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The Political Economy of Palestinian Women's Labour Market Participation

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1. Introduction

Palestinian women's formal labour market participation has been an intriguing phenomenon, mainly due to its striking features. These include: one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world, yet a highly fluctuating one. This is particularly odd in light of the fact that Palestinian women have high educational rates. By 2000, Palestinian girls had higher school enrolments rates and lower dropout rates than boys. Girls' primary and secondary school enrolment ratios are also higher than boys within the entire MENA region (UNESCO, 2009). At the same time, Palestinian society is not as conservative as other neighbouring countries (including Saudi Arabia), yet female labour force participation rates are lower amongst Palestinian women.

Given this context, the chapter will consider the supply and demand determinants of female labour market participation in order to provide a better understanding of the reasons behind the low participation rates of Palestinian women. In terms of organisation, this chapter starts by providing a brief literature review of the determinants of participation in the labour market. Section 3 then moves to examine the characteristics of women's participation and employment in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). The chapter then focuses on the political, economic and social barriers facing women in the labour market.¹

2. Conceptual framework and literature review

The literature has examined a number of factors that attempt to explain the patterns and nature of female labour force participation rates.

Some of these factors are economic; others are institutional, historical/political and attitudinal. This chapter will focus on the economic determinants.

Within the economic literature, analysis has focused on the supply and demand sides of the labour market in understanding women's involvement (or lack of) in the formal labour market. Factors on the supply side (workers) include variables that change preferences (such as the changing role of women over time), responsibilities in the family and home (the number of pre-school children in the household, and the time-cost of producing household goods and services), the income and employment of other family members (such as husbands or fathers), and other family assets. On the other hand, factors that affect the demand for labour (employers) include sectoral changes (such as the rise in clerical jobs for women or the expansion of the service sector in general) and changes in technology that reduce the importance of male physical strength.

The income and employment of family members are important in understanding women's involvement in the labour market. For example, a rise in husband's/family's wage or family income may encourage or discourage women to become involved in the labour market. Which effect dominates cannot be decided a priori, and evidence from around the world provides mixed results.

(Dasgupta and Goldar, 2005)

Human capital factors are important determinants of the probability of labour force participation of women, including education, training and experience (Nakamura and Nakamura, 1985). Another determinant of female labour force participation is the presence of small children in the household (particularly pre-school children) (Cleveland et al., 1996). Theoretically, the relationship between fertility/presence of young children in the family is ambiguous. Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos (1989) explain that a relationship of simultaneity might exist between fertility and work. That is, more children could mean more work for women, either directly (more farming to feed the children) or indirectly (more paid work to support them). However, in the extensive empirical literature on female labour supply, the presence of pre-school children has been identified as likely to discourage labour force participation (Blau and Robins, 1988).

In addition to personal characteristics, historical transformations, gender, patriarchy and demand-side factors are fundamental in

explaining any woman's experience in the labour market – particularly that of a group of women living under settler-colonial conditions.

Within this framework, feminists emphasise the notion of gender as a tool of analysis to understand women's experience in the labour market. Gender is viewed as the social meaning given to biological differences between the sexes; it refers to cultural and social constructs rather than biological givens. From this perspective, household decision-making, patriarchy, division of labour and allocation of resources become important factors in understanding women's participation experience. The concern is in seeing how the household and the rest of the economy are articulated. How do households respond to external economic pressures such as changes in the labour market? How is labour allocated and reallocated? These questions have to do with the gendered division of labour in the household, household labour allocations (market and non-market), and the intra-household allocation of income and resources (MacDonald, 1995).

Demand-side factors are another important determinant of women's participation (Goldin, 1994; Standing, 1999). Explanations of female labour force participation experience need to take into account the structure of employment and incentives. Large differentials in wage rates between men and women would have an impact, by discouraging the group with the lower expected wage. These differences are related to the job structure (sectoral distribution across the economy). Female labour force participation responds to the availability of employment, which is a demand-side constraint. The availability of jobs within a certain market determines women's likelihood of participation in the labour market. From this perspective, the condition that might impact women's labour force participation is the economy and the size of the various sectors (Tansel, 2001).

Within the Palestinian context, much attention in the literature has been paid to women's participation experience, particularly since the early 1990s. Literature can be classified into two main strands; the first examines the supply side of the labour market by focusing on the determinants of participation from a neoclassical economic perspective with a view towards understanding the factors that shape women's decisions to engage in the labour market. These studies utilise statistical techniques and raw data to shed light on women's economic experiences. The second strand of studies is centred on a socioeconomic and political understanding of women's decisions to participate in the labour market, and aims to provide policy measures to enhance women's involvement in the labour market. These studies usually utilise qualitative

techniques in order to provide evidence of the barriers restricting women's greater involvement in the economy. However, less attention has been paid in the literature to the structure and determinants of the components of participation (in other words, employment and unemployment), which we believe are highly significant in understanding these barriers.

Using data collected by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Daoud (1999) examines women's participation in 1997. He finds that years of schooling are an insignificant factor in explaining women's decision to join the labour force. His study also finds that the higher the average male wage, the higher the participation rate of women. In other words, women's participation is positively correlated with men's wages. He suggests this to be so because higher-earning men usually get married to highly educated women, who often participate in the labour market. However, the finding that education is an insignificant factor stands out in the literature on Palestinian women's labour participation, since other studies report a strong positive link between women's labour supply and education.

Olmsted (1996, 2001) collected data on women in the Bethlehem area and estimated participation equations for these women. Her analysis utilised variables such as refugee status, age, years of education, marital status and number of children to investigate their impact on the likelihood of women's participation. Schooling was modelled as a parental decision, which, in turn, determined labour force participation. Her findings indicate that women with low education were less present in the labour market. However, a comparison between refugee and non-refugee women revealed that refugee women made substantial gains in education, which led to higher labour force participation amongst this group of women. Non-refugee women lagged behind in their education and subsequently in their labour force participation.

Another study, conducted by Al-Botmeh and Sotnik (2007), investigates the determinants of labour force participation for women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGs) using PCBS data over three time periods: before, during and after the second Intifada. The findings of this study confirm the importance of education as a determinant of participation. In addition, women from households depending on subsistence farming are more likely to participate in the labour force than women depending on other main sources of income. Further, women from the northern West Bank region have the greatest odds of participating compared to the rest of the WBGs.

Other studies by Hammami (1997, 2001), Shabaneh and Al-Saleh (2009), Mataria and Barghouti (2007) and Daoud (2005) all tackle the

issue of women's participation, employment and remuneration in the labour market. The findings of these studies point towards the importance of a number of variables in explaining women's participation in the labour force, including education, number of children and family income or men's earnings. Some of these studies also expose the extent of wage discrimination against women in the labour market. However, although these studies provide a valuable insight into the factors determining women's participation, they mostly focus on the supply side. A gap hence exists in the literature in relation to the role of demand-side conditions of the labour market.

Another set of studies touched upon the impact of the gender division of labour on women's participation in the labour market International Women Studies, Birzeit University (IWS, 1999; Hammami, 2001; Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007; World Bank, 2010). These studies emphasised the negative role of patriarchal tendencies within Palestinian society on women's participation.

Finally, a common denominator between all studies reviewed is the devastating role of Israel's occupation on women's involvement in the labour market. This includes impact in terms of land confiscation, limiting access to other resources such as water, and causing movement restrictions and closures of borders. Israel's colonisation has had a more profound impact on women compared to men, because it worked hand in hand with patriarchy to justify women's absence in the labour market and, at other times, women's inferior position within this market (Al-Botmeh, 2013).

3. Women's labour market experience: Main trends

Palestinian women's engagement in the labour market is amongst the lowest in the world. In 2013, the female labour force participation rate in the oPt stood at 17.3 per cent, compared to 23 per cent in the Arab region and 51 per cent in the rest of the world (World Bank, 2011).² The participation of women also exhibits a fluctuating trend, which is in contrast to women's experience in the rest of the world, where female participation rates have been rising steadily in both developed and developing countries.

Despite the fluctuation in women's involvement in the labour market, their participation rates rose over the period under consideration, compared to men. On the other hand, men's labour force participation rate in 2011 was at the same level as its 1996 level (68.8 per cent in 2011 compared to 68.7 per cent in 1996). The rise in women's participation trends is a significant development, despite its small magnitude (Figure 9.1).

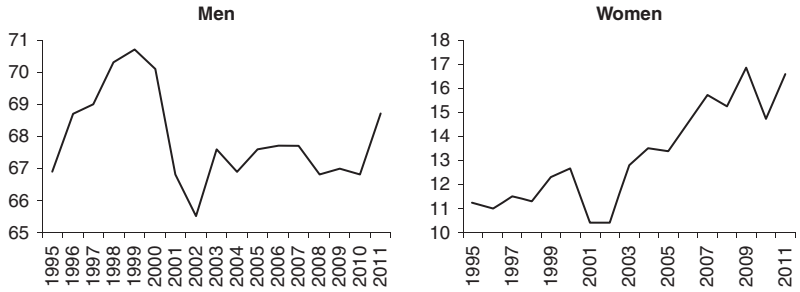


Figure 9.1 Men and women’s participation rates in occupied Palestinian territory (1995–2012)

Source: PCBS, LFS (several years).

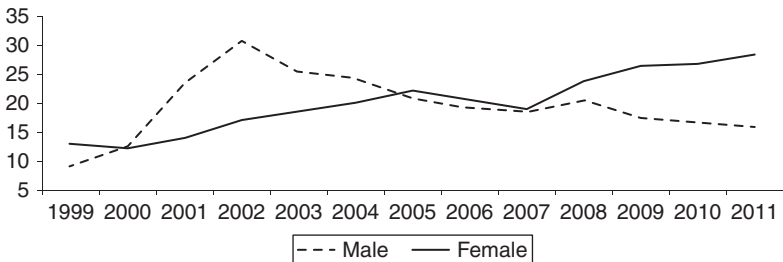


Figure 9.2 Unemployment rates for men and women (%)

Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

Although women have joined the labour market at a higher rate than men in the past ten years, these rising rates translated into a higher increase in unemployment compared to employment. This is illustrated more clearly in Figure 9.2, which shows the unemployment rates for men and women. Women’s unemployment rates have continued to increase since 1999, while men’s have increased up until 2002, then declined steadily. In other words, despite the fact that there has been a rise in women’s working age population and labour force participation, women were more likely than men to become unemployed.

Palestinian women are highly concentrated in two sectors of the economy and virtually non-existent in another two. When such a case arises, the literature identifies this as a form of horizontal segregation (Figure 9.3). The two sectors in which women are highly concentrated are agriculture and services. In 2000, agriculture accounted for 34.7 per cent of women’s employment, while the service sector accounted for

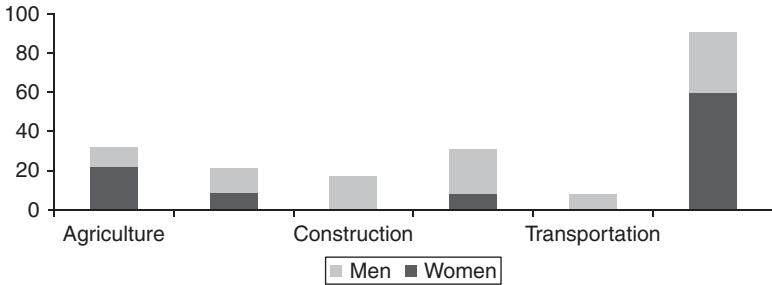


Figure 9.3 Distribution of men and women across economic sectors
 Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

53.9 per cent of this employment. By 2013, agriculture accounted for 22 per cent of women's employment compared to 60 per cent in services. This concentration implies that women do not have equal access to all sectors compared to men. Although this is a worldwide phenomenon, the Palestinian case tends to be extreme. As a result, Palestinian women experience a higher degree of marginalisation in the labour market compared to women in other economies.

More importantly, over the past 17 years, the share of women's employment in the productive sectors (agriculture, manufacturing and construction) continued to decline, while their share of employment in services (services and commerce) rose. In 1996, services accounted for 54.1 per cent of employed women. By 2011, the share of this sector in women's employment had increased to 68.2 per cent (a 14.1 per cent rise). On the other hand, the share of women in the productive sectors (manufacturing, agriculture and construction) declined, from 45.3 per cent in 1996 to 31.2 per cent in 2011 (a 14.1 per cent decline). Employment in the productive sectors is important because these sectors generate long-lasting growth within an economy, hence prospects of further employment can usually be predicted by women's contribution to productive sectors of the economy. This implies that horizontal segregation is actually rising over time, which means that women's prospects for future employment may be negatively affected.

Palestinian women also suffer from high levels of vertical segregation, referring to the difference in earnings between men and women arising from women's inferior position within the labour market. As Figure 9.4 shows, a gap in the real wages of men and women has always existed in the WBGs. Since average wages in Israel were higher than those in the

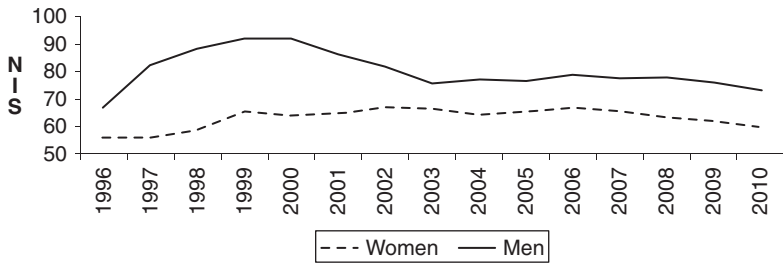


Figure 9.4 Real daily wages for men and women in the WBGS in NIS (1996–2010)

Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

WBGS, this gap was large when the Israeli labour market was opened to the Palestinians. In 1999, the real average daily wage rate for Palestinian male workers was estimated at new Israeli shekel (NIS) 91, compared to NIS 65 for women. In other words, women earned nearly 70 per cent of men's wages. However, following the closure of the Israeli labour market to the vast majority of Palestinians, of which most workers were men,³ the wage gap narrowed. By 2010, men's real daily wages had declined to NIS 73 (a 25 per cent decline), while, in the same year, women's real wage rate was NIS 59 (a 10 per cent decline).

Hence, the narrowing of the wage gap over the years does not represent a decline in the vertical segregation of women in the labour market, for a number of reasons. The first is that the prime driver behind this decline is the reduction in men's wages, resulting from the loss of employment in Israel rather than a more equitable distribution of resources within the local Palestinian labour market. Second, both men and women's real daily wages have declined over time, leaving the population at large worse off in terms of purchasing power and standard of living. Finally, no change has taken place in women's access to senior positions within occupations, which usually translates into better wage rates.

That more women are joining the labour market is supported by the fact that participation rates for women of all age groups have been rising. The highest participation rates amongst women were recorded after 2002 for the 25–44-year-old age group. This means that the prime working age for women in the oPt peaks in this age group.⁴ It also implies that the second Intifada had a profound effect on all age cohorts, who increased their participation.

The percentage rise in the participation rate experienced by all age groups between 1996 and 2011 reflects a number of important

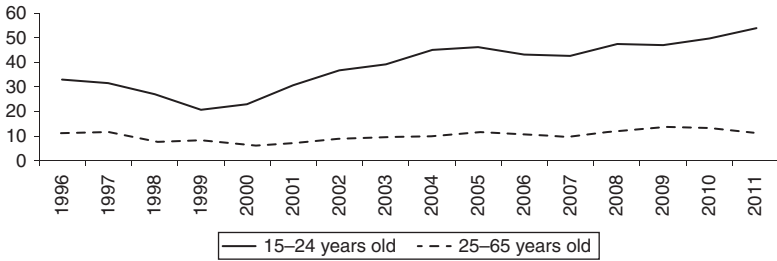


Figure 9.5 Female youth unemployment rates compared to older women (%)
 Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

developments. The first is that more women are remaining in the labour market compared to earlier periods. Second, the rise in women's participation is not only due to the movement of women from younger into older age cohorts, but because women of all age groups who were initially outside the labour market may have entered the market. However, this jump was focused in the prime age groups (25–44 years old) rather in the youngest entrants to the labour market (age group 15–24). This indicates that younger age groups are facing more difficulties in entering the labour market.

Similar to other parts of the region, Palestinian youth face substantially higher rates of unemployment than older workers. As explained earlier, young women are at an even greater disadvantage in the labour market than young men. Figure 9.5 plots the female youth unemployment rate for age group 15–24, compared to women in age group 25–65. It can be noticed that the young women's unemployment rate can reach four times that of other women. This is also true compared to men, where the youth women's unemployment rate is nearly double that of men in the same age group.

At the same time, women with an associate's level of education (13–15 years of education) or higher suffer from disproportionately high levels of unemployment. Young women under the age of 25 with 13–15 years of schooling have nearly 4 times the unemployment rate of women aged 30 or older with the same schooling. These exceedingly unfavourable indicators for younger women compared to older women as well as men, imply that particular attention has to be paid to this group in devising policies to deal with obstacles facing them in the labour market.

At the same time, over the past 17 years, nearly 60 per cent of working-age Palestinian men and women neither participated in any type of recorded economic activity, paid or unpaid, nor were recorded as searching for work. Over time, the percentage of women outside the

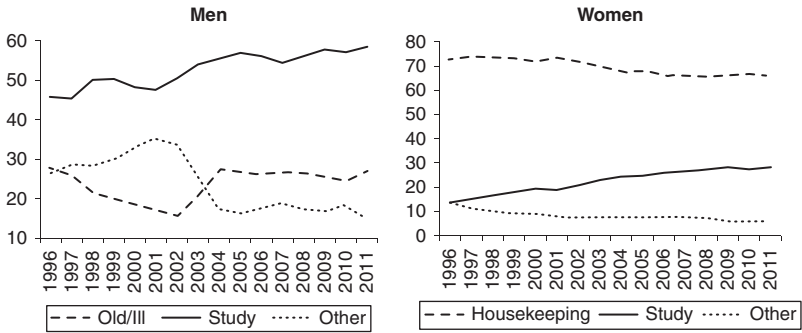


Figure 9.6 Reasons for remaining outside the labour force (%)

Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

labour market has declined, while the percentage of men increased, particularly after 2001/2. The reasons behind remaining outside the labour force, as Figure 9.6 shows, are different for men and women, and are highly reflective of the traditional gender division of labour. Men stay outside the labour force because they are either physically incapable of working, for education purposes or because of losing hope of finding work as a result of political factors. For women, the reasons behind remaining outside the labour force are mainly to do with either education or household duties.

More importantly, it is interesting to observe the change in the trend after 2002, when a relatively larger share of both men and women cited pursuing education as the reason behind remaining outside the labour market. This implies that the economic shocks that took place at the onset of the second Intifada, and the consequent deterioration in standards of living, have pushed both men and women to invest more heavily in human capital. Since their initial dispossession in 1948, Palestinians have used education as a coping mechanism to survive political and economic shocks, a strategy that lives on.

4. Determinants of women's participation in the labour market

4.1 Political factors

Political constraints play a paramount role in restricting women's access and opportunities to work. It is obvious that the imposition of

movement restrictions on Palestinians and the building of the Separation Wall have added further obstacles limiting women's opportunities of moving around the area easily without any risks or dangers. Furthermore, as the occupation policies prohibit the Palestinian Authority (PA) from dealing with everyday basic demands, it becomes difficult and complicated to make demands for gender-aware policies and programmes to be undertaken (Hilal et al., 2008).

Geographical, physical and social fabric ruptures, the consequence of strict checkpoints and permanent closures of entrants and exits to several places of residence, have had a serious impact on Palestinian mobility, particularly that of women. This situation has deprived them of free and easy mobility as well as access to services; it is preventing them from reaching health-care facilities; it is cutting them off from social support once provided by families and kin-related groups; and it is denying them easy access to the workplace.

In 2000, as part of clamping down on the second Intifada, the Israeli government closed its labour market to Palestinian workers from the WBGS (Farsakh, 2005). As a result, the number of Palestinian workers in Israel declined from 135,400 in 1999 (23 per cent of the employed) to 69,270 in 2011 (10 per cent). Since Palestinian workers in Israel have always been predominantly male – 12 per cent of male workers were employed in Israel in 2011, compared to less than 1 per cent of working women – this meant that the economy in the WBGS has become even more competitive for women, which might explain the extremely high unemployment rates for women in the post-second Intifada period.

This situation was compounded by Israel's destruction of substantial parts of the domestic Palestinian economy, including infrastructure, businesses, agricultural lands and farms. According to the World Bank, by 2005, job losses in the labour market amounted to around 100,000, which directly affected the welfare of about 700,000 people, or 20 per cent of the WBGS population (World Bank, 2006). As a result, the World Bank (2006) estimates that those living below the poverty line increased from 20 per cent before the second Intifada, to 37 per cent by December 2001 and to 51 per cent by 2005. By 2011, real per capita GDP, which had fluctuated significantly over these years, remained below its 1999 level.

This devastation of the local economy in the post-second Intifada period means that the local economy was further compressed. The high unemployment rates recorded for women compared to men during this period means that, despite women's high educational rates, the demand side of the labour market presents significant impediments to

women's participation. This partly explains why female participation rates continue to be low, despite their rising trend.

4.2 Economic factors: Demand-side considerations and labour market structure

As indicated by Standing (1978) and Cotter and colleagues (2001), the availability of employment, the structure of this employment and incentives offered by the labour market are important determinants of labour force participation, particularly for women. In practice, demand-side factors have been pivotal in shaping Palestinian women's participation in the labour market throughout most of the twentieth century (Al-Botmeh, 2013). Within this context, the expansion in labour market opportunities along gender lines, large differences in employment opportunities as reflected through male/female dominated sectors, unemployment rates and wage rates have all impacted women's participation decisions over time.

Oppenheimer (1970, 1973) provides an explanation for the link between demand-side factors and patterns of participation of men and women, which rests on the occupational–industrial structure of employment. This approach suggests that the occupational structure can explain part of the level of participation via its effect on relative employment opportunities. Within this framework, the demand for female labour is measured as the extent to which the occupational structure is skewed towards predominantly female occupations. She reasoned that when the structure of employment is skewed towards female occupations, such as clerical work, the demand for female labour would be high, and more women are thus likely to be pulled into the labour market.

Oppenheimer's measure is based on the number of women employed in occupations that are at least 70 per cent female. This measure was further developed in the literature by Cotter and colleagues (2001) through constructing a weighted average of all occupations with the weights given by the national female share of the occupations. Based on this measure, an economy can be classified as having a high or low demand for female labour.

PCBS data shows that, despite the high educational rates of women participating in the labour force, they tend to dominate a few occupations, including office clerks, teaching and associate teaching professionals, as well as skilled and subsistence agricultural workers (see Figure 9.7). However, despite this concentration, only one occupational category meets Oppenheimer's cut-off point of 70 per cent domination – the category of subsistence agricultural workers.⁵

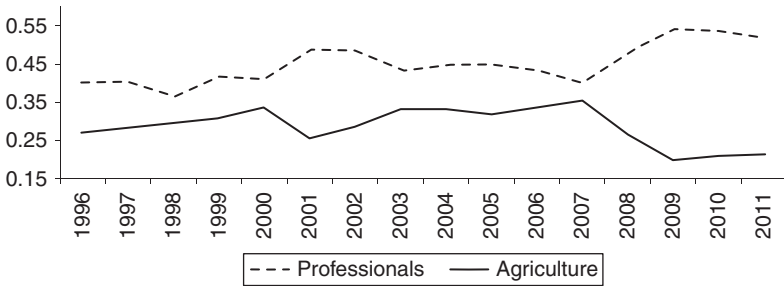


Figure 9.7 Women's employment in skilled agriculture and professions (%)
 Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

This analysis illustrates two significant facts. The first is the importance of the structure of the demand side of the labour market in attracting women into work in the oPt. Secondly, the Palestinian labour market has a weak demand for women's labour. As a result, policy measures have to focus on expanding the demand for women in order to provide them with the opportunity to join the labour market.

However, the analysis so far does not inform us about the extent of substitution between men and women within economic sectors and the labour market. Knowing this information is analytically important, because it is another indication of the strength of the demand for women's labour, hence the prospects for women's engagement in the labour market. This is in line with the views of Standing (1989, 1999) and Goldin (1990, 1994), amongst others, who argued that higher substitutability between men and women within labour market structures might allow more women into the labour market. Empirical evidence from around the world, particularly that cited in Standing's work, illustrates the importance of this factor in shaping female participation trends over time.

Within the Palestinian context, although the number of women participants in the labour force increased by 120,000 between 1996 and 2011 (a 146 per cent rise), those employed increased by 78,700; from 66,000 in 1996 to 144,700 in 2011 (a 120 per cent rise). However, despite these rises, available statistics indicate that women's distribution across economic sectors did not alter during this period. At the same time, the share of both men and women in all economic sectors has declined, with the exception of services, which implies a minimal substitution between men and women across sectors.

This analysis illustrates the fact that substitutability between men and women across the various economic sectors is negligible. The shares of

men and women in all economic sectors have been declining, with the exception of the services sector. In absolute terms, agriculture and services are the only two sectors that witnessed a rise in women's employment, and this increase is not substituting women for men within these sectors. In other words, the creation of new jobs in the services sector, rather than the substitution of women for men across different sectors, is the driving force behind women's increased employment. This implies that, in terms of policy, measures should be developed to enhance the entry of women into economic sectors, particularly the productive ones, agriculture and manufacturing.

4.3 Supply-side economic considerations

As explained in Section 2, participation trends are shaped by a number of factors, including demographic characteristics of the population, which decide the size of the working-age population at each point in time. During the post-Oslo Accords period (1994–2011), the PCBS conducted two censuses in the WBGS: one in 1997 and another in 2007. Based on the results of these, the Palestinian population in the WBGS stood at 2,895,683 in 1997 and 3,767,126 in 2007, a 30 per cent rise over the decade. This shows that the population continued to rise between 1994 and 2011, but at a lower rate than in the pre-1994 period. The major factor contributing to the slowing down in population growth is the decline in the natural growth rate, in other words, fertility minus mortality rates (Al-Botmeh, 2013).

The crude birth rate in the WBGS declined from 42.7 births per 1,000 in 1997 to 32.8 births in 2010. This also corresponds to a reduction in total fertility rates, which declined from 6.1 per woman in 1997 to 4.6 per woman in 2007. Despite the fact that these rates have declined by about 32 per cent, they remain amongst the highest rates in the world. Total fertility rates in neighbouring countries were significantly less in 2007, even in more conservative societies such as Saudi Arabia. According to the World Development Indicators (WDI), the total fertility rate in 2007 in Jordan was 3.8 births per woman, in Lebanon 1.9, Saudi Arabia 3, Syria 3.1, Egypt 2.9 and Turkey 2.1 (World Bank, 2011).⁶

The decline in fertility rates may have lessened the childcare responsibilities assumed by women, which has implications for their prospects of participating in the labour market.

One of the important factors highlighted in the theoretical and empirical literature in determining women's participation trends over time is education. PCBS data show that the percentage of the population that is illiterate has declined over time (both male and female), and that

the share of those with 13 years of schooling or more has been rising. In 2011, the percentage of illiterate women over the age of 15 stood at 7 per cent, compared to 14 per cent having 13 years of schooling or more. It is interesting to also note that the rise in women's educational rates over time is higher than men's. Enrolment rates for males and females at all levels of the education sector have continued to climb since the second Intifada in 2000. In the West Bank, by 2006, female enrolment outstripped that of males at every stage – including post-secondary; while in Gaza, between 2000 and 2011, the gender gap in favour of males narrowed sharply.

While higher male education is perceived as primarily and directly contributing to the possibility of their becoming the main breadwinners, higher female education (although also linked to hopes of employment) encompasses a cross-cutting range of purposes and strategies. The rise in female attendance levels is linked to the crucial role that higher levels of education play for women in accessing the labour market.

The trend in Figure 9.8 illustrates the importance of education in deciding the share of women in the labour force; whereby the higher the number of years of education, the larger the labour market share of that group. The trend also indicates that, at the initial stages of this period, there was a visible jump in the share of women with higher levels of education. This is associated with the availability of 'professional' types of employment provided by the public and banking sectors, which were set up during that period. However, another two jumps took place in the share of educated women, in 2001 and 2007. These two years mark the

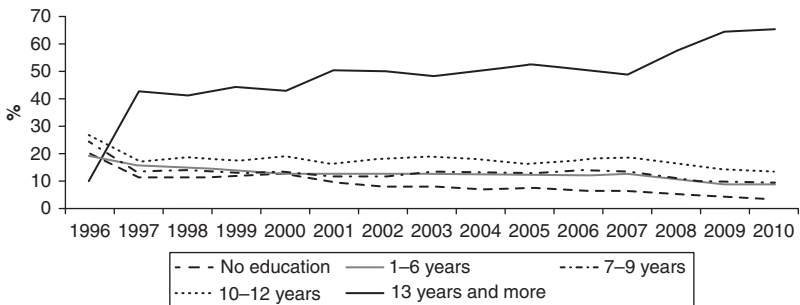


Figure 9.8 Share of women in the labour force by number of years of schooling (1995–2010)

Source: PCBS labour force surveys (various years).

beginning of periods of economic hardship. The second Intifada started in late 2000, and the Israeli siege on Gaza and international boycott of the Hamas-led government in the Strip in 2007.

The rise in the share of women with post-secondary education in the labour force illustrates the competitive nature of the Palestinian labour market when it comes to women. In contrast, men in the labour force are more evenly distributed across educational groups. The share of men with 10 to 12 years of education is highest, followed by men with 7 to 9 years of education, then those with post-secondary school education. The fact that women require more years of schooling in order to access the labour market contributes towards restricting higher female labour force participation.

To understand this analysis further, it is worth discussing certain issues that have a direct impact on gender equality and sustainable development. It can be assumed that the kind of education that women access does not seem to qualify them for existing labour market needs. The specialisation of academic, vocational and technical training means they have a limited range of professions (IWS, 1999). From this perspective, we will discuss issues related to streaming, curriculum, tertiary education, and mismatches between education and the labour market.

4.4 Gender identities and curricula

There is a link between gender identities and curriculum, as gender identities are constructed indirectly through effects of inside and outside school factors. For instance, the effects of the academic curriculum, hidden curriculum, and administrative and structural factors, such as authority or management patterns and streaming, can all have an effect on constructing gender identities and, in a lesser capacity, gender roles. However, gender roles have been influenced mainly by the family, workplace and the media (Kuttab, 2007). It is known that the school has a latent role in developing gender identity. One of the main tools that can impact gender identity is the curriculum. Despite improved gender sensitivity in some Palestinian textbooks, qualitative and quantitative analysis undertaken on a sample of these books regarding masculine, feminine and neutral expressions appearing in content situations, roles or images, produced the following conclusions:

Masculine idioms are much more commonly used than feminine idioms in the sampled books. The masculine form is usually chosen to illustrate situations and exercises, with men's names and pictures of men surpassing female references. Most stories' protagonists are

male, and they are usually depicted as the strong, intelligent characters, i.e. hero, scientist, sportsman, writer, inventor. While women are presented in secondary roles, and often portrayed in situations that take place inside the home. Occasional instances can be found in which women are engaged in non-traditional work for activities.

(Palestine Human Development Report, 2002, p. 52)

Stereotypical gender roles are confirmed through the frequent depiction of women in the home, performing housework and other traditional roles. References to female prisoners or women in non-traditional situations are too infrequent. Women are also typically portrayed as sentimental and non-analytical, while men are rational and methodological. Inconsistent or incorrect usage of gender-specific language is another problem. Frequently, textbooks do not correctly employ the proper forms of the root word and colloquial expressions are frequently masculine in nature (Palestine Human Development Report, 2002). For example, a lesson in the civics textbook for the third grade proposed a selection of women's careers, all of which were consistent with what is typically accepted as female jobs. The subject matter of the lesson is choices of occupation attributed to men; most of these were non-academic and skill-oriented. The lesson was proposing academic and professional training for women and was proposing non-academic professions such as skilled labourers and technicians for men (Kuttab, 2007).

These notions reinforce traditional gender stereotypical notions, which feed into typical forms of education and limited forms of employment. So, while streaming reinforces traditional masculine and feminine identities, which is more evident at the secondary and post-secondary levels of the education system, even when women and men have access to fields of specialisation in theory, enrolment records indicate that women make traditional occupation choices, and avoid science and technology courses and careers. This can either be the result of school administrators, who discourage females from entering non-traditional fields, or through recruiting students based on gender assumptions that non-traditional occupations are not socially acceptable and not a viable option for females. In addition, women may lack information and counselling regarding both educational institutions and employment opportunities, and, moreover, women may have internalised gender roles, which they abide by without any direct coercion (IWS, 1999). Consequently, the real question is not access to education or enrolment rates, but quality, maintenance and transformation through education as an empowerment tool to impact gender roles and diminish gender disparities.

4.5 Tertiary education and the mismatch between skills and labour market needs

Tertiary enrolments in Palestine are very high, yet present quite an imbalanced picture. Enrolments at the traditional universities and university colleges have doubled during the last decade. There are 10 traditional universities, one open university, 11 university colleges and 19 community colleges in the oPt. The bulk of enrolments are found at the university level – 55 per cent at the traditional universities, and 33 per cent at the open university. Enrolments at the six tertiary education institutes that are directly funded by the PA represent a small percentage. These colleges offer both university degree and diploma courses. Business administration, teacher training and health courses account for nearly three-quarters of enrolments (World Bank, 2006).

Most women students are enrolled in stereotypical ‘female’ subjects that represent an extension of their traditional roles. Women are highly represented in health care, teacher training, arts and humanities, and life sciences. Although women are highly represented in life and physical sciences, these subjects tend to be rather abstract and frequently direct students towards careers in teaching.

The demand and supply for this type of education seems to have important failures. For instance, the demand for places at the two United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) colleges in Ramallah is very high, but their capacity to enrol students is quite limited. Among the government/public colleges, however, applicant–place ratios for most specialisations are around one (Figure 9.9).

The PCBS Conditions of Graduates Survey (PCBS, 2010) collected self-reported reasons why recent graduates have difficulty finding jobs. The most important reason cited is a lack of capital to start one’s own enterprise, indicating that the possibility of being self-employed is at least considered by recent graduates. The second reason for not finding a job is a lack of job market opportunities for graduates with their particular specialty. This reason is not simply due to universities producing too many humanities and social science majors, as at least 55 per cent of vocational and Associate degree graduates (as well as Bachelor degree graduates) cite the lack of demand for their particular specialty as a reason for their not finding a job. Finally, more than half cite a lack of connections as delaying their job search success. Personal connections still seem to be a primary way of seeking and obtaining employment by recent graduates in the WBS. Nearly half of all recent job seekers state that one of the ways that they sought work was through personal

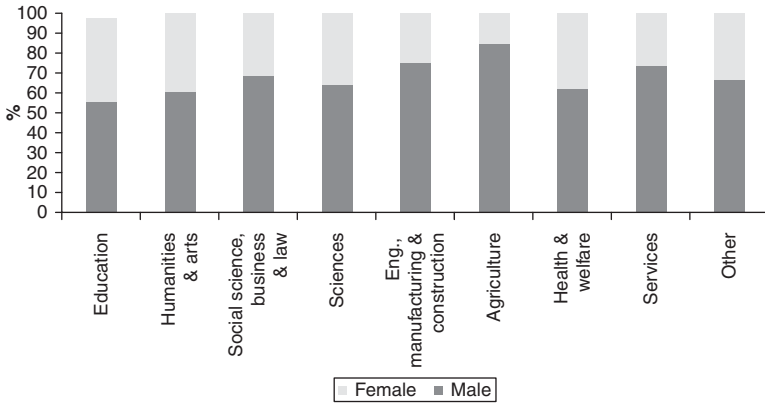


Figure 9.9 Women and men by subject at universities % (2010/2011)

Source: Ministry of Education and Higher Education, 2006.

connections. This was approximately the same proportion that registered at the employment office. Nearly one out of every three new graduates reports doing both activities (seeking work through personal connections and registering at the employment office). While young people pursue multiple strategies in their job search, the job market in the WBS is still dominated by the informal connections made through personal or family relations (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009).

Graduates also cite five specific gaps which inhibit their job search. Top of this list is the lack of capital to start one's own enterprise, then the lack of demand for a graduate's specialty, the lack of personal connections, the lack of experience and the lack of speciality training. Some students also find that proficiency in English, computer skills and one's geographical location can also play a role in job market success.

The match between human capital gained through schooling and the skills desired by employers is a key component of the job search process. For those graduates that do secure jobs, a high proportion claim that their jobs suit their educational training. Over three-quarters of holders of Bachelor's degrees claimed that their skills suited their jobs, and nearly two-thirds of Associate degree holders said that there was a good match. However, only one-half of vocational graduates claimed that their skills matched their jobs. Thus, although vocational schools claim that they prepare workers for a specific career, it is likely that this training does not actually match well with the skills requested by the job market (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009).

More generally, higher female enrolment rates in tertiary education – be it vocational or academic – does not seem to help these women in the labour market, partly because their education is limited to a few stereotypical domains. This implies that women’s choices and skills in the labour market are partially predefined through the nature of their enrolment in schools and higher education institutions. As will be discussed in the Conclusions, this is an important area that requires policy interventions to broaden the scope of subjects in which women are involved, in order to aid their participation across different sectors in the labour market.

4.6 Patriarchy and the gender division of labour

The dominance of males in social, economic and political organisations, known as patriarchy, is a type of power dynamics that originates in the domestic realm (Rubenberg, 2001a; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2005). The basic relations in a patriarchal system are controlled by and subordinated to those who are higher in rank in terms of age and gender. Duties and responsibilities are strictly organised along these two variables.

Within the Palestinian context, Rubenberg (2001b, p. 13) notes, with regards to patriarchy:

It is a system for monopolising resources, maintaining kinship status, reproducing the patriline, controlling women’s sexuality and bodies, legitimising violence, regulating education to reproduce the roles and relations socialised in the family, focusing the health care exclusively on maternity and procreation, and limiting women’s access to the labour market, as well as defining the types of work in which women can engage.

In other words, the patriarchal structure of the Palestinian family and society gives men considerable authority and protects them. Palestinian society grants men power in the family sphere as well as in the public sphere. As a result, men have an advantage in resources, and are perceived as enjoying superior personal characteristics, as well as skills and abilities that are supposedly possessed exclusively by them. Accordingly, it is more acceptable in society to subject women to economic constraints and discrimination, which are usually imposed on them to a greater degree than men, both within and outside of the family. The inequalitarian economic and occupational structure of patriarchal societies, including Palestinian society in the WBGS, leaves women with very few alternatives. In general, the objective and perceived status of occupations and jobs open to women are inferior to those available

to men. For this and other reasons, in many cases Palestinian women earn less than men who are employed in the same jobs. Without access to 'good' jobs, women will continue to be economically dependent on their spouses or partners (Haj-Yahya, 2005).

The Israeli destruction inflicted upon the Palestinian economy, and the devastation caused to people's livelihoods, induced more Palestinian women to join the labour market. However, it was more acceptable for these women to join casual labour or become engaged in unpaid family work, compared to men. This broadening of the scope of gendered roles from the private to the public sphere conforms to the patriarchal structures in the sense that society views the inferior position of women in the household and outside as normal.

5. Conclusion

The lack of demand for work in the domestic economy of the WBGS and women's labour in particular, is an important determinant of women's likelihood of joining the labour market, and one of the most significant hurdles to women's increased participation. The service sector, which witnessed the fastest expansion since 1995, has reached its limit in absorbing women. In order to provide a strategic solution to the problem of women's low participation and high unemployment, policies have to aim at expanding the size of the productive sectors (agriculture and manufacturing) to absorb women. These sectors are considered women-dominated sectors worldwide; through expanding work opportunities within these sectors, female participation and employment levels will necessarily rise.

However, in light of the fact that Palestinians are restricted from conducting 'normal' economic life under occupation, particularly since the restrictions on trade with the rest of the world impede the viability of economic enterprises, a significant opportunity for expanding the productive sectors (agriculture and manufacturing) arises from replacing imports of Israeli goods and services by local production. Palestinians imported \$4.3 billion in 2011, of which \$3 billion (70 per cent) of goods and services originated from Israel (PCBS, 2012). A great proportion of these imports are agricultural products and simple manufacturing goods, which can be easily replaced by local production. A rise in local production and consumption will necessarily generate more employment.

An effective protection of the local market from Israeli goods and services can only be possible through practical measures on the ground led by the government, while tackling the various components of trade

linkages and distribution networks. This requires policies that focus on upgrading and enhancing local distribution networks and local marketing systems, as well as the quality of the products and commodities. This can go a long way towards increasing productivity and generating employment in these sectors.⁷

In other words, there has to be a shift from supply-side policies aimed at enhancing the skills of the individuals to demand-side interventions aimed at protecting economic production from Israeli economic dumping practices which render local enterprises inefficient. These policies are politically challenging, yet are the only meaningful measures to unlock the employment potential with the oPt.

On the supply side, particularly in the area of education, it is important to explore the 'latent' factors of the Palestinian basic education system that impact consequences of learning on both genders. Among such hidden factors are curriculum, textbooks as tools of transformation of values and attitudes regarding gender roles and responsibilities, gender dynamics in the classrooms, teacher's relations with students and so on. All of these need to be addressed in order to attain gender equality and bridge the gap between genders. Once such gaps are bridged within the education system, it is possible for girls/women to have a more reasonable opportunity to participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men.

Notes

1. Labour force participants in the formal labour market are those engaged in or seeking paid employment. Their number is usually expressed as a fraction or percentage of the total working age population, to give an activity or labour force participation rate.
The latter then amounts to all those who are working plus those looking for work (the unemployed) divided by those of working age – which differs between one country and another but mostly tends to be those between 15 and 65 years old (Blau and Robins, 1988).
2. Percentages for the Arab region and the world are for 2010.
3. At any point in time after 1995, only 1 per cent of Palestinian employed women worked in Israel, compared to between 12 and 18 per cent of employed men.
4. The prime working age varies across countries depending on women's child-bearing patterns, enrolment in education and productivity over their lives of market versus non-market time (Goldin, 1990).
5. Notwithstanding Oppenheimer's cut-off point, more broadly, PCBS data illustrates two main stereotypical facts about women's employment: women are concentrated in teaching and clerical-related activities as well as in the agricultural sector.

6. Afghanistan, Angola and Zambia are amongst the countries where births per woman were higher than in the WBGs (World Bank, 2011).
7. Although Israel has confiscated much of the land of the West Bank and places draconian controls on water resources, the current production in the agricultural sector does not utilise the available resources. In other words, there is excess capacity within this sector. Work with the Ministry of Agriculture can focus on pushing for the full utilisation of the land under the PA's control through legislation, while encouraging employment.

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