



Women and Girls with Disabilities

Needs of Survivors of Gender-Based Violence and Services Offered to Them

Executive Summary

This study on GBV among women and girls with disabilities was conducted by UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) with the support of Denmark in the context of the GBV Sub-Cluster Strategy 2018-2020. It was based on a needs analysis and mapping of services offered to women and girls with disabilities aged 15 and older who are survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly in view of the poor protection, care and social services available to women survivors of violence. Its objective was to map the available services; analyze major gaps and challenges related to service delivery; identify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and service providers, including stakeholder coordination, legislation and policies, capacity, prevention and response services, the referral process and accountability; as well as to make recommendations and propose interventions to address the weaknesses in the protection system for women and girls with disabilities in Palestine.

Methodology

To achieve the above objectives, the study adopted a comprehensive methodology, which included conducting a desk review of a large number of available research and literature related to violence, disability and gender at the local and international levels, holding eight workshops and focus group discussions (FGDs) with service providers and a sample of targeted women and girls with disabilities, and carrying out a number of individual interviews with several representatives of the public sector, ministries and government institutions and the nongovernmental organizations (NGO) sector, including NGOs concerned with disability, violence and gender issues.



Main conclusions

With regard to the main conclusions of the study, the following findings and observations can be made:

- ❖ Agreement is noticeable between the different stakeholders and in the available literature on violence at the international and local levels, confirming that **women and girls with disabilities are the group most vulnerable to violence** compared with their male peers with disabilities as well as with girls and women without disabilities. While disability may lead to increased violence, violence in turn may cause a new disability or may aggravate an existing disability and increase the severity of one's vulnerability.
- ❖ The findings of the study indicated that an increasing proportion of women and girls with disabilities in the Palestinian territory experience **various forms of psychological, social, physical and sexual violence**. They often occur under the authority of a guardian and survivors are deprived of the right to make their own decisions, while experiencing discrimination, exploitation, abuse, isolation and exclusion from their families and the public sphere.
- ❖ **Women and girls with most types of disability experience different levels of vulnerability and marginalization** due to a range of complex factors related to the composition of society, the prevailing culture, the structure of service delivery and discrimination on the basis of disability, violence and gender. Their vulnerability is further heightened by their limited awareness, low educational attainment, lack of resources and dependence on others, increasing the likelihood of experiencing higher levels and more severe forms of violence.
- ❖ Significant **obstacles and challenges** remain in place, primarily in the form of the weak protection system for women and girls with disabilities; the absence of laws, legislation and public policy that would ensure their access to justice; limited service delivery to survivors of violence; failure to understand and respond to the special needs of women with disabilities survivors of violence; in addition to the fact that this vulnerable group is usually disregarded at the level of national and sectoral plans and overall policy directions in the Palestinian territory.



- ❖ While protection mechanisms are weak in the Palestinian territories in general, **Gaza Strip faces more significant challenges** related to women and girls survivors of violence. These include the higher disability rate due to the ongoing siege, the recurrent wars on Gaza and the deteriorating political and economic conditions, which in turn increase the risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities in this region.
- ❖ The findings of the study also demonstrated an **apparent lack of ability on part of the survivors of violence to access information, programs and services** from the different agencies and service providers in relation to prevention of violence, protection, recovery and others. In addition, mechanisms for reporting of violence against women with disabilities are ineffective in view of the ineffectual relevant laws and policies, societal barriers, limited public awareness, inadequate engagement of stakeholders in the protection system and the prevailing tendency to underreport all forms and levels of violence.
- ❖ Society in general continues to adopt **negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities**. This becomes more prominent when violence against women and girls with disabilities is addressed; responses are usually shaped by stigma, blaming the survivor for the violence and fearing the repercussions of social disgrace. Therefore, community and family constraints make it very difficult for women to report and disclose the violent incident, especially in relation to physical and sexual violence.
- ❖ **Services offered to women survivors of violence are generally limited, fragmented, disintegrated and seasonal**. They are concentrated in major urban areas and generally lacking in rural areas and Palestinian camps, and are inadequate to cover the needs for and requirements of protection and care. They fail to consider accessibility needs of the target groups and their specific characteristics, such as geographic distribution, disability type and others. This situation indicates an almost complete absence of appropriate, integrated, comprehensive and sustainable programs and services.
- ❖ Similar to the West Bank, **services in Gaza Strip are limited**, fail to take in account the special needs of women with disabilities, are concentrated in certain areas compared



to others and are not easily accessible by persons with disabilities. Gaza service providers face an increasing demand by their target groups and lack the capacity to respond to urgent needs due to the prevailing situation in Gaza and the resulting wide range of challenges. Women survivors of violence are usually known to face much more difficulties in accessing services in an environment of enduring conflict.

- ❖ Many stakeholders report obvious weaknesses in the capacity of service providers, particularly in terms of scarcity of services and programs targeting women with disabilities survivors of violence, as well as the lack of specific policy and procedures for service delivery to this particular group, poor staff qualification and training, and the lack of basic access requirements, such as the required adaptations and accessibility of public facilities and points of service delivery, which hinders women's and girls' access to the needed services.
- ❖ Interventions made by various service providers to ensure protection of women survivors of violence are inadequate in terms of their role and effectiveness. This observation applies to the Directorate of Social Development, which has the formal responsibility for the national social care system, as well as the Family Protection Units in the Civil Police and other legal and judicial bodies. Women survivors of violence frequently have to deal with ineffective laws and legislation and inadequate role of law enforcement and justice institutions in providing them with protection. Often the intervention is limited to conciliation and a routine, non-deterrent procedure, such as taking a pledge from the perpetrator to stop the violence. Consequently, the survivor will return to the same setting and risk being exposed to the same dangers once again. The lack of attention to prevention and post-exposure recovery services contributes to an increasing incidence of violence and heightened severity in general.
- ❖ Mechanisms for coordination, networking and information sharing among service providers are weak and the roles and responsibilities of certain stakeholders are unclear, adversely affecting the ability to offer integrated services and undermining referral and sheltering services for survivors of violence. These factors increase the suffering of women with disabilities survivors of violence.



- ❖ Clear mechanisms for monitoring, oversight and quality control of service delivery are lacking. There are no policies or procedures in place to develop quality criteria for services offered to this particular group or to assess satisfaction of beneficiaries and their families. Furthermore, there is an absence of oversight procedures to ensure that service providers abide by best practices and that survivors of violence are protected and receive the needed services with dignity, equality and independence.

Summary of recommendations and proposed interventions

The study makes a number of recommendations and proposes actions to enhance the protection and care system in the Palestinian territory by developing a clear national strategy for the protection of women and girls with disabilities survivors of violence, enhancing the relevant laws, public policies and operating procedures, raising the level and quality of service delivery, and taking all required procedures and measures to ensure beneficiaries' access to information, protection programs and services offered by the public and NGO sectors, law enforcement bodies and justice institutions.

The proposed interventions also include enhancing the capacity of beneficiaries and different stakeholders to engage in efforts to combat violence and report the different cases of violence, developing the capacity of staff and working teams to offer disability-friendly services, providing an inclusive and accessible environment in service delivery points and institutions, offering referral and sheltering services to survivors of violence, and organizing community-based campaigns and initiatives to address the root causes of violence against women and persons with disabilities, including gender inequality and discrimination on the basis of disability and gender.