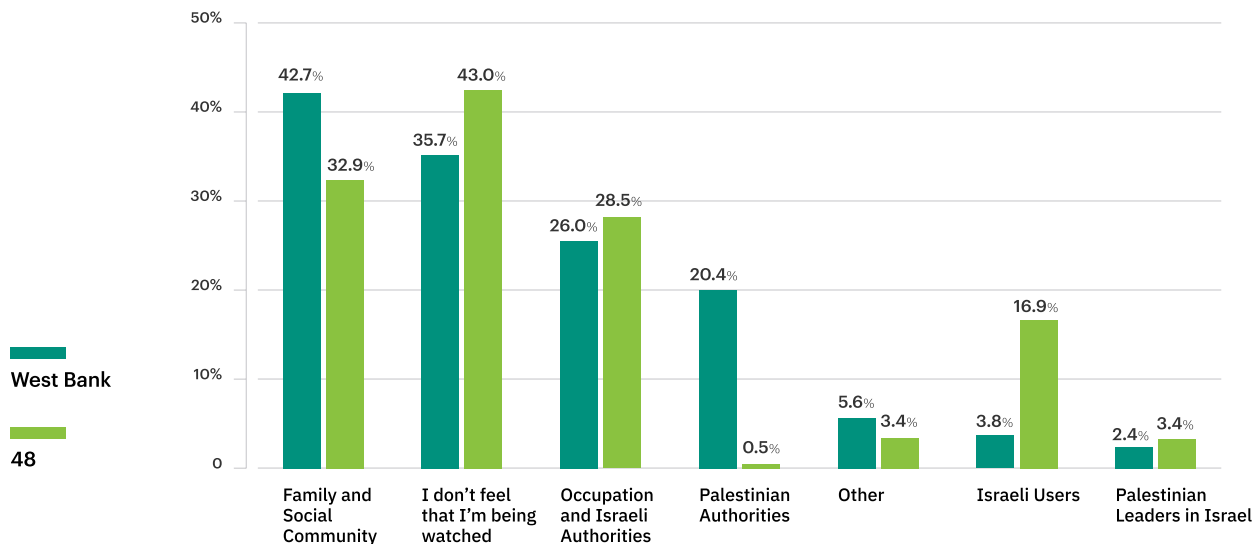
The revolution in communications and information technology has expanded the authority's gaze, broadened the scope of its vision, and reinforced its surveillance practices. This development has generated what academic literature terms «surveillance societies»—a condition in which surveillance has become a structural characteristic of modern society, rendering the collection of information about individuals routine and normalized. Whereas social life was historically comprised of distinct social contexts and spaces with clear boundaries and separations—such as work/leisure time, office/home, and private/public life—the communications and information technology revolution has dismantled these boundaries and divisions, fusing all spaces into a single crucible: digital space. This convergence has empowered various authority systems to implement parallel surveillance mechanisms over individuals. This intricate and multifaceted scenario is demonstrated in Figure 1, which illustrates the diverse entities under whose surveillance Palestinian women perceive themselves to be. The current chapter will examine this intersectionality and concurrent operation of surveillance systems.

24 Fuchs, Christian. (2021). **Social Media: A Critical Introduction (3rd ed.)**. SAGE Publications Ltd.

Figure 1

Q: Do you feel like you are being watched on social media platform by any of the following people?

67% in the West Bank and 57% in '48 feel watched on social media



- * Approximately 67% of females in the west bank and 57% of those in '48 report that they feel like they are being watched.
- * Most (43% of Females in the WB and 32.9% in '48) report that they are being watched by family and direct social community.
- * In '48, there is no worry about the PA, however more concern about Israeli users (17% vs 4% in the WB)

The survey results revealed that 28.5% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel respondents feel they are under surveillance by Israeli authorities when using social media platforms, compared to 26% from the West Bank and Jerusalem [see Figure 1]. Palestinian women's awareness of Israeli authorities' surveillance was reflected through explicit and clear expressions, such as: «We're afraid that we're being monitored, and maybe we're really being monitored, or 100% monitored.» Additionally, this awareness manifested through indirect expressions, such as what one research participant shared about her friend who told her during a phone conversation: «I swear they'll take me away because we're talking politics on the phone.»

In another incident, one of the research participants shared details about threats that one of her acquaintances faced during detention: «They took him and threatened him and told him [...] that it's fine this time, but next time you'll stay with us and let your mother keep crying. And indeed, his mother had been calling my mother crying. So, how much do they know that this mother is strong, this mother is not strong. This mother is politically organized or not, and so on. [...] Many details. [...] You discover that [...] there's nothing they don't know.»

This type of organized, hierarchical, structural, and systematic surveillance is considered the most prevalent in surveillance studies, referring to surveillance that is permanent, comprehensive, coercive, and omnipresent, which compels individuals to be visible. Surveillance techniques contribute to reproducing the prison system to expand its application to non-criminals in an attempt to transfer the prison experience to everyday life. Surveillance here signifies disciplinary power that aims to determine whether an individual behaves as they should or not, and whether they comply with the rules or not²⁵.

Within the same type of surveillance, we find that 20.4% of surveyed women in the West Bank and Jerusalem believe that the Palestinian Authority practices surveillance on them, compared to 0.5% of surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 1]. Women in the West Bank are subject to double surveillance from two different authority systems, while the surveillance of the second is often viewed as an act that complements, intersects with, and sometimes serves the agendas of the first. One research participant shared that she did not dare to explicitly mention the name of the Palestinian Authority in her correspondence when confrontations took place between it and citizens in her city of Jenin: «And always [...] even when we record voice messages or talk about it, [we say:] ‘these ones and those ones.’ I don’t dare say ‘the Authority.’»

In addition to women being subjected to another type of structural and hierarchical surveillance practiced by technology companies, who have established themselves as an actual unrestricted legal authority that lacks transparency, creates arbitrary laws, and applies them unfairly and inconsistently²⁶. One research participant says about technology companies’ targeting of Palestinian content: «Honestly, their way of handling Palestinian Content specifically has really turned me off- like, way too much.” Generally, many activists indicated that their institutions’ posts are often deleted or restricted on social media platforms. Thus, social media platforms have resorted to practicing digital authoritarianism against Palestinian women²⁷, as these companies rely on categorizing and treating users based on their perceived social and economic value, and consequently these classifications often translate into further marginalizing already marginalized groups, and discriminating against them in ways that align with oppressive and discriminatory structures²⁸.

At the fourth level, 3.4% of surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel indicated being subjected to surveillance by Palestinian leaders and elites who hold Israeli citizenship, compared to 2.4% of surveyed women in the West Bank [see Figure 1]. What is interesting about this type of surveillance is that it does not fall within structural and systematic forms of surveillance, as it is not absolute or permanent surveillance, meaning it is limited compared to governmental surveillance capabilities, but it still constitutes a type of hierarchical and authoritarian surveillance, for reasons mentioned by one research participant: «And I was afraid. [...] I mean, I was also criticizing a personality who has connections, and who has influence, I mean. More popular. [...] Well-known.» These examples reflect how Palestinian leadership and elites exploit their popular base to exercise surveillance over women under broad popular protection and immunity. One woman describes what she went through: «I responded back to him [...] but everyone around him, the clique that surrounds him, these drummers

25 Fuchs, Christian. *ibid.*

26 Nurik, Chloe. (2019). “Men are scum”: Self-regulation, hate speech, and gender-based censorship on Facebook. *International Journal of Communication*, 13, pp. 21.

27 Zakagh, Bushra. (April 28, 2024). «Digital Authoritarianism»: Transforming the Arab Space into Surveillance and Punishment Prisons!. *Orooba* 22. Retrieved from: [Click](#)

28 Nurik, Chloe. *Ibid.*

and flute players, and the blacksmiths started attacking me [...]’.»

The survey results revealed that the type of surveillance women believe they are subjected to more than others is societal surveillance, as it received the highest percentage among Palestinian women in the West Bank (42.7%) and Israel as well (32.9%) [see Figure 1]. Alice Marwick (2012) argues that social surveillance differs from traditional and self-surveillance, as this type of surveillance occurs between individuals, not between authorities or organizational institutions and individuals. In these cases, power is decentralized, meaning it is part of every social relationship, and is also reciprocal, where an individual can be either a surveillant surveillante or surveilled²⁹.

The first type of societal surveillance, as reflected in research participants’ contributions, is indirect surveillance by authorities and leaders, practiced by their supporters. In this form of surveillance, citizens and individuals around women transform into additional eyes for the authority; they may not have the same broad and expansive field of vision as the authority, but they are numerous and closer to women, allowing their collective impact to be sufficiently effective. Indeed, 16.9% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel feel they are under surveillance by Israeli users on social media platforms, compared to 3.8% from the West Bank [see Figure 1]. It seems logical that female Palestinian citizens of Israel would be concerned about Israeli surveillance, given their direct and daily interaction with them in educational, work, health institutions, and others. One research participant says about some Israeli influencers who deliberately monitor Palestinian women’s posts and publish them on their accounts: «I mean, she has nothing to do, no work, she goes around snooping on people...» This is evidence that some Israelis have adopted surveillance as a lifestyle and way of dealing with Palestinian citizens of Israel, with the publication aiming to attract other surveillants’ attention to these women, thus expanding women’s societal exposure.

However, the popular surveillance that Palestinian women are subjected to is not limited to Israeli users’ surveillance alone, but also includes that practiced by Palestinians as well: «I mean [...] I’m not talking to a colonizer. I’m talking to someone just like me!» In particular, Palestinian users monitor women to investigate the extent to which their ideas and political orientations align with their own. This surveillance reflects the state of internal conflict and political fragmentation within Palestinian society. This was reflected in statements such as «You’re really being watched from all sides, and everyone follows what you post and what you do.» Surveillance may take another dimension when Palestinians become the surveillant in service of the occupation authority, not just in service of specific Palestinian parties or factions. One woman expressed this as follows: «[...] The eyes are us, too, not just Israel. We’re the ones who inform on each other.»

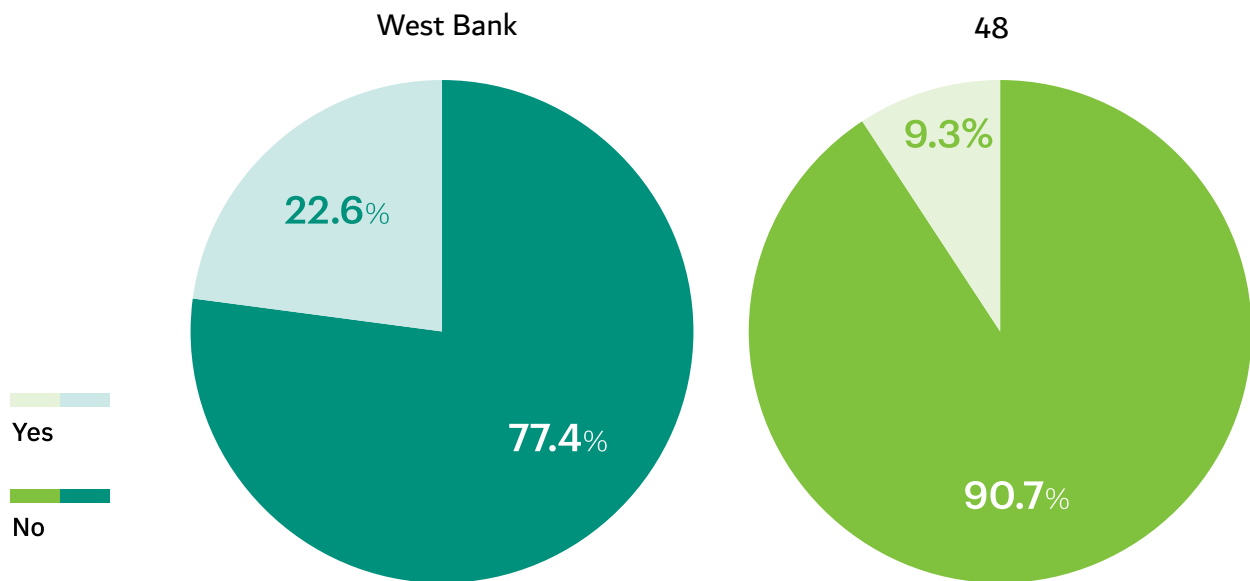
In light of these threats, women face numerous pressures from their families and friends to delete their political or patriotic posts. While these pressures are justified as protective, they do not allow women the space to make independent and free decisions about their political participation. The percentage of women who were asked to take down such posts reached 22.6% in the West Bank and Jerusalem, while it was only 9% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 2]: «The intimidation happens through us, from family too, from friends: What have you written? Why are you writing like this? [...] They might come to you [...]» and «Regarding posting during the war. The family was pressuring: ‘Nobody should post, nobody should post, nobody should post.’»

29 Marwick, Alice. Ibid.

Figure 2

Q: Have you experienced any social pressure to delete certain content or apps for political reasons?

Women face little social pressure to delete apps or content



- * 90.7% of Palestinian women citizens of Israel reported that they had not faced social pressure to stop their political activity online.
- * More than three-quarters of females in the West Bank report that there is no social pressure to stop political activity online.

The second type of societal surveillance stems from human and social motivations, as humans by nature tend to monitor others' behavior and collect social information about them, a practice that is also common on social media platforms. Foucault's proposed term «capillaries of power» may be appropriate to describe this state in which power flows through all social and personal relationships and through daily interactions, rather than flowing through authoritarian and organizational structures as in traditional models of surveillance³⁰. This practice is naturally more dangerous for marginalized groups such as women, who already suffer from other daily restrictions due to their gender identity³¹.

30 Ibid.

31 Mason, Corinne L., & Magnet, Shoshana. (2012). Surveillance studies and violence against women. *Surveillance & Society*, 10(2), pp. 105–118.

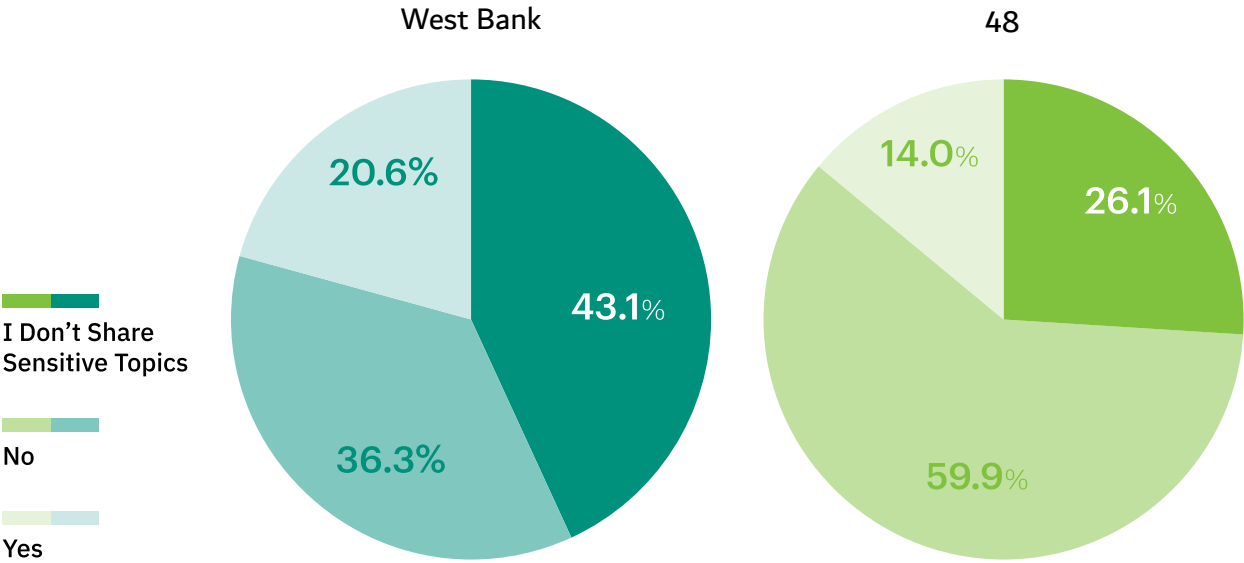
This perspective was reflected in women's contributions as follows: «The same people who, whenever I add someone, they add them too,» «If there's following, then there's an art to following,» «I remember that as soon as people knew I was going to get married, they started adding me from the extended family more [...] suddenly I had this social interaction. [...] I mean I feel here I became more surveilled», «Also the external society, even people you have no relationship with, you don't know them, [...] they allow themselves to this extent to violate your privacy.» The reasons for this intense and frequent surveillance are linked to gender identity: «Unfortunately, there are things I feel that in Arab society, me as a girl, society imposes certain restrictions on me, I mean in my use of social media.» Meanwhile, numerous statements were repeated that reflect society's treatment of women as appendages to a social, familial, and clan system, necessitating and ensuring their compliance with the systems and rules of this structure: «So-and-so's daughter. So-and-so's sister. The house of so-and-so. The woman always belonging to X,» «In the end, you live in a society that doesn't take you as a person, it takes your whole family.»

Societal surveillance is imposed on women in three different areas: 1. Gender-related positions: «But our society unfortunately is a society that remains confined within the bounds of shame, and that you're a girl, and these topics shouldn't be discussed publicly, and you can't talk about them.» Therefore, surveillance is imposed on women's posts concerning everything related to women in general, from issues of sexual harassment, rape, to sexual or reproductive health. 2. Positions on religious issues: «[...] even if I want to express my opinion about religious matters, I get attacked.» 3. Positions on crime and violence, especially within Palestinian society in Israel: «But today, even socially, you can no longer say anything, I mean you can't criticize crime nor criticize the killings that happen, nor the entire feeling of insecurity.» Another research participant shared that when she lost her uncle and cousin two years ago in a shooting incident, she later realized the possibility of criminals tracking other family members through social media platforms, and she says about this: «Just because my name is from such-and-such family, I could be exposed to murder or harm. Even if I have no connection whatsoever to the whole issue of criminality in our society, but because my name is attached to this family's name. So I went and changed my family name on Facebook just out of fear that they might somehow reach me.»

Figure 3

Q: Have you previously been asked to remove a post or opinion because of its social sensitivities?

One-third of women in the West Bank and '48 who share sensitive posts are asked to delete them



- * While many women do not share things about sensitive topics (43% in the WB and 26% in 48), most of those who do are not being asked to delete the post.
- * Younger females (under 35) are sharing more with 39% reporting they don't share, vs 55% of females over 35 in the West Bank.
- * The opposite is true in '48 with 32% of those under 35 do not share, vs 20% of those over 35.

Requests to delete posts are not limited to political issues alone, as 20.6% of surveyed women in the West Bank and Jerusalem were asked to delete their posts because they touched on socially sensitive issues, while this occurred with only 14% of surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 4]: «Of course here pressure was exerted on me, how can you write like this??! Even though I didn't mention names [...],» and «I felt how much the family too, I mean the very close relatives do you wrong when you speak the truth,» and «I mean for example, my mother always since I was young used to say 'except for photos,' and 'be careful,' and 'so-and-so had this thing happen to her [...].»

As a result of the overlapping and accumulation of multiple layers of surveillance—political, technological, and societal—Palestinian women’s experience in digital space can be likened to a Recursive Box, where each box hides a smaller box inside it, but the boxes in this case represent prisons and cages. This metaphor embodies the form of surveillance that Palestinian women are subjected to. On one hand, the layers of surveillance and control overlap and intertwine with each other and are inseparable. On the other hand, this metaphor reflects the diversity of surveillance levels practiced on Palestinian women, starting from individual surveillance cases (Israeli and Palestinian users), passing through more complex surveillance systems (family, workplace, Palestinian leaders and elites, religious figures, and criminal networks), reaching organizational and hierarchical structures (technology companies, the Palestinian Authority, and Israeli authorities). Furthermore, this metaphor highlights the recursive nature of surveillance systems and their continuity.



CHAPTER TWO

The Digital Margin – The Exclusion of Palestinian Women from the Public Sphere

According to Habermas, the public sphere is a domain open to all citizens, formed through the circulation and discussion of public issues that affect governance and policies in a rational and critical manner. Habermas links this sphere's achievement of its function to it being based on free dialogue, independent from governmental surveillance, economic interests, or any other forces that might influence the discussion process within it. However, Habermas acknowledges that ideal public spheres do not exist in reality, and that whenever they are subjected to additional layers of power, they disintegrate or transform into pseudo-public spheres³². Similarly, the external forces that influence digital space and social media platforms destroy the possibilities of the public sphere within them³³.

Despite Habermas's exaggeration in portraying the accessibility and availability of the public sphere to everyone, public spheres have historically been formed through the exclusion of marginalized groups, foremost among them is exclusion based on gender. Consequently, masculine discourse and behavior have become the standard upon which the essence of public spaces are based³⁴. The term «digital exclusion» is used today to describe similar practices exercised through technology to determine which groups are authorized, qualified, and legitimate to participate in digital space³⁵.

Digital exclusion of women was starkly reflected in the focus groups, and this came from the research participants as follows: «Just because you're a girl, I mean. You can't post such things. You can't express your opinion on such topics,» and «Especially if you're a woman and politically active, you feel more criticized,» and «But basically [he] ignored everything I said and in his opinion it was wrong for me to speak just because I'm a girl. And I remember he, like, went through things from my profile [...] feminine things, and started using them against me, like you can't be, that you can't be feminine and be in politics at the same time.» Social practices related to social media use and the comments typically directed at women reflect treating the public sphere as if it were men's property, and that women's political and social participation in it is unwelcome.

Moreover, some women are excluded from the digital public sphere immediately and systematically, through depriving the areas where they live of communication services. This happens either through bombing communication infrastructure as occurred in Gaza and areas in the northern West Bank, or through Israel imposing a ban on developing the Palestinian telecommunications sector, and completely preventing excavation and infrastructure extension in Area «C»³⁶, while 42% of Naqab residents live in unrecognized villages without internet services. One of the Naqab women says «[...] I mean even until recently we didn't have internet³⁷. So it was difficult for me to open a page on social media,» while one of the activists in the southern West Bank says: «But definitely, definitely every girl and every woman in our society regardless of where she lives: West Bank, camp, Area C, 48' territories or Jerusalem. Each one has something to say and express.» The digital gap within Palestinian society itself indicates that within the margin that is Palestinian society, there are other margins, which are the margin of the margin.

32 Habermas, Jürgen. (1996). **Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy**. (Trans. William Rehg). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

33 Papacharissi, Zizi. Ibid.

34 Fraser, Nancy. (2021). «Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy.» In: Sabine Knierbein and Ali Madanipour. (Eds.). **Public Space Reader**. Routledge. Pp. 34–41.

35 Harris, Bridget, and Laura Vitis. Ibid.

36 Abu Daqqa, Mashhour. (2023). Control of Palestinian Space: Telecommunications, Radio and Television. **Institute for Palestine Studies**. Retrieved from: [click](#).

37 Makhoul, Habib. (March 25, 2025). The Digital Divide: Israeli Telecommunications Sector Discrimination Against Palestinian Citizens. **Tamleh – The Arab Center for Social Media Advancement**. Retrieved from: [click](#).

As for cases where women enter the public sphere due to the absence of laws, policies, or social norms that prevent this, social actors rely on informal mechanisms to exclude women from political and social discussion on social media platforms. These mechanisms are embodied in a set of social behaviors and expressions that work to dismantle, confiscate, undermine, reinterpret, or even distort women's voices in order to empty them of their power, potential impact, and ability to create change, and subsequently erase and obliterate them. These mechanisms are what we will explore throughout the rest of this chapter.

The first means of undermining women's voices lies in denying the validity of their statements and questioning the soundness of their opinions. A former municipal council member describes that every time she wrote about the marginalization of women's issues within municipal plans and projects and demanded their inclusion in decision-making processes, the response would come immediately: «They would tell me to take down this [post]. Don't try to always write about women, women. And of course [they would tell me] we're not, we work for the whole town. This isn't true.» And in a comment on a «story» in which the research participant expressed her position on femicide and so-called «honor» killings,» one of her acquaintances told her: «[...] You don't even know. Maybe really [...] her family is holding something against her but it didn't spread. I mean you don't know the circumstances of the story either to post about it.»

The research participants' contributions reflect a perception among men that women do not understand political issues, and that they are incapable of forming their political opinions independently without being influenced by other men in their lives, which—in their belief—is enough to strip them of their right to expression. One of the research participants said about a discussion that took place between her and another young man on Instagram after Syria's liberation: «He was basically telling me not to express myself. That every time I post something against Bashar al-Assad [...] he would come in and make me feel that you don't understand, you don't know anything. [...] And then [he told me]: that surely you think this way because your husband is Kurdish, against Syrians and against Bashar al-Assad. I mean he confiscated my entire existence and all my opinions and everything I post on Instagram and put me in this mold.»

Among the additional mechanisms for confiscating women's voices is the reliance on the assumption that the man's voice is the trusted voice that determines for them how they should behave, where their interests lie, and what their priorities should be. One of the research participants says: «I also felt at the same time a confiscation of the choices that I want,» and another says that when she chose to openly support one of the student parties on social media, her colleague reproached her for it, saying: «Are you stupid, why did you post? I asked him: Why? He tells me: Don't burn your card. You might later benefit from the ones from **** [name of another student bloc] for example.» A third said that when she wrote about femicide during the May 2021 Uprising, one of her acquaintances messaged her saying «These issues shouldn't take our priority. There are many more important issues. And these matters are very marginal.»

The method of reproach and condemnation spreads with the aim of pressuring women to delete their posts on internal social or political issues, and it is a method with high social effectiveness. One of the research participants from the West Bank mentioned that during the COVID pandemic, she published criticism about favoritism in COVID vaccinations, especially since priority should go to her father as he is a cancer patient. One of her family's acquaintances who had already taken the vaccine wrote to her: «That you're the last person we expected to post, and that we're friends and all that. So I was forced that day to delete the post.»

One of the most commonly used mechanisms to silence women manifests in stripping legitimacy from their voices through morally distorting their discourse on social, religious, and national levels, by exploiting traditional concepts such as honor and shame as tools for stigmatization and defamation against them. For example, when one of the research participants commented on a post, another user replied: «You shut up, and he said something to me about honor. He told me: You want to teach us about honor?» She clarified her opinion about this type of attack: «This is how they metaphorically [consider] this to be without honor. [...] Regardless of what the political opinion is. But this attack is usually the first attack on a girl. [...] This is usually the first accusation against a girl on social media.»

In other cases, Israelis employ the system of traditions and beliefs in Palestinian society as a weapon against women in general and queers in particular. Women pointed to repeated comments in which Israelis compared the «liberated lifestyle» that Israel offers female Palestinian citizens of Israel with that in other geographical areas: «You have the first argument if someone wants to argue with you, as a queer, I mean. The first thing they tell you, wow: if you go there, they'll kill you. Who are you defending?» This discourse treats Palestinian society as necessarily homogeneous in terms of values and beliefs, and portrays it in a savage and oppressive way, in an attempt to justify war crimes committed against it, but also in an attempt to create a rift and contradiction between the gender and political identity of queers. This logic accuses queers that when they support the Palestinian cause, it means they're siding with the wrong side in the war - the side that opposes their gender identity. Therefore, the following question is repeatedly posed to Palestinian women: «What, do you want to live there [in Gaza]? Do you want to live in an Arab country? Do you want Palestine to return?» Needless to say, this type of response doesn't actually discuss Palestinian women's political claims, completely ignoring them to redirect the discussion toward internal gender issues within Palestinian society.

In addition, religious discourse forms a fundamental means to restrict women's freedom of expression, especially when their posts or opinions contradict prevailing religious beliefs or when touching upon the religious system and authority. Those who use this means believe that religious authority is absolute, with no other authority above it, while considering their interpretation of religion as necessarily correct. For example, one of the research participants shared that legitimacy is often stripped from her opinions on religious issues because of her appearance or external look, or because she doesn't follow the Islamic religious dress code. In another incident, one of the research participants once posted a saying «that corruption comes from those who wear turbans,» by which she meant turbans in the concept of religious and political authority, but she was attacked for posting it: «I remember that day I was deemed an infidel. I mean there was a very big attack on social media [saying] how can we leave our children with you if you're not teaching them about religion? You're an atheist. You're a danger to society.»

An additional example on this topic: another research participant posted about the Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem leaking lands, and she explains what happened to her: «That I'm an Orthodox Christian. It's not like I'm posting something about another sect. But I'm criticizing. So also my friends at the church made me feel like no, it might cause a problem. Especially since I'm a member of the church scouts.»

One method of erasing women's voices in the digital space involves their social environment invalidating their opinions, based on the assumption that they lack sufficient national credentials to entitle them to express their political positions. For example, when one of the research participants posted criticism against one of the Palestinian student movements within Israel, she received a

message from one of its activists questioning her right to «theorize» about the movement as long as she doesn't live amid the fires in Gaza, as if the eligibility to express an opinion is only earned when a woman is threatened with death by bombardment. The same research participant says that one of the methods of attacking her was by stripping her of her eligibility for political expression because she got married during the war, as she was told in one discussion: «Oh, you had your wedding during the war. What were the songs? Arabic or [...]?»

In contrast, men who commit sexual assaults and violations against women are typically excused on the pretext that their national credentials intercede for them. Not only that, but women who share their stories publicly often face major attacks where they're accused of being agents and collaborating with the occupation to bring down men because of their political activism against the occupation. One of the research participants says about a similar incident: «[...] he made it seem like she was trying to frame him. And that Israel wants to silence him [...] suddenly if a girl wants to talk about any of these young men who [...] supposedly nationalists, it becomes as if she wants to ruin his reputation, or tarnish his reputation, and the girl and her story and what happened to her no longer matter. It becomes why does this girl want to talk about this young man who's known religiously and nationally and so on?» Another added: «[...] it becomes very difficult for you to talk about someone who's in political contexts where someone is considered politicized and such, even though they might be a liar and a hypocrite. But you start feeling that the first thing they'll do is label you a traitor, and ask who's behind you? What's your goal? What are your reasons? And so on.»

From these examples and models, we can discern how patriarchal and colonial systems work to exclude women from the public sphere through systematic and circumventive means. Excluding women from the public sphere limits their right to political participation and influence over decisions on issues that primarily concern them, in addition to depriving them of assuming leadership roles and reducing digital content related to equality and human rights³⁸ that differs from male voices, which are typically characterized by power and violence. Furthermore, erasing women's voices from the digital space leads to hindering women's integration into civic and political life in the physical space as well³⁹, hindering the advancement of development and democracy processes, and even national peace processes, especially since studies show women's pivotal role in preventing conflicts from erupting, and in resolution processes and promoting lasting peace⁴⁰.

38 Dunn, Suzie. Ibid.

39 de Silva de Alwis, Rangita. Ibid.

40 United Nations. (October 2024). **UN Report: Number of Women Killed Due to Wars Doubled in 2023**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

CHAPTER THREE

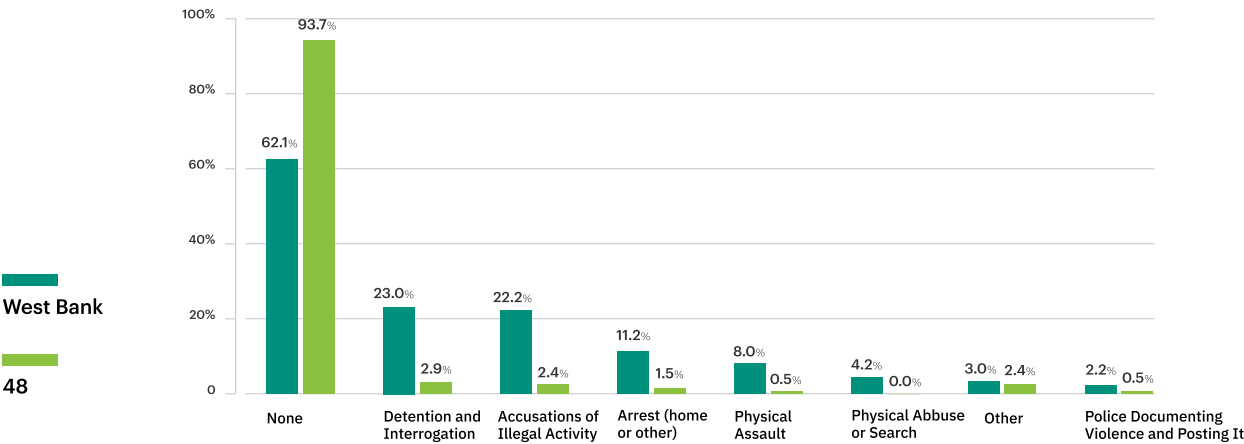
Punishment – Tools of Security and Institutional Oppression of Palestinian Women

When individuals do not comply with the rules set by dominant groups, these groups exercise ideological violence - whether physical or structural - against them with the aim of influencing and controlling their behaviors. In practice, at this stage, dominant groups rely on using coercive means to achieve their goals and objectives after surveillance fails to do so⁴¹. The primary means of punishing Palestinian women for their political activity on social media platforms is security-judicial punishment, where 23% of women in the West Bank and Jerusalem were subjected to detention or investigation and questioning; while 11.2% of them were subjected to arrest or house arrest, and charges of incitement and supporting terrorism were filed against 22.2% of them. These percentages decrease significantly among female Palestinian citizens of Israel, where detention and arrest rates stood at only 2.9%, compared to 1.5% for cases of arrest and house arrest, and 2.4% for filing charges of incitement and supporting terrorism based on social media posts [see Figure 5].

Figure 4

Q: Have you or someone you know been subjected to any of the following attacks because of your political activity on social media?

Physical attacks are rare, but interrogations (23%) and accusations (22%) are common in the West Bank



* The most common types of physical attacks on females in the West Bank are interrogations and accusations of illegal activity like supporting terrorism (23% and 22% respectively).

Research participants indicated that the criteria for arresting women is not only linked to the geographical area they belong to, but also to their level of religiosity, as the Israeli logic of punishment

41 Fuchs, Christian. Ibid.

relies heavily on stereotypical criteria for suspecting and harming individuals: «They don't suspect just any girl, let's be realistic. The veiled girl (wearing hijab), yes, absolutely gets searched, and they suspect her, and she gets treated much worse than me who isn't veiled [...] Even the arrests that take place, they happen in this way.»

Although female Palestinian citizens of Israel experienced lower rates of arrest or judicial proceedings, the fear of arrest was strongly present in their contributions compared to women from the West Bank. It appears that the arrest of prominent female figures after October 7th significantly impacted their fears. One of them states: «It wasn't arbitrary that the first prisoner they took was Dalal Abu Amna. [...] And the method. And the documentation. And the circumstances.. [...] It means that no one has any guarantee.' She clarifies, «When you imprison certain people, it means you feel that you were imprisoned. Okay. Not you physically or anything. But you felt that this imprisonment is for you. Meaning, watch out, this one was imprisoned.' This indicates that Israel succeeded in silencing Palestinian women within Israel solely through nurturing fear and terror among them. Regarding this, one activist in the Naqab says: «You had campaigns where they came and took young women in the middle of the night, snatched them from their homes because of a social media post on Instagram. This intimidation policy they used within Palestinian society in Israel: if I act on 2, 4, 10 like this, the whole village goes silent».

This was not the only factor that created such fear. Female Palestinian citizens of Israel indicate that Palestinian society deals with women's arrest differently from men's arrest, even when the arrest is politically motivated and based on their struggle for social justice: «Very few women among us have been imprisoned. They always had a taboo against taking women.' Other women state that this reaction is linked to the concept of shame: «They say she lowered her family's head. She dishonored her people. God knows what shame she brought upon them,' and «For example, let's say a girl placed a like [on social media], they forget why she was taken [arrested], and they focus on the fact that she's a girl.' Meanwhile, an activist says that this reaction is related to sexual assaults that women face in prison: «In general, women who enter detention, whether for political reasons or otherwise, get a kind of stigma placed on them,' and «Among us, when a woman gets arrested, you start hearing a hundred things in the village. What they did to her inside. God knows what she went through.' The patriarchal logic of Arab societies, which imposes different classifications for men and women when arrested, pushes women to try to avoid arrest at any cost, even if it means silence about the genocide.

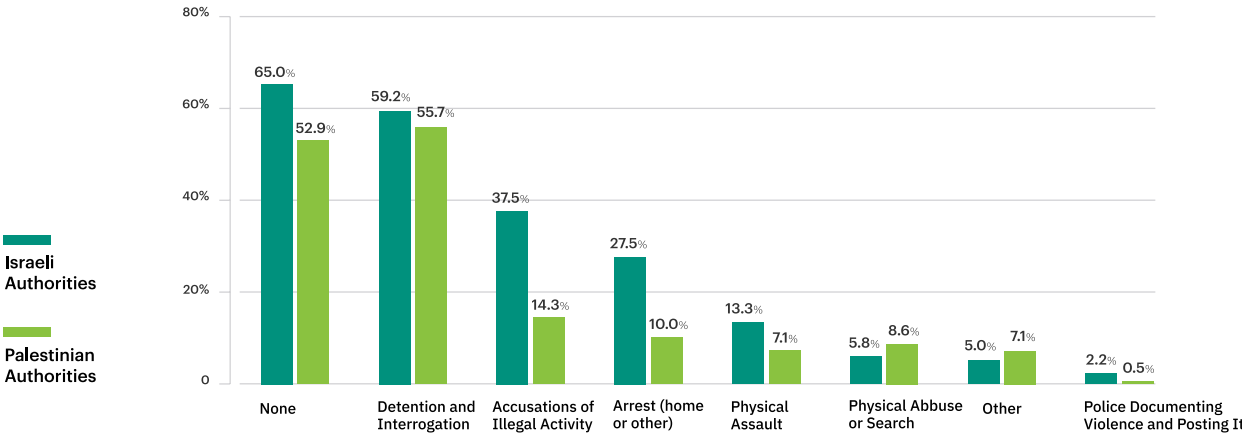
The survey results show that Israeli authorities tend to prosecute women in the West Bank and Jerusalem legally and security-wise more than the Palestinian authorities do, where 59.2% of respondents indicate that they themselves or someone they knew have been subject to detention and interrogation by Israel due to political activity on social media in comparison to 55.7% of respondents indicating the same for the Palestinian Authority. Moreover, 27.5% of respondents indicate arrest and house arrest cases by the Israeli authorities compared to 10% by the Palestinian Authorities. Finally, 37.5% of respondents indicate that they themselves or someone they know

have had indictments filed against them from the Israeli authorities on charges of incitement and supporting terrorism, compared to 14.3% of respondents indicating the same from the Palestinian Authority [see Figure 6]. Nevertheless, legal-security prosecutions remain the most prevalent type for both authorities compared to other types that will be detailed later in the study.

Figure 5

Q: Have you or someone you know been subjected to any of the following attacks because of your political activity on social media?

Israeli Authorities are more likely to be the perpetrators of Accusation of Illegal Activity and Arrest in the West Bank



* While Israeli Authorities are more likely to be perpetrators along most types of assault, the Palestinian Authorities are more likely to be perpetrators of Physical Abuse and Search.

The second form of punishment inflicted on Palestinian women, which receives the highest percentage after legal-security prosecutions, is physical beating or assault at a rate of 8% in the West Bank and 0.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 5]. The percentage of women who were subjected to beating by Israeli authorities reached 13.3% compared to 7.1% by Palestinian authorities [see Figure 6].

Regarding cases of strip searches of women or physical/digital sexual assaults, the rate reached 4.2% among surveyed women in the West Bank and Jerusalem, while there were no similar cases among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 5]. Among the surveyed women, 8.6% of them were subjected to this type of assault by the Palestinian Authority, compared to 5.8% by the Israeli Authority [see Figure 6].

Additionally, assaults on women were documented and published in 2.2% of cases in the West

Bank, compared to 0.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. In this type of assault, the Israeli Authority was responsible for 2.2% of them compared to 0.5% by the Palestinian Authority [see Figure 5]. One activist shared that the majority of Palestinian women arrested during the war were subjected to sexual harassment during strip searches by female soldiers of the occupation authority, while male soldiers watched and documented the searches on video. After their release, numerous fears surfaced about the leaking of these videos and photographs, particularly the possibility of their families discovering them.

3% of the surveyed women in the West Bank indicated they experienced other types of punishment, compared to 2.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 5], and focus groups helped reveal some of these methods. The first method is stalking and harassment in physical space. For example, one woman in the West Bank shared about a case where Palestinian security men followed a young woman with their cars at night to intimidate her because she did not refrain from posting on social media sites. In other cases, occupation forces raided and searched Palestinian women's homes for the same reason. One research participant states: «Many girls – they summoned their families and threatened them, and some girls – they raided their homes at night and gave them a notice and threat [saying] if you write on social media or we see anything else from you, next time it's arrest, not just threats.

The third punishment consists of depriving women of social and civil rights, such as: social security, health and education, citizenship and residency, etc. For example, large numbers of Palestinian women living in unrecognized villages in the Naqab live without status or citizenship, as they are originally from Gaza or the West Bank and married to male Palestinian citizens of Israel. An activist from the Naqab shared about a case where a woman from Gaza who is married in the Naqab wrote a post expressing solidarity with her family regarding what happened to them in Gaza: «My heart is with you all. May God be our refuge and protector, my heart is with you all. I swear I don't know [...]» The activist describes her post as «something very emotional. Humanistic. There's nothing political in it. Her heart is with her family who are there [in Gaza].» As punishment for this post, Israeli authorities deported her to Hebron in the West Bank without her children or husband: «They took her from her home and threw her in Hebron. I mean, not even arrest or anything. I mean, just displacement.» In another case, a female Palestinian citizen of Israel, married to a non-Palestinian man, indicated her fear that Israeli authorities would refuse to register her marriage due to her political posts on social media platform. In other cases, one activist shared that some women «were in the process of obtaining residence or stay permits after they came into Israel, escaping domestic violence- or on whatever grounds- but the procedures got completely blocked; it became impossible [to proceed with it anymore]». This also happened to Women from the West Bank who are married to Palestinian Citizens of Israel. These cases show how the political and social intersect, while civil and social rights are transformed into a bargaining chip to suppress political rights – either this or that.

The fourth method is economic punishment of women, as Israeli authorities consider that women and Palestinians in general should feel grateful to them for allowing them to reside and work in Israel. They view granting these rights as sufficient to ensure their submission to Israel's political and military decisions, as well as being deprived of their right to political expression. One woman from the Naqab who was subjected to investigation says: «Of course he threatened me and told me «your family is an ungrateful family, and like– you work in Israel, and live in Israel, but your loyalty isn't to it, supposedly» One example of economic punishment is imposing security bans on many young women from the West Bank who worked in Jerusalem hospitals, while work permits were revoked from other women. Similarly, an activist from within Israel, according to her testimony, had

her medical license revoked over a post in which she described one of the Israeli officers killed in ground confrontations in Gaza as a war criminal rather than a hero: «And it went as far as [...] them suspending my medical license.» Israel has also exerted pressure on municipality members and teachers in the Ministry of Education to completely refrain from political expression on social media platforms or in the workplace.

In this way, Israel has transformed government positions into a trap in which women are directly subjected to the mercy of the state's central authority, which can threaten their economic security and cut off their income. This is the same trap that women in the government sector in the West Bank face, where one research participant indicated that her extremely sensitive position does not allow her to express her opinion on social media platforms at all, especially if this opinion opposes the Authority's policies. Economic punishment carries particularly severe harm to women more than men, as women already suffer from extensive structural economic oppression due to wage and employment opportunity gaps, their exclusion from administrative and senior positions, and men's domination of certain work fields and sectors, in addition to the fact that employment opportunities within Israel are often linked to the Israeli market.

The fifth type of punishment takes the form of expulsion from education. In these cases, academic institutions transform into one of the authority's arms, performing the functions of the police and military apparatus that serves colonial purposes through the suppression and punishment of Palestinian women. This type of punishment reflects the extent to which different institutions intersect with the authoritarian structure and the extent to which their visions align and conform with the state's visions. These cases were not limited to female Palestinian citizens of Israel, as one research participant from the West Bank shared that a female student at her university was expelled from education for an entire semester on charges of insulting one of the political parties, despite the fact that her post was not written in an educational context.

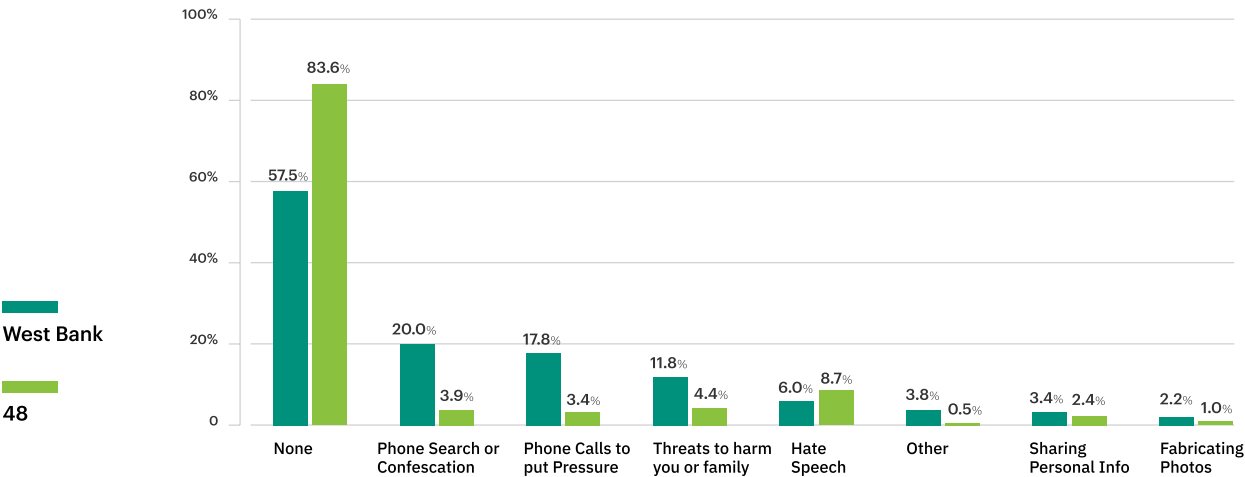
Besides the physical and material assaults that women face as a result of their activity in the digital world, there are other assaults confined to the digital space, experienced by 42.5% of surveyed women in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 16.4% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel. The most widespread digital assault in the West Bank and Jerusalem is phone searches or confiscation at a rate of 20% compared to 3.9% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 7].

It is worth noting that many women are subjected to harassment, strip searches, and rape threats at checkpoints by occupation soldiers. For example, one activist shared: «A veiled young woman, the soldier opened her photos on the Gallery, and looked at her photos and told her 'By God, you're beautiful without the hijab,' and made gestures with his hand.»

Figure 6

Q: Have you or someone you know ever been subjected to any of the following digital attacks because of your national identity of political activity?

Over 40% of WB and only 16% of ‘48 women have faced digital attacks over political activity



- * Overall, approximately 40% of those in the WB have been subjected to digital attacks, while only 16% of those in ‘48.
- * One in five females in the West Bank have been subjected to phone searches or confiscation.
- * Approximately 20% in the WB have also been subjected to phone calls to put pressure on them.

Finally, women expressed concern about the punishment that might target their family members as a result of their digital political activity, as the Israeli and Palestinian repressive apparatus exploited the pivotal role socially placed on women’s shoulders to care for the cohesion and safety of

family members as a deterrent tool. The Israeli repressive system is not satisfied with punishing the individual alone, but extends its punishment to individuals' families in an unjust and illegal manner, subjecting families to collective punishments such as dismissal of family members from work or education, summoning them for investigations with the Shabak, arrests and threats. Survey results showed that 11.8% of surveyed women in the West Bank received threats of harm to themselves or one of their family members, compared to 4.4% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 7].

One activist says: «As a human rights activist, the threat isn't just on you [alone]. I mean, if the threat was just on the person alone, it would be much easier. Today it has become that your whole family is included in this threat. All their interests. All your family members are under this threat», and «I have to take into account that I have a family on my shoulders and every action of mine must be calculated.» Another adds: «First of all, given that my family is not politically engaged, I can't force them to enter this space that they chose not to be in,» and «Because [when it comes to] anyone in the family, the whole family gets dragged in with them, the entire family enters into a state of oppression and injustice and all these things.»

In one story from the West Bank, the research participant indicated that Fatah youth threatened a female student in the university bathrooms because of her criticism of the party's policies in one of her posts: «A girl followed her to the bathroom [...] threatening her, saying 'if you don't delete it, we will harm your family. We, the organization of the town, know your family well, so we can come and attack you all, and don't endanger your family's life, so it's better that you delete the comment and stay silent and not talk about it.'»

Specifically, the conflict emerged between the caregiving role for children and the national and political role among women activists and Palestinian mothers, where the primary concern among mothers was linked to their children losing their care and nurturing in case of their arrest. One of them says: «I told myself if I go to this demonstration, I don't know if I'll be able to return to the girls. And all my thinking was about the girls. Maybe if I were alone I don't know, maybe I would pay this price,» and «I felt the persecution against me would be at the expense of my motherhood.» On the other hand, the persecution that targeted some mothers led to exposing their children to danger or threatening them with harm to their children. One of them says: «Also, maternal emotion [...] has become a source of threat, and a source of weakness. And also the mother is always threatened through her children and her sons.» Additionally, one Palestinian activist who is a citizen of Israel shared that an inciting article was published about her in the Israeli press, which explicitly mentioned that she often takes her daughters with her to her activities in the field.

In these cases, the experience of motherhood, which is supposed to be a warm and tender experience, transforms into a violent experience filled with fear, and into a weapon and point of weakness that may be used against women first, and against their children second. This type of repression attacks the experience that is unique to women, and the central and fundamental role of women as framed by most societies. Therefore, any attack on this role becomes an attack on the meaning behind women's existence and life, effectively a negation of woman in her entirety. Women are placed before two choices: either to perform their maternal and caregiving role for their children and commit only to this role, or the authorities forcibly nullify the woman's motherhood while depriving her of the possibility of protecting her children. This repressive practice seeks to dismantle Palestinian communal life by destroying the gendered roles within it.

As for the threats to women themselves, women are frequently exposed to threats from the surrounding community environment due to differences in political positions. One of the research participants says, describing the university environment: «Especially if you oppose, unfortunately, those affiliated with the youth movement or Fatah. They want to force you to join them. They don't want you to challenge their views. If you write your opinion on one of their posts, even if you're a woman, they'll send women to threaten you.»

For example, women are subjected to threats of publishing or fabricating photos and videos of them (at a rate of 2.2% among Palestinian women in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 1% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel) [see Figure 7]. For instance, one of the research participants describes a similar incident: «Once, young women were threatened with photos. This incident circulated widely. She told her: 'We can fabricate your photos and manipulate them in various ways, then send them to your family, and at that point you'll definitely delete the post and comment you wrote.'»

Within Israel, Palestinian queer women face threats from Israeli users and colleagues who threaten to expose their sexual orientation publicly if they don't take a supportive position toward Israeli policies during the war on Gaza. One of the activists shared several similar cases that reached the organization, including a case of a woman who did not engage with her colleagues' discussion in a «WhatsApp» group after October 7th, which they interpreted as support for Hamas: «One of the colleagues [...] told her, 'you should understand, this is an event where you're supposed to take a position. Not taking a position is a position against the state's narrative.'» In this context, Israelis also exploit internal components and characteristics within Palestinian society to punish queer women for their positions without being directly involved: «[He told her] in his exact words, 'I can't guarantee that your family won't accidentally find out that you're a lesbian. And therefore, they'll do the work for us,'» which transforms queer identity into a means of political pressure and blackmail. This contradicts Israel's claim that life there represents a paradise for homosexuals, and that it is the only country in the Middle East that provides protection, rights, and a dignified life for the queer community; this is known as the «pinkwashing» strategy, which it has long used to whitewash its image as an occupying state and colonial power and to cover up its violations of Palestinian rights.⁴²

Similarly, women are subjected to threats of rape and sexual assault, which is a type of threat directly linked to gender and aims to occupy and control the body. One Female Palestinian activist who is a citizen of Israel indicated that rape threats had reached her and her sister following a post in which she described an army officer as a war criminal. In addition to threats of publishing photos, women face threats of arrest. In an exceptional case, one of the research participants described being threatened by another Palestinian citizen of Israel who is political activist because she criticized the work of the movement to which the activist belongs. As for the type of threat, it was a threat to file a complaint or report against the research participant with the Israeli police. About this, the research participant said: «They want to threaten [political expression] and use the Israeli-political authority that they themselves don't want to deal with [to suppress it...]. Imagine an activist who claims to be Palestinian threatening me.»

In addition to direct threats to women, women are exposed to cases of indirect threats through contacting family members for the purpose of pressure to suppress their digital political activity. The

42 Jamal, R. A. (June 13, 2015). Israel and «Washing» Campaigns: Colonialism in its Pink Color. **Al-Qaws**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

percentage of these cases reached 17.8% of survey respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem, compared to 3.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 7]. This type of threat relies on the societal structure that views men as having authority over women. One of the research participants says: «The reason was mostly threats that would reach my father, or that my brothers would walk by the Shabak and hear talk about them and about me as well,» and another says: «Not me. My brothers were summoned. But my name was mentioned to my family. My name was raised to them. I don't know, maybe they understand the concept that you're Bedouin or maybe as an Arab woman when they call the father, sometimes it gives like a 'roshem' [a Hebrew word meaning impression] as if her father can restrict her or control her. And honestly, they're right about this thing.»

A third research participant describes the feeling that overcame her when the «Shabak» contacted her supervisor, who then contacted her brother with the aim of suppressing her digital activity: «At that moment I felt terribly humiliated. Humiliated as a woman. Humiliated in my very being. In my personality. And they know how free I am as a person.» These examples show how political and patriarchal structures not only feed each other but also interact with one another, transferring the tasks of surveillance and control between themselves.

Among female Palestinian citizens of Israel, the most widespread type of assault is hate speech against women in the digital environment at a rate of 8.7% of respondents compared to 6% in the West Bank. One female Palestinian activist who is a citizen of Israel described being subjected to a vicious incitement campaign against her, in which well-known and famous Israeli social media participated, along with official media and journalistic platforms, and even Israeli political figures.

Finally, many feminists are subjected to defamation and smear campaigns aimed at deterring them from practicing their feminist activities. Defamation is defined as the publication of false information about a person with the aim of damaging their reputation, and women are often the central victims of defamation operations because society places special importance on women's reputations compared to men⁴³. Specifically, four different associations, three from the West Bank and one from Jerusalem, described being subjected to widespread, systematic, and long-term defamation campaigns against them by Hizb al-Tahrir. In all these cases, the party used the term «CEDAW-ists» to describe them, referring to the CEDAW Convention (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women). As part of the campaign, the activists were accused of being paid by the West to implement a foreign agenda aimed at corrupting Palestinian society, opposing Islam and customs and traditions, and even prohibiting legitimate marriage and encouraging women and girls to commit adultery. These defamation attempts seek to delegitimize feminist and women's work by stigmatizing it morally.

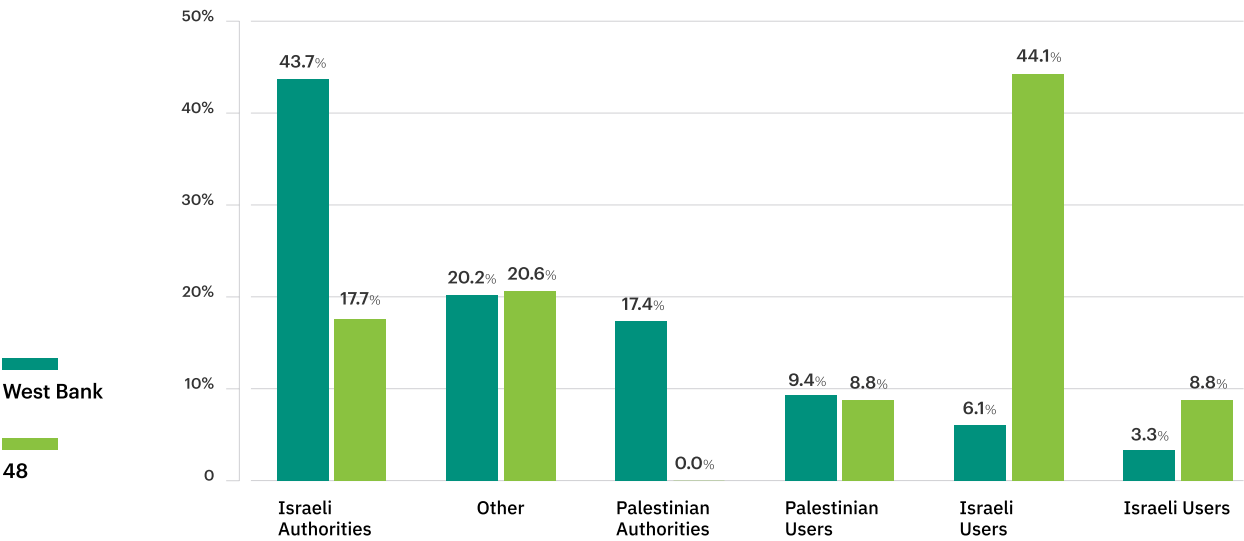
In addition to that, women in the West Bank and Jerusalem are exposed to threats of publishing their personal information because of their digital political activity at a rate of 3.4% of survey respondents compared to 2.4% for the West Bank and Jerusalem [see figure number 7].

43 Dunn, Suzie. Ibid.

Figure 7

Q: Who was the responsible entity for the attack?

Israeli authorities (WB: 44%) and Israeli users ('48: 44%) are the main perpatrators



- * Most perpetrators of abuse for political activity in the WB are official authorities (Palestinian and Israeli) making up approximately 60% of all abuses.
- * Individual users only make up approximately 18% of abuses in the WB.
- * In '48, the Israeli authorities only make up 18% of abuses.

Israeli authorities are responsible for the highest percentage of digital attacks in the West Bank and Jerusalem (43.7% of surveyed respondents), while Israeli users occupy the highest percentage of perpetrators of attacks against female Palestinian citizens of Israel (44.1% of surveyed respondents). Also, only women in the West Bank are subjected to attacks committed by the Palestinian Authority (17.4% of surveyed respondents), while 8.8% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel face similar attacks from Palestinian leadership in Israel. Apart from that, the rates of attacks from Palestinian users are almost equal at 9.4% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 8.8% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel[see figure number 8].

CHAPTER FOUR

Assault — Between Verbal and Behavioral Violence: Women's Bodies in Digital Social Interactions

This chapter reviews the behavioral, verbal, and visual assaults that arise from everyday social interactions between women and their surroundings. To begin with, it should be noted that the unstable political context and war did not deter the practice of digital gender-based assaults against women, which reflects a state of moral disintegration in Palestinian society. Many women expressed their denunciation of the assaults they were subjected to during the war directly to the aggressors: « Even during the conversation I told him: Listen. Do you see what's happening in our country? And you're coming to talk to me?! You honestly feel capable [of continuing your harassment- even now]?» and «I scolded him: Aren't you ashamed? People are being killed. Look at what's happening to our people in Gaza,» while others expressed this during interviews: «Who does something like this during war? Do you have the mindset for this during war?» and «No, no, who sees images of body parts and feels like now I want to go harass a girl? Disgusting. Why, why?»

On one hand, aggressors exploit the chaos resulting from war as cover for these violations and assaults, as women often feel that the political situation is not appropriate to approach or seek help when they are assaulted, and that the first priority should be supporting the people of Gaza. On the other hand, the war has given rise to a category of opportunistic individuals who feed on the human vulnerability of women generated by the war, in order to achieve personal gains and benefits. Thirdly, the unprecedented levels of colonial violence experienced by Palestinians in the West Bank are often translated into gender-based violence within family relationships, where men discharge their anger and resentment on the socially weaker links of women and children.

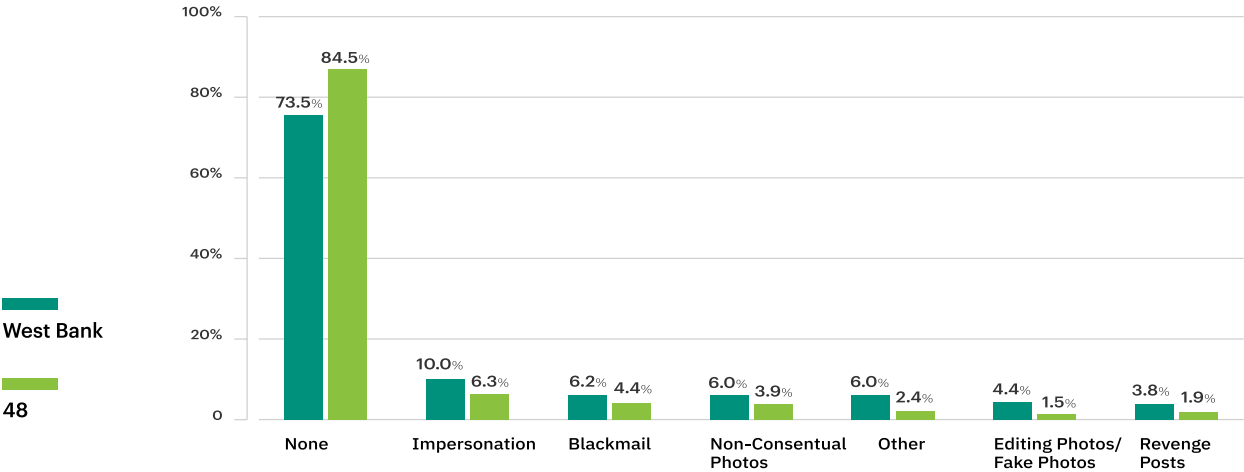
A large part of the assaults against women relies on visual materials because they redirect focus to women's bodies, exposing, violating, and sexually objectifying them, which is the opposite of what Arab culture generally calls for in terms of the necessity of covering, veiling, and hiding the body. Indeed, technology does not enable the physical violation of the body, but it transforms it into material for consumption and visual enjoyment, making it available to large groups of people. One research participant describes her discomfort with the way young men scrutinize and examine women's photos on social media sites: «Because I see photos of other girls, and I see how guys interact with these photos. She might have posted a normal picture of herself in regular clothes, but they start looking at her posterior, or her chest, or her face, or 'look at her teeth,' or 'look how fat she has become' [...]».

Specifically, fears related to image fabrication and editing using artificial intelligence were observed, or as one research participant described it, having «a phobia of AI that distorts images.» Survey results show that 4.4% of women surveyed from the West Bank and Jerusalem were subjected to image editing or fabrication compared to 1.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see figure number 9].

Figure 8

Q: Have you ever experienced any of the following visual attacks in a digital environment?

Visual abuse is rare, with impersonation being the most reported form



- * Approximately 10% in the WB and 6.3% in '48 have experienced impersonation, which is the most common type of visual attack experienced.
- * There is a significant difference for females over 35 years old with 88% in the WB and 90% in '48 reporting "none".

In addition to that, most cases of cyber extortion shared by research participants rely on threatening to publish sexual materials, especially photos and videos, more than text messages. Cyber extortion is considered a behavioral assault and an electronic crime in which the aggressor uses threats to demand money or other benefits from the victim in exchange for not leaking sensitive information they have about them or not harming them in some way⁴⁴. 6.2% of survey respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem indicated they were subjected to extortion compared to 4.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see figure number 9), and it is believed that the percentages may be higher, but women were reluctant to disclose this due to the sensitivity of the topic. Perpetrators may access these photos and videos by hacking women's accounts, but in most cases, young women deliberately share materials with men consensually, and one activist indicates that the biggest problem lies in the trust that young women give to men at very early stages of relationships.

44 Kshetri, Nir. (2010). The Global Cybercrime Industry: Economic, Institutional and Strategic Perspectives. Springer.

As for the reasons and purposes of extortion, some may be for economic and financial purposes, as one activist describes a noticeable increase in assault rates for financial reasons since the beginning of the war. In a shocking incident, one woman shared about a man from Gaza whose phone was stolen during the war, allowing thieves to access materials on it. The problem was that the man kept videos he recorded with his wife during intimate relations, which led the thieves to blackmail him in exchange for not publishing them. For what affected him most was that his wife was martyred during the bombing, yet this did not deter the attackers from their behavior.

Apart from financial purposes, several activists agreed that the most common reasons for extortion are sexual services, either through sexting, or even practicing video sex, up to demanding women engage in physical sex. This type of assault is classified as sexual coercion, which is any pressure that forces women and girls to engage in sexual relations against their will, and deprives them of freedom of choice by imposing severe physical or social penalties if they resist the aggressor's desires⁴⁵.

The third reason for extortion is the Isqat of young men and women and recruiting them for security purposes. Al-Qaws Foundation defines Isqat as blackmailing individuals based on their sexual behavior in various forms to make them fall into the trap of collaborating with the occupation⁴⁶. In other cases, the occupation exploits these materials to blackmail fathers and relatives of women prisoners in jails, pushing them to confess and cooperate in exchange for not publishing them. One research participant says: «[...] and there was a young woman who had an intimate relationship with a Palestinian man. And the thing was filmed. And her father was a prisoner. [She laughed bitterly]. And in order to extract a confession from her father, they showed him the video [...]». Research participants in Jerusalem describe continuous flirtation attempts from occupation soldiers toward Jerusalem women in the Old City, which aim, among other reasons, to entrap them.

Also, some women may be subjected to the publishing of intimate photos or messages for revenge purposes, a type of assault that reached 3.8% among Palestinian women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 1.9% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see figure number 9). One activist shared several cases where husbands recorded intimate relations with their wives, whether consensually or non-consensually, which later provided them with materials to blackmail them when a dispute occurred between them or when they decided to divorce, to make them give up their financial rights and child custody rights. In one of these cases, the husband published photos of his wife semi-nude when she refused to yield to the threat. These cases indicate that neither public space, private space, nor digital space can be safe for women. Survey results show that 6% of Palestinian women surveyed in the West Bank are subjected to being photographed without their consent, compared to 3.9% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see figure number 9).

45 Chawki, Mohamed, and Yassin El Shazly. (2013). Online sexual harassment: Issues & solutions. *Journal of Intellectual Property, Information Technology and Electronic Commerce Law*, 4, pp. 71.

46 Al-Qaws for Sexual and Gender Diversity in Palestinian Society. (April 11, 2023). Colonial «Entrapment» Policy. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

In addition to this type of assault, many feminist activists indicated that the war has led to a resurgence in the technology-facilitated human trafficking market. Due to Israel's closure of checkpoints and its imposition of a widespread ban on Palestinian workers entering work inside the Green Line, the responsibility of supporting the family and covering living expenses has fallen on women's shoulders. Therefore, fake advertisements for employing West Bank women have spread, managed by a well-known male Palestinian citizen of Israel: «They publish that we need women to care for the elderly, with accommodation provided and everything provided,» only for women to later discover that they were lured inside the Green Line and employed in «prostitution and drug networks [...] in addition to security entrapment,» as one activist recounted.

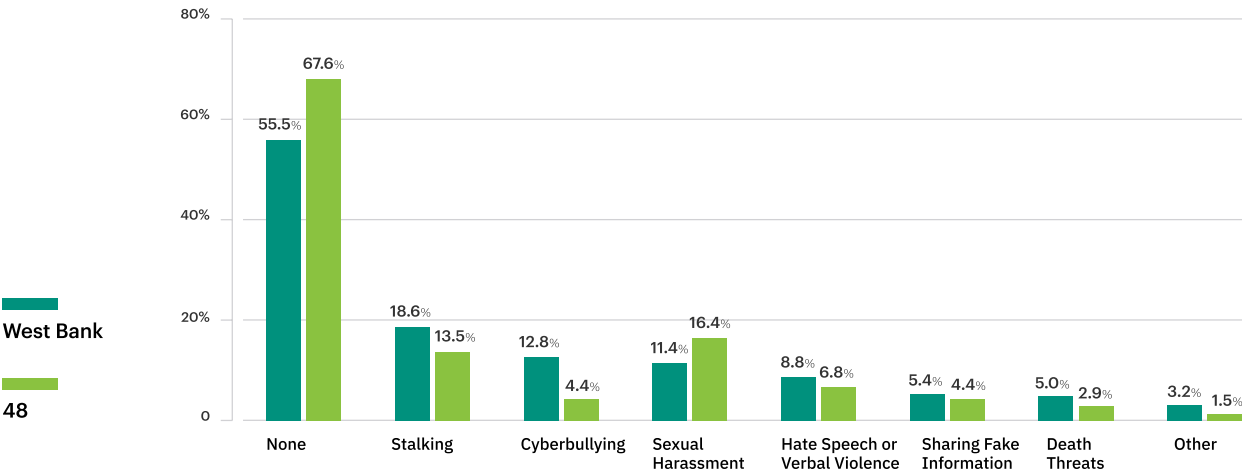
On the other hand, after Israel expelled a large percentage of Gazan women with their children from Israeli hospitals to the West Bank, these women «[...] were sexually exploited, electronically blackmailed, raped, and turned into prostitution,» as shared by a feminist activist from the West Bank. In other cases, service providers exploited the difficult health situation of these women by monitoring their phone numbers from aid lists, contacting them by phone and demanding their compliance with orders if they wished to receive the services they provide, from medications for chronic diseases, food, clothing, water, and so on. Not only that, but they also threatened women to ensure their response to them: «If you don't respond to me, you won't get the service, or I'll threaten you or blackmail you or report you, or share your information with relevant authorities or have you deported, and so on.» These cases of entrapment differ from the previous ones, with some members of Palestinian society exploiting the humanitarian crisis and employing technology and gender-based violence to subject women's bodies to serve their sexual desires and profit-making alike. The activist praised the Palestinian security forces that dealt with these cases quickly and with complete confidentiality, which allowed for controlling these operations and limiting their harm and spread: «He was dealt with, and faced exclusion, held accountable, and legally questioned, so things returned to their almost normal state.»

Apart from that, we find that stalking occupied the highest percentage among women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem (18.6%) compared to female Palestinian citizens of Israel (13.5%) [see figure number 10]. Indeed, stalking was the most common type of assault in interviews and focus groups, specifically unwanted frequent and persistent communication with women. One research participant described this obsessive behavior of continuous communication as a ghost weighing on her life, indicating the heaviness of the experience. She adds that this behavior sometimes transforms into a lifestyle for some men, becoming a common behavior and fixed characteristic in their personality, where they stalk several women in parallel and on a daily basis. In two incidents that embody the degree of obsession that some men may reach, one research participant shared about an aggressor who downloaded her picture from Facebook and asked an artist to draw a similar picture and send it to her home, despite there being no relationship between them of any kind. He also told her of his intention to travel to meet her when she was residing abroad. In a second incident, one stalker came to the research participant's workplace pretending to want to receive her services.

Figure 9

Q: Have you ever experienced any of the following verbal attacks in a digital environment?

Verbal abuse is not widespread, but stalking and harassment still occur



- * Approximately 18% in the WB and 13.5% in '48 have experienced stalking, which is the most common type of verbal attack experienced.
- * In '48 alone, the most common is sexual harassment at 16.4%.
- * There is a significant difference for females over 35 years old in the WB with 72% reporting "none".

Many women shared that stalking is not necessarily related to the victim's age, as one activist says that her 66-year-old mother receives repeated calls late at night, during which the aggressor uses very obscene language. While another says that despite her advanced age, being a mother and grandmother, this has not deterred men from contacting her for the purpose of getting to know her and forming a relationship. In addition, feminist activists are often subjected to unwanted communications from men because the patriarchal imagination portrays them as necessarily non-conservative, without morals, and available for relationships. One activist says about this: «They consider that we are easy in dealing with men, and easy to get.» The trap here lies in the fact that activists as service providers do not always have the luxury of ignoring messages and not engaging with them, as performing her job requires her to examine messages and respond to them for fear that one of the applicants might need help. One of them says: «Sometimes I get a message, I think someone needs help, so I say «Greetings, how can I help?» They start with «I want to get to know you. How old are you? What do you do? You are beautiful.» In this direction, you know.»

In addition to that, research participants in Jerusalem shared about a phenomenon that is common at entrances and gates of the Old City in Jerusalem, where Arab soldiers serving in the occupation army tend to harass women with subtle sexual comments, and some may exploit access to information about Jerusalem women when examining their security files, to save their numbers or names and contact them later through social media platforms in an unwanted manner, and sometimes manipulate them to convince them to date them, which is a clear exploitation of the unbalanced power relations between them.

In some of these extortion cases, women are subjected to emotional and psychological manipulation aimed at pushing them to share photos or videos of themselves which may later be used to blackmail them for the purpose of sexual gratification and exploitation, which is called adult sexual grooming⁴⁷. So these are cases where perpetrators exploit victims' vulnerability to ensure complete control over them, and this vulnerability may be related to a history of depression, violence, and family disintegration⁴⁸. Indeed, one activist reported an incident in which a young woman from Jerusalem was lured by a man, who exploited her psychological vulnerability following her breakup with her former boyfriend, and convinced her to meet him until he almost raped her. In other cases, aggressors succeed through social media platforms in building a state of illusory ideal love for women, which prompted many women to abandon their husbands and children to follow these men, only to discover later that they had fallen victim to sexual exploitation in which they are also subjected to violence. Technology perpetuates the hunter and prey dynamics entrenched in the mindset of patriarchal societies, which symbolizes the societal perception of the relationship between man and woman, considering him a hunter and her the prey he seeks to hunt.

In this context, survey results show that 13.7% of digital assault cases experienced by respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem area turned into physical violence (see figure number 11), compared to 12% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see figure number 12).

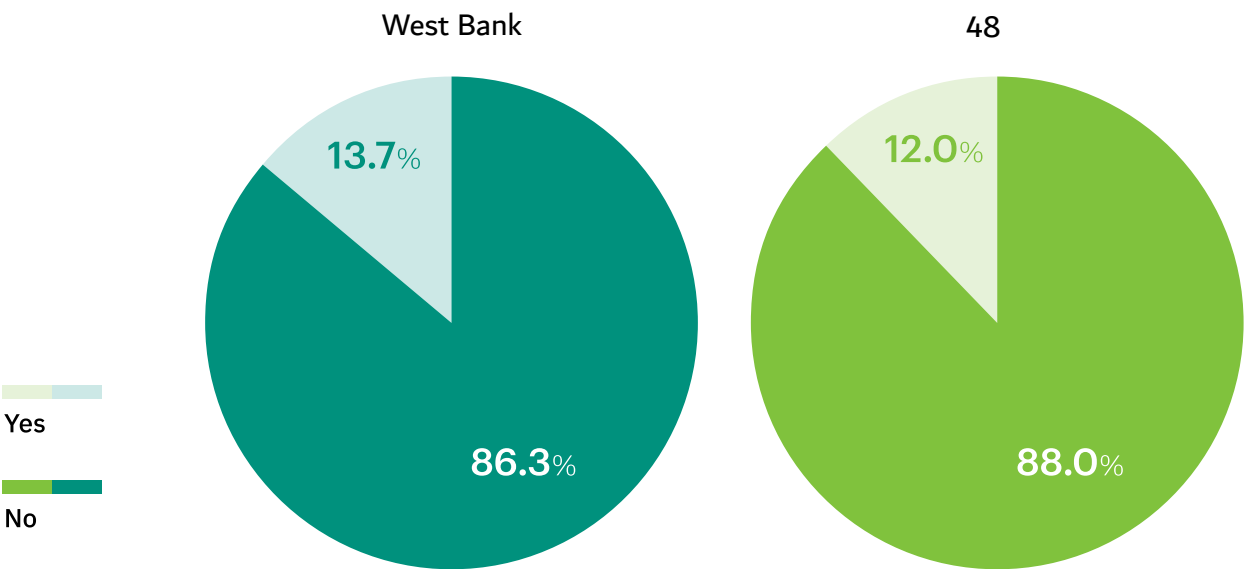
47 Aletky, Christin; Bonita Sharma; Jose Carbajal, and Tia Eubank. (2025). Adult sexual grooming: A systematic review. **Journal of Social Work in the Global Community**, 8(1), Article 3.

48 Slane, Andrea. (2011). Luring Lolita: The age of consent and the burden of responsibility for online luring. **Global Studies of Childhood**, 1(4), pp. 354–364.

Figure 10

Q: Did any of your experiences turn physical?

Women in '48 also rarely identify abusers; most cases remain digital



- * Most of cases in the West Bank (86.3%) do not turn into real physical abuse
- * Most of cases among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (88%) do not turn into real physical abuse.

In addition to that, 10% of survey respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem were subjected to impersonation compared to 6.3% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. As for cases of verbal assault, the most common assault among female Palestinian citizens of Israel is sexual messages and comments at a rate of 16.4% of respondents, compared to 11.4% in the West Bank and Jerusalem [see figure number 10]. In this type of assault, we find that women sharing personal photos on social media may expose them to explicit or subtle sexual comments. In one case, after the research participant published her photo in a dress during the holiday, her colleague at the office commented on it saying: «I saw your photo in a nightgown!» While another says that she once received a message from someone demanding that she sexually enslave him: «Whatever you want. You are the queen and I am the slave [...]».

Digital bullying is considered the second most widespread type of verbal assault at a rate of 12.8% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and 4.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see figure number 10]. Digital bullying is defined as deliberate and repeated aggressive behavior over a period of time, using technological means to execute it, and directed against a victim who cannot defend herself⁴⁹. One activist shared that many girls in school are subjected to

49 Smith, Peter K., Mahdavi, Jess, Carvalho, Manuel, & Tippett, Neil. (2008). Cyberbullying: Its nature and impact in secondary school pupils. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49(4), pp. 376–385.

bullying either about their external appearance, academic performance, short stature, or stuttering. In all these cases, aggressors combine electronic bullying and real-life bullying.

Verbal violence or hate speech against women ranks third in prevalence, with 8.8% of respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem experiencing it, compared to 6.8% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 10]. Hate speech is defined as any verbal expression that promotes, disseminates, incites, encourages, or legitimizes gender-based hatred. This includes the use of derogatory language targeting women and girls because of their gender, which contributes to reinforcing gender inequality and perpetuating violence against women⁵⁰. Women receive numerous offensive comments when their physical appearance does not conform to socially acceptable standards regarding modesty, beauty, humility, and coverage. Two feminist activists were subjected to a systematic campaign against them because one of them, who wears a hijab, had a strand of hair visible from the front of her hijab and a tattoo on her hand. The second activist was attacked because of her «puffy» curly hair and her style of dress. Some men even called emergency lines requesting to speak with one of them by name. This pattern of discourse serves a specific function: to morally judge women and attempt to subject their bodies to social rules, control and dominate them.

In fifth place comes defamation, or sharing false information with the aim of tarnishing women's reputation, at a rate of 5.4% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and 4.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 10]. One of the interviewees shared an incident of a Palestinian woman who was beaten by a settler in the western neighborhoods of Jerusalem; however, Palestinian comments on the video carried a tone of blame and accusation toward her, questioning the reasons and motives that took her to that neighborhood. In another situation, one interviewee shared the story of a young woman who disappeared from one of Jerusalem's buses, and after news spread that her family was searching for her, many rumors circulated accusing the girl of running away with a young man without her parents' knowledge. It was later revealed that the girl had been detained and taken to the Moscobiyya detention center. These two situations prove that women's morals, reputation, and honor will always be the first subject of suspicion in any action or event they may be involved in, even in cases where women are detained or beaten for political reasons, and without the slightest evidence or indication that they committed any act contrary to societal customs and traditions.

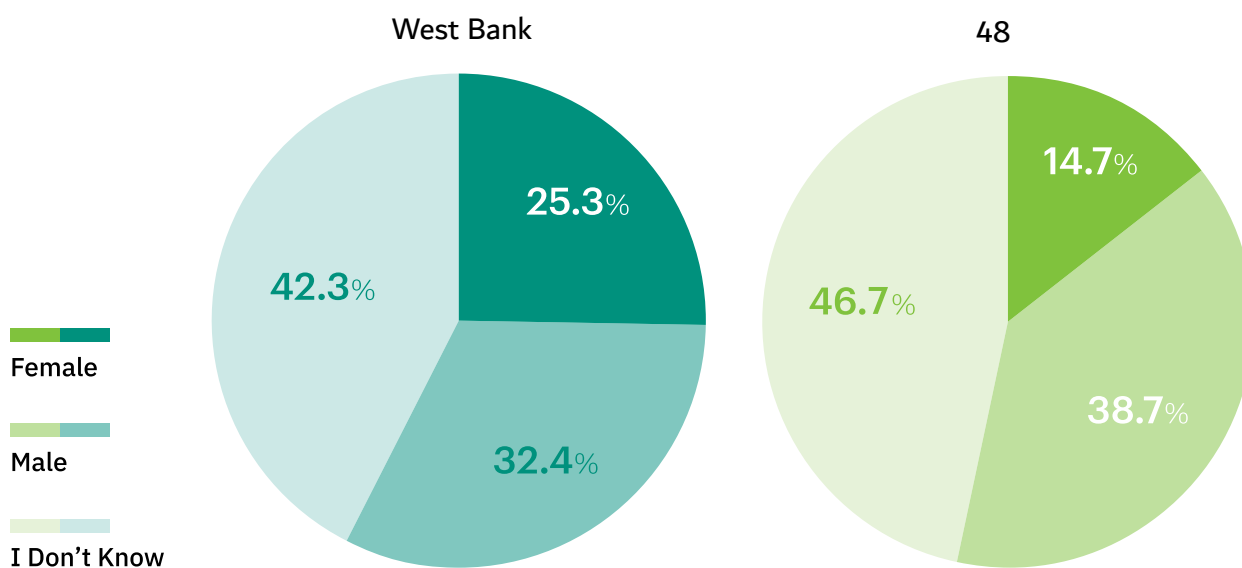
Finally, one of the interviewees -a female Palestinian citizen of Israel- was threatened by Islamic groups following the circulation of a video of her during the month of Ramadan, which did not comply with religious instructions for acceptable behavior during this month. Survey results indicate that 5% of women in the West Bank and Jerusalem were subjected to threats of harm or death, compared to 2.9% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see Figure 10).

50 Council of Europe. (n.d.). **Combating Sexist Hate Speech**. Retrieved from: [click](#).

Figure 11

Q: Who was the perpetrator in this case?

Women in '48 also rarely identify abusers; most cases remain digital



- * Of those that are aware in the West Bank, 56% of the perpetrators are Male.
- * Of female Palestinian citizens of Israel that are aware, 72% of the perpetrators are Male.

In total, 44.5% of women surveyed in the West Bank were subjected to at least one form of verbal assault, and 26.5% to behavioral and visual assaults. Meanwhile, 32.4% of female Palestinian citizens of Israel experienced at least one form of verbal assault and only 15.5% experienced at least one form of behavioral and visual assaults (See figures 9 and 10).

According to the survey results, the majority of reported assaults occurred on Meta's platforms with 66% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem reporting to have experienced assault or abuse on Facebook and 56% within Israel. 54.8% of West Bank and Jerusalem respondents report the same on Instagram, and 46.7% of respondents within Israel. 14.9% of West Bank and Jerusalem respondents have experienced these issues on WhatsApp, with 25.3% of respondents within Israel reporting to have experienced these issues on WhatsApp. Nearly a quarter of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem reported assaults occurred on Snapchat (24.1%), compared to only 2.7% of respondents within Israel. Finally, 11.6% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and 5.3% of respondents within Israel reported assaults occurred on Telegram. 9.5% of West Bank and Jerusalem respondents reported issues on TikTok, with 8% of respondents within Israel reporting the same. As for Twitter, only 3.3% of respondents in the

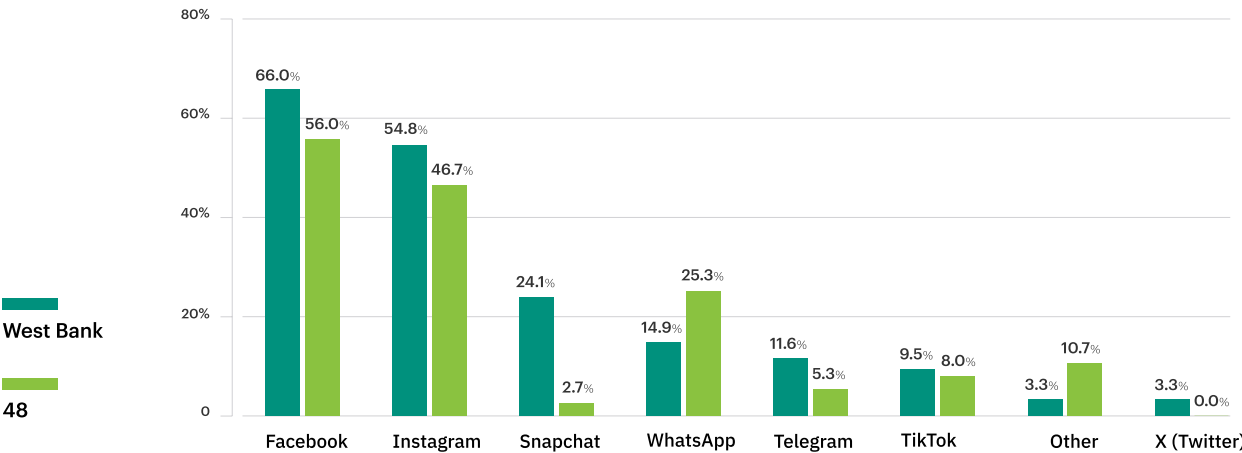
West Bank and Jerusalem reported assaults occurred there, with no significant assaults recorded by respondents within Israel (see Figure 13).

Regarding the identity of the aggressor among cases reported by surveyed respondents in the West Bank, the aggressor’s identity remained unknown in 42.3% of assault cases, while males were responsible for committing 32.4% of them, and females for 25.3% (see Figure 11). Of assaults reported by surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel, the perpetrator’s identity remained unknown, while the perpetrator was identified as male in 38.7% of cases, and female in 14.7% of cases reported.(see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Q: What are the social platforms that you experienced assault or abuse on?

Facebook and Instagram are the primary platforms for online abuse in both regions



- * Nearly one in four females in the WB also experience assault on Snapchat.
- * Nearly one in four females in '48 experience assault on Whatsapp.
- * Messaging platforms like Whatsapp and Telegram have significantly less instances of abuse in the West Bank.

CHAPTER FIVE

Effects and Consequences – After the Assault: How Digital Gender-Based Violence Disrupts Women's Lives?

The fundamental right to access the internet constitutes an essential condition for the realization of other human rights, which women are directly deprived of in areas where internet access is limited or completely non-existent. Therefore, these women are deprived of their right to freedom of expression, political participation, and digital peaceful assembly and organization. As for Gaza, Palestinian women are deprived of the humanitarian right to communicate with their family members and friends to check on their conditions and whether they are still alive or have been killed⁵¹. In the Naqab, the loss of communication with the outside community due to internet deprivation affects women's right to reproductive health and safe and appropriate health-care during childbirth, as cases of women giving birth in cars are common due to delays in communicating with their husbands or relatives who typically work outside the village. Moreover, communication with the hospital and requesting an ambulance is not even possible because vehicles do not enter unrecognized villages, which are not included in electronic maps. This reality reflects how access to the internet and digital justice significantly intersect with women's daily and humanitarian needs, and how internet disconnection has the ability to impact the way women live their lives, their health, and safety.

Similarly, the right of women and their children to education is damaged in areas deprived of communication services, especially after education shifted to Zoom at the beginning of the war, which forced some female students in the Naqab to travel to university periodically under bombardment and put their lives at risk in order to fulfill university assignments. In a report by the Arij Center, it was revealed that frequent internet disruptions due to bombardment led to women losing their jobs in professions requiring internet access, especially in preparing journalistic reports and editing. In order to access the internet, many women risked their lives by walking long distances to obtain temporary internet SIM cards, or climbing to rooftops to catch internet signals⁵². All of this deepened the economic crisis produced by the war and closed off the last available online work opportunities for them after a large part of the employment sector in Gaza was destroyed.

In addition to the effects resulting from internet disconnection, women are deprived of a set of additional rights when they are subjected to punishment based on their political activity in the digital space or digital assault. For example, some young men in the Neqab deliberately photographed young women at bus stations when they were heading to university, intentionally focusing on sensitive areas during filming, and later uploading these images and videos to social media sites and describing the young women with obscene language. The interviewees indicated that the young man's goal was to deter young women from entering public space or pursuing education, which he actually succeeded in doing, as some parents prevented their daughters from continuing education, while others assaulted them physically. In a similar incident, a husband prevented his wife from participating in activities at a feminist center in the Naqab after the center published a photo of her (from the side) in one of the activities, and the husband was able to recognize her. This is in addition to cases where women were deprived of custody of their children and financial rights after divorce, and of their right to residency and housing.

Apart from that, women suffered severe psychological effects as a result of assaults against them, and a general decline in their sense of safety, where survey results revealed that the average sense of security among women surveyed in the West Bank is 45%, with 70% of respondents feeling a safety level less than 5/10. In comparison, the average sense of security among surveyed female

51 Breika, A. (28 September 2024). Israel digitally isolates Gazan women from their families: Palestinian women around the world deprived of communication with their families. **Arij Center**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

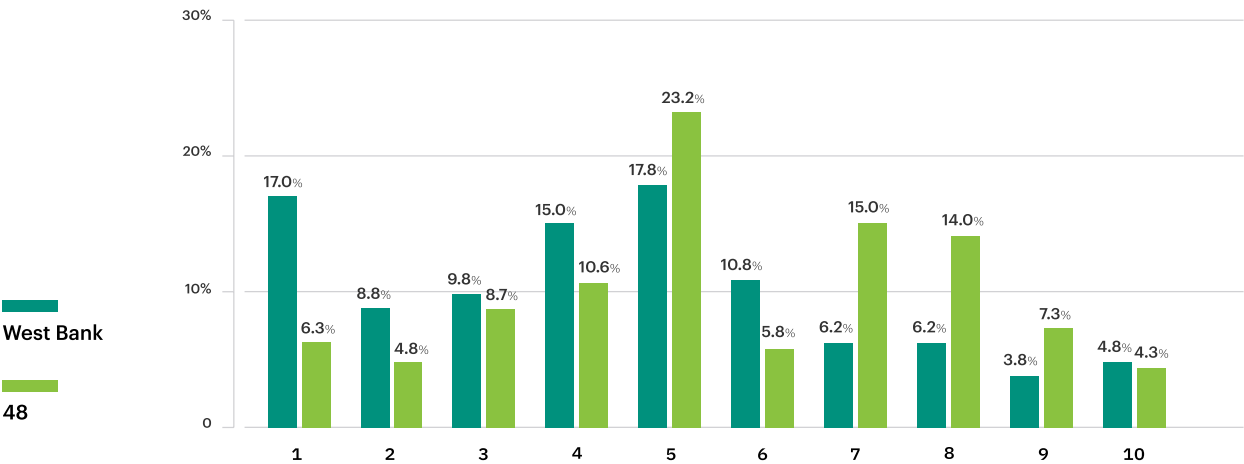
52 Shahwan, M. (13 October 2024). «No Internet»: Gaza female journalists work without internet after Israel cuts communications. **Arij Center**. Retrieved from: [Click here](#).

Palestinian citizens of israel stands at 56%, with 54% of respondents feeling a safety level less than 5/10 [see Figure 14].

Figure 13

Q: To what extent do you feel safe as a women using social media platforms?

Women in the West Bank feel less safe online (4.5/10) than those in '48 (5.6/10)



- * On Average, females in the West Bank report a score of 4.5 out of 10 in terms of feelings of safety.
- * Females in '48 score 5.6 out of 10.
- * Approximately 17% of Females in the WB report a score of 1 out of 10.
- * Approximately 70% report a score of 5 or less in the WB vs 54% in '48.

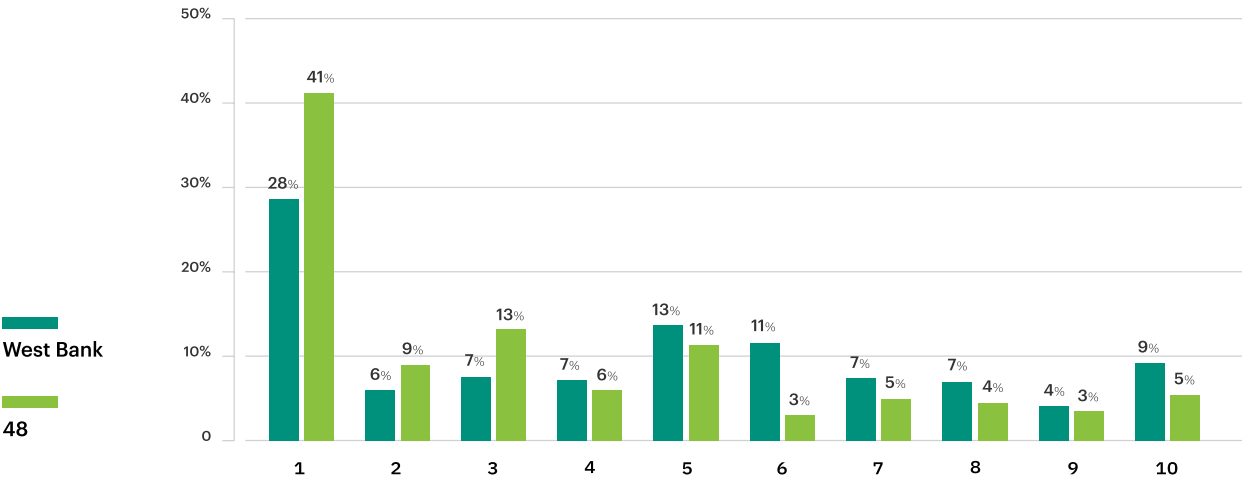
Regarding the psychological symptoms resulting from assaults, some women tend to feel extreme loneliness, while others isolate themselves socially, and others experience high levels of anxiety, tension, and fear about their fate as a result of the persecution or assault that may affect them. Additionally, one social activist noted that victims of digital sexual coercion suffer from the same symptoms as physical sexual assault victims, and in her description of the symptoms experienced by a child, she mentioned the following: self-blame, blaming oneself for falling victim to assault, low self-esteem, embarrassment, shame, and disgrace. In addition to isolation and withdrawal from people. She also lost her ability to interact and communicate with her male classmates, and became fearful of males in general, to the extent that she would cross to the opposite side of the street when she happened to notice one of them. The girl's perception of her body and the concept of sexuality was also distorted, which appeared through expressions that she hated her body and through loss of appetite. Additionally, her psychological state following the assault led to disrupt-

tion in her life, in terms of personal difficulty waking up daily in the morning and going to school, and even decline in her educational performance. Besides, the girl's particular perception of reality changed, as she began to notice the oppression women are subjected to, and question its causes. Indeed, survey results showed that women's mental health was damaged at a rate of 4.5/10 in the West Bank and Jerusalem, with 40% of respondents indicating damage at a degree of 6/10 or higher. Within female Palestinian citizens of Israel, the average of psychological damage was lower at 3.5/10, and only 21% of respondents indicated damage to their health at a degree of 6/10 or higher [see Figure 15].

Figure 14

Q: To what extent was your mental health affected following assaults?

Women in WB report greater mental health impacts (4.5/10) than those in '48



- * The average score reported for females in the West Bank is 4.5 out of 10, and 3.5 for '48ers, showing that most women's mental health is at least somewhat impacted by online assaults.
- * Nearly 40% of WB females report a score of 6 or higher, while 21% of '48ers report the same.

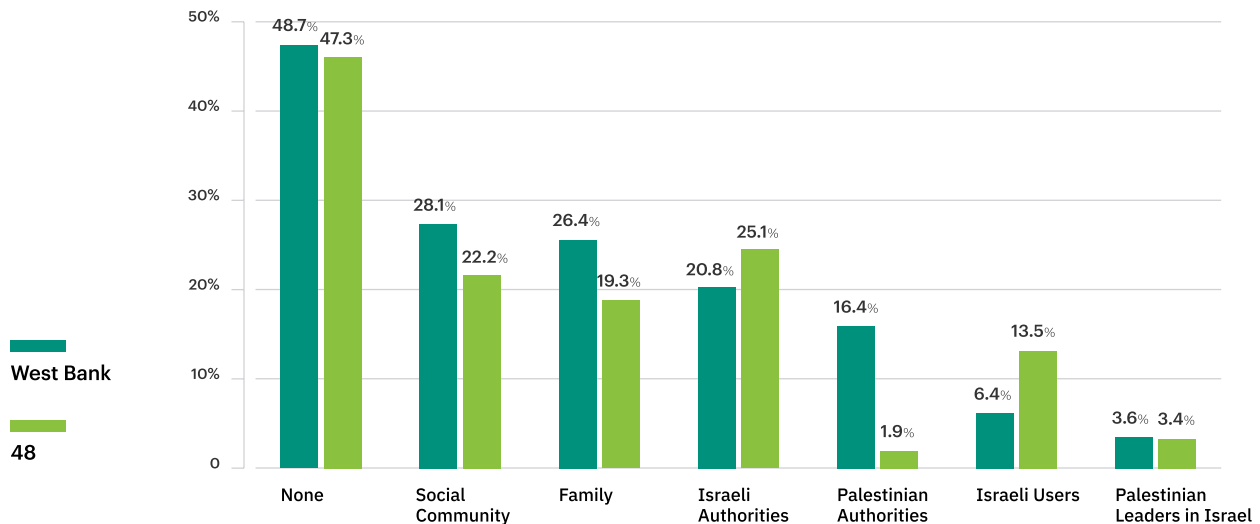
At the second level, with complex networks of censorship, punishment, and assault; self-surveillance becomes an inevitable result. Self-surveillance is defined as the process in which an individual monitors their own behaviors and adjusts them in accordance with societal and institutional standards, so that surveillance stems from within rather than being activated from outside. However, self-surveillance is often a reaction to external surveillance, reflecting the powerful influence of

social and technological systems⁵³ in domesticating individuals and turning them into monitors of themselves⁵⁴. This type of surveillance is especially present in cases where women decide to express themselves and participate publicly, which is interpreted as a departure from their traditional role, where women are expected to remain in the shadows. Therefore, women often choose to practice self-surveillance in order to protect themselves from the consequences of external surveillance.

Figure 15

Q: I do not post personal pictures or opinions on social media because of surveillance and pressure from:

Women feel pressure to limit posts; family and social circles are the main sources of this pressure



- * The most reported source of pressure is the social community, followed closely by family.
- * Younger females generally feel less pressure (51% saying none) vs older females (40%).
- * Females in '48 experience significantly more pressure from Israeli Authorities (25%) and Israeli Users (13.5%) than those in the West Bank (21% and 6.4% respectively).

This was reflected in the survey results and focus group findings, where Figure 9 shows that 20.8% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem practice self-censorship on their political posts due to fear of the occupation, compared to 16.4% of respondents due to fear of the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel practice self-censorship at a rate of 25.1% due to fear of the occupation compared to 1.9% of respondents due to fear of the

53 Lyon, David. Ibid.

54 Marwick, Alice. Ibid.

Palestinian Authority (see Figure 16): «Every action I take must be calculated» and «I have to think not once or twice, but a million times! [...]»

Moreover, Palestinian women's behaviors in digital space are affected by Israeli users, at a rate of 6.4% of respondents from the West Bank and 13.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. Once again, we see that the social environment and family have the largest percentage in activating women's self-censorship on their political posts, where the social environment had the greatest level of influence on women's self-censorship, at a rate of 28.1% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and 22.2% among surveyed among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. As for family influence, it equaled 26.4% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank, ranking second after the social environment, compared to 19.3% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel, ranking third after Israeli authorities and the social environment (see Figure 16). One woman describes this state of self-censorship as paralysis, that her voice and ability to express herself have frozen, adding about the effect of this state on her: «It's a shameful and very humiliating disability to me. [...] I mean, it's a shameful feeling. A shameful feeling that we all remained silent.»

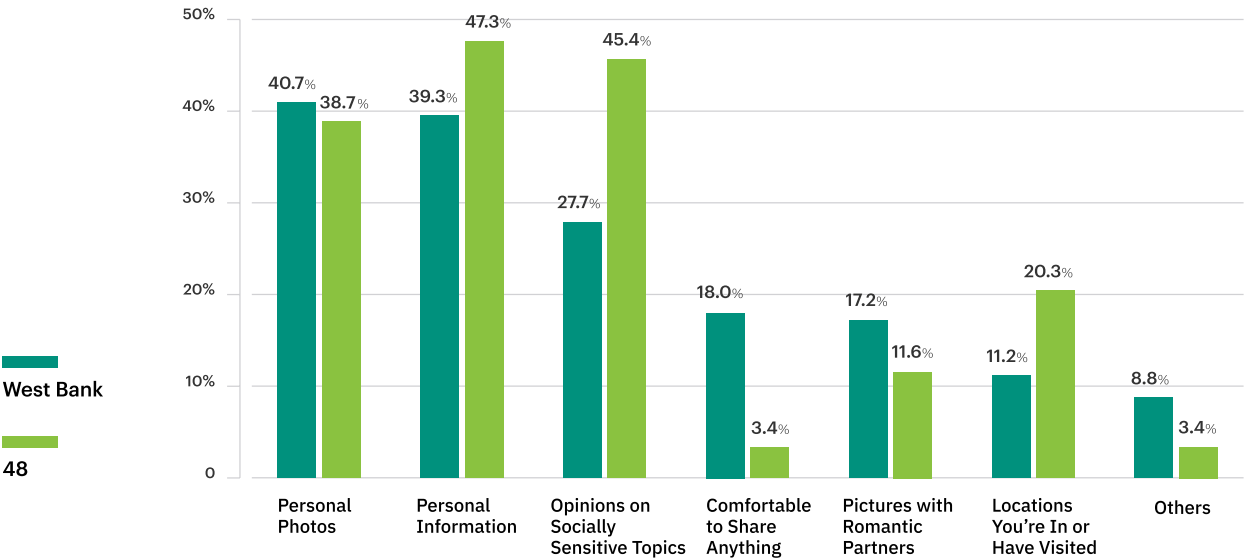
When it comes to self-censorship related to social issues and behaviors, women refrain from sharing the smallest details and information about themselves, and conceal daily, routine, and ordinary details of their lives. Perhaps most notably, 47.3% of women surveyed within Israel, almost half, refrain from sharing their personal information, while the percentage stands at 39.3% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Meanwhile, queer participants in the focus groups indicated that many members of the LGBTQ+ community even refrain from following Instagram pages or «liking» posts that address issues concerning them, for fear that their social environment would notice their interactions with them.

Similarly, survey results showed (see Figure 17) that 40.7% of women surveyed in the West Bank and 38.7% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel refrain from sharing their photos on social media sites, as women sharing of their photos is affected by the binaries of permitted and forbidden, comfortable and uncomfortable, safe and frightening.

Figure 16

Q: Do you generally stop yourself from sharing any of these things on social media platforms?

Women in the West Bank hesitate to share personal content; in '48 socially sensitive topics



- * Approximately one quarter of females in the West Bank also do not feel comfortable sharing their opinions on socially sensitive topics vs 45% of those in '48.
- * 18% of females in the WB feel comfortable sharing anything, vs only 3.4% in '48

17.2% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem indicated that they do not feel comfortable sharing their photos with their romantic partner, while the percentage reached 11.6% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. One interviewee shared that even repeatedly sharing posts of her male colleague in education subjected her to societal questioning, which forced her to refrain from doing so. While another shared that she refrains from expressing love in particular, or even her emotions and feelings in general, not just those related to intimate relationships: «Feelings and emotions that are really suppressed and I can't express without facing family questioning.»

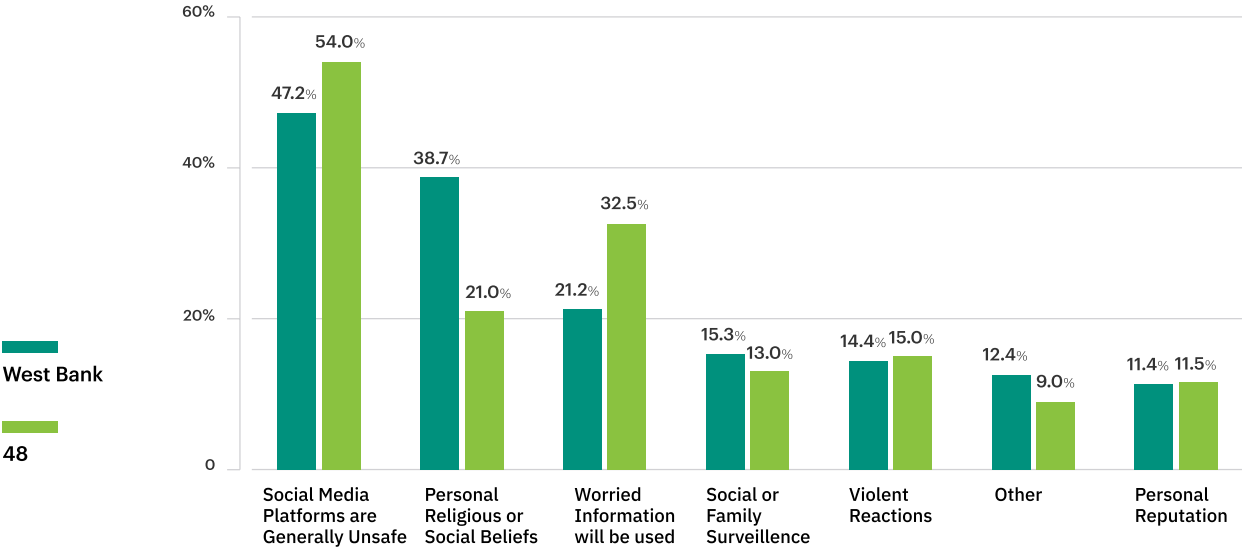
As for controversial and socially sensitive issues, such as gender, religion, crime, and violence, 45.4% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel refrain from posting about these topics, compared to only 27.7% of respondents in the West Bank. Survey results show that only 18% of women surveyed in the West Bank feel comfortable posting anything, less than one-fifth, while the percentage drops dramatically to reach 3.4% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel. Contrary to what Israel usually promotes about the state's liberal climate providing Palestinian women with freedom they cannot obtain in the West Bank, Gaza, or any other Arab country, we find that the spaces of freedom for Palestinian women holding Israeli citizenship are almost non-existent.

However, self-censorship is not only related to societal practices of restricting women, as family and community censorship ranks fourth in terms of its impact on self-censorship practices at 15.3% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 13% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel. Rather, it is also related to women’s general feeling that social media platforms are unsafe at a rate of 47.2% of surveyed respondents in the West Bank and 54% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel, and to personal religious or social beliefs at rates of 38.7% respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 21% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel respectively. While fear of misuse of personal information was reported in 21% of West Bank and Jerusalem respondents and 32.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel, fear of violent reactions ranks fifth among West Bank and Jerusalem respondents at 14.4% while 15% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel reported the same. Concern about personal reputation ranked sixth among West Bank and Jerusalem respondents, with 11.4% of surveyed respondents indicating this and 11.5% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. Finally, 12% of West Bank women surveyed indicated other reasons compared to 9% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel [see Figure 18]. One interviewee says: «This affected me in a way that I became afraid to open any message.»

Figure 17

Q: What are the reasons you do not share things on social media?

Fear of platform insecurity is the top reason women avoid sharing online



- * The second most common reason for females in the WB is personal religious or social beliefs, where as '48ers are more worried about the misuse of the information they share.
- * Only 11.4% of females are worried about the personal reputation when posting on social media.
- * Approximately 15% are worried about violent reactions.

The decline in women's use of social media platforms has harmed the services that women's associations can provide to them, as these organizations primarily rely on these platforms to communicate with women. Additionally, defamation campaigns targeting feminist and women's centers and associations have led to the disruption and cancellation of all their field activities. Many of these associations indicated that the Palestinian Ministry of Education yielded to threats and canceled programs offered by these associations in schools regarding awareness of sexual harassment and promoting children's rights and other gender and rights issues. Meanwhile, the work of another association stopped in some villages, affecting its ability to protect children and women from gender-based violence, or even providing them with psychological support services and agricultural relief programs.

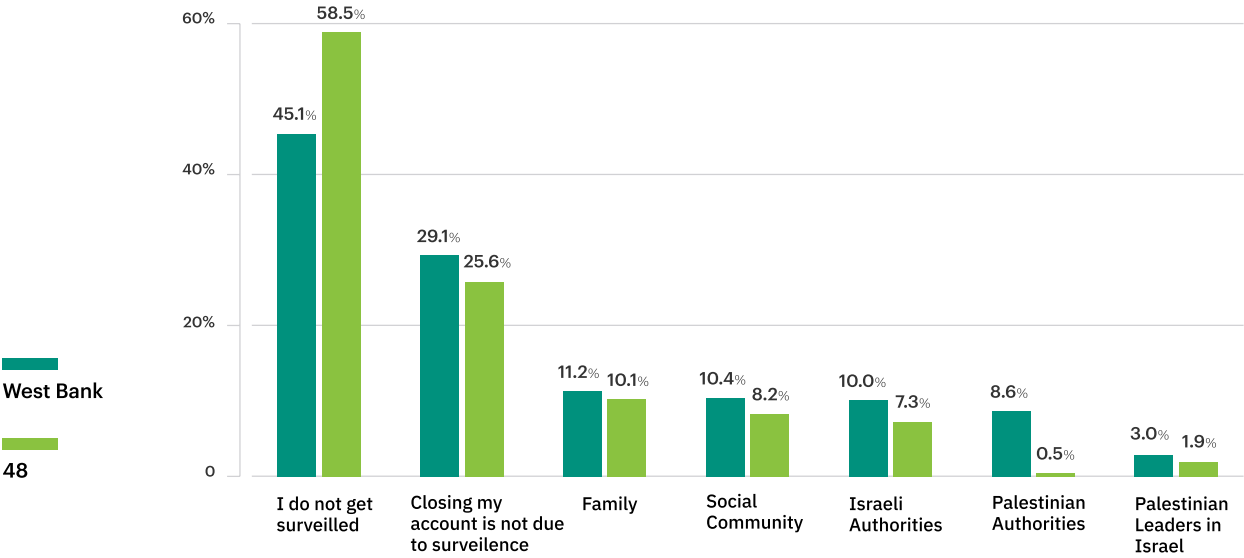
In other instances, activists themselves are deterred from practicing their work after defamation campaigns and reputation smearing. For example, one interviewee describes the situation of an activist who was subjected to attack and sexual defamation: «This thing really affected her work, affected her mental state. It affected [...] before we used to see her much more active, we used to see her more on social media platforms, you feel like she's completely finished, like someone who has lost all the energy she once had, and the passion she used to have has changed.»

Additionally, digital assaults and punishments lead to social disintegration by shaking victims' trust in their surroundings, either because the community is often complicit in these assaults, or because it may justify and legitimize them in other cases, or because it holds the victim accountable as if they were the perpetrator: «She was blamed by people and by her family, and the guilt was placed on her,» while another says: «Always looks of blame, guilt, reproach, and unfair judgments against the victim, and the girl ends up socially ostracized and stigmatized,» and «Not only does the woman bear the consequences, but also her brother, father, sisters, and family. Even her married sisters who are settled with their families were subjected to violence because videos of their sister were circulated. Some were divorced. Some were attacked.» In other cases, digital violence produced physical violence and social conflict between the families of the aggressor and the victims to the extent that drove one victim's family to relocate from the town/village.

Figure 18

Q: Sometimes I delete my social media account due to surveillance from:

Surveillance concerns are high in the WB, with family and social circles playing a key role in both regions



- * Of those who do feel pressure to close their accounts due to surveillance, it is mostly from family and social community.
- * Approximately 1 in 4 females report that closing their account is not due to surveillance.
- * Females in '48 do not feel pressure from Palestinian Authorities while 8.6% of those from the West Bank do.

Finally, many women and activists lost faith in digital activism, and questions arose about its effectiveness and usefulness in the first place. One says, «I'm not benefiting from anything [...] I don't feel I'm reaching my goal as much as I'm being exposed to such socially embarrassing things,» and «I said no more Instagram after today [...] it doesn't help me at all. There's not even any benefit in it,» and «Why do I continue expressing my opinions on social media anyway? [...] I feel sometimes, whether I expressed myself or not, is my opinion making any difference? It's pointless,» and «I feel like I'm talking into empty space. It's just that nothing has changed. Just comments for/against and that's it. Nothing has changed. Just talk.» While others say they began to question whether the impact resulting from posting or the act of posting and expressing opinions in the digital space is worth the punishment that women might face: «Why would I give the occupation an excuse to imprison me just because I might post something on Facebook... and in the end, it becomes a reason for them to come arrest me» and «Is it worth the risk for us here in the '48 territories to post?»

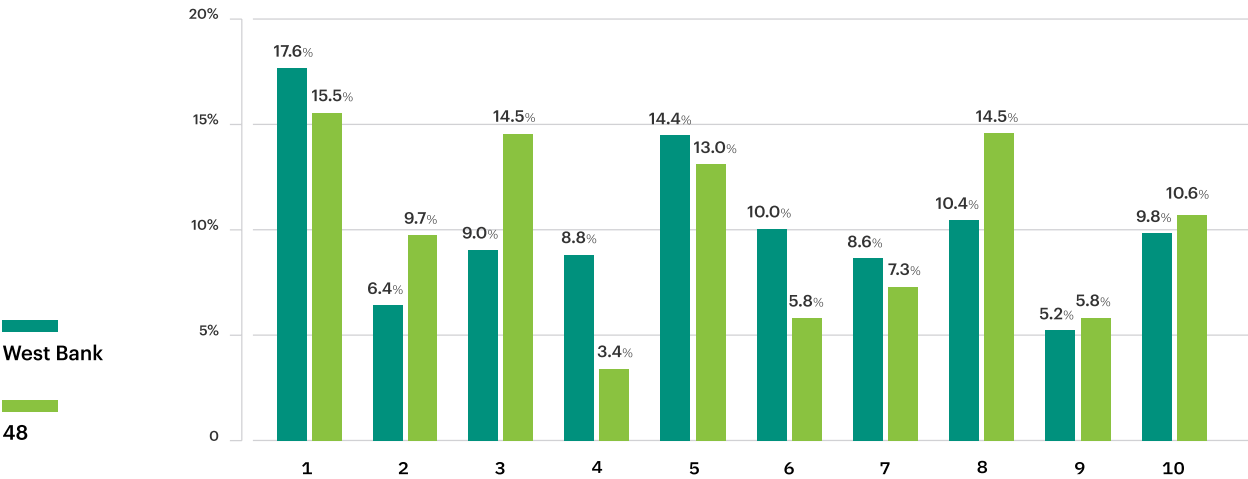
Therefore, we find that more than half of the women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem (54.9%) have deactivated their accounts at least once on social media compared to 41.5% of women surveyed within Israel (see Figure 19).

Similarly, we see that the use of social media after October 7, 2023, decreased moderately in all areas, by 51% of women surveyed, where 49.8% of West Bank women surveyed indicated that their rate of using digital platforms decreased by half (5/10) or more. Within Israel, the percentage of women surveyed who indicated a similar decrease reached 57% [see Figure 20].

Figure 19

Q: To what extent did your social media usage and posting rate decrease after October 7th?

Social media use declined moderately (5.1/10) after October 7th in both regions



- * Older females in the WB report that their usage was more impacted with 21% reporting a 10 out of 10 vs only 6.5% of younger females.
- * On average, older females report a score of 6.1 vs younger females reporting a score of 4.8 in the West Bank.
- * The opposite is true in '48 with younger females reporting 5.5 vs older at 4.8.



CHAPTER SIX

Protection – The Erosion of Security: On Bureaucracies, Cultural Pluralism, Confrontation Options, and Activism

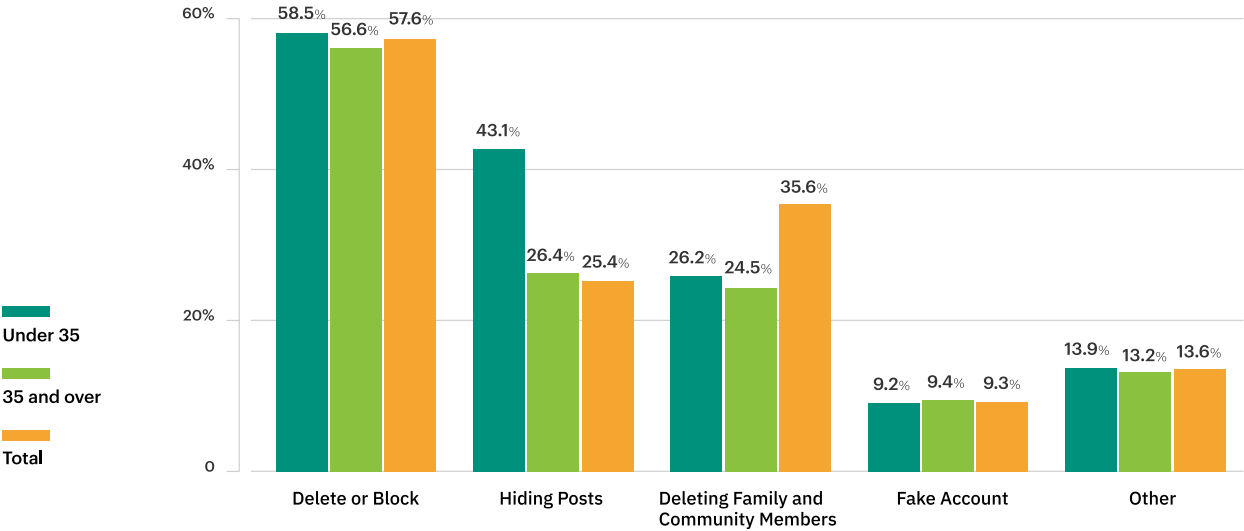
The term «dialectic of control» describes the dynamic in which individuals simultaneously comply with and resist surveillance, even when their resistance remains limited by unequal power relations⁵⁵. For centuries, oppressed groups and women have succeeded in creating spaces of personal freedom and resistance through simple and basic tools that allow them to adapt to harsh conditions. This chapter discusses these methods while indicating the limitations of each and the challenges women face in utilizing them.

Regarding technical means of digital protection, 63.4% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 57.6% among among female Palestinian citizens of Israel rely on blocking friends from their accounts, while 45.3% and 25.4% of them (respectively) use the hide posts feature, and 19.9% and 35.6% delete friends from their accounts. Moreover, 11.2% and 9.3% of respondents in the two respective localities created alternative accounts with pseudonyms, in addition to 9% and 13.9% of surveyed women across the two localities who use other technical methods. Only 11.8% of respondents in the West Bank and Jerusalem indicated that they do not use any technical means to escape surveillance, the majority of whom are women over the age of 35 [See Figure 21 and 22a].

Figure 20

Q: Did you use any of these methods to stop people watching your online activity?

Women in ‘48 also delete/block users while younger women also prefer hiding posts



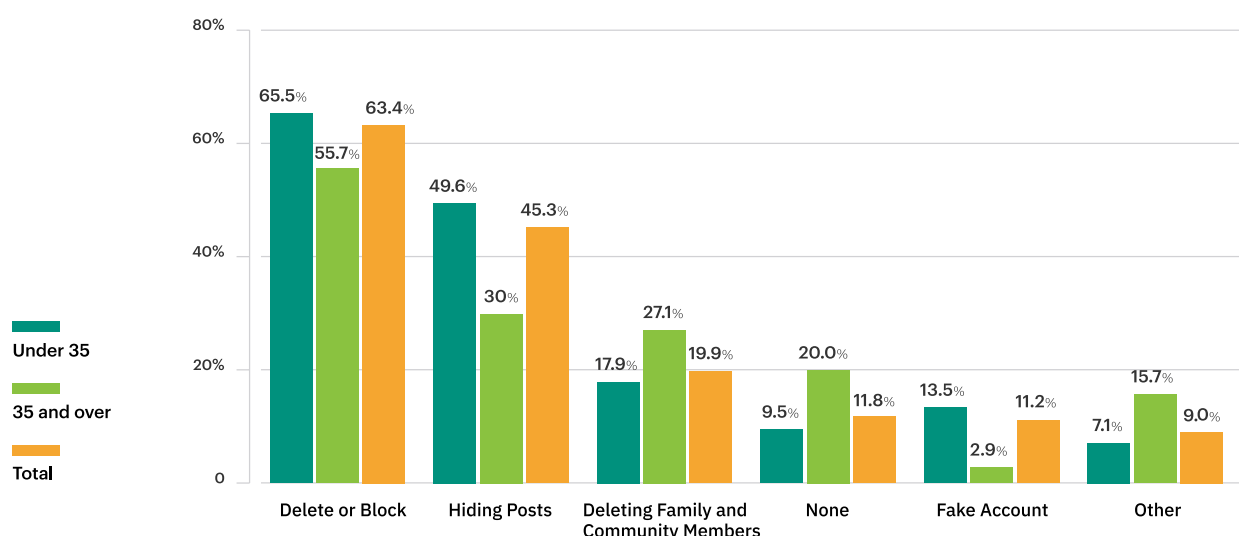
- * A significant number of younger females (43%) report using hiding posts as a way of stopping surveillance, vs only 26% of older females.
- * Approximately one in four females delete family and community members.

55 Fuchs, Chloe. Ibid.

Figure 21a

Q: Did you use any of these methods to stop people watching your online activity?

Most women in the West Bank block or delete users to avoid surveillance



- * The vast majority of females in the West Bank use some method to stop being watched.
- * A significant number of females over 35 years old report using “none” at 20%, and very few use fake accounts (3%).

Indeed, while certain technical measures were developed to protect individuals from surveillance and attacks, focus group discussions revealed how perpetrators have developed methods to circumvent these tools, with some even utilizing them to commit their attacks and shield themselves from consequences. For instance, one research participant blocked her ex-husband who resided abroad after their separation, yet this did not deter him from pursuing her in different ways, beginning with contacting individuals in her social and professional circles, and even sending a message to a Facebook page where she served as an administrator alongside other female friends. Other women reported that regardless of how many young men they blocked, these individuals persistently used new phone numbers or email addresses to contact them.

A third research participant shared instances where young men used a second phone to capture the content of conversations between them when she used disappearing messages. She also shared another case where a young man activated disappearing messages to verbally harass her. In another incident, one of the research participants, a minor, was sexually assaulted by her teacher who asked her to download the Signal application to communicate with her because the application does not store copies of conversations on its servers, thereby eliminating any evidence of his assault after using the «delete for everyone» feature once the participant had viewed the messages. Because she was a minor and unaware of what was happening, she did not take a screenshot of the conversation before he deleted it.

Additionally, 17% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 16% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel resort to filing reports to social media platforms following digital at-

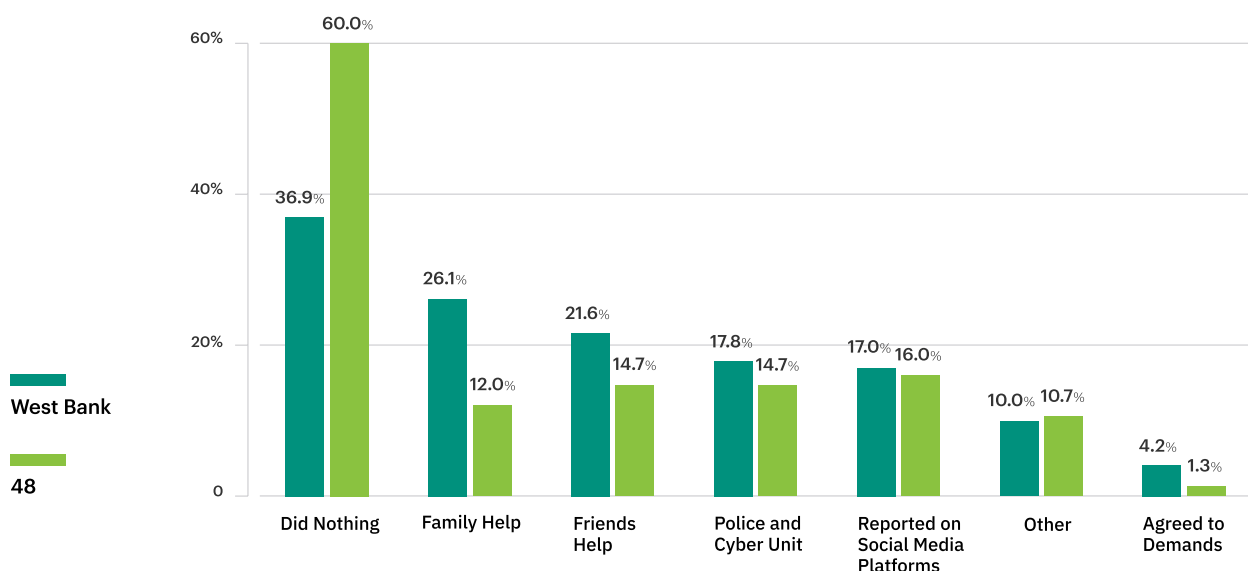
tacks [See Figure 22]. However, their satisfaction rate with technology companies' responses does not exceed 61% in both regions [See Figure 23]. Interviews with feminist activists revealed that the preventive policies of technology companies do not provide complete support and protection for women in marginalized areas or those belonging to cultures different from Western and American culture, as they do not take into account that the risks resulting from technology use are shaped through the interaction of local societal values and norms with the attacks women face in the digital space. They follow universal protection procedures that do not consider the diversity in women's experiences and are insensitive to local contexts and patriarchal and colonial structures that affect women's safety and security.

For example, one activist shared cases where women submitted personal reports through the platform to delete images or videos uploaded without their permission, but the company did not respond to their requests because it did not see any abuse of women in these materials and did not believe their circulation posed any threat to them. Among these cases were images uploaded of women without hijab, or as in another case, when a video was uploaded of a veiled woman dancing during Ramadan, with a comment below stating, «She has her period, and she is happy because she broke her fast in Ramadan, so she's dancing.» Both of these cases could expose women in some areas to either beating or killing, but employees at technology companies do not understand the cultural implications of the hijab, menstruation, women's dancing, and Ramadan in the Palestinian and Arab context, which prevents them from providing an effective response to the report.

Figure 21b

Q: How did you react to the abuse that you experienced?

Most women do not report abuse; in '48, social media reports are most common while in the West Bank they prioritize going to friends and family for help

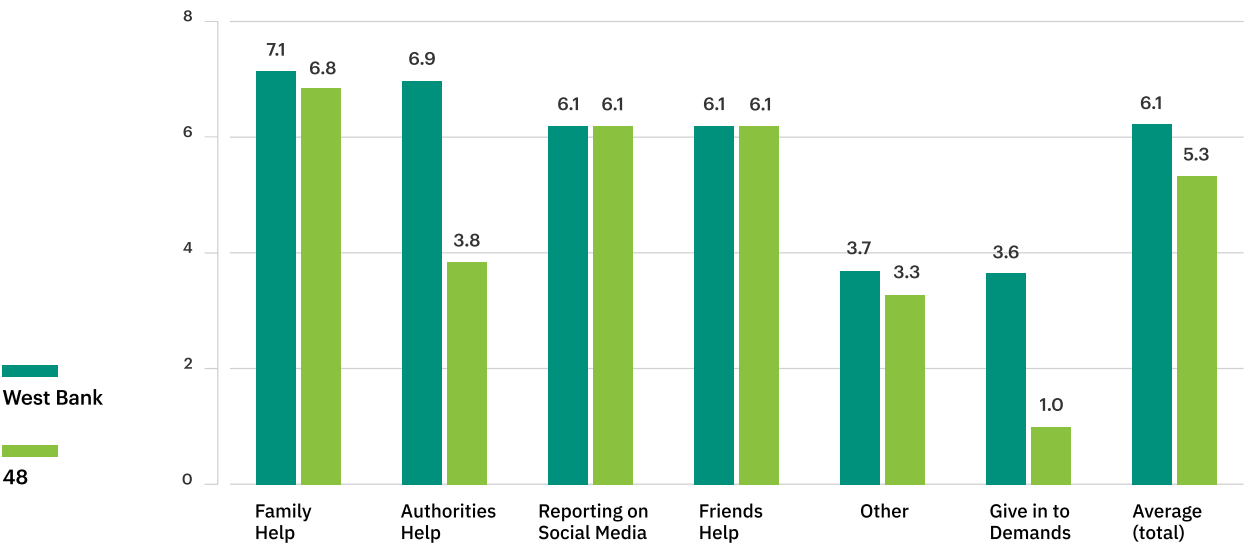


- * Most of the victims in the West Bank are approaching friends or family for help.
- * In '48 the most common type of response after nothing is reporting on social media platforms.
- * Approximately 15% are using official methods of reporting to the police or to the social media platforms.

Beyond that, another activist shared the difficulties associated with submitting an official report to delete content, even those containing clear sexual exploitation: «As you know, social media policies aren't easy; it's not so simple that you can easily delete content.» She adds that the video deletion process upon filing a report typically extends to 48 hours, which is sufficient time for the video to spread, causing social damage to the girl's reputation or even leading to her being killed by her family.

Figure 22

Q: To what extent do you think that the entity you reached out to was able to provide you with support and assistance that you needed at the time? (rate out of 10)



- * West Bank women report higher satisfaction (6.1/10) with support than those in '48 (5.3/10)
- * The most satisfied are those that go to family for help, followed by those who go to official authorities in the WB.
- * Older females (over 35) are generally more satisfied with results (6.6 WB and 5.7 '48 out of 10).

In addition, women may resort to formal institutional protection, which includes approaching law enforcement agencies as an option to confront digital violence. In the West Bank, only 17.8% of women surveyed report attacks to the Electronic Crimes Unit (see Figure 22), and their satisfaction rate with the unit's response to their reports reaches 69% (see Figure 23), which is the second highest rate after family in the West Bank context. On one hand, activists indicate that the Crimes Unit does not always succeed in effectively addressing attacks due to the fact that working according to official protocols and legal processes can be very lengthy, besides the fact that the unit's

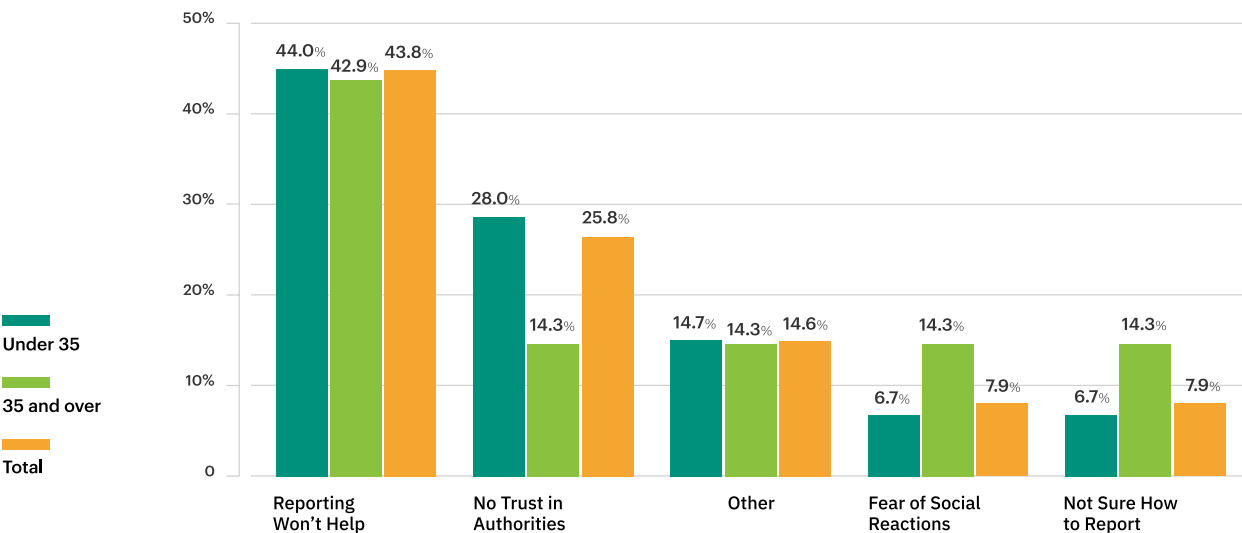
capabilities and resources are modest in themselves, which prevents it from delivering justice to the victim in some instances.

On the other hand, one of the activists indicated that the association had to resort in some cases to Palestinian security agencies and the Preventive Security apparatus instead of the Electronic Crimes Unit, which usually manages to resolve issues that the unit fails to address, reach perpetrators more quickly, and resolve them more effectively. Therefore, the percentage of women who refrain from filing reports to the police because they believe the report will not change anything has reached 43.8% among women surveyed in the West Bank [See Figure 24].

Figure 23

Q: Why did you not report the abuse?

Belief that reporting won't help is the top reason for inaction (~44%) in the West Bank



- * Those under 35 have less trust in the authorities (28%) than those over 35 (14%).
- * Older females fear social repercussions (14%) and are unsure how to report such abuses (14%) more than younger females (6.7%).

The survey results highlighted a low level of trust in the Palestinian police, where 25.8% of female respondents in the West Bank indicated that they refrain from filing reports to the police due to lack of trust (see Figure 24). These findings were confirmed in the focus groups, where some participants reported that they prefer to approach other support agencies, due to circulating stories about some police officers misusing the authority granted to them or leaking sensitive personal information about women who seek their help. It is necessary to note that the mentioned cases of abuse are individual cases for which the unit may not bear full responsibility and do not reflect its official or

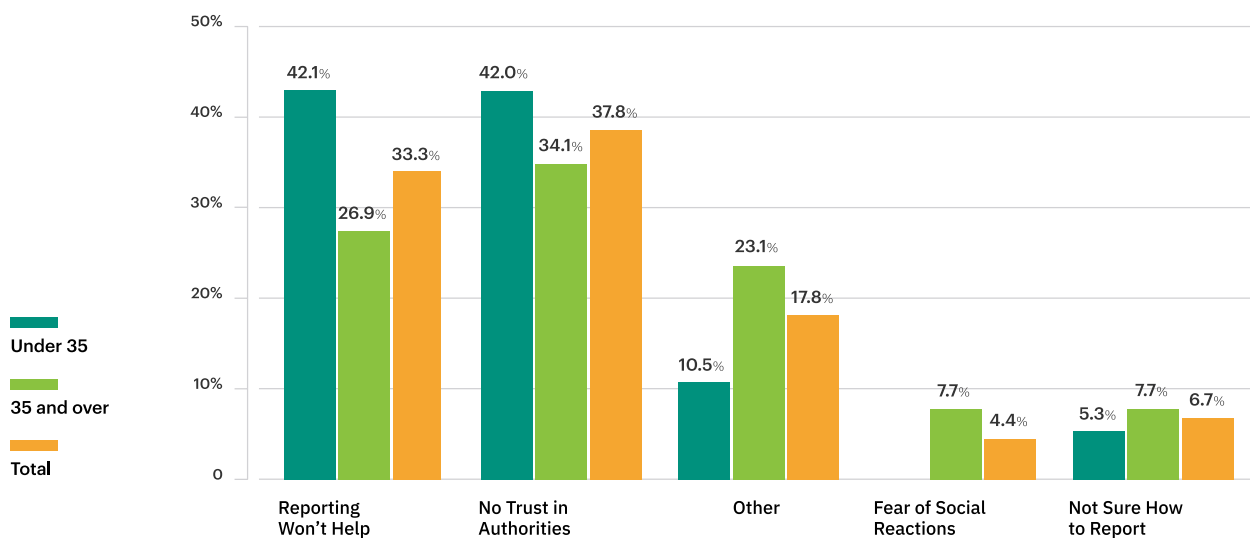
systematic policies, as the police in other testimonies have actually contributed to addressing some extortion cases that women face.

In the context of female Palestinian citizens of Israel, only 14.7% of women surveyed turn to the Israeli Cyber Unit for assistance (see Figure 22), and while the satisfaction rate among West Bank women regarding the help received from the Electronic Crimes Unit reaches 61% of women surveyed, this percentage drops significantly to 38% among Palestinian women surveyed within Israel (see Figure 23). Female Palestinian Activists within Israel indicate that the Israeli police do not provide necessary support to those who seek help, and investigations may be conducted in Hebrew rather than in their native language. Besides, the police are particularly dismissive of Palestinian women's complaints, even in cases involving death threats. Moreover, the investigation experience itself may be characterized by masculine and colonial violence, where police officers exploit the state of vulnerability and lack of confidence of those seeking help and deliberately shout at them and humiliate them, without any sensitivity to how difficult it is to recall details of the assault. Therefore, the percentage of female Palestinian citizens of Israel who believe that filing a report will not change anything has reached 33.3% (see Figure 25).

Figure 24

Q: Why did you not report the abuse?

Lack of trust in authorities is a greater issue for younger women in '48



- * The lack of trust in authorities is much higher in '48 than it is in the West Bank.
- * Older females fear social repercussions (7.7%) and are unsure how to report such abuse (7.7%) more than younger females

In Jerusalem specifically, cases have emerged of women who refrained from approaching Israeli police out of fear that the police would exploit these materials to compromise women for security reasons in the future. Besides that, the option of turning to the Israeli Cyber Unit in gender-based attacks with political backgrounds is not actually available, given that the perpetrators are individuals within the system that should provide them protection. Therefore, the percentage of women who refrain from filing reports to the police due to lack of trust in Israeli security agencies has reached 37.8% of women surveyed, higher than the situation in the West Bank (see Figure 25).

Additionally, the nature of electronic attacks may sometimes require cooperation between several entities when the attack crosses borders. For example, a woman from the West Bank was threatened by a young man from Gaza residing abroad for educational purposes, and the solution to address the issue in this case was through the intervention of the Palestinian embassy in the country where he was residing, which summoned him and threatened to withdraw his educational scholarship if he did not stop the threats and delete all copies of the materials.

In another case, the perpetrator was a Syrian young man residing in Europe, while his family resided in Turkey, which prompted the association and the Crimes Unit to request assistance from Interpol. However, Interpol did not prioritize the woman's complaint, and «the legal procedures with them were prolonged.» Consequently, the victim's brother resorted to an illegal «hacker» to solve the problem, who managed in less than six hours to locate the perpetrator's residence and his family's residence. Later, a member of the young woman's family traveled to Turkey to meet the young man's family, pressure them, and even pay them money to stop the assault. And when the victim is from the West Bank and the perpetrator is a Palestinian citizen of within Israel, the Electronic Crimes Unit «raises its hands and tells you, «We have nothing to do with it, there's no coordination and there's nothing we can do.»

Beyond that, some women refrain from filing reports because they do not know the necessary steps to do so, which reached a rate of 7.9% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 6.7% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel, with most women who selected this answer in the survey being over 35 years old. Additionally, one of the activists in the West Bank indicated that citizens with disabilities whom the association works with don't even know that the option of filing a complaint against sexual assaults is available, which means that many socially vulnerable groups are excluded from the knowledge and skills necessary for protection.

Finally, women may refrain from filing reports out of fear of societal reactions, at a rate of 7.9% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to 4.4% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see Figure 22). Indeed, this aspect was more prominent in the West Bank, where activists indicated that women refrain from filing complaints because they are required to submit them in person. Nevertheless, women avoid and hesitate to do so for fear of being recognized by someone, or news of their visit to the police station spreading to reach their families or social circles.

Moreover, 26.1% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem report seeking help from their families when subjected to digital gender-based attacks, which is more than double the number of female Palestinian citizens of within Israel who resort to this option according to respondents surveys (12%) (see Figure 22). Although some families may pose a threat and danger to women's lives and safety if they become involved in unacceptable sexual and social behaviors, the data indicates that the highest satisfaction rate with assistance received by women was when they turned to their families, at a rate of 71% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem compared to

68% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel (see Figure 23). Indeed, many activists indicated that families can be the greatest supportive force for women during attacks: «The more the family supports her, strengthens her, stands by her and convinces her that she is the victim and not the perpetrator, the woman can overcome the problem faster or actually become a survivor of the aftermath of this violence.»

Additionally, particularly in the West Bank and the Naqab, the role of tribes in confronting digital gender-based attacks has become prominent, as well as their role in mitigating risks that may result from these attacks on women's lives and safety within their social environment, and even their role in addressing crime and violence in general. One activist says: «Look, I used to be against tribal interventions, but if you have a mature, alternative tribal intervention, we found that many times tribes can solve issues for us that the law cannot solve.» So despite tribal interventions sometimes fueling violence, bloodshed, and revenge in certain contexts, according to feminist activists' testimonies, tribes have been able to control gender-based attacks and prevent potential bloodshed: «I've seen tribal members who preserved secrets and protected girls' privacy much better than the police, security forces, and the legal system.»

Considering that the legal protection system for Palestinian women in the Naqab is not sufficiently effective because it is also a repressive system, and the occupation has imposed entry restrictions on Palestinian security forces into «Area C,» Palestinians have relied on internal community structures to organize themselves and protect women. Tribal interventions are typically successful due to the unofficial judicial authority and legitimacy that tribal men possess in their regions.

In general, we can see that women in the West Bank and Jerusalem tend to be more satisfied with the assistance they receive from different entities, at a rate of 61% of women surveyed compared to 53% among female Palestinian citizens of Israel. Despite cases where women take the initiative to seek help from a third party, 4.2% of women surveyed in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and 1.3% among surveyed female Palestinian citizens of Israel Choose to submit to the perpetrator's demands. In contrast, 36.9% and 60% respectively of women surveyed in either locality who choose to ignore the attack (see Figure 23), which is the option that some activists believe is the safest, based on their previous experiences: «The truth is it ends here. Meaning most cases, after you cut off and prevent communication with the perpetrator, most cases don't go beyond that, only a few cases do.»

Finally, like many cases, feminist activists must work within a complex and interconnected network of constraints and risks, yet they typically succeed in finding creative and innovative ways to confront the challenges and difficulties they face. For example, when one association was prevented from providing awareness workshops on gender-based violence with the Ministry of Religious Endowments, they turned to offering them in Sharia departments at universities. In cases where the Ministry of Education suspended feminist centers' activities in schools, activists resorted to collaborating with artists to deliver feminist messages to children through street theater or films. Meanwhile, another association conducted intensive communications and meetings with influential men in areas where they were prohibited from providing their services, and even communicated with protection committees, mosques, and tribes to convince them that they were working toward the same goals and had no intention of dismantling societal and moral values as defamation campaigns had accused of them.

6. Recommendations

This section of the study includes a set of recommendations whose implementation and advancement can support women's rights in the digital space, which may positively reflect on their lives and rights. All responsible entities should commit to these recommendations to ensure women's safety and dignity:

The Palestinian Authority

- Conduct emergency sessions and meetings with feminist organizations to discuss developments in digital gender-based violence issues during political unrest and social upheavals.
- Strengthen direct cooperation between women's associations to confront digital gender-based attacks, and to enhance the feminist perspective among members of the Crimes Unit.
- Train the Crimes Unit personnel on rapid and effective response to urgent reports of digital attacks through tools and resources available to Palestinian security forces.
- Enable electronic reporting of gender-based attacks without requiring physical presence at the police station when the victim has provided all necessary documentation.
- Establish an independent oversight body to hold accountable individuals who exploit their authority and delegated powers to harm those who seek assistance.
- Enact legislation guaranteeing women the right to request deletion of all digital content and materials about them held by the Crimes Unit after their case has been resolved.
- Resist defamation campaigns against feminists, review all cases where ministries have canceled their cooperation with feminist centers, and investigate any future allegations against them before severing relationships.

Technology Companies

- Develop fair and unbiased algorithms toward all voices, especially those of indigenous peoples and marginalized gender groups.
- Develop artificial intelligence tools to analyze patterns of individuals' digital behaviors, proactively alert potential victims about them, and even restrict digital interactions for similar accounts.
- Increase transparency around content restriction policies, while providing appeal mechanisms.
- Establish emergency units to handle reports of gender-based attacks, with each unit specializing in a specific geographic region, and staffed by individuals from that region to ensure cultural sensitivity during resolution.
- Enable rapid and immediate response to reports in gender-related cases.

- Strengthen cooperation and open direct communication channels between feminist associations, digital rights organizations, and these emergency units.
- Improve reporting policies and tools to be more inclusive and sensitive to local cultural and political contexts.
- Incorporate more women into decision-making positions and key leadership roles that contribute to the development and design of technology with an emancipatory vision.
- Electronic maps should include important and unrecognized areas in the Naqab and the West Bank.

The International Community

- Pressure technology companies and the Israeli occupation to comply with international law and respect the digital rights of people and women.
- Pressure the occupation to allow the development and establishment of communications and electricity infrastructure in Area C of the West Bank, the Naqab, and Gaza.
- Pressure Israel to refrain from using surveillance methods against Palestinian women as a tool of political and sexual repression, or to ban security cooperation in cases with a gendered dimension.
- Pressure for ending the Israeli occupation because the protection of women's and girls' rights in the occupied Palestinian territories is linked to the repression practiced against them by it.
- Establish policies and laws that protect women in workplaces and educational settings from discrimination based on their digital expressions, and prevent professional blackmail related to personal digital content.
- Develop an international cross-border electronic crimes unit that enables cooperation between cyber units in different countries with the aim of exchanging information and rapid response in cases of digital gender-based attacks where the perpetrator and victim reside in different countries.

Donor Agencies and Funders

- Provide long-term, sustainable, and unconditional funding for gender-based digital protection initiatives in the Palestinian context and contexts affected by wars.
- Provide funding for comprehensive support for women following digital gender-based attacks: technical, psychological, legal, social support, and more.

Palestinian Feminist Associations

- Strengthen feminist alliances between Palestinian Feminist organizations within Israel, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Gaza to exchange knowledge and experiences about digital security

from a feminist perspective.

- Strengthen collaboration between feminist organizations in addressing digital gender-based attacks, with each contributing according to its position, expertise, and areas of strength.
- Take into account political, class, and geographical intersections when developing response mechanisms.
- Establish a Palestinian feminist committee within Israel to monitor Israeli police behaviors toward gender-based violence issues in general, and digital gender-based violence in particular, and collect evidence about police complicity or neglect of women's complaints, and use this evidence later to hold police agencies accountable internationally and in the media.
- In light of the failure of legal agencies to protect Female Palestinian citizens of Israel, it is necessary to develop a parallel community support system consisting of feminist activists, digital security specialists, members of local authorities, anti-violence committees, civil society organizations, and human rights advocates.

Digital Security Organizations

- Integrate trainings for women in marginalized areas within Palestinian society (Area C, the Naqab, and others), and focus on the most vulnerable groups in Palestinian society (people with disabilities, elderly women, etc.).
- Coordinate trainings with feminist organizations on methods and tools for building campaigns and advocacy in feminist issues, especially in geographically marginalized areas.
- Invest in innovative and free tools for women with limited internet access.
- Provide women with guidance and instructions on how to properly document digital attacks to transform them into legal evidence should they decide to report them in the future.

7. Conclusion and Inference

The current study aimed to shed light on Palestinian women's experiences with technology-facilitated gender-based violence during the war on Gaza, in an attempt to understand how different social and political actors employed the same digital and gender repression tools to achieve different goals serving their personal and collective agendas and interests. Indeed, the study revealed the overlapping systems of digital surveillance and repression of women from three main authoritarian systems: the colonial system represented by Israel, the dominant digital system represented by technology companies, and the patriarchal system represented by the social environment. Within each of these systems operate social and political actors with different levels of control, authority, and influence depending on their position within organizational power networks (army, police, etc.), institutional (parties, factions, etc.), collective (crime gangs, fraud groups...) or individualistic (citizens and users). The level of harm resulting from digital gender-based attacks depends on the position of these actors within the map of societal and political powers, as does the ability to confront and protect against the attack.

The study demonstrated that the triangle of surveillance, punishment, and attacks practiced by actors regardless of their status, necessarily leads to increasingly diminishing women's presence and participation in the public digital space, and to controlling women's digital and physical behaviors and expressions. The danger of digital exclusion of women lies in its ability to perpetuate female marginalization and deprive women of fundamental freedoms and rights defined by international laws, while also preventing them from developing their identity and selfhood independently without the influence of repressive constraints upon them.

Despite the fact that women's ability to counter digital gender-based attacks depends primarily on the perpetrator's identity and their social and political status, the study revealed women's capacity to create alternative spaces of freedom and resistance to traditional protection methods that are inherently flawed and structurally limited.

The study concludes that digital gender-based violence is shaped through the interaction of social actors with technology, with its frequency and forms being influenced by existing authoritarian structures and the constantly changing political and social dynamics. However, digital gender-based violence itself possesses the capacity to influence gendered power balances and relationships in society, as dominant groups control technological tools, thereby ensuring their deployment to reinforce pre-existing gender-based violence. Thus, it creates an infinite circular effect, wherein digital gender-based violence draws sustenance from colonial and patriarchal power relations, only to subsequently reinforce them in reality as well. This conclusion demonstrates the critical necessity of implementing the recommendations outlined in this study to disrupt this cyclical pattern of gender-based violence.

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