



Youth Wellbeing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Mixed  
Methods Study

---

عافية الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة: دراسة مختلطة

**By Ahmad Musa Khatib**

Date of Defense: 06/06/2018

Supervisor: Dr. Weeam Hammoudeh

**Birzeit University – The occupied Palestinian territory**

**2018**



Youth Wellbeing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Mixed  
Methods Study

---

عافية الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة: دراسة مختلطة

**Ahmad Musa Khatib**

Defense date: 06/06/2018

Supervisor, head of the thesis defense committee

**Dr. Weeam Hammoudeh**

Thesis defense committee members

**Dr. Rita Giacaman**

**Dr. Hanna Kienzler**

**This Thesis was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the: Master's Degree in Public Health from the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University, the occupied Palestinian territory**



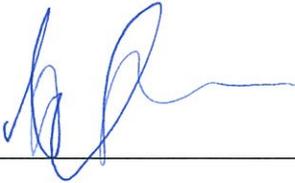
Youth Wellbeing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: A Mixed  
Methods Study

عافية الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة: دراسة مختلطة

Ahmad Musa Khatib

Thesis defense committee members:

Dr. Weeam Hammoudeh  
Supervisor



Dr. Rita Giacaman  
Committee member



Dr. Hanna Kienzler  
Committee member



Date of the defense: 06/06/2018

# Acknowledgment

“Occasionally in life there are those moments of unutterable fulfillment which cannot be completely explained by those symbols called words. Their meanings can only be articulated by the inaudible language of the heart”. **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

It a great pleasure to acknowledge my deepest thanks and gratitude to my mentor **Dr. Weeam Hammoudeh**, for her endless help, constant guidance and kind supervision. It is an honor to work under her supervision.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to **Prof. Rita Giacaman**, for her encouragement and advice, and to **Dr. Hanna Kienzler**, for her valuable comments. Many thanks also go to **Youth Project team** for their help in conducting the focus groups and for all the participants in the study for sharing me their valuable time.

Many thanks also extend to **Dr. Abed el- Latif al- Hussaini**, **Dr. Niveen Abu Rmaileh** and all other lecturers, staff and colleagues in the **Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University**, for enabling me to reach a step where I can conduct this research study and for their kind help in many occasions throughout the process of conducting this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to my parents and parents in law for their encouragement and support, and certainly to my beloved wife **Hala**, and my lovable son **Musa**, who are my champions and inspiration.

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgment .....	IV
Abstract .....	VII
ملخص .....	X
Introduction.....	1
Purpose statement .....	3
The context of Palestinian youth.....	4
Literature review .....	7
Wellbeing.....	7
Youth wellbeing.....	13
Determinants of subjective wellbeing among youth.....	13
Personal Determinants .....	14
Demographic determinants .....	15
Contextual Determinants: Environmental, Social and Political Determinants .....	17
Significance of the study.....	19
Methods.....	19
Approach.....	19
Quantitative Phase Methodology .....	20
Variable Explanations and Scale Development .....	22
Hypotheses .....	26
Quantitative Analysis.....	27
Qualitative Phase Methodology .....	28
Ethical considerations .....	31
Results.....	32
Quantitative Results .....	32
Descriptive statistics .....	32
Bivariate Results .....	34
Multivariate Results .....	36
Qualitative Findings.....	42
Definition, idioms and manifestations of wellbeing by youth in the oPt.....	42

Determinants of Youth Wellbeing in the oPt.....	47
Influences and relationships between the main dimensions .....	111
Discussion.....	117
Conceptualization of wellbeing .....	118
Factors influencing youth wellbeing.....	119
Political dimension.....	120
Economic dimension.....	124
Sociocultural dimension.....	125
Environmental domain.....	127
Demographic variables .....	128
Personal domain.....	129
Conclusion and Recommendation .....	131
Limitations .....	133
References.....	134
Appendix 1.....	140
Appendix 2.....	144

## **List of Tables**

<b>Table 1: Information About Interviews.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Table 2 : Descriptive Statistic .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Table 3: Summary Statistics for Scales.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Table 4: Bivariate Association Analysis.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Table 5: Regression (18-29).....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Table 6: Regression (18-23).....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Table 7: Regression (24-29).....</b>	<b>41</b>

# Abstract

---

**Background:** Youth in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) are facing considerable challenges affecting their wellbeing. While the literature addressing youth wellbeing in the oPt is limited, the need to assess their wellbeing and understand some of the reasons which can negatively and positively affect wellbeing is vital, not only for youth but for the whole nation, especially given the importance of this age group. The aim of this study is to address this research gap by assessing the prevalence of wellbeing and its determinants for youth in the oPt.

**Methodology:** A mixed methods approach, beginning with a quantitative phase to assess the prevalence of wellbeing and its associated factors, then a qualitative phase to investigate the meaning of wellbeing and the factors that influence wellbeing according to the perspective of youth in the oPt. Finally, mixing the two forms of information in the discussion section to obtain rich and complementary information about youth wellbeing in the oPt. The quantitative phase is a secondary analysis of the Power2Youth cross-sectional survey of a representative sample of 1353 youth of age 18-29 years old living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The dependent variable is the World Health Organization (WHO) Well-Being Index (WHO5). Bivariate and multivariate analysis were conducted with five sets of independent variables: demographic, socioeconomic, social relations, internal political and future outlook. The analysis was conducted for the whole sample and then stratified by age group. The qualitative data collection was through 13 focus groups and 12 interviews covering most of the area's in the oPt. A thematic analysis was used, starting with reading and rereading, then coding, arranging codes into themes and themes into domains.

**The quantitative findings:** The mean wellbeing score is 58.7 (s.d =22.7; range 1-100). Age is negatively associated with wellbeing (B=-0.6, p=0.01), and males had scores 3 points lower than young women in the wellbeing scale (B= -2.8, P<0.05). While, living in camp areas compared to urban areas (B=4.5, P<0.01); trust in people (B=1.9, P<0.001); personal freedom (B= 2.0, P<0.001); satisfaction with the quality of governance (B=2.4, P< 0.001); satisfaction with the economic situation (B=1.6, P<0.001), and future outlook (B=0.7, P<0.01). All were significant in their positive association with wellbeing. When stratified by age-groups; political confidence, future outlook and living in camps compared to urban areas are no longer significant for the (18-23) year age-group, while gender had a larger effect for males compared to females (B=-4.45, P<0.05). Residents of the Gaza Strip had scores 3.9 points higher than West Bank (B=3.9, P<0.05). A lack of political confidence was inversely associated with wellbeing (B=-0.9, P<0.05). For the 24-29 age-group, living in camp compared to urban areas became significant (B=8.2, P<0.01), however, gender, region and political confidence were no longer statistically significant. The effect of all the significant variables are increased in magnitude among older age group compared to the younger age group.

**The qualitative findings:** Youth in the oPt described wellbeing as the product of the interaction of all things that makes them healthy, happy and comfortable in all life domains; physically, psychologically, socially and functionally. The factors that influence wellbeing came in six main domains: The Israeli military occupation, the internal political, the socio-economic, the socio-cultural, the environmental, and the personal domains.

**Conclusion:** Youth in the oPt have relatively low levels of wellbeing. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings underscore the impact of the internal political, economic and social domains on wellbeing. The qualitative phase highlighted the importance of the Israeli military occupation

as a source of negative influence on youth wellbeing, in addition to the influence of the environmental and personal factors on wellbeing. Furthermore, all dimensions have an interactive influence over youth wellbeing, forming a complex web of factors that influence wellbeing, while the domains themselves influence each other's. Finally, this study provides a valuable information about youth wellbeing in the oPt and revealed that youth in general face considerable challenges to their wellbeing in the oPt.

**الخلفية:** إن الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة يواجه تحديات كبيرة تؤثر على عافيتهم، إلا أن الأدبيات التي تتناول هذا الجانب من صحة الشباب الفلسطيني محدودة. وبالنظر إلى أهمية هذه الفئة العمرية فإنه من المهم تقييم عافية الشباب وفهم الأسباب التي يمكن لها أن تؤثر سلباً أو إيجاباً على عافيتهم لما لها تأثير كبير على المجتمع بأكمله. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو سد الفجوة البحثية من خلال تقييم مدى انتشار العافية ومحدداتها للشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة.

**المنهجية:** استخدم في هذه الدراسة منهجية البحث مختلط الطرق. حيث تم استخدام المنهج الكمي كمرحلة أولى لتقييم مدى انتشار العافية والعوامل المرتبطة بها. أما في المرحلة الثانية تم استخدام المنهج النوعي لمعرفة معنى العافية والعوامل التي تؤثر عليها من وجه نظر الشباب. وأخيراً، تم دمج المعلومات التي تم الحصول عليها من المرحلتين السابقتين في المناقشة للحصول على معلومات ثرية ومتكاملة عن عافية الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة. في المرحلة الكمية تم عمل تحليل ثانوي لبيانات مسح (Power2Youth) لعينة ممثلة شملت 1353 شاباً عمرهم بين 18 و29 سنة يعيشون في الضفة الغربية وقطاع غزة. المتغير التابع هو مؤشر العافية لمنظمة الصحة العالمية (WHO). تم إجراء تحليل ثنائي المتغير ومن ثم تحليل متعدد المتغيرات مع خمس مجموعات من المتغيرات المستقلة: الديموغرافية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية، والسياسية الداخلية والنظرة المستقبلية. تم إجراء التحليل للعينة بأكملها ثم تم تقسيمها حسب الفئة العمرية. أما بالنسبة للبيانات النوعية تم الحصول عليها من خلال 13 مجموعة بؤرية و 12 مقابلة تغطي معظم مناطق الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة. التحليل الموضوعي لهذه المرحلة تم من خلال البدء بالقراءة وإعادة القراءة، ثم الترميز، وترتيب الرموز إلى مواضيع ثم ترتيب المواضيع إلى مجالات.

**النتائج الكمية:** أشارت النتائج إلى أن معدل العافية لدى الشباب هي 58.7 (s.d = 22.7) المدى (1-100) وأنه يوجد علاقة عكسية بين العمر والعافية ( $B = -0.6, P < 0.01$ ). حيث كان للذكور ثلاث نقاط أقل عن الإناث في مقياس العافية ( $B = -2.8, P < 0.05$ ). بينما الذين يعيشون في مناطق المخيمات مقارنة بالمناطق الحضرية ( $B = 4.5, P < 0.01$ )، والثقة في الناس ( $B = 1.9, P < 0.01$ )، والحرية الشخصية ( $B = 2.0, p < 0.001$ )، والرضا عن جودة الحوكمة ( $B = 2.4, P < 0.001$ )، والرضا بالوضع الاقتصادي ( $B = 1.6, P < 0.001$ )، والنظرة المستقبلية ( $B = 0.7, P < 0.01$ )، كلها كانت ذات دلالة إحصائية في ارتباطها الإيجابي بالعافية. عندما قسمت العينة حسب الفئات العمرية؛ لم تعد الثقة السياسية والنظرة

المستقبلية والعيش في المخيمات مقارنة بالمناطق الحضرية ذات أهمية بالنسبة للفئة العمرية (18-23) سنة ، بينما كان للجنس تأثير أكبر بالنسبة للذكور مقارنة بالإناث ( $B = -4.45, P < 0.05$ )، وكان سكان قطاع غزة أعلى ب 3.9 نقطة من الضفة الغربية ( $B=3.9, P < 0.05$ ) . إرتبط نقص الثقة السياسية عكسيا مع العافية ( $B=0.9, P < 0.05$ ) بالنسبة للمجموعة العمرية (24-29)، أصبح العيش في المخيم مقارنةً بالمناطق الحضرية مهماً ( $B=8.2, P < 0.01$ )، ومع ذلك، لم تعد الثقة بين الجنسين والمنطقة والسياسة ذات دلالة إحصائية. حجم تأثير جميع المتغيرات الهامة ازداد في الفئة العمرية الأكبر سنا مقارنة مع الفئة العمرية الأصغر سنا.

**النتائج النوعية:** وصف الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة العافية بأنها نتاج تفاعل كل الأشياء التي تجعلهم يتمتعون بالصحة والسعادة والراحة في جميع مجالات الحياة ؛ جسديا ونفسيا واجتماعيا ووظيفيا. اما بالنسبة للعوامل التي تؤثر على العافية فقد أشاروا الى ستة مجالات رئيسية وهي: الاحتلال العسكري الإسرائيلي، ومجال السياسة الداخلية، والمجال الاجتماعي الاقتصادي، والمجال الاجتماعي الثقافي، والمجال البيئي و المجال الشخصي.

**الاستنتاج:** تؤكد النتائج الكمية والنوعية على تأثير كل من السياسة الداخلية و الاجتماعية الاقتصادية على العافية. حيث أبرزت نتائج المرحلة النوعية الدور السلبي للاحتلال العسكري الإسرائيلي على العافية ، بالإضافة إلى تأثير العوامل البيئية والشخصية عليها. ويجدر الإشارة الى ان جميع الأبعاد لها تأثير تفاعلي حيث تشكل شبكة معقدة من العوامل التي تؤثر على العافية ، في حين تؤثر المجالات نفسها على بعضها البعض. وأخيراً ، توفر هذه الدراسة معلومات قيمة حول عافية الشباب في الأرض الفلسطينية المحتلة ، وتظهر التحديات الكبيرة التي يواجهها الشباب والتي تؤثر على عافيتهم.

# **Introduction**

---

Youth<sup>1</sup> or emerging adulthood is an important transitional period. Although predictable biological and physiological changes occur, important life transitions take place during this period. Psychological changes are important during this period of heightened instability (mainly in personal identity, economic opportunities and social relationships). This period is characterized by various stressors and uncertainties that are created and molded by contextual factors in the environment in which youth live (Goldin, 2014; Stroud et al., 2015). Furthermore, changes in social roles and responsibilities are expected in this newly independent, unpredictable, and unstable period of life (J. Arnett, 2000; Arnett et al., 2014; Stroud et al., 2015)

While youth may share similar developmental and psychological features, contextual factors may impose forces that have a substantial role in defining their needs and concerns. These contextual factors can vary from country to country and even from different places in the same country.

Moreover, every generation is distinct from the previous generation in terms of these contextual factors (Stroud et al., 2015). Consequently, we cannot infer from past knowledge about the youth environment, whether social, physical, or political because of unique and time bound characteristics and challenges. For example, many youth around the world now live in a more global, more connected world but with more risks and stressors, less social mobility, economic challenges and greater inequalities and opportunity gaps than previous generations; and all these are expected to continue or even worsen (Goldin, 2014; Shanahan, 2000; Stroud et al., 2015). In

---

<sup>1</sup> There are different classifications for youth age group (The United Nations), but in this study youth are defined as young adults of age 18 until reaching full adulthood of age 30, this period is widely known as emerging adulthood (Jeffrey J Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014).

addition, youth today are becoming fully independent at later ages compared to past generations because of many factors such as socioeconomic changes and increasing enrolment in higher education (J. Arnett, 2000; Jeffrey J Arnett et al., 2014).

This phase is also of importance to public health and health policies. Many studies have claimed that in this transitional period, youth may encounter deterioration in health status due to obesity, smoking, physical inactivity and other behavioral risk factors which have many lasting effects on the future health of these individuals (Goldin, 2014; Stroud et al., 2015). Globally, the greatest health burden in this age group is caused by mental health disorders such as mood disorders, depression and anxiety disorders. These issues in turn can lead to behavioral risk factors and substance misuse (Arnett et al., 2014; Goldin, 2014; Nurius et al., 2015; Patel, et al., 2007; Shanahan, 2000; Stroud et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2008). In the Eastern Mediterranean region, where the population is very young compared to the rest of the world, the burden of mental disorders exceeds the global average influenced by many contextual problems and as a result of living conditions amid the political and economic unrest (Mokdad, 2017)<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, there is a need to focus on youth mental health in public health research, and to identify the contextual factors influencing the level of health and wellbeing of youth, who are the generation of the future and parents of the next generation (Farver-Vestergaard & Ruggeri, 2017; Goldin, 2014). In the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) this is especially important because youth face challenges posed by global forces such as capitalism and globalization (Harvey, 2003), as well as the obstacles and challenges resulting from the political context and the

---

<sup>2</sup> The term mental disorders used by Mokdad holds a degree of inaccuracy as it is suspected that it was assessed using tools that were not culturally and contextually sensitive. Also, the mental disorders could be conflated with poor mental health. The information here is used as an indication to reflect the state of ill-being in the region.

ongoing Israeli military occupation. The living conditions for Palestinian youth in general and for marginalized groups of Palestinian youth in specific are likely to pose barriers to development affecting their health and wellbeing through their life course (Giacaman et al., 2009; Giacaman et al., 2011; Goldin, 2014; World Health Organization, 2014).

The move toward wellbeing signals an increasing scholarly interest in a more holistic view of health that goes beyond biomedical models of health and disease (Giacaman et al., 2011; Keyes, 2002; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; McDowell, 2010). This line of research has proven to be important not only in understanding health more holistically, but has also been shown to be important to designing health interventions that focus on preventing adverse health outcomes in the long-term (Patel et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; World Health Organization, 2004). Furthermore, despite the importance of mental health in general and mental health of youth in specific, studies focusing on the health and wellbeing of youth, in the oPt and the low – middle income countries more broadly, are surprisingly limited (Goldin, 2014; World Health Organization, 2014).

## **Purpose statement**

The proposed study aims to address this research gap through an investigation of youth mental wellbeing. The study aims to identify factors contributing to the wellbeing of Palestinian youth, namely social relations, personal freedom, political participation and outlook for the future. A mixed-methods design will be used. The first phase will consist of the analysis of already collected quantitative data from the Power2Youth survey of 1350 Palestinian youth. The focus in this phase will be on how trust, freedom, confidence in the political institutions, satisfaction with the quality of governance and future outlook affect wellbeing? In addition to demographic and

socioeconomic variables. The second, qualitative phase follows the quantitative results to help explain them in more depth. More broadly, the qualitative phase will explore the meaning and importance of wellbeing to youth in the oPt, and explore in depth the important factors that influence youth wellbeing in the oPt.

## **The context of Palestinian youth**

The history of occupation and ethnic cleansing since 70 years and its devastating consequences on all Palestinians, is still perceived and felt today and still expanding (Sitta, 2016). After the Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in 1993, especially since 2011, Palestinians have been facing further rapid deterioration in various aspects of life including political, and socioeconomic conditions linked to various forms of harm from the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian land, and the cancerous expansion of the Israeli settlements and last but not least by internal Palestinian political problems such as the split between the two major political parties (Fatah and Hamas), exclusion and corruption. This deterioration is reported as being equivalent or possibly greater than what they faced before in the 1987 uprising or intifada (Alkhalili, 2017; Høigilt, 2013). In the Gaza Strip, youth between the ages of 18-29 years old are roughly more than one quarter of the population (Abu Fasheh, 2013). All of these youth live under Israeli military occupation and constant conflict, imposing individual and collective chronic exposure to insecurity, oppression, discrimination, marginalization and humiliation. This has an important effect on physical, psychological and social wellbeing which eventually affect health cumulatively, especially among youth being exposed to such adverse living conditions in their critical transitional period of life (Giacaman et al., 2011; Giacaman et al., 2007; Nurius et al., 2015). Moreover, the constant exposure to

pervasive violence and traumas youth face by the military occupation forces have important consequences. For instance, in the Gaza strip, the population of 1.8 million, under siege since the year (2007). In 2008 Gaza Strip faced a seven weeks of destructive and devastating aerial and land attacks by the Israeli military forces, resulting in a total death of 2130 person, a total injury of 11,066 casualties, and about 18,000 house damaged or demolished causing 108,000 person to become homeless, while displacing 290,000 people from their neighborhoods (Jabr & Berger, 2016). Gaza Strip suffered from two other attacks in the years 2012 and 2014. These severe stressful conditions have a considerable impact on youth mental health and wellbeing (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010).

Roughly 25% of Palestinian youth are classified as living under poor economic conditions (especially in the Gaza strip at 38%, and in the West Bank 18.3%) and more than one third of Palestinian youth are unemployed (with the highest rate of unemployment among the holders of higher educational degrees) (Abu Fasheh, 2013). Unfortunately, according to the Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU)<sup>3</sup>, the level of democratic governance has been decreasing since 2006 and the rank of the oPt had declined from “flawed democracy” to “hybrid regime” in 2011, which means combining some democratic traits with autocratic traits (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010). Additionally, youth face other prevalent problems that may have a considerable impact on wellbeing in the oPt, such as paternalism<sup>4</sup>, gender discrimination, and unequal distribution of social and political power (Abu Fasheh, 2013), not to forget corruption, no free elections and nepotism (Transparency International, 2015). These factors negatively influence wellbeing

---

<sup>3</sup> The Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU) is “the research and analysis division of The Economist Group and the world leader in global business intelligence”

<sup>4</sup> Paternalism is the act of limiting individuals or groups space of freedom by the political or the social authorities supposedly in the subordinate’s interest.

which may influence both mental and physical health in the population in general and youth in particular, and can be translated into an epidemic of frustration, stress, crime, violence and drug abuse and above all alienation and marginalization of supposedly the most productive population and potential parents of the future generation (Abu Fasheh, 2013; Giacaman et al., 2011).

In sum, Palestinian youth face challenges in various domains, which can eventually affect their health and wellbeing (Giacaman et al., 2009). While political freedom in the oPt was found to be an especially important determinant of wellbeing (Giacaman et al., 2007), socioeconomic wellbeing was found to be a primary concern of youth in the oPt (Høigilt, 2013). The proposed study aims to examine the relationship between these contextual factors, among others, and youth mental wellbeing in the occupied Palestinian territory.

# Literature review

---

## Wellbeing

The pursuit of wellbeing has been a major goal for people throughout the history of the human kind and currently the literature on wellbeing is flourishing in a considerable pace (Dodge et al., 2012), and the concept of wellbeing is gaining an increasing international interest (World Health Organization, 2004). In the past century or so, the field of public health has focused mainly on epidemiological indicators such as mortality and morbidity to evaluate the health status of the population, and the same applies to the field of psychology by which the concentration of psychological literature was dominated by studies on the negative psychology or so-called psychopathology such as depression, anxiety, stress and other psychological problems (Helliwell, 2003). In contrast, the social sciences literature was dominated by studies using objective indicators such as socioeconomic status, employment and income (Veenhoven, 2008). All of these measures failed to capture the concept of wellbeing (Diener & Seligman, 2004).

As a concept, wellbeing is complex, dynamic and holistic, and refers to optimal psychological functioning and feeling good (Huppert & So, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Optimal psychological functioning refers to having a purpose in life, self-realization and acceptance, environmental mastery and having good relationships (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), while feeling good is having high levels of positive emotions such as happiness and good mood and feeling satisfied with life (Diener et al., 2003). The conceptual complexity of wellbeing and the issue of what constitutes wellbeing fueled a heavy and a long debate since ancient times beginning with Aristotle till the recent flourishing of the field of positive psychology on the meaning or the definition of

wellbeing and what constitute wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Relatively recently, the new field of positive psychology combined the notions of wellbeing as both functional and emotional and linked it with the notion of high levels of good mental health (Dodge et al., 2012; Helliwell, 2003; Huppert & So, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Giving rise to the concept of mental or psychological wellbeing sometimes referred to by the term “flourishing”, which is simply the sum of satisfactions in both emotional and functional levels that constitute living a good, worthy and happy life away from psychological pain and distress (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Keyes et al., 2002; Topp et al., 2015).

Individual wellbeing is not a stable concept, and fluctuates between resources and challenges in the environment (Dodge et al., 2012). Many scholars consider the main characteristic of wellbeing as a subjective, relative and individual-level concept (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Veenhoven, 2007, 2008). Subjective wellbeing is mainly defined as people’s own evaluation of their quality of life (Proctor, 2014; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), or what lay people call happiness, peace, fulfillment and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2003). It is relative because subjective wellbeing has various set-points due to factors that substantially affect wellbeing. On one hand, these factors create inter personal variations which are mainly associated with individual personality (temperament and adaptation and goal striving strategies). On the other hand, these factors creates international variations due to internalized cultural values (such as social and religious ideologies) that play an important role in what constitutes wellbeing (Diener et al., 2009; Diener et al., 2003; Helliwell, 2003). Finally, wellbeing is an individual level concept because it reflects subjective individual experience and feeling about life conditions rather than a collective picture of a phenomenon (Veenhoven, 2008). However, this study will

challenge the individual concept of wellbeing, and the fact that wellbeing is confined to the notion of individual mental wellbeing. Because wellbeing is a more holistic concept which combines the contextual, social and individual concepts.

Commonly, in medical discourse and in the field of public health, wellbeing is associated with the definition of health (both mental and physical) set by the World Health Organization in 1948, as a holistic concept encompassing physical, psychological and social wellbeing (Ereaut & Whiting, 2008). Mental wellbeing is increasingly used as synonymous with mental health, because mental health is not only the absence of mental problems which is necessary but not sufficient for mental health (Keyes, 2002; Park, 2004; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). It is defined as the existence of personal coping resources determined by the surrounding environment (Schütte et al., 2014) and embedded in social and cultural contexts (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Consequently, mental or psychological wellbeing in its conceptual definition is not merely the absence but the opposite of mental problems. Mental illness and mental wellbeing are independent on each other (de Cates et al., 2015), if mental problems are the negative side of the spectrum of mental health, mental wellbeing is the positive side of the spectrum including all features that encompass positive mental functioning and positive feeling (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Notably, low levels of wellbeing have a negative influence on health, but also individuals who have high levels of wellbeing have higher probability to be more mentally healthy than those with low levels of wellbeing. People with high levels of wellbeing (more specifically high levels of positive affect) have fewer symptoms of psychopathology such as depression social phobia or anxiety and less likely to suffer from these conditions (Chida & Steptoe, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Park, 2004; Sisask et al., 2008). On the other hand, many psychological treatments and interventions that intend to

improve mental illness such as depressive states doesn't imply improvement in mental wellbeing, which further confirms that mental disorders and mental wellbeing are two independent states (de Cates et al., 2015). This study will not adopt the dualistic approach, and will be in line with the notion that mental disorders and mental wellbeing are two faces of the same coin.

Objective and subjective measures of wellbeing exist, providing tools for assessing the quality of life of individuals and their health status, which at the same time have some limitations that are elaborated on below (Costanza et al., 2007). Subjective assessments of wellbeing are now commonly used as valid outcome measures for quality of life, for health in various fields and also for development because they cover a perceived judgment of all domains: physical, emotional, social and spiritual (Diener et al., 2003; Farver-Vestergaard & Ruggeri, 2017; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; McDowell, 2010) and self-perceived assessment is a successful tool to examine the connection between subjective self-perception and objective life circumstances (Shanahan, 2000). These filters of judgment are believed to better predict wellbeing than objective assessment (such as socioeconomic<sup>5</sup> or mortality or morbidity indicators), because they are more inclined toward individual perception and appraisal of the environment rather than an objective description of the environment. In addition to the personal coping mechanisms to various stressors to the assessment of wellbeing (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Nurius et al., 2015; Veenhoven, 2008). Despite claims that subjective methods of assessing wellbeing are suspected to have some methodological flaws and absence of absolute standards to compare between individuals and countries (Schwarz & Strack, 1999), subjective wellbeing assessment remains advisable and more practical especially in

---

<sup>5</sup> Such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), level of wealth, national income, consumption and others

developing countries, because this kind of information is scarce and a considerable part of the picture pertaining to how individuals perceive wellbeing is missing, which is a very important in the policy making process (Farver-Vestergaard & Ruggeri, 2017; Helliwell, 2003; Veenhoven, 2007). Mixing between objective and subjective measures, however, is the best way to capture and assess the quality of life or wellbeing of individuals, and to describe the level of wellbeing in any given society (Costanza et al., 2007; Diener et al., 2003; Veenhoven, 2007).

Subjective wellbeing as a self-perception of wellbeing in its both emotional and functional components is a strong predictor and a good measurement tool for mental health that could effectively detect the presence of psychopathology, which has symptoms of both distress and dysfunction such as depression, and anxiety and also the coping mechanisms against stress which may lead to behavioral problems (Dodge et al., 2012; Howell et al., 2007; Keyes, 2002; Park, 2004) . On the other hand, subjective wellbeing has a positive relationship with physical health and there are two assumed pathways to this relationship, one is the behavioral pathway, which can include eating, smoking, physical activity, and alcohol and drug abuse. The other is physiological pathways, by which low levels of wellbeing was confirmed to be associated with physiological problems, such as reduced immunity, and elevated blood pressure and heart rate (Chida & Steptoe, 2008; Howell et al., 2007).

A myriad of other desirable and beneficial outcomes are derived from high levels of wellbeing, especially high level of positive affect (Diener & Seligman, 2004). There is consensus in the literature that people with high subjective wellbeing are predicted to be more successful ,function more effectively, have more resilience to stress, be less violent, be better earners, be more productive, have better relationships, have better social participation and high levels of trust and even have better health, superior mental health and more longevity (Chida & Steptoe, 2008;

Diener & Seligman, 2004; Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2000; Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2004; Larsen & Eid, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Park, 2004). The effects extend to the national level where people with high levels of wellbeing are better citizens, more engaged in civil and political matters and less radical in their views considerably essential for democratic governance, and contribute more to national wealth and development (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Goldin, 2014; Helliwell, 2003; Larsen & Eid, 2008; Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Veenhoven, 2008).

Using wellbeing for implementation and evaluation of policy is in its infancy, although scholars from various domains constantly urge that the domestic and international policies in all countries should be implemented and evaluated based on the wellbeing of the population and not only by conventional economic parameters such as economic wealth or productivity (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Farver-Vestergaard & Ruggeri, 2017; Goldin, 2014; Helliwell, 2003; Larsen & Eid, 2008). Policies should also be tailored respectively to the needs of individuals in the population especially the future generation of youth in their emerging adulthood period. Empowerment of young people is a must, and they themselves with their concerns and priorities must be at the center of every policy making process in all sectors, this will eventually lead to the wellbeing of the nation as a whole (Patel et al., 2007).

Very little information is available on young people in the developing world with much of the evidence suggesting that priorities for populations in rich and poor countries are not the same, and it is of importance to assess, evaluate and intervene in multi-sectorial levels to ameliorate the wellbeing of youth individuals (Park, 2004; Patel et al., 2007).

## **Youth wellbeing**

For youth to be in a state of high subjective wellbeing is extremely important at the individual, social and national level (Larsen & Eid, 2008), important because it implies optimal functioning and health (Suldo & Shaffer, 2008). Unfortunately, in many countries around the world, a considerable number of youth are experiencing low levels of wellbeing, and their mental health needs are mostly unmet, especially in low and middle income countries, mainly because of a challenging and an unsupportive environment (Goldin, 2014; Patel et al., 2007). It is apparent that youth in rich countries have higher levels of wellbeing than poor countries, mainly because they have better resources, better systems and better infrastructure (Goldin, 2014). Furthermore, youth with low levels of subjective wellbeing are more vulnerable to mental problems such as depression and other maladaptive risky behaviors (Park, 2004). which may lead to failures in life and unhealthy development into adulthood (Park, 2004; Shanahan, 2000).

## **Determinants of subjective wellbeing among youth**

Many studies agree on the presence of multi-dimensional and interconnected factors that can foster or protect population wellbeing and the absence of these factors can foster ill-being. (De Moortel et al., 2015; Diener et al., 2009; Diener et al., 2003; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Farver-Vestergaard & Ruggeri, 2017; Veenhoven, 2008). Below is an overview of literature on factors influencing wellbeing.

## *Personal Determinants*

Research studies confirm that a significant amount of variability in subjective wellbeing between individuals is explained by personality traits (positive and negative affect) and temperamental factors (extroversion, introversion and neuroticism). However life circumstances also influence long term levels of subjective wellbeing (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener et al., 2003; Gannon & Ranzijn, 2005; Luthans et al., 2007).

Optimism is a personal dispositional trait that mediates between external events and personal perception of them (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It is a personality construct that promotes active coping strategies which have a strong association and is a strong predictor of subjective wellbeing especially positive affect (Harju & Bolen, 1998; Scheier & Carver, 1992; Scheier et al., 2001; Segerstrom et al., 2017). Several studies found that optimism reduces or even prevents depression (Chang & Farrehi, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), and is associated with vitality and mental health (Achat et al., 2000). Additionally, hope, and optimism are important parts of the psychological capital that are related to performance and satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2007), and are associated with behaviors that promote health and reduce health risks (Scheier & Carver, 1992; Scheier et al., 2001; Segerstrom et al., 2017). People who are optimistic about the future are more motivated and have better coping mechanisms and exert more consistent problem focused effort; while the opposite is the case for those who are pessimistic about the future especially in stressful situations or adversity in which they tend to divert from the present problem either by mental disengagement such as denial or even behavioral disengagement such as substance abuse (Scheier et al., 2001; Segerstrom et al., 2017). Being confident about the future depends very much on the confidence with governments to

provide the needed elements and resources for its population (Helliwell, 2003). In addition, people function well when they see society as having potential for growth (Keyes, 2002).

### ***Demographic determinants***

The most important Demographic determinants found in the literature are: age, marital status, socioeconomic status and education. Subjective wellbeing if compared across age groups gives a U-shaped curve by which the ends of this curve are the early 20s and after the 50s with the best levels of wellbeing, while the worst is in the middle age groups (Helliwell, 2003; Veenhoven, 2008). This middle age group is where mental health problems are most prevalent (Patel et al., 2007). This pattern is due to many factors such as economic and social challenges and the burden of high responsibilities and high working hours in this period especially the period of young adulthood from (18-30) (Veenhoven, 2008).

There is some debate in relation to the role of marital status on subjective wellbeing. The cause of this debate is the complexity and interference of many other variables on this relationship such as the quality of marriage (Helliwell, 2003). But it is generally regarded that marriage is positively related to subjective wellbeing (Veenhoven, 2008). Also, it was found in a study of wellbeing in the general population in the oPt, that marriage is a protective factor for wellbeing (Das et al., 2007)

Low socioeconomic status imposes barriers especially confronting young adults such as low educational attainment, higher chances of living in poverty and fewer resources in addition to greater exposure to forms of discrimination which all lead to low levels of mental wellbeing in a cumulative effect (Nurius et al., 2015). In a study comparing 31 European counties, poor mental wellbeing was associated with low socioeconomic status (Schütte et al., 2014). Meanwhile, there is an ambiguous picture and abundant debate on the role of income on subjective wellbeing and

studies suggest that this relationship is not linear (Helliwell, 2003). It was found that the level of wealth is one reason for this variation, as income and socioeconomic status are more important determinants of subjective wellbeing in less wealthy nations than in wealthy ones because they determine basic needs for wellbeing such as housing and house amenities. Also the correlation between financial satisfaction and global satisfaction with life was stronger in low income nations than high income nations (Diener et al., 2009; Diener et al., 2003; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Diener et al., 1997). For example, in countries with fast growing GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, increase in income was not associated with an increase in wellbeing (Helliwell, 2003). On the other hand a study in Lebanon found that socioeconomic status was significantly directly associated with subjective wellbeing (Ayyash-Abdo & Alamuddin, 2007). Employment and working conditions have an influence on the physical and behavioral health and wellbeing of individuals (Das et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2003; Lucas et al., 2004; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Stroud et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2008). The availability of viable economic opportunities for youth provides stability and optimism, impacting the overall youth wellbeing and the whole society (Goldin, 2014) while education is an essential component in the development of human and social interactions and it impacts many domains of wellbeing such as health, employment, income, social network and participation (Goldin, 2014; Helliwell, 2003; Stroud et al., 2015). Because education provides high levels of cognitive thinking which is critical for long term success and wellbeing (Goldin, 2014; Howard et al., 2010), education is a protective factor for both physical and mental wellbeing and has a greater effect on more disadvantaged youth (Nurius et al., 2015) and poor wellbeing is more prevalent in groups with lower educational levels in almost all the world (Schütte et al., 2014; Topp et al., 2015). However, it was estimated that there are 120 million illiterate youth around the world (Goldin,

2014), and that education is more difficult to attain for youth today compared to past decades because many youth cannot afford the increasing financial burdens that education impose. This in turn can reduce the wellbeing of youth in many countries around the world (Stroud et al., 2015).

## ***Contextual Determinants: Environmental, Social and Political***

### ***Determinants***

The physical environment defined by landscapes is considered as the main source of human agency and wellbeing; from home to neighborhoods, to parks and forests, all these landscapes are an important determinants of mental wellbeing (Milligan & Bingley, 2007). In addition, good infrastructure, available resources, community safety and security are all positively associated with wellbeing. The hostile environment caused by conflict and violence undermines youth's social and emotional development and have consequences on many aspects of youth wellbeing and on the whole national economy and productivity (Goldin, 2014).

Social support (social network or social relationships with family, peer and community even through social media) is positively associated with and necessary for mental wellbeing (Diener & Oishi, 2005; Nurius et al., 2015; Stroud et al., 2015; Veenhoven, 2008), and low social capital is associated with poor levels of wellbeing (Topp et al., 2015). Youth who suffer from social disadvantages that accumulate producing an overwhelming stress burden have poorer physical and mental health than advantaged peers (Nurius et al., 2015). Social marginalization caused by social and material inequalities does not only exert stressors and deprivations at one moment in time but through the life course, and this accumulation of disadvantages affects the health and wellbeing of individuals (Nurius et al., 2015; Schütte et al., 2014). Trust is a main mediator to

ensure social capital and evidence shows that trust whether in the family, among peers and community, has a strong significant association with subjective wellbeing (Helliwell, 2003; Veenhoven, 2008).

People in general and youth in particular function well when they feel that they belong in their social environment and community (Keyes, 2002). Social participation, whether through voluntary actions or religious participation through mosques or churches or political participation through voting and paying taxes is strongly related to wellbeing (Das et al., 2007; Helliwell, 2003). However, youth participation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is ranked the lowest in the world (Goldin, 2014). Citizen participation in civic engagement and political expression is strongly associated with social cohesion and stability which in turn forms a critical component of youth wellbeing (Goldin, 2014). Exclusion and oppression produces frustration which in turn can produce apathy and instability (both economic and social) or violence (Goldin, 2014).

All the characteristics of good governance, such as human rights, political and economic stability democracy and freedom are associated with wellbeing and it is believed that improvements in the quality of governance will substantially improve wellbeing (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Diener et al., 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Goldin, 2014; Helliwell, 2003; Larsen & Eid, 2008; Veenhoven, 2000). Some scholars pointed to an interaction between economic and political conditions which interferes with the association between socio-economic status and wellbeing (Eikemo, Bambra, Judge, & Ringdal, 2008). So, even if economic conditions are good, poor political conditions can mitigate the positive impact of these improvements. Unfortunately, conditions for youth in many parts of the MENA region are unfavorable in this regard, which is likely to have adverse effects on wellbeing.

## **Significance of the study**

---

The study of youth wellbeing and its domains in the oPt, defined here as demographic and contextual domains, is important for several reasons. First, understanding the relation between wellbeing and its determinants, by revealing factors influencing youth wellbeing in the oPt, is the first step toward addressing these issues with evidence based policies and interventions by all policy makers and stakeholders interested to properly invest in youth and the future of the Palestinian state. Second, contextual factors specific to Palestinian living conditions will add to the literature on factors influencing youth wellbeing in low and middle income countries and similar contexts in political conflict.

## **Methods**

---

### **Approach**

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach. The first phase is a quantitative secondary analysis of youth survey data set. The second phase is qualitative data collection and analysis to dig deep, fill the gaps and to explain some of the quantitative findings. The third phase combines quantitative findings from the youth survey with a qualitative findings to produce a more complete picture on the dimensions and factors that influence youth wellbeing in the oPt (Creswell, 2013).

The choice to use a mixed method approach was made because this approach can provide a better understanding of youth wellbeing in the oPt and allow us to obtain more comprehensive and complementary data from both approaches, in addition to reducing the weaknesses and limitations of a single approach. The decision to combine a qualitative approach with a quantitative approach stems from several reasons, first qualitative data is needed to be integrated with the quantitative data in order to understand what is meant by the concept of wellbeing in the Palestinian context, because little prior research has been done on wellbeing among youth in the oPt. Hence, the qualitative phase will serve to enhance our understanding of wellbeing among youth as youth expresses, its key determinants, as well as youth's main concerns more generally. As the qualitative phase will provide insights which are different from the knowledge provided by the quantitative phase. Second, the uniqueness of the Palestinian living conditions which is different than most of the world in terms of the political situation and the existence of the occupation, is likely to have important implications for understanding wellbeing. These have several consequences that can have important effects on the youth wellbeing which need an in-depth flexible qualitative approach in addition to quantitative research. This is also needed to better understand the points of similarities and contradictions with the rest of literature on wellbeing.

## **Quantitative Phase Methodology**

The quantitative phase of this mixed methods study consists of a secondary analysis of the Power2Youth<sup>6</sup> cross-sectional survey conducted between 13 October and 31 December 2015 in

---

<sup>6</sup> "Power2Youth is a consortium of research and academic institutions from different disciplines based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries formed to explore the

the oPt. The Power2Youth survey was conducted by the Palestinian staff of Fafo<sup>7</sup> and its team of trained local interviewers. The Power2Youth survey was designed to provide comparison among six Middle Eastern countries and was conducted in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, the oPt, Tunisia and Turkey.

The participants of this survey were Palestinian youth between the ages of 18-29 years old living in the oPt (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip). Structured questionnaires were filled by the interviewers through face to face interviews with the participants. A representative sample was obtained through stratified two stage cluster sampling. The first stage adopted a systematic selection of clusters of households using the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) sampling frame. The second stage consisted of a random selection of households through random walk process. In households that have more than one eligible individual, one youth was selected randomly using a Kish table. The response rate in the households was close to 98.2 percent. The original sample contained 1,930 households, but 1,423 households were selected because the rest either did not have eligible participant aged from 18 to 29 or refused to participate (16 households<sup>8</sup>). Some participants were unreachable or refused to participate and others didn't take the interview seriously and gave unreliable answers. So the final data set comprises 1,353 respondents (Giacaman, Mitwalli, & Hammoudeh, 2017).

The questionnaire was initially developed by Fafo and was fully developed collectively by all Power2Youth country teams using qualitative research. The country team for the oPt consisted of researchers from the Institute of Community and Public Health at Birzeit University. The

---

dynamics of youth exclusion and the prospects for youth transformative agency in the SEM region. The project is funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme. See, <http://www.power2youth.eu/>”.

<sup>7</sup> Fafo is a Norwegian research foundation (*Forskningssiftelsen Fafo*)

<sup>8</sup> Personal correspondence with Fafo manager for Power2Youth/ Palestine Tiltne Åge A.

questionnaire contains the WHO-5 scale of mental wellbeing (World Health Organization, 1998) in addition to many other sections that provided variables pertinent to this study.

## ***Variable Explanations and Scale Development***

### **Dependent Variable**

The 5-item World Health Organization Well-Being Index (WHO-5) is among the most widely used self-report questionnaires assessing subjective (mental or emotional) well-being over a 14 day period (Downs, Boucher, Campbell, & Polyakov, 2017; Topp et al., 2015; Utter et al., 2017). It is made of five positively phrased items assessing constructs of positive mood, vitality and general interests (Utter et al., 2017).

The dependent variable of interest is wellbeing measured by the WHO-5 scale developed by the WHO to assess mental well-being covering 5 items related to positive mood, vitality and general interest and the items are:

1. I have felt cheerful and in good spirits.
2. I have felt calm and relaxed.
3. I have felt active and vigorous.
4. I woke up feeling fresh and rested.
5. My daily life has been filled with things that interest me.

Each of the 5 items is scored from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all of the time). The raw score therefore theoretically ranges from 0 (absence of well-being) to 25 (maximal well-being). Because scales measuring health related quality of life are conventionally translated to a percentage scale from 0 (absent) to 100 (maximal), the raw score ranging from 0 to 25 is multiplied by 4 to give the final

score from 0 representing the worst imaginable well-being to 100 representing the best imaginable well-being. The 5 items form a unidimensional scale of the level of wellbeing, by which every item has distinct information. The cutoff point below 50% is an indicative of poor wellbeing according to the WHO (Topp et al., 2015).

The WHO-5 wellbeing index was published in 1998, translated into more than 30 languages and used in studies in many countries around the world. As a generic scale (disease anonymous scale) for wellbeing it was successfully applied across a wide range of research fields and was a coherent measure of wellbeing with adequate construct and predictive validity and reliability (Downs et al., 2017; McDowell, 2010). The scale was successful because it is straightforward, is worded in culturally sensitive language, and provides a useful tool to assess and compare wellbeing between individuals, and has been used as a screening tool for psychological symptoms such as depression or anxiety (Downs et al., 2017; McDowell, 2010; Topp et al., 2015), and suicide risk in individuals (Sisask et al., 2008).

Several studies reported good internal consistency of the WHO-5 wellbeing index (McDowell, 2010; Topp et al., 2015), which was also ranked among the top 20 scales used in clinimetric validity (valid clinical measurement for wellbeing without overlapping with other clinical dimensions) and is considered as a scale to assess general wellbeing (Hall, Krahn, Horner-Johnson, & Lamb, 2011; Topp et al., 2015).

## **Independent Variables**

In the analysis for this study, seven sets of independent variables are used in the statistical analysis:

1. **Demographic variables:**

- Age (continuous).
- Gender (categorical) in two groups: females and males.
- Region (categorical) in two groups: West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- Place of residence (categorical) in three groups: urban, rural and camp.

**2. Socio-economic variables:**

- Education (categorical) in two groups: equal and less than secondary, and secondary and above
- Subjective economic situation scale, includes questions on:
  - a) Economic situation of household by national standards.
  - b) Current economic situation comparing to 12 months ago.
  - c) Satisfaction with housing conditions.
  - d) Satisfaction with neighborhood.

**3. Social relations scale measured by the level of trust in people, includes questions on:**

- a) Trust in extended family.
- b) Trust in neighbors.
- c) Trust in people knowing personally.
- d) Trust in people meeting for the first time.

**4. Personal freedom scale, include questions on**

- a) Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions at home.
- b) Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions among friends.
- c) Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions in community.
- d) Feeling about freedom in visiting places.
- e) Freedom of choice.

f) Feeling about opinions being taken seriously by other adult family members.

**5. Political confidence scale which includes questions on**

- a) Confidence in the armed forces.
- b) Confidence in the police.
- c) Confidence in the courts.
- d) Confidence in the central government.
- e) Confidence in local government.
- f) Confidence in political parties.

**6. Quality of governance which includes questions on:**

- a) Democratic governance,
- b) Political attention to youth,
- c) Youth influence in local politics,
- d) Youth influence on national politics.

**7. Future outlook scale which include questions on**

- a) Perception on economic development after 5 years.
- b) Perception on the living conditions development after 5 years.
- c) Perception on economic development after 5 years.

The scales were created using factor analysis by which all the independent variables and the wellbeing variables (the WHO-5 questions) were included in the factor analysis. The process started by first, choosing the questions from the survey that are considered connected to the factors that influence wellbeing according to the literature. Then, entering all the suspected variables to create scales, then using principal component analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis indicated that there were eight dimensions with Eigen values greater than one, where the

scree plot indicated that seven dimensions were appropriate for the data. The analysis was repeated with a fixed number of factors (7) suppressing small coefficients (absolute value less than .4). Items with loadings of 0.4 or more were included in the factor's construction. The resulted factors (shown in appendix 1) have Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy of 0.81 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant ( $P < 0.001$ ), which are indicative of very good fit.

The scales that were created are: wellbeing, trust (weighted), personal freedom (weighted), economic situation, and future outlook. While, the political confidence and the quality of governance were used as (weighted) counts. Because they consisted of considerable missing answers (about 170), the scale was created by counting the number of answers with no confidence or not very much confidence. The same was done with the quality of governance and it was created as count of answers which indicate satisfaction with quality of governance in the four questions.

The variables of interest from the Power2Youth questionnaire are in appendix 1.

Further information about the scales used is available in appendix 2.

## ***Hypotheses***

1. There is an association between demographic variables (age, gender, region and place of residence), whereby: age is negatively associated with wellbeing, males have lower levels of wellbeing than females, individuals in urban areas have higher levels of wellbeing than individuals in both rural and camp areas, and residents of Gaza have lower wellbeing than residents of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

2. There is an association between the socioeconomic variables (satisfaction with economic situation and education) and wellbeing in Palestinian youth, whereby higher levels in the satisfaction with economic situation and high level of education are positively associated with wellbeing.
3. There is a positive association between good social relations, determined by the level of trust, and good wellbeing.
4. There is a positive association between high personal freedom and good wellbeing, whereby youth with high reported freedom will have higher levels of wellbeing.
5. There is a positive association between the youth's positive future outlook about several issues concerning their living conditions and good levels of wellbeing.
6. There is a negative association between youth low confidence in the political institutions and good wellbeing.
7. There is a positive association between youth's high satisfaction with quality of governance and good wellbeing.

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

The analysis began with a univariate description of the sample, followed by bivariate analysis. The bivariate analysis for categorical independent variables was performed using independent sample T-test for variables with two categories and ANOVA for variables with more than two categories in order to assess the association between the continuous dependent variable, which is wellbeing and all the independent categorical variables. Pearson correlations test were used to estimate the association between wellbeing and continuous variables. Statistical significance and

F and T scores, and Pearson's correlations coefficient (in regards to the type of variable) were calculated using SPSS to assess associations.

Following the bivariate analysis, multivariate linear regression was conducted with the wellbeing variable as the dependent variable and all the variables that were found to be significant in the bivariate analysis, as well as key variables that are deemed important based on the literature were entered as control variables. The multivariate linear regression analysis is used because it is a simple and efficient strategy that is used for the data that have a linear trend, and provide an accurate estimation compared to multiple logistic regression that use groups that are assumed to be sharing the same descriptions. The coefficient of determination (R square) was examined to check for model fit, along with other model fit indicators like the F-statistic. The employment variable was excluded from the regression because it was not significant in the regression and could be confounded with gender and region variables (when it was excluded they become significant). The final sample size was 1296 because of missing information in some variables.

The regression model was first done for the whole sample then it was done for the age group from 18-23 and 24-29 separately. Given variations in responsibilities, priorities and outlooks it was important to analyze each age group separately and examine the relationships between the variables and wellbeing. As the linear multivariate analysis states, a unit change in independent variables indicate a unit change in the wellbeing score.

## **Qualitative Phase Methodology**

The qualitative phase followed and built on the quantitative analysis It provided a deeper perspective of the concept and determinants of wellbeing by obtaining up-close information relevant to the youth in the oPt, and explored different types of questions, to understand the

meaning youth give to wellbeing and its determinants in their own living conditions. This helped to develop a picture that is more holistic and may have been missing in the previous quantitative phase. The qualitative component of this project intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What is wellbeing and how do Palestinian youth define and perceive it?
2. What are the factors that influence wellbeing in Palestinian youth and what is their feedback on the variables obtained from the quantitative analysis?

The data was obtained through interviews and focus groups discussions from Palestinian youth from the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Because it is very difficult to enter the Gaza Strip, field work was performed by a researcher in the Gaza Strip, who conducted the focus group discussions. Since East Jerusalem was not included in the survey the qualitative research added the perspectives of the youth living in East Jerusalem, which could be different than those in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in term of the challenges faced and living conditions there. Adding the voices of youth in Jerusalem to the overall study will highlight specific factors in their context, as they constitute a significant portion of Palestinian youth who live under complete authority of the military occupation.

In total, 13 interviews and 12 focus groups were completed, recorded and transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data was analyzed and then compared to the quantitative data that was previously obtained. The analysis started by reading and rereading for familiarization. Then, coding and arranging the codes to create themes. The final task was combining and integrating the quantitative and qualitative data in the discussion to create a more holistic and more comprehensive understanding of wellbeing and factors that predict wellbeing in Palestinian

youth. Combining both data in the analysis enabled us to answer the main question of the mixed methods approach which is: To what extent and in what ways do the qualitative data help to add to quantitative associations between the variables and the wellbeing of youth in the oPt in a more comprehensive and actual manner via mixed methods analysis?

Recruitment for the focus groups participants was conducted through snowballing and by contacting institutions, youth organizations, and clubs and university students. The duration of the focus groups was on average one and a half hour. The focus group discussions were conducted in several locations throughout the oPt, including: South of the West Bank including Hebron, Halhul, and Bethlehem; Center, including Ramallah, the Northwest Jerusalem villages, Jerusalem city, and Birzeit University; North of the West Bank, including Nablus city, and Northern West Bank villages (discussion took place in Nablus city); and the Gaza Strip, including Gaza City, Deir Al-Balah, and Rafah.

The interviews were conducted after the focus groups were completed and the qualitative data from these focus groups was analyzed. The duration of the interviews was on average 45 minutes. The selection of participants for the interviews was based on covering areas, ages and backgrounds that were not covered in the focus groups. The interviews were conducted with 13 participants from villages in Jerusalem (At-Tur, Beit Hanina, Sur Baher, and Silwan) (4), villages east of Jerusalem (al-Eizariya and Abu Dis (2), Jericho (1), Tubas (1), Jenin (1), village north of Ramallah (Tammun) (1), Ramallah (1), Jalazone Camp (1) and Gaza city (1). The sample included youth from age 18 to 29, or maybe older to maximum age of 35. Participants are from both sexes and different socioeconomic backgrounds, and education levels. Information on the interview participants are shown in table 1 below:

<b>Table 1: Information About Interviews</b>		
<b>Description</b>		<b>Number of interviews</b>
Age	<24	6
	>=24	7
Gender	Females	7
	Males	6
Area	Gaza Strip	1
	North West Bank	3
	Central West Bank	3
	Jerusalem	6
Years of Education	Secondary	3
	Undergraduate	7
	Postgraduate	3

## **Ethical considerations**

---

The quantitative secondary data was de-identified and kept confidential and the qualitative portion was conducted after an oral consent assuring anonymity and confidentiality. The proposal was submitted to and approved by the ethics committee at the Institute of Community and Public Health, Birzeit University. Confidentiality was maintained (no mentioning of names or sharing of personal information) and efforts were made to assure that no harm was done to participants. Participation was completely voluntary and participants had the right to refuse or withdraw from the interview or focus group.

# Results

---

## Quantitative Results

### *Descriptive statistics*

As seen in table 2, the sample contained approximately 54% females and the mean age was 23 years old ( $SD = 3.4$ ); 60% of the youths in the sample were from the West Bank and 69% of them were from urban areas, while 15.5% and 15% were from rural and camp areas respectively. Approximately, 63% of the respondents had a secondary education or above, while those who are unemployed were 72%; 34% were married. As for satisfaction with the quality of governance 71% reported low satisfaction.

The mean wellbeing score was 58.7. Which is an indication that on average youth in the oPt have low amounts of wellbeing, as the mean score is near to the cutoff point of 50 (poor wellbeing according to the WHO), When stratifying by age, the older age group (24-29) have mean wellbeing score that is about three points less in their mean wellbeing score compared to the younger age group (18-23). It was found that 36% of youth (18-29) have poor wellbeing (below the cutoff point 50% in the wellbeing scale). While, the prevalence of poor wellbeing is higher among older age group (24-29) compared to the younger age group (18-23). By which 33% of the younger age group have poor wellbeing, whereby 40% of the older age group have poor wellbeing.

<b>Table 2 : Descriptive Statistic</b>				
<b>Sample statistics</b>		<b>(18-29)</b>	<b>(18-23)</b>	<b>(24-29)</b>
<b>Variable name</b>		<b>Mean (SD)/ N(%)</b>		
Age		22.79 (3.4)	20.4(1.7)	26.4(1.7)
Gender	Female	728(53.8%)	431 (52.2%)	297 (56.2%)
	Males	625 (46.2 %)	394 (47.8%)	231 (44.8%)
Region	West Bank	812(60%)	510 (61.9%)	301 (57%)
	Gaza Strip	541 (40 %)	314 (38.1%)	227 (43%)
Education				
	≥ Secondary	853 (63%)	512 (62%)	341 (64.6%)
	< Secondary	500 (37 %)	313 (38%)	187 (35.4%)
Residence:	Urban	937 (69.3%)	585 (70.9%)	353 (66.8%)
	Rural	210 (15.5%)	125 (15.1%)	85 (16.2%)
	Camp	206 (15.2%)	115 (14%)	90 (17.1%)
Employed		380 (28.1%)	192 (23.3%)	189 (35.7%)
Not employed		973(71.9 %)	633 (76.7%)	340 (64.3%)
Marital Status:	Single	888(65.6%)	670 (81.2%)	218 (41.3%)
	Married	463(34.2%)	135 (18.5%)	310 (58.7%)
High Satisfaction with quality of governance		391(28.9%)	238 (28.9%)	153 (28.9%)
Low Satisfaction with quality of governance		962(71.1%)	586 (71.1%)	375 (71.1%)

The scales descriptive statistics including the mean scores, the standard deviations and the ranges including the dependent variable (wellbeing) is shown in table 3. It is obvious from the table that participants in general have relatively good amounts of trust in people, personal freedom, satisfaction with the economic situation, and positive future outlook. However, in the internal political domain, participants have low amounts of satisfaction with the quality of governance and high amounts of low confidence in political institutions.

**Table 3: Summary Statistics for Scales**

<u>Scale name</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Mean(SD)</u> <u>All</u>	<u>18-23</u>	<u>24-29</u>
Wellbeing	0-100	58.73 (22.7)	59.9 (22.4)	56.9 (23.4)
Trust in people	2.66-10.65	6.93 (1.46)	6.9 (1.45)	6.9 (1.5)
Personal freedom	4.76-14.9	11.98 (1.83)	11.8 (1.9)	12 (1.8)
Satisfaction with the economic situation	4-15	9.98 (2.36)	10 (2.3)	9.7 (2.5)
Satisfaction with quality of governance toward youth	0-4	1.0(1.0)	1.0 (1.1)	1.0 (1.0)
Low confidence in political institutions	0-6	4.163 (2.03)	4.1 (2.0)	4.3 (2.0)
Future outlook	3-15	8.81 (2.8)	9.0 (2.7)	8.8 (2.8)

### ***Bivariate Results***

As seen in table 4, age has a weak inverse, yet statistically significant, association with wellbeing ( $r = -0.08$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). All the scales were moderately and significantly associated with wellbeing ( $P < 0.001$ ). Gender, region and residence type were not significant in their association with wellbeing. The significantly associated variables with wellbeing were: education ( $T = 2.6$ ,  $P = 0.01$ ), employment ( $T = 3$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). The satisfaction with quality of governance when it was divided into two groups (comparing low satisfaction with high satisfaction) it had a significant association with wellbeing ( $T = -7$  and  $P < 0.001$ ).

<b>Table 4: Bivariate Association Analysis</b>				
		<b><u>Dependent variable (Wellbeing)</u></b>	<b><u>Significance/P value</u></b>	
<b><u>Continuous variables</u></b>		<b><u>Pearson's correlation coefficient</u></b>	<b><u>Significance</u></b>	
Age		<b><u>-0.082</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Trust in people scale		<b><u>0.210</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Personal freedom scale		<b><u>0.194</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Economic situation scale		<b><u>0.245</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Quality of governance scale		<b><u>0.210</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Political confidence scale		<b><u>-0.159</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
Future outlook scale		<b><u>0.187</u></b>	<b><u>P&lt;0.001</u></b>	
<b><u>Categorical variables</u></b>		<b><u>Mean</u></b>	<b><u>T or F</u></b>	<b><u>Significance / P value</u></b>
Gender	Female	<u>59.76</u>	<u>1.788</u>	<u>0.074</u>
	Male	<u>57.54</u>		
Region	West Bank	<u>59.41</u>	<u>1.33</u>	<u>0.184</u>
	Gaza Strip	<u>57.73</u>		
Education	Secondary and above	<u>59.96</u>	<u>2.597</u>	<u>0.010</u>
	Less than secondary	<u>56.64</u>		
Residence type	Urban	<u>58.78</u>	<u>1.66</u>	<u>0.191</u>
	Rural	<u>55.74</u>		
	Camp	<u>59.64</u>		

Employment	Not employed	<u>59.90</u>	<u>3.022</u>	<u>0.003</u>
	Employed	<u>55.75</u>		
Quality of governance	Low satisfaction	<u>56.02</u>	<u>-7.01</u>	<u>P&lt;0.001</u>
	High satisfaction	<u>65.42</u>		

## ***Multivariate Results***

### **The whole sample model**

Table 5 below summarizes the multivariate linear regression model for the whole sample. The model has an adjusted R square of 0.144 ( $f = 19$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that slightly over 14% of the variance is explained by this model.

Age, gender, living in camp areas compared to urban areas, trust in people, personal freedom, satisfaction with governance, perception of economic situation and future outlook were all statistically significant in their relation to wellbeing in this model. Age was inversely associated with wellbeing by which a year increase in age is associated with 0.6 point decrease in the wellbeing score ( $B = -0.602$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ); being a male compared to being a female results in 2.8 points reduction in the wellbeing scale ( $B = -2.802$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). However, living in camp areas compared to urban areas is associated with a 4.5 points increase in the wellbeing scale ( $B = 4.451$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

A unit increase in the trust in people scale is associated with about a 2 point increase in the wellbeing score ( $B = 1.917$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ) and the same was with the personal freedom scale ( $B = 2.027$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). While, a unit increase in the perception of the economic situation scale was associated with a 1.6 points increase in the wellbeing score ( $B = 1.611$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). For every question in the satisfaction with the quality of governance scale answered as satisfied is

associated with 2.4 points more on the wellbeing ( $B = 2.364, P < 0.001$ ). While a unit increase in the future outlook score was associated with an increase of 0.7 point in the wellbeing score ( $B = 0.672, P = 0.001$ ).

<b>Table 5: Regression (18-29)</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Sig</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>		
(Constant)	12.259	6.863	1.891	0.059
Age	-0.602	0.180	-3.382	0.001
Gender (male)	-2.802	1.247	-2.402	0.025
Region (Gaza)	2.566	1.295	1.831	0.049
Education (Secondary and above)	-0.954	1.295	-0.707	0.448
Rural compared to urban	-2.185	1.714	-1.26	0.202
Camp compared to urban	4.451	1.678	2.685	0.003
Political confidence	-0.419	0.310	-1.608	0.182
Trust in people	1.917	0.430	4.578	$P < 0.001$
Personal freedom	2.027	0.340	5.972	$P < 0.001$
Economic situation	1.611	0.270	6.010	$P < 0.001$
Satisfaction with quality of governance toward youth	2.364	0.609	-3.930	$P < 0.001$
Future outlook	0.672	0.222	3.185	0.003

### **Age group (18-23):**

Table 6 below summarizes the multivariate linear regression model for the age group 18-23. The model has an adjusted R square of 0.122 ( $f = 10.3$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that slightly over 12% of the variance is explained by this model.

Gender, region, political confidence, trust in people, personal freedom, perception of economic situation and satisfaction with governance were all statistically significant in their relation to wellbeing in this model. While, age and living in camp compared to urban areas are no longer significant. Future outlook remained not statistically significant. Being a male compared to being a female in this age group was associated with 4.5 point decrease in the wellbeing scale ( $B = -4.497$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). However, living in the Gaza Strip compared to the West Bank was associated with 3.8 point increase in the wellbeing scale ( $B = 3.796$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

For every political or governmental institution included in the scale that the youth indicated to have no or low confidence in, the average wellbeing score decreased by 0.9 degree ( $B = -0.908$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). A unit increase in the trust scale is associated with 1.8 points increase in the wellbeing score ( $B = 1.774$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and the same was with the personal freedom scale ( $B = 1.809$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). While, a unit increase in the perception of the economic situation scale was associated with a 1.5 points increase in the wellbeing score ( $B = 1.538$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ). For every question in the satisfaction with the quality of governance scale answered as satisfied is associated with 2 points more on the wellbeing score ( $B = 2.112$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ).

<b>Table 6: Regression (18-23)</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Sig</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>		
(Constant)	17.259	11.524	1.584	0.114
Age	-0.324	0.452	-0.789	0.485
Gender (male)	-4.472	1.555	-2.893	0.004
Region	3.896	1.634	2.324	0.018
Education	-0.441	1.558	-0.269	0.777
Rural compared to urban	-3.144	2.163	-1.501	0.146
Camp compared to urban	1.701	2.149	0.791	0.429
No Political confidence	-0.879	0.392	-2.315	0.026
Trust in people	1.754	0.558	3.180	0.002
Personal freedom	1.814	0.416	4.344	P<0.001
Economic Situation	1.527	0.340	4.529	P<0.001
Satisfaction with quality of governance toward youth	2.112	1.05	2.954	0.006
Future outlook	0.321	0.284	1.182	0.261

### **Age group (24-29):**

Table 6 below summarizes the multivariate linear regression model for the age group 24-29. The model has an adjusted R square of 0.17 ( $f = 9.5$ ,  $P < 0.001$ ), indicating that 17% of the variance is explained by this model.

Living in camp compared to urban areas, trust in people, personal freedom, perception of economic situation, and satisfaction with governance, were all statistically significant with wellbeing. In addition to future outlook that became statistically significant only in this age

group. However, age, gender, region and living in rural compared to urban areas in addition to political confidence are no longer statistically significant. Living in camp compared to urban areas in this age group was associated with 8.15 point increase in the wellbeing scale (B = 8.154, P<0.05).

A unit increase in the trust scale is associated with 2.2 point increase in the wellbeing score (B = 2.204, P=0.001), while a unit increase in the personal freedom scale was associated with an increase by 2.4 point in the wellbeing score (B = 2.380, P<0.001), a unit increase in the perception of the economic situation scale was associated with a 1.8 points increase in the wellbeing score (B = 1.825, P< 0.001), for every question in the satisfaction with the quality of governance scale answered as satisfied is associated with 3 point increase on the wellbeing (B = 3.102, P< 0.05). Finally, a unit increase in the future outlook scale was associated with 1.15 points increase in the wellbeing score (B = 1.150, P< 0.05).

<b>Table 7: Regression (24-29)</b>				
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Unstandardized Coefficients</b>		<b>T statistic</b>	<b>Sig</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>		
(Constant)	-18.687	17.467	-0.841	0.401
Age	-0.098	0.559	-0.344	0.860
Gender	-0.169	2.099	-0.354	0.936
Region	1.522	2.160	0.436	0.485
Education	-1.265	2.147	-0.511	0.555
Rural compared to urban	0.508	2.823	-0.104	0.857
Camp compared to urban	8.154	2.766	2.974	0.003
Political confidence	0.269	0.510	0.172	0.604
Trust in people	2.100	0.680	3.24	0.002
Personal freedom	2.377	0.591	3.240	P<0.001
Economic situation	1.824	0.454	4.021	P<0.001
Satisfaction with quality of governance	3.102	2.295	2.380	0.003
Future outlook	1.150	0.359	3.448	0.002

## Qualitative Findings

### *Definition, idioms and manifestations of wellbeing by youth in the oPt*

#### **The definition of wellbeing**

The first section of both the interviews and the focus groups was intended to explore how youth define wellbeing in order to formulate a concept of how youth in oPt perceive the meaning of wellbeing. This was done in order to explore what wellbeing is meant to participants before investigating the factors influencing it.

At the beginning of the interviews and the focus groups, the discussion was about the difference between health (Sihha صحة) and wellbeing (Affia عافية<sup>9</sup>). Are they the same or different than each other? On some occasions youth combined health and wellbeing and stated that “health and wellbeing hold the same meaning”. While others said “health is a part of wellbeing” and “wellbeing is more general than health”. Throughout the discussion, it became clear that most participants understood wellbeing to be more holistic concept compared to health. As a young man from Jerusalem stated that “health is part of wellbeing, to be in good health you need to have good levels of wellbeing, but wellbeing is a wider concept”.

The discussions of the meaning of wellbeing were, at times, related to good health. In other words, “wellbeing” was on several occasions attached to a state of positive physical health that included “physical strength القوة البدنية او الجسدية”, “vitality النشاط و الحيوية”, and the absence of physical illnesses or disorders, such as “not having disease فاش مرض”, “not feeling pain form anything فاش من اشى”, and “a body without disabilities اجاعة بدون جسم”. Interestingly, when the participants

---

<sup>9</sup> Affia (عافية) is the closest Arabic word to the meaning of wellbeing in the context of health

started talking about psychological or mental dimensions of health and wellbeing, their focus was mainly on the positive side of the mental health spectrum. The majority of the participants focused on positive notions of mental health such as “peace of mind راحة البال أو هدأة البال”, “comfort راحة”, “happiness السعادة”, “safety السلامة”, “stability الاستقرار”, “satisfaction الرضا”, “tranquility الطمأنينة” and “feeling safe and secure الشعور بالأمن و الأمان”. All these concepts were considered by participants as synonyms for wellbeing.

The participants concluded that wellbeing is the interaction between mental and physical health. As stated by a young man from Jenin “my wellbeing is to be comfortable (مرتاح). If I am comfortable then I have good levels of wellbeing, comfortable physically and mentally”. The consequences of poor psychosocial wellbeing in the present were mentioned to lead to adverse physical health events or illness in the future. A young man from Jerusalem stated “anyone who can’t deal with stress (الضغط) and always feel stressed (متوتر) and tired (تعبان), this will bring illnesses in the future”. Also a young woman from Rafah stated that “heart problems, heart attacks and stroke are all results from psychological problems”. Another young woman from Halhul said “blood pressure, heart disease, and all the diseases are caused by psychological problems and also anyone who has physical problems it will cause to her psychological problem”. Here, we also clearly see how participants view the long-term links between mental and physical health.

Wellbeing according to the participants includes the interaction of all aspects of good life. As stated by a young woman from Jerusalem “to be in wellbeing is to be fine (منيح) in general. Wellbeing is the interaction between physical, mental and social dimensions of health as a young woman from Rafah added “wellbeing is the integration between physical, psychological, and social wellbeing”. This went even further, as it was stated that wellbeing is the interaction of

mental and physical aspects of health with the environment, as a young man from Jericho stated “wellbeing is the balance between the body and life, the external life situation such as work, people, and all other things and the internal physical and intellectual state”. A young woman from Gaza included the social wellbeing in the equation as she stated that “mental health and wellbeing comes from peace of mind (راحة البال) , to feel safe (تشعر بالأمان) , me and my children, to be able to secure all our needs, to have good relationships with the society around me, my environment I am living in, and to live a life without troubles (مشاكل)”. Finally, wellbeing also includes also functional aspects, to be able to achieve and to be successful, as mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “when I am successful in my life and reach my goals and dreams, this is wellbeing”. In fact, it was resembled to be like energy, which is gained from all dimensions of life, as stated by a youth from Jericho “wellbeing is like energy (طاقة), used and recharged and affected by internal and external forces”. It is a dynamic concept and never is a fixed point, as a young man from Jenin said “wellbeing is a scale from complete wellbeing to no wellbeing, and it’s not a fixed point that can define you, it keeps changing as a response to several factors”. In other words, wellbeing according to youth in the oPt is the general positive state that constitute living a safe, happy and a comfortable life, among family and loved ones; all basic needs secured; not having worries and problems more than comfort; and to live in an environment where it is possible to achieve personal goals, desires and dreams.

### **Instances and idioms of wellbeing**

There was discussion on instances where the term “Afia عافية” is used and other idioms for wellbeing. In the Arabic language the word Afia is close in meaning to prevention and protection from disease, such as “Allah yi’afina الله يعافينا” when people talk about a disease or someone having a disease, and ask for God’s protection from having this disease. A Youth from Halhul

stated that “health is to be in physical and psychological wellbeing from disease (where here wellbeing is close to the concept of protection from disease)”. Another instance where the term is used is when someone has finished a difficult activity or is tired after a work activity. Usually people encountering this person will say “may Allah give you Affia *الله يعطيك العافية*”. This instance of wellbeing was described by the participants to mean “rest and comfort as opposed to tiredness” and “strength as opposed to weakness” as idioms of wellbeing. Another instance where wellbeing is used is in the occasion when someone is eating and offering food to you and you are not willing to join her so you say “Sihha or Affia *صحته و عافية*” or “health and wellbeing”, which implies that the food she is eating will bring her health and wellbeing.

To have good amounts of wellbeing is a form of immunity and protection against disease and other symptoms such as tiredness and weakness both physically and psychologically. Several idioms were used to describe wellbeing other than that mentioned earlier, such as “peace of mind *راحة البال*”, “feeling good *الشعور الحلو*”, “joy *الفرحة*”, “happiness *السعادة*”, “equilibrium *التوازن*”, “stability *الاستقرار*” and “feeling safe and secure *الأمن و الأمان*”. The complexity of wellbeing is that it is not only physical or mental, but also the process of how the individual youth interact with the environment. All the positive health, emotions, and functioning that result from this interaction is what constitutes wellbeing.

### **Manifestations of wellbeing and poor wellbeing or ill-being**

According to the participants, wellbeing is the positive aspect of physical and mental health as a young woman from Tubas said that “if disease and illness is the negative side of health then wellbeing is the positive side”. Now, to get insight from participants on how low levels of wellbeing are manifested among youth individuals or how it is embodied. The question “how do you recognize youth with low levels of wellbeing from those who have high levels of

wellbeing?” was asked during the discussion in the interviews and in focus groups. Several embodiments of wellbeing were stated, encompassing physical, mental, behavioral, functional and social dimensions such as “vitality وحيوية نشاط”, “good manners and behaviors أخلاق و تصرفات”, “healthy interaction with others تفاعل جيد مع الآخرين”, “motivation تحفيز”, “creativity إبداع”, “productivity إنتاجية” and “success نجاح”. Good amounts of wellbeing protect youth from physical, psychological and social ills, as stated by a young woman from a village south of the West Bank “the one who has wellbeing is fortified, protected, and resistant”. Finally, good levels of wellbeing enable youth to be successful whether in education, profession and in life, as a young man from a village east of Jerusalem stated “when a person have good amount of wellbeing he will become more successful in university education and also in life in general”.

Youth with low levels of wellbeing (or those who embodied ill-being) were described as “pale and tired face بنين اكبر من عمرها”, “nervous عصبي”, “appear older than her actual age بنية تعبان و شاحب”, “appear sick عيان”. The consequences of ill-being on behavior were described as it “may result in deviation”, “may put youth in danger of addiction on alcohol and drugs” and if very low wellbeing “it may lead to suicide”. Low wellbeing according to participants may lead to behaviors that damage health. As a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem said “wellbeing affects behavior; if anyone has low wellbeing, then she will behave in a way that will damage her health”. So having poor levels of wellbeing has social consequence as it may push youth towards negative behaviors such as drug-use or bad behaviors and manners such as crimes or hurting people etc. As mentioned by a young man from a village north of Ramallah that “from his behavior with others, you can know the wellbeing of any person”. Poor wellbeing according

to the participants is manifested and embodied in physical, psychological and social symptoms that disable youth in all domains.

Based on the discussions on the meaning, instances, idioms, and manifestations of wellbeing, we can infer that according to youth in the oPt, wellbeing is a multidimensional concept that describes the positive side of physical and mental health, as opposed to disease. Wellbeing encompasses all aspects of a good life, including psychological, behavioral, physical, social and functional components. While, it is influenced by contextual and internal factors from various domains. The following section is about these factors that influence youth wellbeing in the oPt.

### ***Determinants of Youth Wellbeing in the oPt***

Participants recounted a number of diverse factors that either positively or negatively influence youth wellbeing. These determinants emerge in six main domains: Israeli military occupation, internal political context, socioeconomic, sociocultural, environmental and personal. However, these domains are highly interrelated and influence each other to a great extent. These domains are presented in this section beginning with the macro political level including the Israeli military occupation and internal political dimension, followed by the socioeconomic, sociocultural, environmental domains and ending with the internal personal domain. The order of the domains forms a coherent transition from the macro level to micro level factors that influence wellbeing. The domains influence each other, by which every dimension is mainly influenced by the dimension before it, albeit not exclusively.

## **The Israeli Military Occupation**

The Israeli military occupation and its several consequences was reported to be a major negative influence on youth wellbeing in the oPt, according to all the participants. It affects all aspects of life as mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “the military occupation is the source of our psychological ills. Everything is depressing because of it”. Another young man from a village east of Jerusalem mentioned that the Israeli military occupation has both direct and indirect consequences on youth wellbeing, as he said “the Israeli military occupation can affect your wellbeing directly, like simply you get attacked or prisoned or your house demolished. Or, indirectly, like it affects you economically, socially like on your freedom, and your individual rights”. The intensity and the type of effects may differ according to region. In the Gaza strip for example, the issue of blockade with its consequences on freedom of traveling to other regions in the oPt and outside the country, the constant cut of electricity and the unavailability of economic opportunities were the main problems caused by the military occupation. As mentioned by a young woman from Gaza “all the community is affected by the problems of electricity, and when we graduate we have no jobs, this causes a psychological pressure...” While youth living in Jerusalem and the West Bank, especially neighborhoods in proximity to tension areas such as old city Jerusalem and old city Hebron or areas in proximity to the separation wall or settlements, suffer from constant feeling of insecurity, uncertainty, stress, and humiliation in addition to assaults, house demolitions and detention. The direct exposure to these factors negatively affect wellbeing as mentioned by a young woman from Bethlehem “it’s killing (us)and I live near the

separation wall and every now and then I hear the sound of bombs ...this situation naturally affects our psychological state<sup>10</sup>”.

Many themes emerged on how the military occupation negatively affects youth wellbeing. The Israeli military occupation negatively impacts wellbeing through intensifying feelings of insecurity, stress, uncertainty, in addition to the feeling of humiliation, limited space of freedom mainly freedom of movement and expression, separation of families, detention and imprisonment, and the feeling of being incapacitated against all these factors. Specific to youth in Gaza Strip, the restriction on the freedom to traveling abroad and the blockade and the several severe military attacks on Gaza Strip are sources of frustration. For youth in Jerusalem, discrimination and marginalization compared to Israeli Jews are particularly important and affect various aspects of their lives. All these factors were reported to have a strong negative influence on youth wellbeing in the oPt, as will be described in more detail below:

### **The feeling of insecurity, lack of safety, uncertainty and stress**

The feeling of insecurity as a result of the Israeli military occupation is an important source of youth ill-being in the oPt. The occupation leads to ill-being through the general feeling of insecurity in various domains such as the economic dimension or because of lack of safety in daily life due to the violations of the military occupation such as assaults by soldiers and settlers, confiscation of homes and land, demolition, detention and imprisonment of youth. All acts of the military occupation were perceived as a threat to security and thus have a negative influence on youths' wellbeing. As a young woman from Ramallah stated, “as long as there is a military occupation there is no security (فشل امان). No security for youth, their families and their children.

---

<sup>10</sup> The psychological state was used several times by the participants as synonymous or referring to psychological wellbeing

Our wellbeing is poor because of this because security is very important for wellbeing”. Another young man from a village east of Jerusalem said “this insecurity (عدم الامان) from the military occupation is creating insecurity in every aspect of our lives. Because we are constantly anxious and worried that something is going to harm us. Not only physically like assaults and your personal freedom or your house could be taken from you. But also, psychologically like you are prone to humiliation (ذل) at any moment. We have no security in life”. Another young man from Jerusalem emphasized the idea that this high level of insecurity is a source of a chronic state of uncertainty and stress, especially in high tension areas (here he is referring to the old city in Jerusalem) by saying “we live in some kind of war zone (ساحة حرب) . Your life is at risk every day. When we get out from home we have a thinking that we may not come back. They become more brutal (بتوحشو) with time [referring to the occupation]. Everything is stress, and fear, psychological feelings. The tension is very high that if we sneeze beside a soldier they may shoot you. Before we leave home we take the blessings (بركات) of our mothers in case we do not come back”. The other face of insecurity is in the sense of losing basic needs in other dimension, such as loss of homes, lands, or even loss of own life or a life of a dear person, as stated by a young man from Gaza “most of the population in the oPt have low levels of wellbeing because even essential needs are not fulfilled. Like here in Gaza we do not have security. Also in the West Bank they have military occupation so they do not have security. All Palestinians do not have security”. House demolition and confiscation is a problem that affect the security and the life of many families, as mentioned by a young woman from Tubas “when the military occupation confiscates (يصادرو) the houses and lands or demolish them it is a catastrophe (مأساه). Suddenly the whole family is on the streets, they took everything from them. In all respects this affects wellbeing”.

The constant feeling of insecurity and lack of safety from the Israeli military occupation violations against the whole population, especially the youth, is producing uncertainty in daily life, where participants felt as if they were living in the unknown, and this is creating a chronic state of stress, which is more apparent in high tension areas. All these factors are hindering youth wellbeing. As a young woman from Gaza said “nothing in the oPt is stable, in any dimension. We are living in a country that nothing in it is stable, economic, individual, social and political nothing is stable. As long as there is this confusion and no clear path for the future they will have poor wellbeing”. A young man from Jerusalem summarizes this by saying “all our life is not stable, we do not know where we are going”. This environment of insecurity and uncertainty is an immense source of chronic stress that is added to the stress of other life dimension. As mentioned by a young man from Nablus “everything that the military occupation is doing to us is increasing our psychological stress(الضغط العصبي). ” Especially in the high-tension areas such as the old city Hebron and Jerusalem, the greater the insecurity and uncertainty there is, the more stress youth have. As a young woman from Hebron said “the people living in the old city in Hebron face constant pressures and assaults from settlers, check points, and closures more than other parts in Hebron. They can’t move, they live under stress (عائشين في توتر) . Similarly in Jerusalem, a young man from Jerusalem elaborated on the conditions in Jerusalem by saying “the military occupation in Jerusalem is affecting wellbeing in daily basis. Stress is constant (توتر دائم).

### **Suffocation and frustration from restrictions on youth freedom**

The restrictions on the freedom of youth by the military occupation were mentioned by all participants to have a negative influence on their wellbeing. They feel suffocated being under high levels of restriction by the military occupation. A young man from Jerusalem described it as

“how would we have wellbeing when the occupation is standing on our chest (قاعد صدورنا), we can’t breathe, we can’t live wherever we want, we can’t move without the permission of the occupation, see our people in the Gaza Strip, is it normal to live like that?”<sup>11</sup> The restriction on freedom of mobility is a major obstacle for youth, which is adding more problems over other life problems as mentioned by a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem “when you feel that everything is closed in front of you, you will have a lot more problems. How will you have good wellbeing”? Youth have reported that many kinds of freedoms are affected by the military occupation including, freedom of expression and movement is one example mentioned by a young man from Jericho “I feel that the military occupation chains us (بقيدنا), sometimes one feels helpless (عجز). Freedom of expression does not exist, and this affects your psyche. I want to let this out but I can’t let it out. Also, freedom of movement from one place to another does not exist. This affects me as a person”.

The restrictions on traveling outside the country for youth living in the Gaza Strip was also mentioned as a factor that undermines their wellbeing. The blockade on the Gaza Strip is restricting youth from traveling abroad to participate in international sports competitions, education, and conferences, also restricting youth from visiting other family members.

Restricting youth from participating in international sports competitions was also mentioned by a young man from Gaza “I am a youth who have an ambition to go out the country and be a famous swimmer, to carry the name of Palestine in international competition. But the border is closed. And because of this situation even the sea here is polluted with sewage. I do not swim in the sea, I swim in a pool”. Restrictions on traveling abroad also affect opportunities to study

---

<sup>11</sup> Youth from Jerusalem are given a different type of ID from the West Bank or Gaza Strip. They are forbidden to enter Gaza Strip, but they are free to travel anywhere in Israel, or between Israel and the West Bank. However, they have to go through check points every time they move between the West Bank and Israel.

abroad. As a young woman from Rafah said, “I was supposed to study abroad and I had a visa, because of the closure I lost the visa and the scholarship. Of course this affected me and affected my education.... I lost the opportunity of my life as they say”. Another young woman from Rafah added “my profession includes a lot of conferences that I want to attend. Even university professors always say they wish to attend conferences. But we can’t go”. It also affects visiting the family living abroad as stated by a young woman from Rafah “It affects me a lot, my mother is Egyptian, I hear that I have an uncle in Egypt, I never met him, I have never been to Egypt. Also my brother is in Libya, he left when I was five years old. I can’t go and see him”. The blockade on the Gaza Strip is not only restrictive in the above mentioned aspects but also creates an unfavorable environment for talents and creativity. As stated by a young man from Rafah “we have talents in the Gaza strip, but they are buried. The Gaza Strip is a graveyard for talents(مهارات), competencies(كفاءات), and capabilities(قدرات). We do not have openness(انفتاح) , neither cultural nor economic, nothing”. The blockade is affecting several factors in several dimensions that hinder youth wellbeing in the Gaza Strip.

Youth from the West Bank and Jerusalem also suffer from separating families and family members from each other and restricting their mobility to reach each other was mentioned to negatively affect wellbeing. A young woman from Tubas said “the military occupation is affecting us generally (بشكل عام) , like some people are separated from their families because of the separation wall and the checkpoints. Nobody can see the other, they can’t reach each other. This separation is certainly affecting their psyche (نفسيتهم) and their wellbeing”. A young man from Jerusalem stated “I have a problem. The military occupation removed the residency from my father and he is totally forbidden to enter Jerusalem. We all live in Jerusalem with my mother but my father is forbidden to live with us. Isn’t this a problem to our wellbeing”. Even romantic

relationships from different regions are problematic, as mentioned by a young man from Jerusalem “my brother loved a girl from the West Bank, he loved her greatly, but our family told him: how would you travel together? And your kids? You will face a lot of problems. Even love here is not working”.

Participants from Gaza Strip expressed their frustration from the blockade enforced on the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military occupation. They demonstrated that the blockade is creating an intolerable life conditions, and bad economic conditions. They feel that they are deprived from basic human rights and wellbeing. A young man from Gaza mentioned how blockade is affecting the mental health of Gazans as he said “I guess that youth in the Gaza Strip generally need psychotherapy. We are psychologically sick. Even the psychotherapists here need therapy. I am not talking about the material stuff, the material stuff here does nothing in the Gaza Strip. Here, youths’ ambitions are to get the least of their rights. This is a big problem. When you ask any youth what their ambition is, they tell you to work or to study! They do not know that these are rights not ambitions. When your biggest ambitions are simply human rights! Me as a human being I have rights; I do not actually have any of these rights. This frustrates me (بحبطني). We as youth of the Gaza Strip are only thinking about how to survive and can’t do anything more. Everything is closed, no work. Even if you have work, the income is not appropriate”.

Another source of suffocation results from restriction on visiting places for entertainment purposes, which is important for wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Bethlehem “it is enough (بكنفي) that our freedom is nonexistent. You can’t go outside the borders of Bethlehem. This affect us, not only our wellbeing but make us lost. For example, we have a beautiful sea, and I want to see it but I can’t. I can’t go to the sea to have fun. Where shall I go”? Another young man from a village east of Jerusalem said “I am 28 years old; I visited Nablus for

the first time only before several months. The sea, I never been to the Mediterranean Sea and the Palestinian coast. How far is it? Less than two hours. But I have never been there”. Another young man from the same focus group continued “a lot of places we never visited, we only hear about it. We wish to visit these places. Isn’t called freedom to be there? If this freedom is nonexistent, does it affect us psychologically or not? I think it affect very much... We live in a prison but a big one. This is the best expression”.

The sense of suffocation from all mentioned restrictions imposed on youth and the accompanied sense of frustration from the situation and life conditions that they live in is an important source of negative influence on their wellbeing. They express several needs that are perceived as important to their wellbeing but not met because of these restrictions, which ended up by the feeling of suffocation and frustration instead of wellbeing.

### **Humiliation, and discrimination**

Participants stated that the humiliation they suffer from the Israeli military occupation is negatively influencing their levels of wellbeing. Humiliation is mainly felt at checkpoints. These checkpoints were mentioned to be a source of humiliation by all participants. A young man from Jerusalem called them “a humiliation points (نقاط اذلال)for the Palestinian people”. High amounts of humiliation is sensed by youth when they cross a checkpoint. Either directly on themselves or when they witness how the soldiers are treating other Palestinian individual especially old people. A young woman from Jerusalem described how people feel when crossing the checkpoint “checkpoints are the worst thing in my life. Especially, if I am taking public transportation from a Palestinian region to Jerusalem. I have to get down and go through the metal detector and paper check. I feel like I am going to explode (رح انفجر) . This is complete submission and humiliation. Sometimes I ask myself what men feels about that, in front of his

children and humiliated in this way, and a young female soldier shouts at him to take off his shoes or anything. Sometimes soldiers shout very rudely on old men without any dignity. This is a crime. A crime against the universe (جريمة بحق الكون). The occupation made me hate everything here, I hate the society because of the military occupation". Another young woman from Tubas commented on how youth feel when they pass checkpoints "at checkpoints when the soldiers search you, you feel like, weak and humiliated. You feel like you are less than them and they are better than you. This feeling that we are inferior to them (احنا اقل منهم) destroys our feeling of happiness and wellbeing (بتدمر شعورنا بالسعادة و العافية)". Dignity (الكرامة) is important for all human beings, whereby a young man from a village east of Jerusalem described the Palestinian people as they lose their dignity when crossing a checkpoint between West Bank and Jerusalem as they go to work every day, as he said "go see Qalandia checkpoint in the morning; they die because of the crowding. We may think that people who got permission to work in Israel as lucky. These people leave their dignity in their homes at the morning and then go to work".

Participants, especially in Jerusalem, also stated that there are other sources of humiliation and oppression by the military occupation. At the streets, as mentioned by a young man from Jerusalem "when a soldier stops a girl in the street and start to search her in front of everyone. This affects everyone that sees her. Nobody can ignore this humiliation". Another young man from Jerusalem added "me, a while ago, my mother was in Damascus Gate, she was stopped by soldiers and they started to search her but she refused, they pushed her and she fell on the ground, she was wounded on her face. This pressured me a lot. Nobody can accept this to his mother? This breaks a person (بكسر الواحد) and destroys his wellbeing. And he is helpless. If he wants to do something he will lose his life or his house". Also, youth in Jerusalem stated that the government institutions especially the ministry of interior are intentionally humiliating them

through having only one highly crowded office for Jerusalemites. As a young man stated, “the Ministry of Interior and other institutions like the national insurance office are intentionally humiliating the Palestinian population in Jerusalem, they want us to leave”. A young man described the lives and wellbeing of youth in Jerusalem: “we do not have wellbeing we are living in humiliation”. This emphasizes the negative chronic effect of humiliation that youth specially living in Jerusalem suffer from on their wellbeing.

In addition to humiliation, participants from Jerusalem stressed the structural discrimination and marginalization that they face in their everyday life, in comparison to Jews<sup>12</sup>, as a source of negative influence on their wellbeing. This was obvious in a statement of a young man from Jerusalem as he said “look at us and look at the Jewish people, we are marginalized (مهمشين)”. Discrimination was prominent theme in the narratives of participants from Jerusalem. Jerusalem Palestinian population is unique being under direct and total authority of the Israeli occupying force and under the Israeli institutional and legal sovereignty. Living side by side with Israeli population they face constant individual and structural discrimination. The discrimination favoring Jewish population compared to the Arab Palestinian population is at several levels: in education and neighborhood infrastructure, as stated by a young man “the Israelis have everything, best schools, parks and sport fields not like us”. Another young man commented on the educational institutions “look at their universities and our universities. They are one thousand degrees different. Even our universities are not recognized. If you study at Al Quds University, for example, they keep asking things until you give up. It’s not a life”. Another participant

---

<sup>12</sup> Jerusalem is considered part of Israel, so youth holding a Jerusalem ID can access the same services as with Jews but in fact, they feel discrimination in these services. In addition, the Palestinian population in Jerusalem are confined with specific areas and neighborhoods exclusive to the Palestinians to live in. Youth from these communities’ experience marginalization compared to Jewish communities.

commented on health care institutions: “even at hospitals, if you are injured you have to wait a lot until they come to you at the emergency room but if you are a Jew they treat him more quickly. This affects your health and wellbeing.” Governmental institutions were also considered to be discriminatory, as a young man commented on the Ministry of Interior, “all Palestinians, the residents of Jerusalem come to one office of the ministry of interior. But for the Israelis they have several offices. Even though the Palestinian population in Jerusalem is greater in number compared with the Israelis, but they stick us all in one office that is always very crowded... This is discrimination (تمييز)”. This feeling of humiliation and discrimination, in addition to the fact that youth believe that they are intentionally marginalized is a chronic source of negative influence on their wellbeing. And when they try to object or demonstrate, they face detention and imprisonment.

### **Repression and the sense of being incapacitated and subjugated to the military occupational actions**

Any attempt to demonstrate or to express frustration against the Israeli military occupation, youth in the oPt are faced by many kinds of repression. The military occupation is using various kinds of repression techniques to stop Palestinian youth from demonstrating or expressing their sentiments. Participants mentioned the issue of imprisonment and detention of Palestinian youth by the military occupation as one kind of repression that intentionally targets youth, and has negative influences on their and their families’ wellbeing. A young woman from Tubas said “the acts of the military occupation in detaining youth who participate in the demonstrations certainly only to subdue (تركيع) them will of course affect their wellbeing and health. It affects the whole family. Imagine how the prisoner feels in jail for several years. How many years are lost from his or her life? Being alone and away from family”. A young man from a village west of Jerusalem explained the effect on the prisoner family “if I am living in a house that has a prisoner. It is

natural that every member of the family will be affected, especially the mother, which is the most important member of the family. When the mother has a bad psychological state (حالة نفسية سيئة) it is normal that all members will have a bad psychological state. Or, if they have a prisoner for life. The mother will always be tired and unhappy, and this will be reflected on all family members. Even if life conditions are for example excellent and all dimensions of wellbeing are excellent. But still they have a dimension where there is no wellbeing”. This explains how the imprisonment of a Palestinian youth negatively influences other youth in the same family.

The sense of being incapacitated (ما عنا القوة على الرد) or the inability to respond to the violations and assaults of the military occupation, in addition to the sense of being subjugated (خضوع) by the occupational forces, was mentioned to be a negative feeling with a negative influence on youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young man from Jericho “we can’t do anything, because nobody supports us, even Arab countries are having relationships with Israel, they are much stronger than us, even military conflict is not an option because they are much stronger and have better weapons than us. At any time, they can destroy us. We have to accept what they impose on us. We have no choice. This is very disturbing”. Another young woman from Tubas mentioned, “we feel that our rights are lost. We are under a lot of cruelty and nobody is standing with us. As if we have to accept the status quo, no other solution, this is not good to our wellbeing”. This feeling of weakness that youth in general have could be due to their inability to react or express their anger at direct assaults or humiliations. It could also be from all other general actions of the military occupation against all the Palestinian population, as a young woman from Ramallah said, “Palestinian youth see themselves as weak in front of the military occupation. We want to do something for our country but we cannot. We are tired from this idea. Like when we see that Al Aqsa is confiscated and also now they declared that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Of

course we will be frustrated and angry. It is natural and instinctive to be patriot and defend our country. But we cannot and this has a big effect on wellbeing”.

Another situation where youth are unable to respond is when they work in jobs with Israelis and be exposed to provocation, as mentioned by a young man from Jerusalem “a lot of times when I work among Jews they start talking about politics. I always try to ignore them and do not open discussion. Because I do not want to get in trouble and lose my job. But they intentionally want you to hear to see your reaction. So, I agree with them because I need the work and the money to afford my education and support my parents. But this affects my wellbeing. When they start to curse you and your people (يسبو عليك) and you can’t respond. And if you respond you will lose your job”. So in addition to all the negative influence on youth wellbeing caused by factors in the Israeli military occupation dimension, this negative influence is exacerbated by the sense of helplessness, incapacitation and inability to change or even to express objection against these actions that affect every Palestinian youth.

The Israeli military occupation is a source of negative influence on youth wellbeing through several kinds of violations, which positions them in challenging life conditions and various restrictions of their freedoms and negative emotions such as frustration and anger, that reduce their wellbeing. However, The Israeli military occupation affects other life domains that in turn further reduces youth wellbeing.

### **Internal Political Domain**

Participants expressed frustration and objections on a variety of subjects in the context of internal political environment which eventually have negative influence on youth wellbeing in the oPt. A young man from a village east of Jerusalem stated, “I am frustrated from internal politics, because we have extreme political stupidity, no appropriate leaders, corruption, and everything is

unequal. This is a huge pressure on our wellbeing. In addition, you feel like this is what the Israeli's want, or even you feel the politicians work for the occupation. We are not satisfied with what is happening in the politics and this reduces our wellbeing". Another young woman from Ramallah stated, "politics became the most disgusting thing, because people are unaware and are just followers to a certain political direction". In addition, youth said that they have no confidence in political institutions as stated by a young man from Bethlehem "we do not have confidence in the institutions in general, and the health institution in specific."

According to the participants, the internal political factors that negatively influence youth wellbeing are corruption and cronyism (wasta واسطة)<sup>13</sup>, weakness of the law, reduced space of freedom, exclusion, inadequate quality of governance and inadequate educational system. Below are the key ideas from the discussions on the internal political determinants of youth wellbeing.

**Corruption, cronyism (wasta واسطة), weak laws and an untrustworthy legal system as a source of injustice, inequity and discrimination**

This section is closely connected to the sources of inequity in both the economic and social domain. But here it is obvious that this problem is initially a sociopolitical problem. Corruption and wasta were reported to be common and fixtures of everyday life. If you have good connections with powerful and influential people it is very useful for you. You can easily secure a job regardless of your competencies and you can overrun the laws. However, if you do not have Wasta, it is a source of inequity and injustice for many youths and affects several aspects of life eventually their wellbeing.

---

<sup>13</sup> Wasta refers to using the connections that the individual has as a door to privileges and resources or cronyism. These connections could provide privileges and resources directly or serve as a patron for other third party as returned or to be returned favor. For example, to use the assistance from a connection to get hired or to get access to a certain institution

Many participants stated that the legal system and law enforcement are weak in the oPt which results in weak laws. This has a negative impact on youth wellbeing through the inability of these weak laws to deter violations on people's lives and rights, and the inability to secure justice and fairness. Weak law enforcement implies that laws are not firmly enforced. In addition, participants explained that they do not trust the legal system mainly because of corruption. As a young woman from Ramallah said "we do not have legal justice here in this country. We live in a country without law, especially in the streets. People do not care about the red (traffic) light. They do not care about other people's lives because there are no strict laws. Also there is a problem for example you hear stories when one kills another the punishment is sometimes not strong enough and the killer is free after some time in jail. There is no justice and this is not good and negatively influencing wellbeing. At the end the law is weak and to be successful in life and to have good wellbeing we need to trust the law and it should be away from corruption. Everything needs law because it makes life fair and ordered". The police are part of the legal system that was heavily criticized by the participants as law enforcers, whereby they are the cause why the law is weak and untrustworthy. As stated by a young woman from Jerusalem, "the police in Ramallah are corrupt and only serve benefits to the corrupt people. We do not go to them; we do not even think about it". The police were accused of only applying laws on powerless people. As a young man from a village north of Ramallah said that "the police only capture weak drug addicts, why they do not capture the big dealer? These people are miserable; the police should target the head of the snake". Another example of the corruption on the police was stated by a young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank stated "let me tell you a story about myself. My second husband was drunk and hit me, my leg was broken. The police came and I told them that he pushed me from the balcony in the first floor... then the file was in

the police department. But because he knows a lot of people in the government and in the police force, and he himself told me that my file is with the police but hidden, lost between the files... I tried many women rights organization... when they asked me about his name and I told them. They respond to me “try to solve this problem yourselves””. Corruption, and cronyism (wasta) and weak law are all related to each other and are considered as the source of distrust and eventually have a negative influence on youth wellbeing.

Cronyism or wasta on the other hand, was reported to be prevalent and have a negative influence on youth wellbeing. Certainly, youth who do not have wasta are considering it as a negative influence on their wellbeing. However, most of the participant, no matter they have wasta or not, illustrated that wasta is a source of injustice for youth, and that it is damaging the institution that should recruit youth based on qualifications not connections. wasta is found everywhere as mentioned by a young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank “in the health system, in the education system, and anywhere there is something called wasta”. In fact, wasta is a condition for living as young woman from the same focus group responded “if you have wasta you will live, if not forget about your life”. Even though youth know that it is not favorable but they are obliged to seek it because it is entrenched in the sociopolitical system as a young man from Ramallah said “even though we hate wasta but you can’t live without it. You are obliged to use it”. The stronger wasta a youth have the more chance they have in job opportunities and many other favors. As young woman from a village east of Jerusalem stated that “I am graduating in the coming months. Do you know what I am thinking? How to find someone with a high influence to help me find a job? To this degree the situation is bad. Maybe I will never work without wasta. Is this normal? Tell me”.

Cronyism or wasta is damaging the institutions according to a young man from Rafah that “the positions here became hereditary like the royal authority, like when I finish you come in my place. wasta is everywhere, it depends you are the son of who and which political fraction”. It was claimed by the participants that wasta is damaging health care services. As mentioned by a young man from the Jalazone camp “the government is neglecting many things including providing good and affordable health services, but if you have someone in the government or with high influence you will get referral outside the country at the expense of the government insurance”. wasta was reported as a source of discrimination also in the health care institutions such as in hospitals, as stated by a young woman from Rafah which said “even in hospitals, you can feel how they treat like refugees compared to local people”. So wasta issue is disturbing youth and especially youth who do not have wasta, it is considered as a source of unequal and unjust distribution of privileges and also not putting the right man in the right place as mentioned by a young man from Hebron “you see any institution if you have wasta, it takes the place of qualifications. No right man became in the right place, all the institutions are like that, that’s why they are not doing their job”.

**Inadequate quality of governance (reduced political freedom, repression, exclusion and neglect) have negative influence on youth wellbeing**

Participants stated that the reduced space of political freedom that they feel from the government has a negative consequence on their wellbeing As mentioned by a young man from a village east of Jerusalem “the lack of political freedom from my government affects me more than the military occupation. Because, I deal with the military occupation as an enemy and it is normal that it will try to reduce my freedom. But from the Palestinian internal politics it is much worse for my wellbeing”. But, as a young woman from Ramallah said “youth are under two kinds of repression. One from the occupation and one from the military occupation. They have no

freedom, they are frustrated, they have something they want to express but they can't. This pressure affects them heavily and they can't live freely".

Many participants mentioned that youth in general "suffer from repression". A quote from a young woman from a village west of Jerusalem. Most of the participants said that political repression and lack of political freedom and participation have negative influence on youth wellbeing. About repression a young man from Jenin said "the amount of political repression that it is accumulated in people through their lives literally take the level of wellbeing to the minus". The government was claimed to be non-democratic and this is why there is a limited space of freedom. As mentioned by a young woman from Gaza "when people feel that they have no freedom of expression it affects their wellbeing. If the government was democratic sure the situation will be better". Another young man from Jericho described the political dimension by saying that "we do not have space to express our opinions as youth and this returns back to our wellbeing. When you suppress your feeling and do not express it will destroy you".

Participants expressed that they feel themselves as excluded from the political and policy making arena, and they lost hope in changing the policies that negatively influence their wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Gaza "youth are the agents of change, the strength of every society. We live in a place where youth are marginalized. Youth now only want to afford living and secure basic needs. They lost hope". Another young man from Jalazone refugee camp said "youth want to change many things but they can't, because they are far away from decision making. The politicians are in a valley and youth are in another valley. This is why all youth in Palestine are frustrated....". Political participation was mentioned as important to youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Hebron "whenever the individual is practicing her right in participation and accountability she will have good wellbeing. They should

participate in the decision making”. She continues by saying “tell me about any sensitive position like minister or politician that is occupied by youth, here in Palestine? They are all old and if he is very old they remove him and bring another old one”.

Many participants reported that they are not satisfied with the quality of governance and that politician’s neglects people especially youth. That is because the government is not democratic and the politicians are not elected or appropriately chosen by the public in general and youth in specific. They feel frustrated that the government and its institutions are not addressing youth needs. As stated by a young man from Jericho “the politicians are in one direction and the youth are in other direction”. Another young woman from Tubas said that “when we feel that the politicians do not resemble us and we are not in agreement with what they say. We feel suffocated. And we can’t express that. Our voices are not reaching (policy making) They do not want to hear from us. But at the same time they are the decision makers they determine our lives. It’s like a military occupation”.

The government or the authorities, according to many participants, are not giving enough attention to youth and to their wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from Gaza “the government doesn’t care about youth unless it needs something from them”. Many participants claimed that, the most important domain that is neglected by the government is the economic domain, including high costs of living and poor economic opportunities that provide good income for youth. As mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “not only it is hard to find a job here (West Bank). But also if you have a job it’s not sufficient. The wages are very low to live in a comfortable way and life is very expensive, and life is still worsening. Jobs are decreasing and costs of living are getting higher, and the government is doing nothing about that, nothing”. Another young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank implied that the

government is not providing support for youth trying to start their own business “I had a personal project and I wanted to do it. I want to develop it, a kindergarten. When I decided to do it, the ministry (of education) asked me many things that frustrated me. And so does the municipality. Every place I go they frustrate me but I am determined to do it because I have hope”. A young woman from Hebron tries to describe how they neglect youth in the economic domain “two things, one is that the ministry is not targeting youth and not working properly toward them. Two, there is a lot of corruption in the money that comes from donors. They can build factories and employ youth but we do not see the money. All the projects that come from donors are consumed; nothing is targeted to increase production. Or to support personal resources and skills in schools that helps youth to develop life skills”.

Participants stated that the government is not creating a supportive environment for youth. On the one hand, at the economic and institutional level, as a young man from Ramallah said that “maybe there are between us (in the focus group) youth with good intellectual abilities who have ideas but there is nobody who motivates us or supports us”. On the other hand, at the entertainment and recreational level, such as places like parks, sport clubs, and libraries were reported to be neglected. As mentioned by a young woman from Ramallah “youth and also children who will be youth in the future lack the appropriate parks and promenades that is important to relieve the negative energy and do physical activity that is needed for wellbeing and this will affect their development too. Also sports and clubs are neglected and all the activities that raise the awareness. Youth do not want restaurants they need libraries or I can call it cultural restaurants”. The government was also blamed that it only care in the main cities and totally forgetting the rural or remote areas, as mentioned by a young man from Jenin “the government should take care of all places evenly, not like that, look how much they care about Ramallah,

what about other places, how many villages there are without a club or promenades or many other things important for wellbeing”. Politicians were accused of not caring for youth nor the society, that’s why youth do not trust them, as young woman from Gaza stated that “the politicians only care about themselves and their children wellbeing, or the type of their cars, or their jobs, money. They do not care about youth or the society wellbeing; we do not trust them to promote our wellbeing”. This feeling of neglect by the government and the politicians toward youth, as if they do not care or do not give enough attention to their needs and aspirations is creating a relationship of distrust between them and the government.

Meanwhile, the government was accused of intentionally reducing wellbeing, as a young man from Jenin said that “the government is not only neglecting youth wellbeing, but using the budget that is supposed to be serving the wellbeing in things that reduces wellbeing like for example when students make a protest to express that they are not satisfied with the government of something that reduces their wellbeing, the government pay for the security forces to make these students go home”. Another young man from Nablus stated “do you think that politicians do not know that what they are doing, they do, and they want us low in wellbeing so we do not ask for more”. Promoting youth wellbeing is claimed not to be a priority of the government. In contrast, there is a belief that the government is neglecting youth wellbeing in purpose, which highlights the lack of trust and confidence by youth in the government. Participants also claimed that the government is benefiting from the low levels of youth wellbeing as a strategy for control and safeguarding the status quo of power and authority.

### **The negative influence of the educational system on the wellbeing of youth**

On one hand, youth reported that education is important for wellbeing as mentioned by a young woman from a village in the south of the West Bank comparing between education and leaving education to work in trading “if you do not have education this will limit the wellbeing because the mind is narrow... But with education people become open-minded, more life skills, their ability to accept different opinions. I know money is important but there are things other than money”. On the other hand, the educational system and its institutions were extensively mentioned to be inappropriate for enhancing wellbeing by not providing the needed personal resources. On the other hand, youth mentioned that it reduces the levels of wellbeing by imposing inadequate and old methods of education and examination like for example putting more emphasis on memorization in place of creativity skills in both teaching and marking. As mentioned by a young woman from Hebron “our education system is no good. The education [system] consists of spoon feeding. Whether schools or universities, all just feed you information...”. Another young woman from Jerusalem stated “I am against the Tawjihi<sup>14</sup>, it destroyed our psychological state. A lot of stress. It changed my personality. I was interested in things but now I stopped. It changed us psychologically”.

Many participants stressed that the educational system should change and develop as stated by a young woman from a village south of the West Bank “I think that the methods of education should change. They should add things to the curriculum... they should teach us how to solve problems and how to manage stress. Not after we are very old and by chance read about these things and understand. These things must be studied at schools. How to love ourselves, how to be confident, how to concentrate and how to be creative”. A young woman from Jerusalem

---

<sup>14</sup> <sup>14</sup> Tawjihi is the final exam after high school. A prerequisite to enter the university.

stressed on that the educational system in addition to all sociopolitical institutions should put more focus on extracurricular activities “why they do not care about the extracurricular activities in schools or universities and also in the society? Why they do not care about culture, art music, theater, cinema? All these are neglected by the government, the authorities, the institutions and the society”. A young woman from a village in the east of Jerusalem said “if you have a skill or something that you want to cultivate you have to go outside the country. Here nobody cares. And this why Palestinian youth have lower wellbeing compared to other countries”. Some reported that the educational system is not preparing youth well for professional life. As mentioned by a young man from Gaza “...we have a gap in the education, between the things that we studied and what we face at work...”

### **Economic Domain**

The economic conditions are an important determinant to youth wellbeing, as stated by the majority of participants. It is mainly important because it influences lifestyle and quality of life such as habits, activities, housing, education, and many other issues. A young woman from a village east of Jerusalem said “the economic (life) situation is one of the most important determinants of wellbeing. Because, frankly, in our life now, the economic situation is very important. Everything depends on how much money you have. We live in a materialistic world. Education, entertainment, travel, even health depends on how much money you have. So the economic situation is very important”. Another young woman from Gaza described how the bad economic conditions affected her life and her wellbeing “my wellbeing is on the ground (very low) because our house is very small and not suitable. Another thing, I finished education but I didn’t get the certificate because I have to pay for the university”. In these quotes, it is obvious that the economic domain plays an important role in influencing youth wellbeing by which the

privileges of good economic situation is strongly associated with good levels of wellbeing and vice versa. Another young man from Jericho said “I am an ambitious person, and I have goals in my life that I want to achieve. But, these goals need money, like for example to study I need money. Or I am a musician; I need money to buy equipment’s. So the economic situation is very important for wellbeing and psychological state. Also it is important for health, to afford good food quality and secure the basic needs for healthy life”. This clarifies how the economic domain is connected and determinant to other domains that influence wellbeing.

Some participants took the effect of the economic situation further by connecting it to psychosocial problems stating that the economic domain affect the quality of life which in turn have a psychological effects and even lead some youth to sacrifice their life in a commando operation. As mentioned by a young man from a village west of Jerusalem “maybe, youth who do commando operation (عمليات استشهادية) are motivated by the bad economic and psychological situation”. Another young woman from the same focus group commented that “maybe the life is not going well with them and this made them think of sacrificing their life in a commando operation”.

The participants stated that the economic domain can negatively influence youth wellbeing. This domain is divided into two parts, one part for the macroeconomic level factors including the unavailability of economic opportunities, inequity, income injustice. And, microeconomic level factors including poverty, economic hardship, debt, unemployment, employment with insufficient income and unsatisfactory working environment.

### **Unavailability and inequity of economic options and income injustice have negative influence on youth wellbeing**

Inequity and in availability of economic opportunities were mentioned in the sociocultural domain and will be mentioned in the political domains as it is caused by all these dimensions collectively and will be discussed in the connections of these domains section. Participants mentioned that the availability of economic opportunities is positively associated with wellbeing. However, unequal distribution of economic opportunities is negatively associated with youth wellbeing. It was mentioned that in the oPt there is a difference in the economic opportunities in term of area of residence, favoring youth living in areas with better opportunities. As stated by a young man from Jenin “there is difference in the economic options available for youth. For example, youth living in Ramallah have better and more options, though better range of wellbeing than youth living for example in Jenin. This limitation in options limits wellbeing”.

The issue that being a worker in construction or maintenance in Israel, even without education, earn better than a university degree holder in Gaza strip or West Bank, was mentioned to be a kind of injustice that negatively influence youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank “it is not fair that a worker in Israel earn better that a teacher here. It is an insult”. Another young woman from a village in the south of the West Bank elaborated in this issue that to secure economic needs youth go and work in Israel “this issue by itself affects youth wellbeing. It made their ambition to go and work in Israel”. The point here is that, because of the wages injustice, the ambition of the youth became to work in Israel and leaving education, instead of continuing the university degree and work in the oPt or elsewhere.

## **Poverty, economic hardship, insufficient income and debt have a negative influence on wellbeing**

Poverty and economic hardship of youth is connected to the economic hardship of their families, unless they are totally independent. According to the participants they have an important negative influence on youth wellbeing as they create a challenging life conditions and reduce the quality of life of youth. Money was stated by the participants to control several aspects of their lives, education, housing, and many other needs. As stated by a young woman from Ramallah “poverty is the biggest sources of ill being. I know that money is not everything but it is important to live a decent life without the need of the help of others”. However, insufficient income to secure the basic needs create conditions of constant stress and worry. As stated by a young woman from Jerusalem “you feel that some people are always tired. The tiredness from always thinking; this is an indicator that they are not in good wellbeing. Because they have needs that they are not able to meet”. Here tiredness is indicative of poor wellbeing. The inability to afford certain needs and intensions because of economic hardship was stated to hinder youth wellbeing as a young man from a village east of Jerusalem said “when you have things in your mind that you want to do and you can’t do them because you do not have enough money. For sure this has a very negative influence on wellbeing”. The bad economic conditions limit the individual options and abilities to achieve certain goals which negatively impact youth wellbeing.

Being in debt and getting loans from banks was stated to negatively influence youth wellbeing. As it was considered as a source of stress and tension to be in debt. As mentioned by a young woman from Bethlehem “it is important to be economically comfortable and not being in debt. If anyone have debts or loans they will be tried and always thinking how they will pay them so

definitely they will be in ill-being”. Another young woman from Ramallah said “debt by itself create even more problems”.

On the other hand, money was stated to positively influence wellbeing. As stated by a young man from Jerusalem “If you have money you have wellbeing”. Another young man from a village west of Jerusalem said “wellbeing is strongly associated with money and income. If you have money you eat well, you have entertainment. So it is natural that wellbeing is resulted from things that need money. So if you have abundant money you will have abundant wellbeing. If you do not have money, the person will be always thinking how to bring money. Minimally, to have good life situation. To be independent, to have a house and to provide for a family. Even if you work a lot but the money you gain will give you a good life situation for you and for your children”. Here he explained how having good economic conditions plays an important role in reducing the stress coming from thinking about the future.

### **Unemployment and employment with insufficient income and unsatisfactory work environment have negative influence on wellbeing**

On a personal level, being unemployed was extensively mentioned to have negative influence on wellbeing. As mentioned by a young man from Hebron, “unemployment is a very big issue. It increases worry and stress. It is like energy depletion”. The national problem of high rates of unemployment is not exclusively an internal political problem. Because the military occupation is a principal contributor to the lack of economic opportunities and unemployment, as reported by the participants. This is because of the checkpoints and the separation wall that limit the freedom of movement. A young man from Bethlehem elaborated on this issue, “the military occupation affects the economic dimension. There are no economic opportunities because the space is limited.... This affects wellbeing”. This is further elaborated by young woman from a

village east of Jerusalem “because of the problems in movement between a city and another, especially the search and traffic at checkpoints, the person doesn’t search for work outside her city. And because we do not have a lot of jobs in our city, we have unemployment. The only way is to run away and leave the country to search for jobs. Sure, this affect the psychological state of youth. But also, sometimes especially for females, we can’t travel to work abroad, we do not have support from the family and the community. So we have to accept the reality we are in. This affects wellbeing negatively. All youth are not happy and they have become alienated from the society”. Internal migration from villages to the cities was mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem, as she said “when a village is enclosed by a wall, it has no economic opportunities. So youth migrate from their villages instead of staying there to develop it. They change their society and run away to grab any opportunity. The military occupation is a major obstacle for change”.

On the other hand, employment was considered to be an important factor in influencing wellbeing. As all participants agreed that being employed positively influence wellbeing compared to being unemployed. Other than providing income, employment was regarded as making a person productive, as stated by a young woman from Tubas “When you have work, you have something to wake up for in the morning. Psychologically, it is important to feel productive. If you are not productive you will be unhappy and not comfortable in life because you have nothing to do. I knew several youths who are depressed, miserable and desperate because they are not working, so not productive and do not have income”. Another young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank said that work can be important for wellbeing: “simply getting out of the house because I do not want to stay at home. Work is good for wellbeing”.

However, for employment to be a source of positive influence on youth wellbeing, first youth should like what they do at work. As stated by a young woman from Bethlehem, “there is employment that brings depression. The person should like and be happy with her employment. This affects wellbeing”. Second, work should provide a stable and sufficient return, to have an opportunity for development, as stated by a young man from a village east of Jerusalem “employment is very important for wellbeing, but it should provide good and stable income and also there is opportunity to develop”. Another young man from Jenin explained how if employment is not securing sufficient income it will reduce wellbeing, as he said “the problem is that work is consuming my wellbeing, because the financial return from this work is not sufficient to give me wellbeing to continue working”.

A third important characteristic of employment is the work environment. The environment should be comfortable. This was illustrated by a young man from a village east of Jerusalem “the idea that my work environment is not comfortable bothers [me]. Like the customers that I work with, the management. I feel a lot of stress because I do not have another employment option other than the work that I am in right now, which I hate. I have very low wellbeing because of that. Sometimes I feel that I have no energy. I am always tired and unhappy”. Finally, to work in a specialty other than what youth gained from their education was mentioned to negatively influence their wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank “it is called frustration to leave my certificate and go to a work in something else...”

In conclusion, the economic domain is an important determinant of youth wellbeing. It could promote wellbeing through good economic conditions of the family, and for youth to be economically independent they should have an employment that satisfies them that secure a sufficient and stable financial return and have a good working environment. However, if these

conditions are not available the economic domain could have an important negative impact on youth wellbeing through poverty, economic hardship and debt.

### **The Sociocultural Domain**

The sociocultural domain has both positive and negative impact on the level of wellbeing of youth in the oPt. In addition, to its influence on the personal determinants that is cumulative, from infancy and through the life course. The factors of this domain were described to be interrelated. As mentioned by a young woman from a village in the west of Jerusalem “society is a web of factors that affects youth, from home, school, the education system, the nature of students in school, the social environment, the relationships, and the friends, all of these you can say that they influence the level of wellbeing”. The participants pointed out several resources and challenges in the sociocultural domain that could be divided into two contexts, the family and community. The family, as stated by several participants, has a major role in determining youth wellbeing. But, at the same time, the family environment is very much attached and influenced by the larger social environment such as the neighborhood, community and culture.

### **The community environment**

The influence of community on the level of wellbeing of youth in the oPt was considered to be important by the participants, and in both directions. The sociocultural domain also influences the conditions in which youth live in, it creates capacities, values, and beliefs that craft the way youth should live.

On one hand, participants mentioned that there are social resources that youth need in order to have good levels of wellbeing. Including, the healthy interaction of youth in the society, good social relationships and friends that youth trust, interact and pass a good time with, also the social support and the understanding of youth and their needs in the community, in addition to

living in a community where people appreciate and trust youth. All were mentioned to have positive influence on youth wellbeing.

On the other hand, there are social challenges and pressures in the sociocultural environment that sometimes outweigh the positive influence provided by this domain to promote youth wellbeing. These challenges and pressures includes the social traditions and customs of the community that restrict youth freedom and oblige them to live accordingly; the gender based restrictions and obligations that overburden youth; social behaviors such as imposition, people talk, negative comments and interfering behaviors; the social behaviors that reflect no respect to order and cleanliness of the community environment; and the social inequity and discrimination that favor people with social status on the account of others. Youth need to tackle these pressures and challenges and sometimes they need to compromise in order to sustain a sense of belonging to the community, which is important for youth and their wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “to be with the society I am not happy, and to be against the society I will be susceptible to many effects that will make me unhappy, so I should compromise, to do what I want and in the same time do not show that I am opposing society, you need society. Example of this compromise is your clothes. In some places you can wear whatever you want in other places you are obliged not to wear whatever you want”. However, a considerable number of participants expressed that there are a lot of pressures from the societies the live in, even exceeds the resources they provide. As a young woman from Jerusalem stated “me and maybe 80 or 90 percent of the youth I know, face more pressure from the family and society than the support we get, that’s why we have low wellbeing”.

Below are the detailed areas where the participants lived through by which the community influence the level of youth wellbeing in the OpT.

### **Good relationships and friends promotes youth wellbeing**

To have good relationships in the community was extensively mentioned by the participants as having a positive influence on the youth wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from Gaza “if the social life is excellent and you have good relationships with no problems you will have an excellent level of wellbeing”.

Having people around youth is important for good levels of wellbeing. As stated by a young female from Tubas “to have good relationships has a lot of influence on how youth feel, also reflects how they behave. If youth have friends and people around them and spend good time with them, it is very different than anyone who does not have friends and living alone. For me, when I feel alone, I become depressed”. Another woman from a village west of Jerusalem said “through social relationships I find myself, the human being is a social being in nature; we need people to appreciate and respect us”. Another young woman from Halhul said “anyone without relationships doesn’t have wellbeing”.

Participants considered friends to be an important component of a life lived in good levels of wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem, “the most thing that I like to do is with my friends, they are a source for good wellbeing, with them I practice my hobbies, I can dance, I can release my stress”. Moreover, a young man from Halhul said “to have friends is good for wellbeing; frankly speaking it is a vital need”. However, friends and social relations could negatively affect wellbeing, depending on the types of people in this relationship. As stated by a young man from Halhul “sometimes if you have relationships with negative people and they see everything negative, it will affect you negatively”.

### **The positive influence of understanding, appreciative and supportive social environment on youth wellbeing**

Understanding and appreciation from people around youth was considered to be very important, and positively influence youth wellbeing. If youth do not feel understood or appreciated enough, this will likely have a negative influence on wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Tubas, “if society’s opinion became an obligation for the youth and the control exerted on them will make them unable to achieve their ambitions or the things they love. Certainly, this rejection will negatively affect their wellbeing”. A young man from a village east of Ramallah also said “I want a goal that satisfies me not a goal that satisfies them and I am obliged to achieve it”. This reveals how important it is for youth to feel understood by the people in their social environment, where feeling supported and understood is likely to have a positive impact on their wellbeing. A young man from a village north of Ramallah who is detained in a youth rehabilitation center answered a question about what he thinks that youth his age need the most to make their wellbeing better by saying: “they need society to understand them and appreciate their needs, the parents, the family, and the people”. This youth is a very good example of how the need for an understanding and supportive social environment is crucial in order to promote youth wellbeing. He added that he never had support, which led him to be in low levels of wellbeing, which in turn led him to misbehaving “my father is a drug addict and my mother is sick with cancer. I was working and supporting my family. But nobody helped me or guided me when I had problems. Nobody supported me or stood beside me no body, neither family nor friends, they all just act according to their benefit. Instead of supporting me, they destroyed me. That’s why I started to steal and do drugs”.

Support is not only material, but also through providing acceptance and encouraging social environment. As a young woman from Tubas said “when youth sense that they are rejected from

the community, like they have no freedom, they can't do the things they like to do because the community is standing in their way instead of accepting them. It will certainly affect their wellbeing greatly". Encouraging environment on the other hand is very important for youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young female from Jerusalem "for example, to have hobbies is important for wellbeing because you do things that you love that promote wellbeing, but before that you need the climate and the environment to be encouraging". In contrast, instead of support and motivation many participants said that youth in many communities in the oPt face inhibition and frustration as stated by a young man from Halhul "here nobody supports you if you have an idea, for example, if you have an idea for a project to work on. You will find that even the closest people to you will demoralize you, they will say to you that you will not succeed". Another young female from a village north of the West Bank mentioned that even when young females are successful, society still try to frustrate them, "I feel that people around me do not want me to continue what I am working on. They try to frustrate me and say to me stop working and be comfortable, but this idea is not comfortable to me I want to work". In conclusion, the understanding, appreciation and acceptance toward youth are important features of a supportive social environment, that promotes youth wellbeing.

**Social traditions and customs as a source of control, pressures and restrictions that reduces youth space of freedom have negative influence in youth wellbeing**

Some of the social powers that govern social life were claimed to be old or not suitable for youth today (mainly called social traditions and customs<sup>15</sup>). Youth should abide by these social powers else their and their families' image and reputation in society are threatened. As mentioned by a young man from Bethlehem, "your reputation in the community will be reflected on your

---

<sup>15</sup> For the rest of this study I will use social norms "as did the participants" referring to all the social norms and behaviors of the society that produce pressures, restrictions and obligations on people.

wellbeing”. These social forces shape youth identity and influence their wellbeing. Meanwhile, the effect of these social traditions and customs are mainly mediated to youth through their families. For example, the community social traditions and customs create restrictions imposed by the family, close and sometimes distant family, that reduce the space of freedom of youth. This social control is claimed by the participants as a source of pressure, which in turns hinder their wellbeing. As a young woman from Tubas said “our society does not create wellbeing to young people, only wants to control you, even your family and relatives”. The pressures and control that are exerted on youth from the social traditions and customs, was by far the subject that took a lot of emphasis by most of the participants in relation to the negative effects of the sociocultural dimension on youth wellbeing in Palestinian communities.

As a young man from Jenin said, “the culture of the society matters a lot in how it determines the wellbeing of people”. This shows that the culture of any society is an important determinant of wellbeing of youth in that society. It is the social norms and behaviors that govern the societies. This sociocultural base is what produces these norms and customs, and it was claimed by the participant that a lot of these norms are wrong, old, faulty and not suitable for youth. As mentioned by a young man from a village south of Jerusalem “Palestinian society as other Arab or eastern societies, we have wrong norms and customs that limit intellect and creativity, this affects the wellbeing of youth here, we need awareness to fight these traditions and customs”. These norms and customs were considered a main source of pressures, restrictions and limitations imposed by the society on youth which negatively influence their wellbeing, as mentioned by a young man from Jenin “the restriction that comes from the traditions and customs that limit your life and limit your wellbeing”. The participants described them as powerful social rules that determine what is right and what is wrong, what is accepted and what

is forbidden in society and the source of these rules are the ancestors or the past generations. These social rules are used to restrict and control youth in the Palestinian society, as stated by a young man from Jericho “we have traditions and customs that hold and chain the individual, and this is the biggest source of pressures and ill-being”. Another young man from Halhul said “these traditions and customs cause problems for us, control us, and restricts us, for example how the young man should behave with the young woman or with the elders. You feel as if there is a high authority upon you, of course there are sometimes red lines that you shouldn’t cross but my norms are not like my father before sixty years. I should behave spontaneously from my personality ... and I want others to respect my thoughts. We do not have this. We have a lot of people who have a lot of traditions and customs, no one respects any one”. Here he stresses on the issue that the social norms are old and no longer accepted by the young generation.

It was mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem that to remove these restrictions is more important to wellbeing than the support they get from the society: “I do not care about support; the more important is not putting obstacles in front of me. Permissions and prohibitions. To achieve I want a clear path and this affects the wellbeing of the individual. For example, I like dancing and I have a skill in it, but I do not have a lot of options where to perform, even the places that I can perform in it, oblige you to do thing that restrict you. So I feel that the society here restrict me to be creative in something that I like and gives me wellbeing. Here the people acceptance to me and to the art is the support that I need”. On the topic of hobbies, another young woman from Jerusalem said that “to do your hobbies is positive for wellbeing, to do the thing you love without thinking. Because you know you love to do it. But most of the time you can’t do it because there are restrictions”.

Social traditions and customs were reported to hinder the space of freedom that the youth need in many aspects in their lives. As mentioned by a young man from Halhul “sometimes you have the energy to do many things, but the social environment restricts you. It restricts you from doing what you want”. The social traditions and customs are gender biased; they exert a lot of control and affect females more than males in the Palestinian community. As mentioned by a young woman from a village west of Jerusalem “let us talk about a young female, her age is 18 or 19 and she wants to participate in certain activities. We suffer from this in many areas. You will find that a lot of females want to participate in many things but there is something that prevents them, it is traditions and customs. And maybe this will lead to additional problems with her family because they restrict her. This is additive then she will become intolerable. Why? Because of the retarded traditions and customs”. Another young female from Ramallah responded “when a young female finishes Tawjihi and she wants to go to a university then her father says to her: I do not have girls who study at a university or a mixed university. What do you call that?” Another young woman from Ramallah said “We as a society are very attached to traditions and customs, for example when I as a female want to hang out with friends at night, when the time is 10:00 PM, my parents start calling me to come home. Maybe traditions and customs that are exaggerated affect the wellbeing of the person”.

It was reported that there is a lot of confusion between religion and social traditions and customs as reported by a young woman from Hebron “how many girls in Hebron wear the head cover because she is religious? There are a lot of girls in Hebron who want to remove the head cover but they can't because of the traditions and customs and what people will say. Not because it is prohibited from religion but because it is considered shameful by the community”. On many occasions, the norms of marriage were mentioned as an example on how norms control the lives

of youths in the oPt. As mentioned by a young woman from Gaza “there are norms in marriage, like to marry a relative or traditional marriage. This man, I do not like him! How would you oblige me to marry him and be happy with my life with him”? Another young woman from a village east of Jerusalem said “the problem of early marriage is caused by tradition and customs, the girl reaches a certain age and they oblige her to marry. This affects her wellbeing very much”. Here the participant sheds light on the issue of traditional marriages, and how in some communities these traditions and customs are used as excuses for early marriage or other obligations on female youth.

Despite the focus on the restrictive aspects of customs and traditions, on a few occasions, norms and customs were reported to be good for wellbeing. As reported by a young woman from Ramallah, “generosity and manhood are from norms and customs and of cores these have a positive influence on wellbeing”. Another young man from Ramallah said that “the problems between families let’s say in the period of the intifada... the law was not ruling. Only traditions and customs were ruling. It played an important role in making people’s wellbeing better. So they could be used at certain times to positively affect wellbeing and solve a lot of problems”.

As a conclusion, the control imposed by the social traditions and customs is regarded by the majority of the participants as a source of restrictions and obligations. These traditions and customs are not suitable for the lives of youth in the Opt, and are widening the gap between the generations, because they create several challenges and obligations for youth. Youth consider that these traditions and customs only serve as source of unneeded and unwanted control that hinder their wellbeing.

### **Imposition, people talk, interfering social behaviors and negative comments are hindering youth wellbeing**

A young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank said “everything you hear (from the community) will affect you, whether positive or negative talk”. Several negative behaviors of people in the community toward youth were mentioned by the participants to have negative influence on youth wellbeing. First, the imposition behaviors, by which people impose their opinion or point of view on youth, as stated by a young woman from Jerusalem, “the behavior that everyone wants to impose their point of view on others, and that they think that they are right and the others are wrong, this environment is a source of tension”. Whether based on personal point of view, or believed to have a religious background or affected by the social traditions and customs, these impositions are creating an unhealthy social environment. A young man from Jericho said “it’s good to have traditional and religious ideologies and beliefs but not to impose it on others. I do not have the right to impose mine on others. This is important for me and for the wellbeing of society as a whole”. Youth are exposed to these impositions directly by older family members on younger ones, or males on females, and members of the community on each other in social gatherings.

Second, social imposition could be exerted indirectly on youth through people talk<sup>16</sup>. People talk was mentioned to be a threat on the person’s social reputation. It was reported to be powerful in terms of imposing restrictions on youth, by the fear of doing anything that is rejected by the religious or social norms. Youth and other members in the community suffer from people talk and it was called “a social ill” (أفاه اجتماعيه). This common negative social behavior especially in conservative communities can have unsatisfactory consequences on the social reputation of youth or their families. How the way that people talk affects youth is illustrated in a conversion

---

<sup>16</sup> People talk كلام الناس is close to the meaning of gossip, when people talk on others behind their back

with a young woman from a village north of the West Bank, who came with her mother to the focus group. The mother said “here is an example, this is my daughter and she is divorced, and she wants to come here (to the focus group). I came with her because I can’t let her out alone”. The daughter responded “she can’t let me out alone because we are in a community that asks ‘where is she going alone?’”. The mother responded “you know that if she is out alone, it will be a problem”. The daughter responded “of course they will talk, they will come out with a million stories if I came here alone”. This conversation reveals the degree in which some communities are interfering in the lives of the youths especially with young women. It is also clear from the aforementioned example how the reputation in the society is important and “people talking” could affect their reputation. This negatively affects wellbeing and obliges youth to do things that further reduce their wellbeing. It was reported that youth in camps also suffers a lot from this problem, as young woman from Rafah described how this interfering takes place by saying that “regarding our community especially in camps, when they see a girl, they ask when will you be engaged? When she is engaged, they ask when she will marry? When she marries, they ask when she will have children?”. Third, the negative comments, people produce a negative feeling that hinders youth wellbeing. Comments could come from family members, which are mainly in the form of objection to what youth do or wear, as mentioned by a young woman from Tubas “wellbeing is associated with what you hear from the community. For example, when all the community is always saying negative comments, like showing objection to the way you live, or the way you dress or anything. Like saying, why you are like this? Or, why you wear like this? This will affect your wellbeing. Because you will feel the objection and you will feel that people do not want you to live as you like. It is all connected to traditions and customs. If you do not abide by them, you will be seen as different from the rest. So everyone will stand against you.

No one accepts that there are people different than them”. Another form of comments that youth receive from know people are the disappointing comments that brings frustration to youth, as a young woman mentioned a story about her brother “my 19 years old brother is always thinking about death. Always asking when he will die. He is so frustrated and he is still 19. You know why, we are living in a rented house in our village, every time he tries to tell people (referring to the extended family) that he wants to build a house for himself, all the people around us said to him: your father didn’t do that how can you”. While the comments from strangers are usually in the streets, as a young woman describes what she faces in the streets or what may be called verbal harassment, “you know I have problems in confidence in myself, above that, when getting out without make up or wearing a slipper, the amount of comments that I hear in the street make me say why I am here in this society. It is really disgusting”. Young men also face the same problem of comments too, as mentioned by a young man from Jericho describing the comments he receives in his community and how they do not accept difference “because my hair is long, when I walk in the community I feel that everybody is looking at me and start hearing people commenting about my hair. When I hear this of course this will affect me psychologically”. He continues by saying “when you do something different from than the standards in the community for example, they start saying to you that this is flawed. And if different from the religious standards they say that it is Haram...especially in conservative areas. The comments made me feel like different; I really felt that I am different than them. This negatively affected me psychologically”.

The negative social behaviors of imposing and not respecting youth point of view, the people talk behind each other that threaten the integrity of social reputation or the negative abusive or

disappointing comments or comments that shows rejection to the actions and doings of youth, all these were reported to have a negative influence on youth wellbeing.

### **Gender based social obligations, restrictions and discrimination have negative influence on youth wellbeing**

There are several gender based obligations and restrictions in Palestinian society. There are specific obligations and restrictions for each gender based on social roles and expectations. For example, female youths are exposed to more social control, while male youths are subjected to a lot of economic obligations and responsibilities. As a young female from a village east of Jerusalem stated “what affects wellbeing in males is not like what affects wellbeing in females. Females are more affected by the social surveillance, control and religious dress codes a lot more than the males. But also society reduces the wellbeing of males through the problems of responsibilities, independence and economic burdens, like marriage. If he doesn’t have a lot of money, he will not be able to marry”. A lot of debate was caused by this issue in the focus groups, some stated that female youths have more social obligations, restrictions, and control, compared to male youths, in addition to the discrimination inflicted on females in favor of males. As stated by a young man from a village east of Jerusalem on obligations and restrictions for females “females in general are somehow dominated by males in society. This domination brings control, not only from the males but from the family and society as a whole. Because there is some kind of an image the young woman in specific that should be preserved in order to have better opportunities to find a husband. For example, I can go wherever and whenever I want, of course women cannot do that, and of course this is a kind of pressure on her which will reduce her wellbeing. So in this area I have an advantage on wellbeing compared to her”. This control over females was reported to hinder their freedom and opportunities, such as studying abroad as a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem said “here, young women can’t travel alone, or

travel abroad to study. So if she wants to study in a university, only local university is permitted, even if it is her ambition to study abroad she can't and this certainly lowers her wellbeing". She continues with another example on gender issues that reduce the wellbeing of young women by saying "sometimes a young woman when she marries, her husband prevents her to work, even when she has a university degree and this lower her wellbeing even more. Women are suppressed in our society, they are always less than males, in everything. I know some young women who tried to resist this suppression and not care about society but this made them unwanted or excluded from society. This has a big effect on their lives". Another young woman from Hebron said "in the city (Hebron) young woman are forbidden to hang out. This pressure may take her to wrong direction. Because everything is forbidden, this could lead to explosion. But too much freedom and too much pressure are same".

Gender discrimination against females was also mentioned as a source of ill-being for them as reported by a young woman from Tubas that "the discrimination between the males and females very much reduce the wellbeing of the females here in our society, it is everywhere, in employment, and many things like when I want to go somewhere they send my brother with me".

On the other hand, other gender based obligations and responsibilities are affecting males more than females, as reported by a young woman from Jerusalem "I feel that most of the girls are walking on the same path, which is [the idea that] when they marry they will be happy. They are not happy before marriage because there are many restrictions that tighten their lives. I see that only very few girls say no to these restrictions. But on the other side, the males who had a lot of freedom compared to females before marriage, but do get married and after marriage they have many pressures and responsibilities compared to females. That's why most of the married males

are not happy. Because many responsibilities came to them, while before marriage they have less. But for the females, they stay almost the same before and after marriage, so they are used to responsibilities and restrictions too”. Another young woman from Hebron said that “I see the young men in our office, to be able to marry they have to save money for the house, the ceremony, dowry, and the gold. I am more comfortable than them. I feel that young men have a lot of pressure because of the traditions and customs which we do not know why it is used. They have to feed one thousand persons in the wedding and then they talk negatively about us. Men work for five years so they can afford marriage...”. This illustrates some of the social obligation that burden young men in the oPt that hinder their wellbeing.

As a conclusion for this debate, the society is the source of creating more responsibilities especially economic burdens upon male youths, whereby female youth suffer from more restrictions, social control and discrimination. But in the end, both are affected by these gender based issues and obligations that negatively influence youth wellbeing.

### **Behaviors that shows no respect for order and cleanliness in the public have negative influence on youth wellbeing**

The behavior of not respecting order and cleanliness in the community, have a strong influence on the level of wellbeing of the youth as stated by them in several occasions. These public behaviors were considered to be a problem originating from the mentality of many people in the society. Some participants claimed that they have a different mentality than the rest, as stated by a young male from Jerusalem “you can’t live without people, you need the society. But when you have a certain mentality that is different than the community you will suffer. For example, I like order and cleanliness. The disorder and the dirtiness that I see in the community is causing a big problem, really, the chaotic behavior of people in the streets, the cars, shopping centers etc. causes to me a lot of stress”. Another young woman from Ramallah mentioned the same issue by

saying “here there is no order in the mentality of people, simply like when you want to take a bus or to stand in a traffic, no body respects order, they start pushing or taking your turn, and this indeed affects all of us”.

### **Inequity and the gap in the socioeconomic classes and social discrimination is negatively influencing youth wellbeing**

Equity between social classes was mentioned to have an important positive influence on wellbeing of youth in the community. As mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “the distance between the social classes (الطبقية), is very not good for youth wellbeing. When I went to Europe, I noticed that I can’t differentiate between people, they seem as if they are all at the same social class, they all have access to anything. But, look at the Arab countries and here in Palestine, there are billionaires and there are very poor people. Many things here the poor can’t afford. This difference is not healthy and affects youth wellbeing very much, in a negative way”. Here the participant perceived and experienced the benefits of equity and the negative outcomes of inequity on wellbeing. Not only the unequal distribution of socioeconomic resources, but also the internalized feelings of inferiority by the disadvantaged youth. As a young woman from Tubas said “for the person to feel equity and equality, surely this will give her more wellbeing. Not like when the person feels like she is different or lower than others. Or when she feels that there are people deserving better than her. Especially in the same community. We have this in Palestine”.

Discrimination between socioeconomic classes or between areas of residence or between urban, rural and camp was considered to have a negative influence on youth wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from a village in the east of Jerusalem “sometimes I hear from people a kind of discrimination between for example rich and poor, educated and uneducated, or from that place or another. They even make problems if one youth want to marry another from a different

background. It is pathetic and sure it has negative influences on youth wellbeing”. Religious discrimination was also mentioned by a young woman from Ramallah “here, there is some kind of discrimination between Muslims and Christians for example in private schools. The same as the discrimination between males and females. All kinds of discrimination are not good for wellbeing; it exerts pressures on youth”. The issue of inequity and discrimination has a social, economic and political origins and constitute a factor that is made by the interaction of these dimensions that have a negative influence on youth wellbeing. More of the issues of equity will be discussed in the next section of the economic domain and also in the internal political and military occupation domains.

### **The Family environment**

The family is very important to youth in the oPt, supposedly, all youth around the globe.

However, as a part of the eastern Mediterranean and Arabic cultures, the influence of the family is strong and extends from birth till death. According to youth, not only the parents, but also brothers and sisters and even children have an influence on the youth wellbeing. Maybe different than the western culture, youth in the oPt are still strongly attached to their families, as stated by a young man from Jenin: “you can never separate yourself from your parents, they influence everything in your life, your health your personality and your wellbeing. Every bit in your life”.

The family is considered by youth as a source of “refuge”, “stability” and “a safe haven”. It was described as a “the first unit”, “the basic building block of the community”, and “where you were created and shaped”. From the day they are born and through their development, youth acquired their positive internal personal attributes, habits and activities that positively influence their wellbeing, mainly from their parents but also from close and extended families. But also during the period of youth, they are still affected by several factors perceived from the family that have

a positive influence on youth wellbeing. Such as parents' education, understanding, and having a good amount of wellbeing, and providing good quality of upbringing. Also, a positive family environment, family cohesion, and good relationships between family members have a positive influence in youth wellbeing. In addition, to the family that provide a good space of freedom, support and trust for its members promotes youth wellbeing. However, it could also be a source of immense negative influence on the wellbeing of youth if the above mentioned factors were not adequate, and strict control over the youth is imposed resulting in the loss of their space of freedom. It is worth mentioning that the negative effects of the family on youth wellbeing were emphasized more by the younger youth participants compared with older youth, logically because they have more dependence on the families. And like the positive factors, these negative factors are a two edged sword, because they directly influence youth wellbeing but also have an impact on their personal attributes, habits and activities.

Below are the detailed family characteristics that influence the youth wellbeing in the oPt:

**Parents education, understanding and wellbeing, in addition to a good parents-youth communication and sound upbringing promote youth wellbeing**

The issue that when parents do not understand their children needs and aspirations was reported to cause problems between the youth and their parents which negatively affects the youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young man from a village north of Ramallah "I am staying at a social rehabilitation center and also all of the residents here because our parents do not understand us, the parents want their children to be doctors and engineers but they do not know that they want to have fun for example. They do not understand that they have other needs". The gap in the mentality between the two generations (parents and youth) is another issue that is considered as a problem in the parent's youth relationship. this was addressed by a young woman from Gaza "there is a lot of freedom these days because of the technologies and the

modernization that is taking place in the world, and this made a wide gap which caused a lot of troubles between the youth and their parents. Parents do not accept their children behaviors and personalities. This causes problems in the communication between them”.

The level of education of the parents affects their children’s wellbeing, according to participants. As stated by a young woman from Tubas “the education and the culture of the parents are essential in raising children with good personal qualities and principles. More importantly, they will correctly advise them on how to deal with problems that affect their wellbeing”. Another young woman from Rafah said “The level of education of the father and the mother matters a lot, it influences the education of the youth and shapes their personality by using good techniques of upbringing which gives them self-confidence, decision making skills and wellbeing”. It was stated that the education and the wellbeing of the parents determines the wellbeing of their children, as mentioned by a young woman from Hebron “it’s like hereditary, if the family especially the mother is in high levels of wellbeing, educated and her thought and her behavior are healthy. When she marries and has children she will pass this to her children through upbringing”.

The quality of child upbringing was mentioned to influence wellbeing and as stated by a young man from Jerusalem “sound upbringing (تربية سليمة) is the base stone for wellbeing”. Another young man from Hebron said “upbringing is what gives you qualities such as confidence which is important for wellbeing”. On the other hand, bias in treatment by one or both parents with their children, where they prefer one over another, has negative influence on wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem and a young man from Jenin “inequality or bias in treatment between the parents and their children negatively influence wellbeing”. Here

they mean that preferring one child over another will have a negative impact on the one who perceives that her parents like her sister or brother more than her.

**Family cohesion, positive family environment and good relationships within the family promote youth wellbeing**

Family cohesion plays an essential positive role in youth wellbeing, and if it is troubled and absent it considerably negatively influence wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from a village north of the West Bank “when the family is cohesive it will be a source of comfort and ease”. Another young woman responded to her by saying “the family should be cohesive. In order for you to take the first steps in your life and to enter the society you should have a cohesive and tolerant family. A family that you can have a discussion in, not whenever you speak they shut you up”. Here she combined the effect of family cohesion, tolerance and providing space for freedom for youth as a source of positive wellbeing. The relationship between parents was stated to be an important determinant of youth wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from Rafah, “problems between the mother and the father affects negatively the wellbeing of their children”. Also a young woman from a village in the east of Jerusalem said that “if the mother and the father do not treat each other well it will negatively affect the personality and the wellbeing of their daughters or sons”.

Positive relationships in society in general are important but the positive relationship with the family was mentioned to be far more important. As stated by a young man from Bethlehem, “when a person becomes disappointed from someone else it is not that shocking but when this person is from the close family it is, it will affect your wellbeing”. Also, stated by a young man from a village south of Jerusalem “if a person’s relationship with his parents is not good, surely this will cause constant stress and problems in his life and certainly problems in wellbeing”. A young woman from Tubas brought up the idea of violence in the family by saying “if there was

violence in the family, it will negatively affect the youth wellbeing; a comfortable family environment is important”. Positive family environment and cohesion is important for youth wellbeing.

### **Freedom of expression, support and trust granted to youth by their families promote their wellbeing**

A space for freedom of expression was mentioned to be a very important determinant for youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from a village north of the West Bank, “if I was raised in a family that is accustomed to no freedom of expression, if anyone tells me anything I should say yes even if I am not satisfied. This is frustrating”. Freedom of expression is not only important for wellbeing, but also important for other issues that in turn are important for wellbeing such as self-confidence, decision making and trust as mentioned by young female from Rafah “here in Rafah, the females have low self-confidence, this made them marry at a young age and not continuing education. This life doesn’t reflect what they want and it is caused by not being able to decide for themselves, they need others to decide for them. It is all coming from the parents not giving their children freedom to do what they want. From childhood there should be trust” . Another young woman from Tubas said “a family environment where there is freedom of expression, and where there is openness in discussion is very important for wellbeing, this will enable the youth to freely express her opinion and not to be afraid to express her opinion or to be wrong”. She also said “freedom of expression is important so the youth could share her problems and feelings with her family, which in return she will get advice from them. This will let her benefit from their experience. It is all related and it is all affecting her wellbeing”. In sum, freedom of expression is essential in order to gain support and both are important for youth wellbeing.

Family support was extensively stated to be important for youth wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from Rafah “if a person has problems she will find the whole family beside her, as a support, not only her that will suffer from the problem but the whole family. The family will help her and think with her”. Another young woman from Tubas said “when youth sense that their family and the people they trust are standing with them, they will become stronger and better able to face changes and problems”. Another woman from Jerusalem said “my family has a big role in my wellbeing, through their psychological support and understanding, and also through economic support too, because this is important to achieve what you want in life, to have your family beside you”. The support could also be from the children, as stated by a young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank “I get my support in life from my children, I am a divorced woman and I have nobody to care about except my children, I live for them”.

It was also important for youth that they had trust from their parents and family, as mentioned by a young man from Rafah “for me I need the trust from my family, I do not care about other people, I do whatever I see appropriate but for my family when they trust me and trust my deeds they support me, they believe in me, this is good for wellbeing”. Trust, support and freedom of expression are connected and all are important for youth wellbeing.

### **Strict control reduces the level of youth wellbeing**

The strict control that many parents exert on their children was mentioned by a lot of participants to have a negative influence on youth wellbeing. This control is exerted on youth as an intention from the parents to make them better but has an inverse outcome as mentioned by a young woman from Hebron “there is a common behavior from the parents, they think that if they exert more control on their child she will become better. But to the contrary, this has negative effects”.

This pressure on youth continue through the lifetime as mentioned by a young woman from a

village east of Jerusalem “here, your parents stay with you until you die, you will stay under their control and pressure”. The source of this over control is from the society as mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “if the parents are pressured from the society or they care very much for their status in the society, they will pass this pressure to their children. They should not impose things only because they fear what people will say”.

An example of this control on youth is on life decisions like the subject they will study at the university as stated by a young man from Rafah “it is unjust to impose control on the youth choice of education, if the father chose what his son will study you will see that he will get low marks, and the son wellbeing will be low”. Another young woman from Hebron said “there is a difference between when the parents want their child to be a copy of them and to be a mentor. To be wanted as a copy is a risk for low wellbeing. If I want to be as they like me to be, as they wish then I will be submissive, is there anyone submissive have high wellbeing? No. You should not be obliged or pressured to be like your father, if his father is a lawyer his child must be a lawyer. Or if his father is a doctor, his child must be like him”.

Control is not only exerted by the close family but also from the extended family. As reported by a young female from Jerusalem “not only your father is your father, your uncles are your father. For example, it is forbidden to shake hands with a guy, even though my father has no problem with that, or even to hug a guy, because he knows who that it is acceptable, but my uncles do not have that mentality. Once my uncle knew that I brought a friend to my house to practice playing music, my father knew and he was in the house but my uncle made a big problem, not only for me but for my father. You see how much stress my father had because of that, I had double that amount”.

The close and the extended family are strongly affected by the sociocultural powers, norms and behaviors of the community. After all it the family is attached to the grander social structure in the community. The community influence the way parents control their youth, the space of freedom they give to them. This section illustrated the interconnected and important factors of the sociocultural dimension and some structures of dominations, in addition to negative social behaviors that impact youth wellbeing in the oPt.

### **Environmental Domain**

In many occasions, the environment where youth live and work was stated to influence their wellbeing. It should be suitable and healthy in order to positively influence youth wellbeing as pollution, traffic noise, unavailability of green and open spaces where mentioned to have a negative influence. While clean and safe streets and neighborhoods promotes youth wellbeing

#### **Pollution, traffic noise, and unavailability of green, open and walkable spaces, have a negative influence on youth wellbeing**

Several problems in the built environment in the OPT were mentioned by participants to negatively influence youth wellbeing. Pollution was mentioned by a young woman from Ramallah as she said “if you live in a polluted environment, air pollution and garbage on the street, polluted water, simply not a healthy environment it will affect your health and wellbeing negatively”. Also mentioned by another young woman from Ramallah “the environment that we live in ...is not healthy, like for example, the smoke from the cars, it affects my wellbeing...”. Traffic noise was mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem said “the traffic and the sound of cars certainly reduces wellbeing”. Green, open and walkable spaces are mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem to be important for wellbeing “we do not have green places, a place to walk and see nature and this plays a very important role in wellbeing and releasing tension. There are no open spaces, like for example in Kufur Aqab (a high crowded area), imagine living

there, in all these building without a single tree. Put any healthy person there for three months and monitor her life, I am sure she will commit suicide. It's a disease. People need green places like parks, it is an important release of stress. Also you may find green places in some rural areas but it is exclusively for men to walk in. Women can't be there it's not safe".

### **Organized, calm and clean neighborhoods and streets and natural sites have a positive influence on youth wellbeing**

Organized and clean neighborhoods were mentioned by a young woman from Tubas to be important for youth wellbeing as she said "when you wake up in the morning and look through the window and find the surrounding area is arranged and clean, calm and good people and something like that. It all affects a lot in the psychological state and wellbeing". Another young woman from Nablus said "clean streets, clean areas and clean people are very important for wellbeing. Here we do not have the culture of being clean. You smell garbage everywhere even people do not take baths". A young woman from Jerusalem elaborated that natural places are important for wellbeing "for me, I take positive energy from natural places like mountains, the sea. It relieves the stress of life. There is no sea in the West Bank and people are forbidden to reach the sea, sure this is not good for wellbeing". She continued by saying "I really consider Europe as a psychological comfort. How the governments take care of the natural places that they have. And make it accessible for all people to go there. They care about the wellbeing of their people not like here. We only care about creating more buildings and no spaces no clean oxygen". She illustrated the role of natural sites in reducing stress and promoting wellbeing.

In conclusion, the environment too has an influence on youth wellbeing, whether the built or the natural environment. the built environment should be properly managed and planed in order to be supportive for youth wellbeing. While the natural environment should be available and accessible in order to relief the stress and promote wellbeing.

## **Personal Domain**

In general, all participants recognized that there are external contextual factors and personal factors that influence wellbeing. The personal factors are what explains the difference between people living in the same context. As stated by a young man from Halhul that “people are different in how they react over circumstances and events in life. That’s why the effects of these circumstances and events on wellbeing of people is not the same”. In fact, many participants concluded that the personal factors could have more influence on wellbeing or control the influence of the effect of external factors. As stated by a young woman from Jerusalem “there are people, even if everything in their environment is good and they have good life conditions, but still from the inside they have issues, this affects them”. This was further explained by a young man from Jerusalem who said “wellbeing is influenced by personal factors which are somehow controllable and external factors by which the individuals should enhance themselves to be able to deal with them”. Here he refers to the power of personal factors and characteristics, by which they have a direct effect on youth wellbeing but also determine how youth interact with the wider levels of external environments such as the social, economic, political, and all the built environments. The fact that individual youth could have more control on the personal factors that affect wellbeing compared to that of the external environment was further explained by a young man from Jenin as he said that “I can control my wellbeing, I will not wait for the circumstances to influence my wellbeing, and instead, I will influence the circumstances”. And he continued by saying “I have the ability and the will to control these circumstances and to control myself and my wellbeing, not to leave the people or the circumstances to take full control”. Another young man from Jericho said that “I believe that my wellbeing rises from me, because I do not have that much control over the external circumstances. So if I want to increase my wellbeing I should start with my way of thinking, my pattern of thinking will enable me to jump over the wall (the

obstacles) of external circumstances”. Here he stresses on the importance of perception. How youth perceive the external environment has a great impact on their wellbeing. Personal characteristics of the individual can help in controlling the negative influences of contextual conditions of the individual that negatively influence wellbeing, and not to surrender or to be overwhelmed by these conditions.

Several themes of personal factors were extracted from youths’ discussion on the factors that influence wellbeing. There are factors that have a positive influence. First, good personality attributes such as purposefulness, determination, contentment, gratitude and generosity. Second, good personal habits and activities such as hobbies, physical activity, good diet, sports, and reading. Third, a good degree of awareness and spirituality. While, psychological problems, negative emotions, and bad habits such as drug abuse, have negative influence on youth wellbeing.

### **Personal characteristics that promote youth wellbeing**

Personality attributes and personal characteristics were mentioned in all focus groups and interviews to have an important influence on the youth’s level of wellbeing. Certain personal attributes usually referred to as the attributes that constitute “a strong personality”, enable youth to better manage and solve life problems or adverse life circumstances that they encounter in their everyday life. As mentioned by a young woman from Hebron:” when youth have a strong personality they can deal (effectively) with the problem facing them and this affects their wellbeing”. Strong personality was stated as an asset for success and wellbeing as a young man from a village west of Jerusalem said that “in our societies, if the youth didn’t possess a strong personality ... they will fail in their first steps in professional life, they will fail in their social life, and they will fail in their family life. If youth have a strong personality even if they do not

have good economic situation for example, they will have good levels of wellbeing because of their strong personality”. In addition, personal characteristics can provide youth with the ability to cope with adversities as a young man from Nablus said “some people are able to cope with their environment and others do not, this plays an important part of their wellbeing”. Another young woman from Tubas mentioned that these personal characteristics enable youth to control their emotions and overcome pressures “there are some people who can make themselves happy regardless of their problems or pressures or worries. You do not see them sad or crying. As if they can overcome these things”.

These personal attributes are purposefulness, determination, contentment, gratitude, generous and giving personality and awareness, spirituality, hope and positive future outlook. The personal attributes mentioned by the participants are discussed more fully below.

### **Purposefulness, determination and hard work**

Having a purpose, a goal, a dream, or an ambition was regarded as an important determinant for wellbeing according to several participants. A young man from a village north of Ramallah said “if you do not have a goal you do not have wellbeing. If you do not have a goal, why are you living?” Another young woman from Jerusalem said “people who know what they want are happy and have wellbeing”. On the other hand, if a youth doesn’t have a goal it’s a big problem for their wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Tubas “to live without clear goals makes you paralyzed and numb. This makes the individual unproductive and unworthy, in other words psychologically damaged. You have an ambition, you have a goal, and this will make you busy, and give you a sense of self-worth and wellbeing”.

Also, it was mentioned that volition, and determination are equally important. As it is important to have a goal, but without determination and hard work to achieve this goal it is useless. A

young woman from a village east of Jerusalem said “if you put a goal for yourself and you have the will to realize it, and you put your efforts to reach it. This will increase your wellbeing”.

Another young woman from Hebron said “some youth do not want to work on themselves, they do not want to get tired, they want things to come quickly and easily, this is no good for wellbeing for the long run”. A young woman from Jerusalem said “when you have determination to achieve something and motivation from inside, you will have a good sense of where are you going and this is very important for wellbeing”. In general, the point is that for youth to have good amounts of wellbeing they should be able to manage their lives properly by setting goals and an appropriate plan to achieve them, coupled with working hard, since there is a strong connection between achievement and wellbeing. This implies that maintaining wellbeing is an active process between setting goals and achieving them, including long term and short term goals.

It was mentioned that putting goals and work hard to achieve them is one of the most important personal characteristics that can help youth to overcome adversities in the external environment.

As a young man from Ramallah when he said “especially in youth and young age, youth can change whenever they want, by setting goals and have determination they can achieve anything, and against difficult circumstances. There are a lot of stories of how people faced extremely challenging situations but at the end they overcame them”. Both the personal and the external characteristics and factors are important to have the highest levels of wellbeing. The influence and the importance of both personal and external social for instance is obvious in the discussion of two young women from a village north of the West Bank. One said that “the person should have a strong ambition because the people around you can bring you down”. And the other young woman responded “exactly, nobody can bring you up except you”. Another young woman

commented “it is important to get encouragement and support from others but we should learn how to focus on our goals internally”.

### **Contentment and gratitude**

Other personal attributes that were mentioned to have an influence on wellbeing are contentment and gratitude. Contentment is to be happy with what you have; gratitude is to be grateful for what you have. Both of these attributes are connected to each other. As these attributes may provide positive emotions and prevent upward social comparisons that negatively influence youth wellbeing. As young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank responded that “contentment and gratitude certainly affect my wellbeing, whenever I am content and grateful for anything and thank Allah that I have the things that I have and I am better than many people, this is essential to my wellbeing”. Another young woman from a village in the north of the West Bank said “whenever I am grateful for what I have and I internally accept it, it will give me better wellbeing”. Being content as an opposed to being greedy will reduce the stress of material cravings and better control the effects of financial and economic factors that can influence wellbeing, as stated by a young man from Jerusalem” how much you work on yourself to be content and satisfied of what you have or your income. This will reduce the material stresses and better deal with the material needs”. Contentment and gratitude here refer to the state recognizing and valuing what you have and not to be overwhelmed by what you do not have, but, it does not imply to stop seeking personal or career development.

### **Giving and charitable personality**

Being a person who likes to give and help other people was mentioned to be positively associated with wellbeing. As young man from Jalazone refugee camp said “whenever I want to be happy, I give and help people, and when I am happy I want to give more, it is connected and important to my wellbeing”. A giving and charitable personality was also mentioned by a young

woman from Gaza, she said that “whenever I do charity to others and to give without waiting to get anything in return, I feel that my psychological state is better which make my physical state better so I will reach to better levels of wellbeing, internal comfort”.

### **Awareness and spirituality**

Awareness was mentioned extensively as being important to enabling youth to have high levels of wellbeing. Awareness here refers to both knowledge about the self or the mind, and also conciseness about the environment and the factors affecting the self or the mind. Awareness was stated to enable youth to have control over their lives. As a young man from Jenin stated “what happens with people is that they do not reach an internal thinking on things that affects their physical and psychological wellbeing, they do not know that they can control wellbeing from inside out, for that you need awareness”. A young man from Jericho also stated “when you are aware you can manage your life, your future plans. I believe that awareness is crucial to wellbeing”. Compared to ignorance or mindlessness, awareness is important to deal with problems. As stated by a young woman from Jerusalem “the lack of awareness in the youth nowadays, makes them vulnerable against any problem in their life. Even small problems make them confused and do not know where to go. If they are aware they will be able to better manage their problems, reduce their stress, eventually this will reduce their problems and increase their wellbeing”.

Spirituality was emphasized by several youths in terms of its positive and beneficial effect on wellbeing. Whether through religious spirituality like what was mentioned by a young woman from a village west of Jerusalem “religion and belief gives you comfort, stability, safety, and other things”, and also through other means as stated by a young woman from Gaza “whatever your religion, you need a connection with the higher entity, with Allah, to be relieved, to be in a

state of internal peace, if you have a war it will destroy your wellbeing”. Nature could be a source of spirituality according to a young woman from Jerusalem pointed out that “nature is a source of spirituality for me, trees; they provide me with positive energy”. A young man from Jericho said “I obtain my spiritual needs through music, it’s like a connection between me and God, I feel that God is in me, this is a big support for the human being”.

### **Hope or positive future outlook help promote youth wellbeing**

Hope was mentioned to be promote youth wellbeing and provide some comfort in the face of adversities, as youth from Jericho said “youth in the oPt always have pressures from everywhere, but hope when it is not present, these people with no hope could commit suicide, or think about committing suicide. Hope brings and protects wellbeing”. Hope help youth individuals to overcome the negative influence of the external social, political and physical environment. Even though participants realize the amount of stress and frustration from external factors they are living in, and sometimes they are not optimistic about the future outcomes, they use hope to reduce its associated negative influence on their wellbeing. As stated by a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem “we always try to make ourselves believe that external conditions will become better, because we are frustrated, even though you know that the situation is not going to be good, but there is always hope”. Another young man from Jenin said “in my mind I know that the situation in Palestine whether social or political will not change, but I lie to myself, and I am happy with this lie, it’s an eternal anesthetic”. They know that what they are hoping for is sometimes unrealistic but it still helps.

### **Hobbies, spending time in an enjoyable activity, breaking routine and reading**

Several youths stated that spending time doing what they like to do makes them feel good and increase their levels of wellbeing. Whether by doing hobbies or through interaction with friends or family. A young woman from Jerusalem said that “to have hobbies, is important because you

spend time doing something you like, this is important for wellbeing”. Another young woman from Jerusalem said “I use dancing as a way to feel good and release all the tensions and stress, I feel completely free”. She continues by saying “when you do something you enjoy and pass a good time it will give you a good feeling which is good for wellbeing”. It was also mentioned that doing activities to break the routine of life especially at work enhance wellbeing. As stated by a young man from Halhul “the routine of life, there is no break for the routine that you are living in. For example, I am an employee in the municipality, I work every day... and we deal with the same people. We do not have a day for entertainment or if your child becomes sick. In European countries in general, youth have a day for entertainment but we even in the weekend we work. If not at work, we work at home. All the week we work... The routine is not broken, so your psychological state is affected. Sometimes if we go out as a group, hangout or do some kind of activity and break the routine for some time, we come back even working better, we will achieve better than before. For example, if we travel outside of the country for a week. We come back with a lot of energy”.

Reading was mentioned by some participants to play a positive role in improving youth wellbeing. Through gaining knowledge and spending time in a useful habit that prompt the good the feeling as both positively influence youth wellbeing. As mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem, “reading is important and it creates good feeling and wellbeing for the person, it empowers her with knowledge and makes her less ignorant and more in wellbeing. Also she can direct and manage her life in a better way”. The idea that knowledge gained through reading empowers the person to better self-management, through better dealing with stress which positively influences wellbeing, was explained by a young man from Jenin that “the knowledge obtained by reading and other means as well, even in small specificities affects how the person

deal with stress through his day”. The other point was that reading brings good feeling and satisfaction was mentioned by a young woman from Jerusalem “I like to learn through reading, reading anything, subjects such as space or whatever. This very much affects my psychological state; it gives me satisfaction”.

### **Good health, healthy habits and physical activity**

Youth reported that being healthy and having healthy habits such as healthy diet and doing physical activity has a positive influence on wellbeing. As a young woman from Tubas said that “being in good health is important for wellbeing because illness brings ill-being”. She also said that a “healthy diet is connected to health and wellbeing, not only physically but also psychologically”. Sport was mentioned to be an outlet for releasing negative energy or stress by a young woman from Jerusalem said that “sport is incredibly good for your wellbeing, not only because of the physical health but also for the brain, the psychological state of mind, as source of relief or venting; it is the best way to release negative energy”. The connection between healthy habits including good diet and sport with wellbeing was explained by a young woman from a village east of Jerusalem, as she said “to eat well and to do sports regularly, this will certainly make you think better and to cope better with stress, so then you effectively deal with your problems. Sports make you release negative energy that came from stress and stress reduces wellbeing, it’s a cycle that should be broken”.

### **Negative emotions, psychological problems, pessimism and drugs, lowers wellbeing**

Negative emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, suspicion, and over thinking were stated to negatively influencing the levels of youth wellbeing. As young man from Halhul said “fear, anxiety and anger reduce my wellbeing”. Suspicion caused by fear was mentioned by a young woman from Bethlehem “when someone always has suspicion in everything she will always feel low wellbeing in this angle, and will always feel fear from everything”. A young man from the

same focus group responded on the subject of suspicion in people and commented that suspicion is a psychological problem that negatively influences wellbeing: “the issue of not trusting people and being suspicious come under psychological illness, so at the end it’s a psychological illness that affects the health and wellbeing of the person”. A young woman stated that “anxiety and overthinking about the future have an impact on my wellbeing”. So, negative emotions generally have a negative implication on wellbeing, regardless of the source.

On the other hand, bad habits can negatively influence youth wellbeing, such as drugs, which was mentioned by a young man from a village north of Ramallah “drugs destroy everything, your body, your brain, your personality, your wellbeing everything. It’s my personal experience”. These negative emotions, psychological problems, and bad habits in addition to not having the above mentioned positive personal factors have a negative influence on youth wellbeing.

Personal factors have a strong influence on wellbeing. Meanwhile, the external physical, sociocultural, socio-economic in addition to the political environment, all influence youth personal determinants and wellbeing. The next section of the qualitative results explores the realm of external contextual environment that influence wellbeing.

### ***Influences and relationships between the main dimensions***

On one hand, the personal domain is important in influencing youth wellbeing and youth perception of the factors affecting their wellbeing coming from the external contextual environments, and how youth deal with these factors. On the other hand, the external influence of the social, cultural, economic, and political resources and challenges shapes both the youth personal characteristics and habits in addition to their wellbeing. This relationship is clear

between social and personal domains. For example, the good personal attributes stated by the participants that are important for wellbeing, are all affected by the social domain. The initiation and development of these skills, abilities and attributes in setting goals and plans, determination, contentment, gratitude, and generosity are all dependent on the sociocultural environment, whether at home, school, neighborhood, university, media, religion and other spheres of interaction. As a young man from a village south of Jerusalem said “the environment should be supportive throughout the life time especially childhood and youth, because it interferes with the development of young individuals and prepare them for the future. If the external environment is not suitable, or not supportive, it will be reflected on youth, on their future, on their personality, and on their wellbeing”. Especially, the family and its important role in the development and growth of youth, but also the community and institutions. One such institution is the educational institution in its role to provide proper rearing and education as mentioned by a young woman from Hebron “our education doesn’t teach youth how to have attributes such as self-management or how to have an initiative”. Another important example of how the external sociopolitical environment affects the personal domain is through creating a supportive environment to shape personal factors. Creating a supportive environment for instance is important for cultivating skills and hobbies. As it was stated by a young woman from Jerusalem “society and the environment should be encouraging for the youth to have and practice hobbies”.

The sociocultural forces and social and religious beliefs, traditions and behaviors were considered to have an important impact on youths’ personalities, awareness, mentality, behaviors, space of freedom, and opportunities. Affecting every aspect in the internal personal determinants of youth, mainly through affecting their communities and their families. The sociocultural domain also has an important role on wellbeing through providing support and

space for freedom for these habits, hobbies and activities that influence wellbeing. For example, practicing hobbies, sports and physical activity especially for females is highly affected by the social norms, tradition and culture of any community. Not forgetting the role of the media, religious and social institutions in influencing internal individual factors that have either positive or negative influence on wellbeing. Furthermore, the external sociopolitical environment is very important in determining personal factors. For example, through its influence on creating good and healthy habits such as sports, good quality of food, and for providing places important for youth to influence and encourage activities such as learning, having fun and physical activity. All these habits and activities need support, such as facilities, proper and equipped places and appropriate and affordable products, and these in turn depend on the sociopolitical institutions and policies such as the government, cultural and educational institutions, and the civil and private sector as well.

The sociocultural determinants of youth wellbeing are influenced by the economic and political dimension, by which the exclusion of youth from political participation and policymaking prevents youth from addressing the sociocultural issues that negatively influence youth wellbeing, including traditions, obligations and negative social behaviors. And also prevent them to promotes their economic conditions and create economic opportunities.

The economic domain is also related to the other domains. The microeconomic level factors such as poverty, insufficient income, debt and unemployment and employment conditions have a significant influence on the internal personal factors through impacting education, affordability of doing activities, achieving goals and having habits that positively influence youth wellbeing. The microeconomic level factors also have an important effect on the social domain including both the family through affecting the family environment and the community through affecting

the social status and relationships. In addition, it has an equally important effect on the environmental factors such as housing and neighborhood quality and cleanliness. While, on the other hand, these microeconomic individual level factors are caused by the macroeconomic level of sociopolitical origins such as unavailability and inequity in economic opportunities. They certainly came in the economic domain but they are caused and affected by the political domain including both the Israeli military occupation and the internal political domains. The Israeli military occupation determines the amount of economic opportunities by controlling the economic resources and limiting the freedom of movement of the Palestinian youth, in addition to the important impact of the separation wall and the checkpoints in confiscating the land and even constraining youth to seek more economic options in other areas especially female youths. Many internal political factors such as waste and corruption, centralization, and governmental neglect are the main causes of the inequity in the distribution of economic opportunities and the other causes of unavailability of economic opportunities and employment.

The Israeli military occupation dimension has a negative influence on the economic domain. But, also have an influence on other domains. The greatest influence is on the internal personal domain, by which the Israeli military occupation is a source of various negative emotions such as stress, frustration, anger, sadness, fear and worry. Caused by various factors such as checkpoints, separation wall and their role in reducing the space of freedom of movement and travelling and separating families and communities from each other marginalization, discrimination, oppression and violations of human rights and freedom of expression. Adding to wars and siege on Gaza Strip and direct assaults, violations, confiscation, demolition and detention produces negative emotions directly and indirectly on all youth. In addition to the general feelings of insecurity and humiliation. All these factors cause immense and strong negative emotions. These factors

contribute in limiting and inhibiting the positive emotions of joy, amusement and hope. The military occupation factors also limit internal individual capability to practice good habits such as skills, hobbies and sports through limiting the freedom of movement and traveling abroad and the economic constraints. While it allows a space or even as claimed by several participants create a space for bad habits such as using drugs and violence through facilitating drugs and weapons in the hands of dealers and collaborators. The Israeli military occupation also influences the sociocultural domain, like for example the separation of individuals, families, and communities from each other. This leads to directly affecting social cohesion and relationships between people. Also promoting conservative traditional attitudes and beliefs through creating closed communities and bad economic situation for these communities.

The internal political domain as mentioned above has a important influence on the macroeconomic domain. Through corruption, and cronyism (wasta) which are the sources of inequity and unjust distribution if economic opportunities and resources. Inadequate quality of governance and support causes loss and depletion of youth power to work and to be productive. Inappropriate educational system is the cause of imbalance in the economic opportunities by which it doesn't properly qualify youth into the market and distribute youth properly in the needed sectors of the market. The internal political domain also influences the sociocultural domain as corruption, wasta and weakness of the law are the sources of social inequity and facilitator of discrimination between people. They are the sources of favoring individual over the other, family over another, even village, community, and city over another. This favoring creates inequity, which in turn transform the relationships between the mentioned players instead of being in good relationships they became rivals. The weaknesses of the law in particular, clear the path for behaviors of gender discrimination and strengthen the laws of social tradition to govern

the communities instead of legal modern laws. Also, the weakness of law enforcement is the main contributor of negative social behaviors such as order, cleanness, and traffic violations.

The internal political dimension also has an influence on the personal dimension, by which the acts of repression, political exclusion, reducing the space of freedom of expression, corruption and wasta causing inequity and injustice, dissatisfaction with the quality of governance due to neglecting youth and not investing well in programs that promotes their education, participation, economic situation and their wellbeing and other factors. All are a source of negative emotions such as frustration, stress, anger etc.

Finally, every domain has an influence on youth wellbeing and all the domains have either direct or indirect relationships or influencing each other. But mainly, the sequence of influence is from the macro political dimensions toward the micro personal factors. But, at the end they all have a hand in determining the level of youth wellbeing.

## Discussion

---

This is the first mixed methods study that investigates youth wellbeing in the oPt. The findings revealed that youth in the oPt have lower levels of wellbeing compared to other countries such as Lebanon, Turkey and Tunisia, that had the same Power2Youth survey<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, compared to a study that analyzed wellbeing in the oPt using data collected three years before the data of this study (Harsha et al., 2016), it appears that the level of youth wellbeing in the oPt has decreased since then. This could be an indication that youth in the oPt are facing an increasingly unfavorable contextual environment that hinders their wellbeing.

In general, several studies showed that youth period entails a decline in the levels of wellbeing, (Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017), and high rates of depressive symptoms (Ibrahim et al., 2013), due to the increased responsibilities and uncertainty in this period (Patel et al., 2007). This might partially explain the low levels of youth wellbeing in the oPt. However, given the flexibility of youth and heterogeneity of wellbeing in this period (Shanahan, 2000), other studies found that youth wellbeing tends to improve (Howard et al., 2010; Tanner & Arnett, 2011), if their contextual environment is encouraging and promoting their wellbeing (Goldin, 2014; Li et al., 2014; Moore, 1997), and if youth have the personal characteristics that reinforce wellbeing and have the potential for resilience (Masten et al., 2004; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017; Rutter, 2006). What we found in this study, through both the quantitative and qualitative phases, that the contextual environment, especially in terms of the political and economic dimensions are not supportive and pose challenges to youth wellbeing.

---

<sup>17</sup> Based on unpublished information that was acquired through personal correspondence with the research team

## Conceptualization of wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing used by the participants in the qualitative phase was partially compatible with the WHO5 wellbeing index used in the quantitative phase. The WHO5 wellbeing index assesses constructs of positive mood, vitality and general interest. The resulting scale assesses mental wellbeing in relation to those constructs, linking it to mental and physical health (de Cates et al., 2015; Topp et al., 2015). Youth in the oPt, too, focused on mental or psychological wellbeing as an important aspect of wellbeing. However, the difference is that the conception of wellbeing according to youth is more comprehensive and complex, as it includes physical, social and functional aspects in addition to psychological aspects. In other words, poor wellbeing is reflected and embodied in all these dimensions of wellbeing. This is confirmed by the body of literature (Dodge et al., 2012; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Harris, 2010; Huppert & So, 2013).

The meaning and definition of wellbeing according to youth in the oPt are found to describe all things that make them healthy, happy and comfortable in all life domains: physically, fit and strong; psychologically, balanced and able to cope with stress; socially accepted and loved; functionally focused and productive. In other words, youth wellbeing is the positive aspect of health and the sum of all benefits from a healthy interaction with the surrounding the physical, social, and political environment. Although participants focused on wellbeing as the positive side of health, it can also coexist with disease and ill-being. This is different from the binary concept of wellbeing that is often presented in the literature. Wellbeing can coexist with states of illness and even suffering. Mainly, a holistic, interactive, dynamic and subjective concept that describes the state of psychological and physical ease, comfort and satisfaction. Holistic because it

includes physical, psychological, social and functional aspects as confirmed by several studies such as (Helliwell, 2003; Huppert & So, 2013). Interactive, because it constitutes the interaction between the body, and the mind on one hand. On the other hand, the body and mind with the surrounding social, material and political environments, circumstances and events (Diener et al., 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Dynamic, as it is not a fixed state rather a continuum of positive and negative tendencies, resulting from contextual features and internal characteristics (Dodge et al., 2012; Keyes, 2002). Finally, subjective, as it has no specific standard that define it, it depends on personal and collective perceptions and needs (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, the WHO-5 concept of wellbeing is more inclined toward individual wellbeing which does not take into consideration collective wellbeing. The holistic concept of wellbeing, based on this study, indicates that collective social wellbeing is an important part of the concept of wellbeing, and not only a determinant of individual wellbeing.

## **Factors influencing youth wellbeing**

As we can see from the study youth perceived that their wellbeing is affected by an external web of factors in all life dimensions, political, economic, cultural, social, and environmental. The effects of these dimensions interact together to cumulatively influence youth wellbeing throughout their lives. These factors could be either challenges and destructive factors or could be resources and opportunities for youth. This relationship between youth wellbeing and life dimensions was confirmed by the body of literature (Barber, 2015; Costanza et al., 2007; Elder et al., 2003; Harris, 2010; Slade, 2010). Both types of factors are filtered through youth personal characteristics. That in turn could be either undermining or empowering characteristics (Gannon

& Ranzijn, 2005; Slade, 2010). All life dimensions have influence on youth wellbeing but to varying degrees. Usually in accordance with the priorities and perception of youth, by which the more youth feel that a certain dimension has the most impact on wellbeing depends on the context they are living in. For example, youth living in a highly conservative community perceive that the sociocultural domain is the main negative influence on wellbeing compared with any other dimension. Or a youth who lives in extreme poverty perceive that the economic domain is the main contributor and so on.

### ***Political dimension***

Like studies in the past, this study highlights the importance of the political context on wellbeing (Barber, 2015). In this context, which includes both the Israeli military occupation and the internal political domain. However, the quantitative portion of this study only included variables of the internal political domain, and the Israeli military occupation was covered by the qualitative portion of this study. The Israeli military occupation domain was found by this study and confirmed by several studies as a source of direct negative influence on youth quality of life and wellbeing, especially young men (Abu-Rmeileh et al., 2011; Alkhalili, 2017; Giacaman, 2016; Giacaman et al., 2007), whereas the effect varies by region given the differences between the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem in terms of restrictions and the political status. It worth mentioning that Jerusalem is understudied in terms of the effect of the military occupation on Palestinian population compared to the other two regions.

This study shows that youth are directly exposed to violence, assaults, traumas, detention and imprisonment which negatively influence their wellbeing. It also shows that we cannot ignore the traumas they were exposed to in the past; during infancy, childhood and adolescences. This

stresses on the cumulative effect of the military occupation, through the life course of Palestinian youth. The literature confirmed that the military occupation and the political conflicts have both historical and contextual negative influence on youth wellbeing through increasing the amounts of stress, distress and suffering (Alkhalili, 2017; Barber, 2015; Giacaman et al., 2007; Giacaman et al., 2007; Høigilt, 2013; Jabr & Berger, 2016).

In addition, this study shows that all youth are affected by restrictions that reduce their space of freedom of mobility and expression. Considering this critical, passionate and instable developmental period, and there need for adequate space of freedom, dignity and agency is crucial (Arnett et al., 2014; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017). The findings also shows that these threats are further augmented by living in chronic exposure to insecurity, humiliation, and subjugation all these were confirmed by the literature to have a negative influence on youth wellbeing. (Giacaman et al., 2007; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017; World Health Organization, 2016) . Finally, as youth period is characterized by heightened instability, at the personal, economic and social levels (Stroud et al., 2015), whereby the military occupation was found to further amplifying this instability through its important negative impact on these dimensions.

These exposures are shared by all youth in the oPt as a source of chronic stress. However, specific exposures of youth in Gaza strip were found to be the siege and the severe military attacks, with their various consequences on people and life conditions. Gaza strip is perceived as a prison but on a grand scale, youth call it “the biggest prison on earth”. Since 2007, youth in Gaza Strip expressed that they are living in a miserable condition of blockade, with all the accompanying states of insecurity, deprivation and incapacitation. It was found that youth are suffocated from the violations of basic human rights. On the other hand, consequences of the four severe military attacks, beginning in 2006 and lastly the 2014 attack. These attacks were

perceived as physical, mental, and economic disasters upon youth in the Gaza Strip. It was found by this study that the situation is until now (2018) didn't recuperate, on the contrary it is worsening by time, because of the continuing blockade, Giacaman (2016) and Jebril (2018) confirmed that.

Youth from Jerusalem was found to suffer from the violations of the military occupation as all other youth in the oPt. However, they have an additional unique aspect compared to other youth in the oPt. As they are living under a complete authority of the military occupation institutions.

The study found that youth in Jerusalem feel that their communities are intentionally marginalized and not developed, in terms of neighborhoods infrastructure and services.

Moreover, they are exposed to structural discrimination, in various institutions such as education, healthcare, and governmental institutions. The literature confirmed that both intentional and unintentional actions and policies that favor one group over another have important negative influence on youth wellbeing (De Moortel et al., 2015; Schütte et al., 2014; World Health Organization, 2016). Both Gaza strip and Jerusalem are heavily affected by the heightened sense of insecurity, as an important source of stress and ill-being in a daily basis. Also, they feel an absence of adequate support and advocacy to their cause from both the Palestinian politicians and the international key players. This created insecurity about the future.

Meanwhile, the internal political domain was also a source of negative influence on the wellbeing of youth in the oPt. Both the quantitative and the qualitative components showed that low satisfaction with the quality of governance toward youth in parallel to low confidence and distrust in political and governmental institutions have a negative impact on their wellbeing. Several studies confirmed this relationship (World Health Organization, 2016). This could be due to the fact that youth in the oPt was found to feel themselves excluded from the policy

making process, because the government is perceived as non-democratic, allowing a limited space of political freedom. In fact, this creates the feeling of repression in youth that is further cultivating a feeling of frustration that negatively influencing their wellbeing. Studies confirmed that this reduced opportunity to participate in the political decision- making process, whether local policies or political agendas means that in general youth voices and concerns are not heard and prioritized which has a negative impact on their wellbeing (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007).

Corruption and cronyism (wasta) in economic, political and governmental institutions were found to have a negative influence on youth wellbeing in the oPt. This is consistent with studies that examine the relationship between corruption or cronyism (wasta) with wellbeing of the population is a negative relationship (Alwerthan, 2016; Fleche et al., 2011; World Health Organization, 2016). Even though youth who have wasta or connections with people with influence have better social status and opportunities which may positively influence their wellbeing, but there are a considerable number of youth in the same environment with fewer opportunities because they have fewer connections, so reduced wellbeing (De Vogli, 2004). However, according to Jebiril (2018), wasta is “ a cultural norm of dependency on social relations”, it obliges youth to focus on it and not on merit or performance. It creates a reinforcing cycle of inequality that have a negative influence even on people who are benefiting from it through stigmatizing as corrupt. Additionally , corruption or cronyism (wasta) were found a as a source of injustice, discrimination and inequity which create an unequal distribution of resources in the society, which in turn decrease social cohesion and trust between the society members, which in turn negatively influence wellbeing (Alwerthan, 2016; Eriksson, 2011; World Health Organization, 2008).

Both the quantitative and the qualitative findings showed that when youth have low confidence in the government, political parties and political institutions including armed forces, police and courts this will negatively influence wellbeing. The qualitative findings added educational and economic institutions to the list. All these institutions were considered to be inadequate. On one hand, there is corruption and cronyism (wasta) and on the other hand these institutions do not have youth wellbeing on their agenda. The government and all these institutions should strive to promote youth wellbeing, but in reality the majority of youth feel that the opposite is happening. This reduced trust and confidence in the political institutions was indicted by several studies to hinder the wellbeing of people (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006; Hudson, 2006; Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017)

In fact, the political dimension, both from the Israeli military occupation and the Palestinian political institutions is on the top of the pyramid of factors influencing wellbeing, as it has an important influence on other dimensions in determining wellbeing. This dimension was described to be an important source of negative influence on youth wellbeing and the wellbeing of the whole Palestinian population.

### ***Economic dimension***

Both the quantitative and the qualitative components of this study showed the importance of satisfaction with economic conditions on promoting youth wellbeing. It was found that poverty and economic hardship creates life stresses through the inability to secure basic needs, inadequate living conditions, and debt, all were reported to have negative influence on youth wellbeing. Numerous studies confirmed the relationship between the economic conditions and

wellbeing (Das et al., 2007; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017; Proctor, 2014; Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017; Veenhoven, 2007; World Health Organization, 2008).

On the other hand, bad economic conditions were reported to be a result of multiple macroeconomic level factors, including socioeconomic status of the families of youth, unavailability and limited options of economic opportunities and inequity in distribution of these opportunities between areas or people, in addition to high costs of living. Regardless of the individual economic conditions these macroeconomic level factors were reported to have negative influence on the economic conditions and of youth therefore their wellbeing.

Regarding the effect of employment on wellbeing, this study found that employment is necessary for youth wellbeing, whereby the characteristics of employment and the contextual conditions around it such as appropriate and sufficient wages compared to living expenses, potentiality for career development and good working conditions and work environment, all play an important part in defining its role of employment in promoting youth wellbeing. The effect of employment and employment conditions was confirmed by literature (Lucas et al., 2004; McKee-Ryan et al., 2005; Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017; World Health Organization, 2008). While, if youth from poor families who are studying at the university and obliged to work, they perceive employment as a source of stress and ill-being. In fact that this study showed that youth who are obliged to work because of economic hardship, employment will have a negative influence on their wellbeing, and several studies confirmed that (Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017).

### ***Sociocultural dimension***

The findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative components of the study showed the importance of the social dimension on youth wellbeing. The quantitative highlighted the positive

aspects of the social domain, and found that trust, and personal freedom in the family and community have a significant positive influence on youth wellbeing. The qualitative findings provided a more detailed account on this domain, by which it added that a supportive, educated, open minded, understanding, appreciating family and community all are necessary for youth wellbeing. In addition to a positive environment of good relationships and cohesion in both the family and the community as a source of positive influence on youth wellbeing. These all was confirmed by previous studies (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Eriksson, 2011; Giacaman et al., 2017; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017).

However, the qualitative findings revealed that the society could be a source of a negative influence on youth wellbeing. This was not indicated by the quantitative findings, because it only assessed positive influence from the social domain. On one hand, it was found that conformity with social traditions, norms and customs was found to be considered as a condition to social support, and this was viewed by youth as an obstacle for them to gain support from the social environment which is important to their wellbeing. It was found that, in order to have social capital youth should comply with these social traditions and norms, which impose social control that strict youth freedom and chain youth. Several studies talked about how this social control forms a vicious cycle of patriarchy and domination from generation to generation, while those who fail to adjust and abide could be punished or excluded (Bicchieri & Muldoon, 2011; Dabbagh, 2012; Eriksson, 2011). The social traditions was found to act on youth through the behaviors of society such as comments and gossips that threaten the integrity of youth reputation or their family's social reputation, especially females. Studies have shown that if the stress from social control exceeds the positive effect from social capital and social support, the positive

effect of the later on will being will diminish (Ditzen et al., 2008; Eriksson, 2011; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the study found that there are certain destructive social behaviors such as direct imposition, people's comments and interfering social behaviors, and also the social behaviors that shows no respect to others. All these behaviors were perceived as sources of negativity and discouragement that have negative influence on youth wellbeing. Social inequity and discrimination between social classes, regions and religions was also found to have a negative influence on wellbeing. Finally, the society was found to be a source of negative influence on youth wellbeing through gender based restrictions, and obligations. These old traditions were initially considered as social rules and laws; they were implemented to guide how the society works. Giacaman (2016) stated that youth in the oPt are frustrated by social control, from the patriarchal social structure and traditions, whereby this study revealed that they can't risk their need for social support and a positive social environment and relationships in order to gain freedom. This conflict between freedom and dependence on society is creating a further negative influence on youth wellbeing.

### ***Environmental domain***

The participants indicated that the built environment could be a source of negative influence on the sense of wellbeing for youth in the oPt. Studies have shown that the presence of pollution (whether in land or in air) and noise in the neighborhoods and community is perceived as a negative influence on wellbeing (Gidlöf-Gunnarsson & Öhrström, 2007; Maas et al., 2006; Mabahwi et al., 2014; Pacione, 2003). While, it as stated by the participants and confirmed by the literature that organized, safe and clean neighborhoods and communities in addition to

natural, safe, walkable green sites around the neighborhoods and communities, or in nearby areas to promote wellbeing (Gidlöf-Gunnarsson & Öhrström, 2007; Groenewegen et al., 2006; Milligan & Bingley, 2007).

### ***Demographic variables***

The quantitative component of the study revealed that age is inversely proportionate to youth wellbeing as hypothesized. Younger youth (18-23) have better amounts of wellbeing compared to older youth (24-28). The qualitative component of the studies explained that younger youth are still under the umbrella of their families with less obligations and responsibilities than older youth, whom they are either married and either totally or partially independent and thinking more about the future than the younger youth. This emphasizes the cumulative effects of all domains on wellbeing (Giacaman, 2016). The quantitative component of the study also revealed that youth from age (24- 29) living in urban areas have poorer wellbeing compared to living in camps. This could be somewhat strange, given the better life conditions and the built environment in the cities compared to camps. However, once explored this with key informants, they explained that social ties, social cohesion, trust and safety, are better in camps compared to urban areas. These could be priorities to youth (24-29), whereby they are not priorities for younger youth, explaining why older youth in camps have better wellbeing compared to their counterparts in urban areas. Quantitative findings showed that youth (24-29) are more affected by the socioeconomic dimension compared to youth from age (18-23), as it was stated by the key informants, that the camps are better in terms of costs of living compared to the city such as real estate and bills. Eriksson (2011) explained that the equity gap between social classes is a source

of social anxiety, while participants mentioned that it is more apparent in urban areas compared to camps.

The issue of equity gap could also explain why youth in Gaza Strip have better wellbeing than youth in the West Bank, opposite to what was hypothesized. Several studies showed that equity is an important for wellbeing (Eikemo et al., 2008; World Health Organization, 2016). In addition to the fact that wellbeing is highly affected by social comparison at all levels (Diener & Fujita, 1997; Slade, 2010). Youth reported that in the West Bank there are more unfavorable social comparisons compared to in Gaza Strip, as it was mentioned by a participant that in Gaza Strip the majority of youth face the same life conditions, whereby youth in the West Bank are more heterogeneous in terms of challenges, resources and violations of the military occupations.

### ***Personal domain***

Life dimensions according to this study, do not only determine youth wellbeing in the present moment, but also retrospectively. Life dimensions cannot be separated from youth personal characteristics and habits that influence their wellbeing. While, research has shown that youth personal characteristics affect their wellbeing (Diener et al., 2003; Masten et al., 2004; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017). It was found that personal attributes such as purposefulness, determination, contentment, gratitude, awareness, spirituality and hope, combined with positive behavior, habits and activities such as hobbies, physical activity, good diet, sports, and reading, promotes wellbeing through promoting adaptive and relieving stress strategies, all these were confirmed by previous studies (Elder et al., 2003; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017; Segerstrom et al., 2017; Slade, 2010).

From early childhood till adulthood periods, this study found that youth were and still are molded by the external contextual environment, via upbringing, learning, socializing and experience, which have important implications on personal wellbeing and success, as several studies referred (Arnett, 2000; Howard et al., 2010; Roisman et al., 2004). These personal factors were found to either moderate or exaggerate the influence of the external challenges or stressors on wellbeing. The mechanism was explained by several studies, which is through either being successful or failing to develop coping strategies and positive habits and activities that promote wellbeing (Diener et al., 2003; Li et al., 2014; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017).

Moreover, youth wellbeing was found to be determined by the present living experience with all the accompanied feelings and emotions gained from the interaction with the surrounding environment. However, past childhood experiences and events cannot be detached, and they too can predict wellbeing. For example, studies have shown that all forms of childhood abuse have negative implications on youth wellbeing (Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017). In that, the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental influences cannot be separated from the personal factors, they commutatively through the life course play an important role in the development these personal factors that in turn influence youth wellbeing (Barber, 2015; Elder et al., 2003; Nurius et al., 2015).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

---

The objective physical health signs of youth may appear good in general. However, using subjective wellbeing as a tool of youth's own assessment for their health, the results are different. Youth face many kinds of challenges, pressures and obstacles in their environment. Considering the critical and sensitive period of life, they are vulnerable to deterioration in their mental health and wellbeing. Youth are going through a period of stress and uncertainties because they are expected to become independent and responsible full grown adults in a short period of time.

Wellbeing is not only important for youth health and success at the individual level, but also at the national level. Youth are the foundation of the future any country, nevertheless, in the oPt they suffer from a challenging and discouraging contextual environment that hinder their wellbeing which mean their future physical, mental, social and functional wellbeing.

This study provided information about youth wellbeing in the oPt. A quantitative generalizable findings complemented with detailed and thorough qualitative findings, describing wellbeing and its determinants, from the perspective of the youth themselves, in an endeavor to create a full picture of one of the most fundamental and essential aspect of good life and good health.

Unfortunately, the picture is somber.

Youth in the oPt, as they recounted, are exposed to a high amounts of stress, pressure, tension or whatever this negative force or influence on wellbeing is called. This negative influence arrives from several life dimensions, the military occupation in particular, as a primary source of negative influence on youth wellbeing; besides the internal political, socioeconomic and

sociocultural dimensions. These dimension where deemed to harbor negative influences on youth wellbeing, mainly through imposing strict control that impede youth freedom and opportunities necessary for their wellbeing. In addition to the wide gaps that separate politicians and youth, adults or elders and youth, even female youth and male youth. All these gaps are disfavoring youth and hindering their wellbeing. Inequity, injustice and discrimination, in spite of being a national issue and not specific to youth, but they further amplify the negative influence in these dimensions, favoring people on the account of other people and lowering their wellbeing, and youth are the victims. The distribution of resources and challenges in these dimensions should be a topic for future research in the oPt.

For the status quo to change, for the better, the supportive environment for youth should start from all directions and in all domains. From up to the bottom, first, there should be an intensified and concerted advocacy, local and international, against the violations of military occupation as a root cause of poor wellbeing. Second, promoting youth inclusion in policy making to understand and give more attention to their needs and appropriately tailor policies accordingly. Third, reduce corruption, cronyism (wasta) and increase integrity, accountability and transparency. Forth, promotion of acceptance and freedom through policies and social institutions. Finally, from bottom to up, to strengthen and empower youth, as they themselves take part in reforming the social, economic and the educational system, as they have a very important role in promoting wellbeing for the future generations.

# **Limitations**

---

The limitations in the quantitative phase are: first, the survey was not intended to explore youth wellbeing, so it didn't include variables that specifically suspected to influence youth wellbeing. Second, the quantitative data didn't include any question about the Israeli military occupation, so its effect on youth wellbeing could not be quantified. Third, the survey does not include youth in Jerusalem, while they constitute a significant number of youth in the oPt.

The limitations of the qualitative phase are: first, the focus groups were organized by youth institutions and this could pose a limitation in the selection of youth. Youth participants in the focus groups are those who are active or volunteering in these youth institutions. Second, the focus groups that were conducted in Gaza Strip were performed by an outside researcher, which could affect the data through the probing process. Third, the sample for the interviews was reached through snowballing with connections with the researcher or connections with students at Birzeit University, which could be confined with certain characteristics. Finally, the participant of the interview from Gaza strip is a student in Birzeit University and is living in Ramallah in the West Bank.

# References

- Abu-Rmeileh, N. M., Hammoudeh, W., Mataria, A., Husseini, A., Khawaja, M., Shannon, H. S., . . . Giacaman, R. (2011). Health-related quality of life of Gaza Palestinians in the aftermath of the winter 2008–09 Israeli attack on the Strip. *The European Journal of Public Health, 22*(5), 732-737.
- Abu Fasheh, W. (2013). The Status of Youth in Palestine: Sharek Youth Forum
- Achat, H., Kawachi, I., Spiro, A., DeMolles, D. A., & Sparrow, D. (2000). Optimism and depression as predictors of physical and mental health functioning: the Normative Aging Study. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 22*(2), 127-130.
- Alkhalili, N. (2017). Between Sumud and Submission: Palestinian Popular Practices on the Land in the Edge Areas of Jerusalem.
- Alwerthan, T. A. (2016). *The Consequences of wasta (favoritism and nepotism) on individuals' psychological well-being from educators' perspectives*. University of Rochester.
- Arnett, J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American psychologist, 55*(5), 469.
- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*: Oxford University Press.
- Arnett, J. J., Žukauskienė, R., & Sugimura, K. (2014). The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18–29 years: implications for mental health. *The Lancet Psychiatry, 1*(7), 569-576.
- Ayyash-Abdo, H., & Alamuddin, R. (2007). Predictors of subjective well-being among college youth in Lebanon. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 147*(3), 265-284.
- Barber, B. K. (2015). Political Conflict and Youth: A Long-Term View. *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*.
- Bicchieri, C., & Muldoon, R. (2011). Social norms.
- Catterberg, G., & Moreno, A. (2006). The individual bases of political trust: Trends in new and established democracies. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 18*(1), 31-48.
- Chang, E. C., & Farrehi, A. S. (2001). Optimism/pessimism and information-processing styles: can their influences be distinguished in predicting psychological adjustment? *Personality and Individual Differences, 31*(4), 555-562.
- Chida, Y., & Steptoe, A. (2008). Positive psychological well-being and mortality: a quantitative review of prospective observational studies. *Psychosomatic medicine, 70*(7), 741-756.
- Costanza, R., Fisher, B., Ali, S., Beer, C., Bond, L., Boumans, R., . . . Farley, J. (2007). Quality of life: An approach integrating opportunities, human needs, and subjective well-being. *Ecological economics, 61*(2), 267-276.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*: Sage publications.
- Dabbagh, N. (2012). Behind the statistics: The ethnography of suicide in Palestine. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry, 36*(2), 286-305.
- Das, J., Do, Q.-T., Friedman, J., McKenzie, D., & Scott, K. (2007). Mental health and poverty in developing countries: Revisiting the relationship. *Social science & medicine, 65*(3), 467-480.
- de Cates, A., Stranges, S., Blake, A., & Weich, S. (2015). Mental well-being: an important outcome for mental health services? : RCP.

- De Moortel, D., Palència, L., Artazcoz, L., Borrell, C., & Vanroelen, C. (2015). Neo-Marxian social class inequalities in the mental well-being of employed men and women: The role of European welfare regimes. *Social science & medicine*, *128*, 188-200.
- De Vogli, R. (2004). Status Syndrome: How Your Social Standing Directly Affects Your Health and Life Expectancy. *Bmj*, *329*(7462), 408.
- DeNeve, K. M., & Cooper, H. (1998). The happy personality: a meta-analysis of 137 personality traits and subjective well-being. *Psychological bulletin*, *124*(2), 197.
- Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2002). Will money increase subjective well-being? *Social Indicators Research*, *57*(2), 119-169.
- Diener, E., Diener, M., & Diener, C. (2009). Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations *Culture and well-being* (pp. 43-70): Springer.
- Diener, E., & Fujita, F. (1997). Social comparisons and subjective well-being.
- Diener, E., Lucas, R. E., & Scollon, C. N. (2006). Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of well-being. *American psychologist*, *61*(4), 305.
- Diener, E., & Oishi, S. (2005). The nonobvious social psychology of happiness. *Psychological Inquiry*, *16*(4), 162-167.
- Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Lucas, R. E. (2003). Personality, culture, and subjective well-being: Emotional and cognitive evaluations of life. *Annual review of psychology*, *54*(1), 403-425.
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of well-being. *Psychological science in the public interest*, *5*(1), 1-31.
- Diener, E., Suh, E., & Oishi, S. (1997). Recent findings on subjective well-being. *Indian journal of clinical psychology*, *24*, 25-41.
- Ditzen, B., Schmidt, S., Strauss, B., Nater, U. M., Ehlert, U., & Heinrichs, M. (2008). Adult attachment and social support interact to reduce psychological but not cortisol responses to stress. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, *64*(5), 479-486.
- Dodge, R., Daly, A. P., Huyton, J., & Sanders, L. D. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing. *International journal of wellbeing*, *2*(3).
- Downs, A., Boucher, L. A., Campbell, D. G., & Polyakov, A. (2017). Using the WHO–5 Well-Being Index to Identify College Students at Risk for Mental Health Problems. *Journal of College Student Development*, *58*(1), 113-117.
- Economist Intelligence Unit. (2010). Democracy index 2010: Democracy in retreat London: Economist Intelligence Unit
- Eikemo, T. A., Bambra, C., Judge, K., & Ringdal, K. (2008). Welfare state regimes and differences in self-perceived health in Europe: a multilevel analysis. *Social science & medicine*, *66*(11), 2281-2295.
- Elder, G. H., Johnson, M. K., & Crosnoe, R. (2003). The emergence and development of life course theory *Handbook of the life course* (pp. 3-19): Springer.
- Ereaut, G., & Whiting, R. (2008). What do we mean by 'wellbeing'? and why might it matter?
- Eriksson, M. (2011). Social capital and health—implications for health promotion. *Global Health Action*, *4*(1), 5611.
- Evans, S. D., & Prilleltensky, I. (2007). Youth and democracy: Participation for personal, relational, and collective well-being. *Journal of community psychology*, *35*(6), 681-692.
- Farver-Vestergaard, I., & Ruggeri, K. (2017). Setting National Policy Agendas in Light of the Denmark Results for Well-being. *Jama Psychiatry*, *74*(8), 773-774.
- Fleche, S., Smith, C., & Sorsa, P. (2011). Exploring determinants of subjective wellbeing in OECD countries.
- Gannon, N., & Ranzijn, R. (2005). Does emotional intelligence predict unique variance in life satisfaction beyond IQ and personality? *Personality and Individual Differences*, *38*(6), 1353-1364.
- Giacaman, R. (2016). People in danger: effects on health of the 2014 Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip.

- Giacaman, R., Abu-Rmeileh, N. M., Husseini, A., Saab, H., & Boyce, W. (2007). Humiliation: the invisible trauma of war for Palestinian youth. *Public health, 121*(8), 563-571.
- Giacaman, R., Khatib, R., Shabaneh, L., Ramlawi, A., Sabri, B., Sabatinelli, G., . . . Laurance, T. (2009). Health status and health services in the occupied Palestinian territory. *The Lancet, 373*(9666), 837-849.
- Giacaman, R., Mataria, A., Nguyen-Gillham, V., Safieh, R. A., Stefanini, A., & Chatterji, S. (2007). Quality of life in the Palestinian context: An inquiry in war-like conditions. *Health policy, 81*(1), 68-84.
- Giacaman, R., Mitwalli, S., & Hammoudeh, W. (2017). Linking Social Capital: Political Confidence among Youth in Occupied Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) *POWER2YOUTH*. West Bank, Palestine Institute of Community and Public Health (ICPH), Birzeit University.
- Giacaman, R., Rabaia, Y., Nguyen-Gillham, V., Batniji, R., Punamäki, R.-L., & Summerfield, D. (2011). Mental health, social distress and political oppression: The case of the occupied Palestinian territory. *Global public health, 6*(5), 547-559.
- Giacaman, R., Shannon, H. S., Saab, H., Arya, N., & Boyce, W. (2007). Individual and collective exposure to political violence: Palestinian adolescents coping with conflict. *The European Journal of Public Health, 17*(4), 361-368.
- Gidlöf-Gunnarsson, A., & Öhrström, E. (2007). Noise and well-being in urban residential environments: The potential role of perceived availability to nearby green areas. *Landscape and Urban Planning, 83*(2), 115-126.
- Goldin, N. (2014). *The global youth wellbeing index*: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Groenewegen, P. P., Van den Berg, A. E., De Vries, S., & Verheij, R. A. (2006). Vitamin G: effects of green space on health, well-being, and social safety. *BMC public health, 6*(1), 149.
- Hall, T., Krahn, G., Horner-Johnson, W., & Lamb, G. (2011). Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Expert Panel on Health Measurement, "Examining functional content in widely used health-related quality of life scales,". *Rehabilitation Psychology, 56*(2), 94-99.
- Harju, B. L., & Bolen, L. M. (1998). The Effects of Optimisin on Coping and Perceived Quality of Life of College Students. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 13*(2), 185.
- Harris, K. M. (2010). An integrative approach to health. *Demography, 47*(1), 1-22.
- Harsha, N., Ziq, L., Ghandour, R., & Giacaman, R. (2016). Well-being and associated factors among adults in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). *Health and quality of life outcomes, 14*(1), 122.
- Harvey, D. (2003). Young people in a globalizing world. *World Youth Report, New York*.
- Helliwell, J. F. (2003). How's life? Combining individual and national variables to explain subjective well-being. *Economic modelling, 20*(2), 331-360.
- Høigilt, J. (2013). The Palestinian spring that was not: The youth and political activism in the occupied Palestinian territories. *Arab Studies Quarterly, 35*(4), 343-359.
- Howard, A. L., Galambos, N. L., & Krahn, H. J. (2010). Paths to success in young adulthood from mental health and life transitions in emerging adulthood. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 34*(6), 538-546.
- Howell, R. T., Kern, M. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2007). Health benefits: Meta-analytically determining the impact of well-being on objective health outcomes. *Health Psychology Review, 1*(1), 83-136.
- Hudson, J. (2006). Institutional trust and subjective well-being across the EU. *Kyklos, 59*(1), 43-62.
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research, 110*(3), 837-861.
- Ibrahim, A. K., Kelly, S. J., Adams, C. E., & Glazebrook, C. (2013). A systematic review of studies of depression prevalence in university students. *Journal of psychiatric research, 47*(3), 391-400.
- Jabr, S., & Berger, E. (2016). The Survival and Well-Being of the Palestinian People Under Occupation *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies* (pp. 529-543): Springer.

- Jebril, M. A. (2018). *Academic Life Under Occupation: The Impact on Educationalists at Gaza's Universities*. University of Cambridge.
- Kahneman, D., & Krueger, A. B. (2006). Developments in the measurement of subjective well-being. *The journal of economic perspectives*, 20(1), 3-24.
- Keyes, C. L. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 207-222.
- Keyes, C. L., Shmotkin, D., & Ryff, C. D. (2002). Optimizing well-being: the empirical encounter of two traditions. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 82(6), 1007.
- Koivumaa-Honkanen, H., Honkanen, R., Viinamäki, H., Heikkilä, K., Kaprio, J., & Koskenvuo, M. (2000). Self-reported life satisfaction and 20-year mortality in healthy Finnish adults. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 152(10), 983-991.
- Koivumaa-Honkanen, H., Koskenvuo, M., Honkanen, R., Viinamäki, H., Heikkilä, K., & Kaprio, J. (2004). Life dissatisfaction and subsequent work disability in an 11-year follow-up. *Psychological medicine*, 34(2), 221-228.
- Larsen, R. J., & Eid, M. (2008). Diener and the science of subjective well-being.
- Li, B., Ma, H., Guo, Y., Xu, F., Yu, F., & Zhou, Z. (2014). Positive psychological capital: A new approach to social support and subjective well-being. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal*, 42(1), 135-144.
- Lucas, R. E., Clark, A. E., Georgellis, Y., & Diener, E. (2004). Unemployment alters the set point for life satisfaction. *Psychological science*, 15(1), 8-13.
- Luthans, F., Avolio, B. J., Avey, J. B., & Norman, S. M. (2007). Positive psychological capital: Measurement and relationship with performance and satisfaction. *Personnel psychology*, 60(3), 541-572.
- Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? : American Psychological Association.
- Maas, J., Verheij, R. A., Groenewegen, P. P., De Vries, S., & Spreeuwenberg, P. (2006). Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation? *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 60(7), 587-592.
- Mabahwi, N. A. B., Leh, O. L. H., & Omar, D. (2014). Human health and wellbeing: Human health effect of air pollution. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 153, 221-229.
- Masten, A. S., Burt, K. B., Roisman, G. I., Obradović, J., Long, J. D., & Tellegen, A. (2004). Resources and resilience in the transition to adulthood: Continuity and change. *Development and psychopathology*, 16(4), 1071-1094.
- McDowell, I. (2010). Measures of self-perceived well-being. *Journal of psychosomatic research*, 69(1), 69-79.
- McKee-Ryan, F., Song, Z., Wanberg, C. R., & Kinicki, A. J. (2005). Psychological and physical well-being during unemployment: a meta-analytic study. *Journal of applied psychology*, 90(1), 53.
- Miller, K. E., & Rasmussen, A. (2010). War exposure, daily stressors, and mental health in conflict and post-conflict settings: bridging the divide between trauma-focused and psychosocial frameworks. *Social science & medicine*, 70(1), 7-16.
- Milligan, C., & Bingley, A. (2007). Restorative places or scary spaces? The impact of woodland on the mental well-being of young adults. *Health & place*, 13(4), 799-811.
- Mokdad, A. H. (2017). The burden of mental disorders in the Eastern Mediterranean region, 1990–2015: findings from the global burden of disease 2015 study. *International Journal of Public Health*. doi: 10.1007/s00038-017-1006-1
- Moore, R. (1997). Youth mental health promotion: A public health perspective. *Youth Studies Australia*, 16(4), 27.

- Newcomb-Anjo, S. E., Barker, E. T., & Howard, A. L. (2017). A person-centered analysis of risk factors that compromise wellbeing in emerging adulthood. *Journal of youth and adolescence, 46*(4), 867-883.
- Nurius, P. S., Prince, D. M., & Rocha, A. (2015). Cumulative disadvantage and youth well-being: a multi-domain examination with life course implications. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal, 32*(6), 567-576.
- Pacione, M. (2003). Urban environmental quality and human wellbeing—a social geographical perspective. *Landscape and Urban Planning, 65*(1-2), 19-30.
- Park, N. (2004). The role of subjective well-being in positive youth development. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 591*(1), 25-39.
- Patel, V., Flisher, A. J., Hetrick, S., & McGorry, P. (2007). Mental health of young people: a global public-health challenge. *The Lancet, 369*(9569), 1302-1313.
- Proctor, C. (2014). Subjective Well-Being (SWB) *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (pp. 6437-6441): Springer.
- Reeskens, T., & Vandecasteele, L. (2017). Economic hardship and well-being: Examining the relative role of individual resources and welfare state effort in resilience against economic hardship. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 18*(1), 41-62.
- Roisman, G. I., Masten, A. S., Coatsworth, J. D., & Tellegen, A. (2004). Salient and emerging developmental tasks in the transition to adulthood. *Child development, 75*(1), 123-133.
- Rutter, M. (2006). Implications of resilience concepts for scientific understanding. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1094*(1), 1-12.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual review of psychology, 52*(1), 141-166.
- Ryff, C. D., & Keyes, C. L. M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 69*(4), 719.
- Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1992). Effects of optimism on psychological and physical well-being: Theoretical overview and empirical update. *Cognitive therapy and research, 16*(2), 201-228.
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (2001). Optimism, pessimism, and psychological well-being. *Optimism and pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice, 1*, 189-216.
- Schütte, S., Chastang, J.-F., Parent-Thirion, A., Vermeulen, G., & Niedhammer, I. (2014). Social inequalities in psychological well-being: a European comparison. *Community mental health journal, 50*(8), 987-990.
- Schwarz, N., & Strack, F. (1999). Reports of subjective well-being: Judgmental processes and their methodological implications. *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology, 7*, 61-84.
- Seegerstrom, S. C., Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2017). Optimism *The happy mind: Cognitive contributions to well-being* (pp. 195-212): Springer.
- Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction *Flow and the foundations of positive psychology* (pp. 279-298): Springer.
- Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life course perspective. *Annual review of sociology, 26*(1), 667-692.
- Sisask, M., Värnik, A., Kolves, K., Konstabel, K., & Wasserman, D. (2008). Subjective psychological well-being (WHO-5) in assessment of the severity of suicide attempt. *Nordic Journal of Psychiatry, 62*(6), 431-435.
- Sitta, S. H. A. (2016). Palestinian People: Hundred Years of Struggle to Survive *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies* (pp. 505-528): Springer.
- Slade, M. (2010). Mental illness and well-being: the central importance of positive psychology and recovery approaches. *BMC health services research, 10*(1), 26.

Stroud, C., Walker, L. R., Davis, M., & Irwin, C. E. (2015). *Investing in the health and well-being of young adults*: National Academies Press

Suldo, S. M., & Shaffer, E. J. (2008). Looking beyond psychopathology: The dual-factor model of mental health in youth. *School Psychology Review*, 37(1), 52.

Tanner, J. L., & Arnett, J. J. (2011). Presenting “emerging adulthood”: What makes it developmentally distinctive. *Debating emerging adulthood: Stage or process*, 13-30.

The United Nations. Definition of Youth from <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

Topp, C. W., Østergaard, S. D., Søndergaard, S., & Bech, P. (2015). The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: a systematic review of the literature. *Psychotherapy and psychosomatics*, 84(3), 167-176.

Transparency International. (2015). Asset Declarations in Palestine Illicit Enrichment and Conflicts of Interest of Public Officials Transparency International.

Utter, J., Denny, S., Peiris-John, R., Moselen, E., Dyson, B., & Clark, T. (2017). Family Meals and Adolescent Emotional Well-Being: Findings From a National Study. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 49(1), 67-72. e61.

Veenhoven, R. (2000). Well-being in the welfare state: Level not higher, distribution not more equitable. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 2(1), 91-125.

Veenhoven, R. (2007). Subjective measures of well-being *Human Well-Being* (pp. 214-239): Springer.

Veenhoven, R. (2008). Sociological theories of subjective well-being. *The science of subjective well-being*, 9, 44-61.

World Health Organization. (1998). WHO (Five) well-being index (1998 version). Available at: [www.who-5.org](http://www.who-5.org).

World Health Organization. (2004). Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, practice: Summary report.

World Health Organization. (2008). *Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health: Commission on Social Determinants of Health final report*: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2014). *Social determinants of mental health*: World Health Organization.

World Health Organization. (2016). Global report on urban health: equitable healthier cities for sustainable development

# Appendix 1

	<i>Code from the questionnaire</i>	<i>Question</i>	<i>Answers (recoded)</i>
<b><i>Socio-demographic variables</i></b>			
Age	AD07	What is your age?	(continuous)
Gender	AD08		Female
			Male
Marital status	HR08	What is (...) marital status ?	Currently single
			Currently married
Education	PW05	What is (was) the highest education completed	Secondary and above
			Less than secondary
Place of residence	QI03	Household address	Urban
			Rural
			Camp
Employment	Work		
Region			West Bank
			Gaza
<b><i>Political Confidence questions</i></b>			
Palestinian security services	TR18		
The police	TR19		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all</li> </ul>

The courts	TR20	How much confidence do you have in....?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A little</li> <li>• Quite a lot</li> <li>• A great deal</li> </ul>
The central government	TR21		
Local government	TR22		
Political parties	TR23		
<b><i>Trust Scale</i></b>			
Extended family	TR05	How much you trust..?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No trust at all</li> <li>• Not very much</li> <li>• Somewhat</li> <li>• Completely</li> </ul>
Neighbors	TR06		
People knowing personally	TR08		
People you meet for the first time	TR09		
<b><i>Personal freedom</i></b>			
To express your ideas and opinions at home	OA38	To what extent do you feel freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not at all free</li> <li>• Just a little free</li> <li>• Fairly free</li> <li>• Completely free</li> </ul>
To express your ideas and opinions among friends	OA39		
To express your ideas and opinions in your community	OA40		
To visit places you like	OA44		
Over the way your life turns	TR02	How much freedom of choice and	

out		control do you feel you have ...?	
Opinions are taken seriously by other adult family member	FR11	To what extent do you feel that..?	
<b><i>Perception of economic situation</i></b>			
Economic situation of household	HD04	Consider the total economic situation of your household. How would you describe it by [national] standards?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Below average</li> <li>• Average</li> <li>• Above average</li> </ul>
Economic situation compared to 12 months ago	HD05	How is the current economic situation of your household when compared to 12 months ago?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Much worse</li> <li>• Somewhat worse</li> <li>• About the same</li> <li>• better</li> </ul>
Satisfaction with housing	HD03	In general, how satisfied are you [and the household] with the housing conditions? Are you...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very unsatisfied</li> <li>• Rather unsatisfied</li> <li>• Rather satisfied</li> <li>• Very satisfied</li> </ul>
Satisfaction with neighborhood	SP11	Overall, to what extent are you satisfied with your neighborhood? Are you ...	
<b><i>Quality of governance</i></b>			
Democratic governance	OA31	How democratic would you say that Palestine is governed? Is it ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not or so democratic</li> <li>• Yes or fairly Democratic</li> </ul>
Political attention to youth	PP48	Do politicians pay enough attention to issues of relevance to young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>
Satisfaction with governance	OA30	How satisfied are you with how Palestine is governed? Are you...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not Satisfied</li> <li>• Satisfied</li> </ul>

Satisfaction with government to ensure employment	WA02	To what extent are you satisfied with the efforts that the current Government is doing to ensure that young people get employment? Are you ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsatisfied</li> <li>• Satisfied</li> </ul>
<i>Future outlook</i>			
Economic	OA48	If you were to look 5yearsahead/ into the future and compare with the situation today, how do you think the economic development of [country] would be? Do you think the change would be ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very negative</li> <li>• Slightly negative</li> <li>• No Change</li> <li>• Slightly positive</li> <li>• Very positive</li> </ul>
Political	OA49	If you look 5 years ahead and compare with the situation today, how do you think [country] would have developed with regard to its political system? Would the change be...	
Personal	OA50	If you were to look 5 years ahead and compare your living conditions with the present situation, how do you think the change would be? Would it be ...	

# Appendix 2

## Factor analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Confidence in the armed forces reversed	.832						
Confidence in the police reversed	.872						
Confidence in the courts reversed	.826						
Confidence in the government	.796						
Confidence in the local government reversed	.713						
Confidence in the political parties reversed	.468						
Economic Situation of household by national standards						.704	
Current economic situation comparing to 12 months ago reversed						.618	
satisfaction with housing reversed						.715	
Satisfaction with neighborhood reversed						.583	
Trust in extended family reversed					.641		

Trust in neighbors reversed					.802		
Trust in people knowing personally reversed					.570		
Trust in people meeting for the first time reversed					.588		
Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions at home			.751				
Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions among friends			.707				
Feeling about freedom in expressing ideas and opinions in community			.596				
Feeling about freedom in visiting places			.574				
Freedom of choice reversed			.533				
Feeling about opinions being taken seriously by other adult family members reversed			.571				
Perception of the economic development after 5 years				.830			
Perception of the political development after 5 years				.833			
Perception of the living conditions development after 5 years				.823			

satisfaction with governmental efforts to ensure employment of youth recoded							.480
Satisfaction with governance in country reversed							.609
Politicians pay enough attention to issues of relevance to youth							.496
Perception of youth if there is Democracy in Palestine							.641
cheerful and in good spirits reversed		.773					
calm and relaxed reversed		.809					
active and vigorous reversed		.822					
fresh and rested reversed		.774					
daily life filled with things that interest me reversed		.717					

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.