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## Attitudes Towards Women in Palestine: A Quantitative Survey

By Erni Gustafsson<sup>1</sup>, Nabil Alawi,<sup>2</sup> Per Normann Andersen<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

The survey's aim is to address whether or not the practice of placing Norwegian Social Work students over six consecutive years in the Balata Refugee Camp in Nablus, Palestine, has had any impact on the attitudes toward women among the population in the camp. To achieve this, two groups, one experimental and one control, of a total 261 respondents, have been exposed to the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (AWS) that is translated from English to Arabic for this purpose. Another research was to see if there are statistical differences between male and female respondents, and if there is an association between education level, socio-economic status, age, religious affiliation, and total AWS scores. The findings suggest that the students have had no impact on attitudes toward women within the camp population. However, a significant positive correlation exists between positive and egalitarian attitudes toward women and level of education.

*Keywords:* Quantitative Survey, Women, Attitudes, Palestine

### Introduction

The treatment of women in Palestine has been brought to the attention of the researchers during the implementation of an internship program (Practice in Palestine Project; PPP). Over six consecutive years (2010-2015) nine groups, a total of 46 Norwegian students, mostly females, from Lillehammer University College (LUC) spent three months each at Yafa Cultural Center (YCC) in Balata Refugee Camp, in Nablus, Palestine. The placement internship takes place in the third year of the three-year education at LUC and is meant "to give child welfare and social work

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students an experience of direct contact with children, adolescents, and their relatives” and an opportunity to develop skills in the “planning and implementation of activities” (The Norwegian Education and Research Department, 2005, p. 31[our translation]).

The internship project brought the Norwegian students on an annual basis into direct contact with different strata of Palestinian society through conducting different activities related to social work and child welfare. The students’ role and approach during the placement are to be engaged in “participant observation” and the main aim is to participate with staff, children, youth, and parents at YCC. The students were expected to be with, in a deep sense, the actual culture in order to develop cultural sensitivity, as well as to be at a critical distance through actual participation in different contexts. Through interaction with participants in various types of welfare facilities, the students are challenged to work in a reflective and self-reliant way in order to develop a professional standard on different topics related to their education.

To have students in the West Bank means to have students in a profound Islamic community. One of the goals for the placement is to encourage students to reflect on surrounding themes and ethics such as the status of minorities, children’s behavior, parenting methods, and women’s worth and rights in the community. The students are therefore encouraged to create “meeting points” and activities where they meet children, parents, and women in order to participate and observe how culture unfolds in an everyday setting. To help students with this endeavor, they live with a refugee family for at least one week (often much longer). Students are asked to create discussion groups consisting of young Palestinian women and the students themselves. The discussion groups undertake issues that concern women in both Palestine and Norway. In that way the students get involved in the very inter-relational fabric of the society.

In different relational contexts, including colloquial conversations with a wide range of peoples, the students experience for themselves, how culture and religion affect people’s attitudes toward women. They experience women talking about their rights in the Islamic society, and how they in several areas and in an effective way can affect how women in general are treated. Students also experience a paternalistic culture that penetrates a good part of Middle East societies (Offenhauer, 2005).

Through their contact with Palestinians, Norwegian students noticed certain behavior betokening not only differences between the two cultures, but also, sometimes, undermining the feelings of women in social interactions. During the years, students that have participated in the placement in Palestine have reported, on different levels, sexual insinuations; they complained of men who have not acknowledged their privacy, of young men saying undesirable things, etc. (the researchers private conversations with students). They have also experienced cultural differences in how women are regarded. For example, some of the students noticed that a Palestinian husband (from among the people they met) does not necessarily find it strange or offending to say to his wife “You are fat!” or to commend another woman’s appearance in her presence. Such remarks are considered rude and socially taboo in a Norwegian social context. These experiences inspired the researchers to search for studies on the topic of attitudes toward women in Palestine.<sup>4</sup> No quantitative study on the topic was found and to the researchers’ knowledge, no such studies have been conducted within Palestine. In searching previous studies on this topic, little can be found.

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<sup>4</sup> More on the Practice in Palestine project’s visions, methods, components, objectives, theoretical frames, procedures, successes, and obstacles is described in detail elsewhere by Gustafsson & Alawi (2013, 2014, 2015).

*Women's Conditions in Palestine*

Cheryl A. Rubenberg, (2001) in her *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank*, addresses the distress of Palestinian women and attributes their dilemma to social codes and not Islam. She maintains that the oppression of women in Palestine is attributed to the tribal nature of Palestinian society that obliterates the rights that are granted to women by Islam. Actually, by the edicts of kinship, women agree to surrender their rights given to them by Islam to appease the tribal hegemony.

In a study from 2010, Suheir Azzouni examines the condition of women's rights in Palestine (Azzouni, 2010). As many other studies, her analysis points at Palestinian women facing two major types of obstacles to their rights: "those arising from within their own culture and society, and those imposed as a result of occupation, war, and civil unrest" (Azzouni, 2010, p. 2). In the domestic realm, women are subjected to restrictive personal status laws that retain discriminatory provisions related to marriages, divorce, and child custody. The treatment of women, according to penal code, depends on old Egyptian (Gaza) and Jordanian (The West Bank) laws "not necessarily updated in tandem with the laws of those countries" (Azzouni, 2010, p. 2). The Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has, according to Azzouni, avoided addressing issues related to the personal status law. These discriminatory laws – and traditions – affect many sides of women's ordinary lives. Domestic abuse is a significant problem "and violence against women has increased in recent years" (Azzouni, 2010, p. 2). Social norms that shame women who dare to report abuse makes it even worse for them. The fact that abortion is not allowed and is criminalized in instances of rape or incest, endanger the pregnant woman "of becoming the victim of an honor killing" (Kelly & Breslin, 2010, p. 25), and can make the lives of many women unbearable.

According to The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2006) in 2005 61.7% of ever married women experienced psychological abuse, 23.3% physical violence, and 10.9% sexual violence (PCBS, 2006). In addition, a large number of never married women were exposed to different forms of violence. No data on sexual violence on this group exist, as collecting such data is viewed as a taboo, according to The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS, 2006).

In Palestine, people increasingly indulge in pornography and women-degrading content on the internet. The Daily Mail web site reports that Hamas on the Gaza Strip has needed to crack down on internet providers in order to block pornographic sites. These sites are "surpassing social and news websites, including official ones," the columnist Issam Shawar writes in the Gazan newspaper, *Felesteen*. (Daily Mail, 2012, Sept 4). Clearly indicating that Palestinian authorities regard this more than "only" a cultural problem.

A publication of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Arms (DCAF) titled *Palestinian Women and Security: Why Palestinian Women and Girls Do Not Feel Secure* (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stettler, 2010), gives an explicit account of the harassment of women on social, political, and economic levels. The general outcome of the study, using 35 focus group discussions and 8 in-depth interviews, is that women in Palestine do not feel secure and that they are continuously abused to conceal the failure of men. Some women are sexually abused by their immediate relatives, a brother, a cousin, even a father, and are killed to "clean" the honor of the family. The study gives testimonies of women from different Palestinian areas and comes to some shocking conclusions.

In addition to the socioeconomic realities of Palestinian women that are restricted by their gender, they are victimized by the Israeli occupation. They mourn their dead children, brothers, and husbands while being in a constant confrontation with soldiers who frequently undermine the peace of their homes in search of "wanted" men. Israeli soldiers often foster stereotypical images

of women. They invade houses at night and ignore women as they search for men, dumping them as mere followers. However, the report states that “women and girls routinely cited the factional conflict [between different political/religious factions in Palestinian society, authors’ remark] as an even greater source of stress and insecurity than the occupation” (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stettler, 2010, p. 21).

In the streets women routinely, even foreigners such as our Norwegian students, are sometimes exposed to verbal harassment. Males narrowly control Palestinian women, by false rumors, slander, and gossip. They also face threats to be kidnapped. In the home, beside a general lack of money, they fear being brutally beaten, mistreated, and raped by their husbands or other male family members, such as fathers, brothers, brothers-in-law, and even sons. Daughters are detained in their homes and deterred from entering the public sphere (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stetter, 2010).

Help is not expected from any part of the society. The police, staff at the hospitals, court members etc. are all more or less inclined to accept, as a matter of fact that different forms of violence against women, even murder, are to be recognized as “justified” and conforming to acceptable social norms (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stettler, 2010).

“Women and girls described Palestinian society’s tacit acceptance of physical violence against them within the family circle as eliciting feelings of powerlessness. It is an unwritten rule that speaking out against this type of violence will cause more problems, as women and girls are likely to be stigmatized by their families and by their communities. The stigma of asking for help outside of the family, coupled with a lack of confidentiality among response mechanisms, leaves women feeling re-victimized and suspicious. The very real fears of losing one’s children, or facing divorce, increased abuse or even murder, cause women to employ the strategy of keeping quiet” (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stettler, 2010, p. 31).

One can ask if Palestinian society is progressing in terms of how women and their rights and liberties are viewed. The present study gives a hint in that direction. Another study, from 1989, also indicates trends within the educated strata of the society that view women less traditionally. Shadid & Seltzer (1989) conducted a study covering 1018 students from largest universities in the West Bank, and 1044 non-students from the same region. It was found that men made the important decisions concerning the general life quality of the household’s female members in a higher degree in non-student families (53 per cent versus 35 per cent) than in student families. In addition, students were in a higher degree allowed to choose their own spouse than in families with no students.

There are some organizations, mostly NGOs, whose objective is to help women organize themselves, to guide them in recognizing their rights, and to create programs to meet their needs. One organization is The Women’s Studies Center (WSC) in Jerusalem, (established in 1989). It is, according to its mission statement, an independent organization “that strives for the realization of the principle of equality between women and men” (WSC, Information sheet, 2004, p.1). Among the strategic objectives of WSC is to collect and document research studies conducted by Palestinian women to “serve as a resource from which to learn and devise strategies” (WSC, 2004, p.2).

Another Women's Studies Center is located in Nablus, the same town in which the present study is conducted (a third is located in Hebron). Under the headline "Women's rights are Palestinian rights," the director of the Center explains the rationale behind the organization. "We are trying to build a female leadership within the Palestinian resistance movement," she declares in an interview (Weber, 2012, p. 1). The programs focus on self-organization and grassroots thinking, and try to "empower children and adolescents on how to protect themselves against sexual assaults" (Weber, 2012, p. 2). The Center has produced a series of books for children challenging classical gender roles.

Why different investigations report an ongoing practices of mistreatment of women in Palestine, and at the same time many ordinary women and men report a high degree of freedom-oriented values and feminist attitudes toward women's roles and rights, begs an answer. One answer can be that a higher awareness of women's rights, egalitarian gender roles, and women's general worth in the home and society has a tendency to be more prevalent among higher educated people. In this survey, around 92% of all respondents answered "secondary or higher education" on the educational demographic data. This is of course a much higher score than average for the Palestinian people - between 32% and 39%, depending on refugee or not; higher among refugees (Marzio, 2003).

### *The Purpose of this Survey*

The purpose of the survey is to answer some assumptions condensed in three hypotheses. This study relies on the premises that cross cultural communication and exchange of ideas is a source of cultural change and influence. Floyd Henry Allport (1924) considered communication an important factor that defines common traits and ideas within a culture. Experience with culturally-determined behaviours is found to foster norms that reduce conflicts based on cross-cultural differences (Adler & Gielen 2001; Hammer, 1992; Neyer & Harzing, 2008; Sperring, 2001). Changes in persons' self-concept or ethnic identity resolutions can occur due to contact pressure and sociocultural adjustments can follow intercultural adaptation (Gibson, 2001; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Kurtz-Costes, McCall, & Schneider, 1997; Leyer, 1991; Thomas, 1994; Thomas, 1996; Ward & Kennedy, 1999).

**Hypothesis 1.** There is a statistical difference about awareness of women's worth, roles, obligations, and rights between people living in the Balata Refugee Camp who have socialized with the Norwegian students over the course of six sequential years (Balata Refugee Camp) and a comparable group who has not. Assuming that socializing with Norwegian students is found to be one explanation for different attitudes shown in the scores. Therefore, the respondents who have met the students score higher than those who have not.

**Hypothesis 2.** There is a statistical difference between the answers of men and the answers of women, whether located in Balata Refugee Camp or in Nablus outside the Camp. Women's scores are higher than men's scores.

**Hypothesis 3.** There is an association between education level, socio-economic status, age, and the total AWS scores, i.e. that higher education level and socio-economic status together with lower age are correlated with a more egalitarian view on women's roles and rights.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 261 (128 male/133 female) participants took part in the study. Ninety nine were recruited from Balata Refugee Camp, and had cooperated with the Norwegian students. A hundred and sixty-two participants in the control group were recruited from Nablus, the area outside the Camp. They had not been previously in contact with the Norwegian students, and were 18 years or older. There were no statistical differences between the groups on sex distribution, age, level of education or socio-economic status. All participants reported themselves as Muslims, except for one that reported him/herself as a Christian, and one as not religious. For demographic characteristics, see table 1.

**Table 1: Demographics**

Variable	Balata Refugee Camp (n=99)	Control group (n=162)	Chi-square	p
<b>Sex</b> (male/female)	53/46	75/87	1.3	ns.
<b>Age</b> (M/SD)	31.4 (10.1)	29.9 (10.0)	1.1	ns.
<b>Marital status</b>				
1. Single	1. 44 (45%)	1. 71 (45%)		
2. Married	2. 53 (54%)	2. 81 (52%)		
3. Widow/widower	3. 0 (0%)	3. 3 (2%)		
4. Divorced	4. 1 (1%)	4. 2 (1%)		
<b>Level of education</b>				
1. Elementary	1. 1 (1%)	1. 0 (0%)		
2. Preparatory	2. 6 (6%)	2. 12 (7%)		
3. Secondary	3. 15 (15%)	3. 40 (25%)		
4. University	4. 76 (78%)	4. 109 (68%)		
<b>Socio-economic status</b>				
1. Below average	1. 4 (4%)	1. 9 (6%)		
2. Average	2. 79 (89%)	2. 143 (91%)		
3. Above average	3. 6 (7%)	3. 4 (3%)		

### Measure

The measure used in this study is the 15-item short version of Attitudes Towards Women Scale (AWS) by Spence and Helmreich (1978). This is a development from an earlier 25 item short version (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1973) of the original 55 item AWS (Spence & Helmreich, 1972), which is not in use any longer. The 15-item version AWS has been used and validated by different researchers in different locations with the aim to measure the roles and freedom of women (Bailey, Less & Harrell, 1992; Daugherty & Dambrot, 1986; Delevi & Bugay, 2013; Galambos, Petersen, Richards & Gitelson 1985). The reliability (internal consistency) of the scale has been reported to be between .81 (Delevi & Bugay 2013; Whatley, 2008) and .89 (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Each item is scored on a four-point Likert scale from (A) *agree strongly* to (D) *disagree strongly*. The scale addresses issues such as matrimonial issues, work relations, and social interactions. For example, “swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than a man”, “women should assume their rightful place in business and all professions along with men”, “the intellectual leadership of a community should be largely in the hands of men”, “sons in a family should be given more encouragement to go to college than daughters”, and “economic

and social freedom is worth far more to women than acceptance of the ideal of femininity, which has been set up by men". Seven items are reversed before computing total score. Higher scores on the AWS indicate a more egalitarian view towards women's roles and rights in society.

In a meta-analysis of 71 American undergraduate students' responses to AWS from 1970 until 1995, Twenge (1997) found a strong correlation between score and year of administration. The overall mean score for men rose from 1.67 in 1970-75 to 2.05 in 1991-95, and for women from 1.91 to 2.36 in the same period. Spence and Hahn (1997) found the same trend during cohort changes in studying their students from the same university who were tested in 1972, 1976, 1980, and 1992. The most liberal and egalitarian attitudes were found in the 1992 cohort. Bailey (1993) reported that a sample of respondents in 1991 was more liberal than was a sample studied by Helmrich, Spence & Gibson (1982). This indicates that the score measures the general change of attitudes toward women's rights, roles, and worth—as one knows from general trends in the American society, whose outlooks on women have developed steadily toward more liberal/feminist attitudes during the late twentieth century, as it has in the rest of the western world.

The respondents were given suitable space, time, and peace of mind to fill out the questionnaire. Respondents were given the questionnaire sheet with an envelope. Research assistants gave the basic necessary information to the respondents so that they would not influence their choices. Upon completing the questionnaire, respondents were asked to put the questionnaire in the provided envelope and to seal it. Respondents were given the assurance that their answers would remain confidential and be used for research purposes only.

### *Translating the Questionnaire*

For translation from English to Arabic and re-translation, the TRAPD methodology—Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting, and Documentation—was used (Harkness, 2003b).

The AWS was translated into Arabic by one of the researchers who has a Ph.D. in American literature and wide experience in teaching translation at the graduate level (Alawi, 2010; Mohammad, Alawi, & Fakhouri, 2010). The Arabic translation was later back-translated (Brislin, 1970; Butcher & Pancheri, 1976; Harkness, 2003a; Werner & Campbell, 1970) to English and read by a bilingual academic and translation expert at the English Department of An-Najah National University. The final form of the questionnaire was tested on university English students and in a pilot study among the bilingual research assistants employed for this study. In accordance with Harkness et al. (2010), the intention has been to focus on the best possible translation and then to evaluate the translation in Arabic by bilingual experts. The form chosen for respondents in Arabic was the one that was validated by the professional translators. The back-translated version was given to one of the researchers of this paper for comparison with the original version of the questionnaire.

There were some differences between the original version of the AWS and the back-translated version. The differences, though minor, may cause some comprehension problems among respondents. Some conspicuous differences were spotted: for example, in the translation of item 7, "A woman should not expect to go to exactly the same places or to have quite the same freedom of action as a man," the translator added the word "permission" in the Arabic translation with reference to women having freedom. The translator justifies the addition of the word "permission" by maintaining that in Palestinian culture women are not permitted "to go to the same places," as men do and therefore it is natural for the translator to suggest that they should be "permitted." Whereas in other cultures, "permission" may not be necessary.

Item 3 in the questionnaire quotes the word “obey” from the Christian ceremony. A discourse therefore would not sound natural in Arabic. The obedience of a woman to her husband, though not mentioned in the marriage contract or ceremony, is implicit and explicit in other texts, including the Quran. The translation of the item, therefore reads as follows (back translation); “Maintaining the phrase ‘I will obey’ in the marriage ceremonies is insulting to women.” It is a literal translation, but the context conveys the meaning and the fact that obedience of women is taken for granted, the aim of the item is achieved. In item 11, the word “dates” is used in the original text: “Women earning as much as their dates should bear equally the expenses when they go out together.” As women do not have "dates" in Islamic cultures, as in Palestine, the word “sweetheart/fiancé” is used instead (خطيبها\عشيقها).

In view of the above realities, the Arabic version was given to a third translator for a second back translation for more authentications. The third translator has an MA in English literature from a US university; he has been practicing translation and interpretation for the last 25 years. He is currently a lecturer of literature, translation, and professional writing at An-Najah National University. The third translator rendered his back translation without any significant differences between the English source text and the back translation. The Arabic version of the questionnaire was accepted as is, without modification.

### Data Analysis

Significant results are reported at  $p \leq .05$  level. Demographic characteristics were investigated using the Chi-squared test for independence (gender), and independent samples t-test (age). To measure group differences on AWS, independent samples t-tests were applied. We also ran a correlation analysis between the AWS total score and level of education, socio-economic status, and age. The data analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0 for Windows.

### Findings

**Table 2: Results: total score for groups, means and standard deviations**

	Mean score <sup>a</sup>	Total score <sup>b</sup>
<b>Total for the whole sample</b>	2.7 (0.4)	40.1 (5.5)
Men	2.6 (0.4)	38.8 (5.8)
Women	2.8 (0.3)	41.3 (4.8)
<b>Balata Refugee Camp</b>	2.7 (0.4)	40.8 (5.6)
Men	2.7 (0.4)	40.3 (6.0)
Women	2.7 (0.3)	41.4 (5.6)
<b>Control group</b>	2.6 (0.4)	39.6 (5.3)
Men	2.5 (0.4)	37.8 (5.5)
Women	2.7 (0.4)	41.2 (4.6)

Note: <sup>a</sup> Range 1-4, <sup>b</sup> maximum score = 60, higher score equals more egalitarian view

In contrast to our hypothesis, an independent samples t-test revealed no significant differences between the Balata Refugee Camp sample and the control group sample on total AWS score.

As expected we found a significant difference between males and females on AWS total score,  $t(259) = -3.8, p < .001$ , with women reporting more egalitarian views. This difference in means (mean difference = -2.5, 95% CI: -3.8 - -1.2) was moderate (Cohen's  $d$  0.5).

In the Balata Refugee Camp, there were no significant differences between men and women on total AWS score. However, within the Nablus community we detected a significant difference between men and women,  $t(160) = -4.4, p < .001$ , with women holding more egalitarian views. This represents a moderate effect size (mean difference = -3.4, 95% CI: -5.0 - -1.9, Cohen's  $d$  0.7).

A correlation analysis showed a small, but significant correlation ( $r = .29, p < .001$ ) between AWS total score and level of education, indicating that higher level of education was associated with a more egalitarian view. We found no significant correlations between AWS total score and age or between AWS total score and socio-economic status.

## Discussion

### *Hypothesis 1 Falsified*

No significant difference was found between the answers from people in Balata Refugee Camp who have met and socialized in different degrees with the Norwegian students, and those residents from outside the camp who had not met the students. The total score is slightly higher in Balata than outside Balata Refugee Camp. It is hard to explain why the scores are somewhat higher inside the Camp. This is somewhat contra intuitive since people in the camps in general are perceived slightly more morally conservative than the rest. One possible explanation can be that the people in camps are forced to live in a much denser environment and that the necessary proximity between the sexes therefore is shorter. Because of that, one is "forced" to take into consideration matters of gender issues, as pointed out in the questionnaire. However, the difference was not significant and can most likely be arbitrary.

Changes in people's belief systems do not come easy. To change one's own mind requires a large degree of self-knowledge. To change others' minds is a much more difficult task. It may be too optimistic to expect some profound change in people's opinion because of socializing with 48 Norwegian students on a three-month basis over the course of six years. As it has not been an intention of the project that students should have changed the opinion of people they communicated with, they have not tried this in any systematic way. Instead, they have many times avoided confronting their colleagues and acquaintances with their own opinions, despite the big difference in attitudes. As having intention to be polite toward their hosts and their colleagues, they have not wanted to stir hostile feelings among the people they have been in close relation with, and "difficult" or sensitive issues have many times been avoided. Only on occasions of more informal meetings between friends, have Norwegian students chosen to confront people with their opinions and beliefs. However, they have not, in most cases, failed to give their opinion if they have been asked (Gustafsson & Alawi, 2014a, 2014b).

The reserved attitudes and neutrality of the Norwegian students explains, to some degree, the non-existing change in opinion and attitudes toward women's worth, freedom and rights in Balata Refugee Camp. Psychological attitudes and religious beliefs are difficult to change (Bicchieri & Mercier, 2014; Festinger, 1957; Mercier & Sperber, 2011). It is therefore not

surprising that the Norwegian students' impact on attitudes toward women is negligible, considering the relative brief period of time the students have socialized with some of the people in the Camp.

### *Hypothesis 2 Partially Confirmed*

There is a significant difference between the total score among men and women, with women scoring higher. There was no significant difference between men and women inside Balata Refugee Camp (men 40.3, women 41.4). Whereas, among the population outside Balata there was a significant difference between men and women (men 37.7, women 41.2).

The study by Mark Whatley in 2008 with 180 male and 180 female American undergraduate university students shows a difference of 6.19 between males and females (the mean for men is 30.14 and the mean for women is 36.33). This is both a general lower score than indicated in our Palestinian survey and it shows a bigger difference between sexes; 2.5 in the Palestinian survey.<sup>5</sup>

Eagly and Mladinic (1989) asked 203 American university students to answer the AWS on gender stereotypes. The findings showed a mean score of 2.06 (raw score 30.9). In Schbley and Walton's (2014) research on religious resurgence impact on attitudes toward women using AWS on 284 Lebanese university students, showed a mean difference of 4.83 points "between respondents who expressed egalitarian attitudes toward women and those who expressed traditional attitudes. In an effort to assess reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the 15-item AWS, Delevi and Bugay (2013) asked 207 university students to answer the scale. "Females reported significantly higher scores (M=35.08) than males (M=29,36)" (p. 268).

This implies that the Palestinian scores, female and male, camp residents and none camp residents, are higher on the scale than any other studies mentioned above. The differences between males and females are also lesser in the Palestinian population than among other survey populations in review.

### *Hypothesis 3 Partially Confirmed*

Only a small positive correlation was found between AWS total score and level of education. This indicates that a higher level of education is associated with a more egalitarian view on women's rights and roles in society.

There was no significant correlation between self-reported socio-economic status (SES), and more liberal attitudes toward women's rights and freedom. The same nonexistent significant correlation between feminist attitudes and SES was found among Turkish students (Delevi & Bugay, 2013).

There was, however, a weak, albeit non-significant, tendency towards lower scores following higher age. The mean age of the participants in our study is relatively young, which could in part explain the relatively high scores. However, one has to consider that the Palestinian age structure shows that ages between 0 to 14 years occupy 39.2%, 15-29 years 30,3 of the total population and only 5,0% consists of people 60 years or older. (The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

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<sup>5</sup> In a pilot study for the present survey in 2015, 87 Norwegian child welfare students, 17 male and 70 female, mean age 23.9 years, were asked to answer the English version on the short 15 item AWS. The outcome showed a general mean of 55.43, (SD 4.81); mean for men 55.00, (SD 7.36); mean for women 55.59, (SD 4.04) and a difference of only 0.6 between the two sexes!

Differences in attitudes toward women depending on different religious affiliations cannot be answered due to the fact that nearly all respondents reported that they are “Muslim.”

Compared to the findings on attitudes and reported conduct toward women from other studies discussed in this paper (Chaban, Daraghmeh & Stettler, 2010; Rubenberg 2001; Azzouni 2010; The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006), the present attitude survey presents data that is more positive on attitudes. Why the discrepancy in the findings?

Some may say that Islam as a religion fosters attitudes which are hostile to women’s rights and worth. Although there are some places in the Quran (2008), e.g. surah 3:34, and in some hadiths (submitted stories about the Prophet's sayings and work) that describe mistreatment of women, the canonical Islamic texts do not generally promote attitudes seriously discriminating women, neither are the texts taken as a defence of severe misogynist practices.

One reason could be the respondents wanted to please the foreign, western researchers and therefore answered in a more egalitarian (aka ‘western style’) than what they otherwise would have done. People tend to downplay or overstate their own behavior, depending on who is asking and what is calculated to be ‘good’ (Levitt & List 2007). However, all the respondents were assisted with only Palestinian research assistants in the concrete answering section. In addition, as mentioned above, the female respondents were assisted with only female assistants.

Another, more plausible, explanation for the discrepancy is the well-known methodological problem with self-reporting survey research (Northrop, 1996; Haddaway & Marler 2005; Trives, 2011; Beam, 2012). People deluding their self (and perhaps the researchers) and there is often a gap between how people say they behave and actual practice.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

To conduct attitude studies in Palestine offers some challenges and methodological quandaries (Zureik, 2003). The notion that there is something called “normal public out there” available to survey research is problematic as the society is unstable and full of conflicts between different interests. Responding to individually given questionnaires assumes a basic trust and confidence between researcher and respondent. In authoritarian societies, the public may not feel that they have any influence on events and, therefore, do not see any utility in divulging their views. Moreover, because of lack of trust, respondents fear that the information given can be handed to the “wrong” people, such as local leaders or religious authorities; such fear can jeopardize one’s position (Tamari, 1984). One way to handle this is to minimize differences in social status between researchers and respondents. One of the researchers in the team is well known to many of the respondents and is socially and personally esteemed. Moreover, all the research assistants live in or nearby the Camp and the other areas where the respondents were chosen to answer the questionnaires. In that way, the trust and confidence in answering the questionnaires in a reliable and truthful manner were optimized.

The Palestinian society is generally a collectivist society. There the individual and his different views are subordinate to the views of the collectivist society. When one is asked to answer a questionnaire individually, as is customary in most western research methodologies, the respondent is placed in a difficult ethical position in choosing between what his/her individual opinion “really” is (if it deviates from the norm) and what it “should” to be, according to the society’s ruling norms. In the survey presented in this study, there are possible sensitive statements that are presented to women in a pronounced paternalistic culture with strong sentiments around what women’s obligations, proper behavior, and moral stances are. It is understandable that answering “wrong,” according to established norms, can be a fearful endeavor (Sa`ad Eddin,

1987). If e.g. choosing a room at the home of female respondents for conducting the completion of the questionnaire, one could be in danger of not getting a true answer due to the female's fear of men (the husband, brothers etc. ) seeing her answers.

In order to minimize and rectify these problems, a female research assistant approached all female respondents. If possible, a neutral place was chosen to conduct the survey.

Although the authors of this paper have not been able to find any quantitative studies, qualitative studies, or opinion polls concerning possible differences in attitudes toward women in Palestinian refugee camps and average Palestinians, there is a well-known impression for all who are acquainted with Palestinian society that, in general, people in camps are somewhat more conservative on moral and religious matters.

As Eagly and Mladinic (1989) have spelled out, it is a misconception that the scale measures attitudes toward women as the *object*. As the original developers of the scale, Janet Taylor Spence and Robert Helmreich, have noted, the scale was designed to assess attitudes toward "the rights, roles, and privileges women ought to have" (Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 39). It has also been argued in recent times that the study has been somewhat obsolete due to the rise in awareness to women's rights in the western world and the questions therefore are a little "old-fashioned." Liss et al. (Liss, Hoffner & Crawford 2000) thus claims "AWS...is no longer viewed as a measure of feminism... and is considered...outdated on women's roles", (p. 279). Others argue that the reliability has decreased, not because of flaws in the scale as such, but as "a result of item wording when the scale was written in contrast to spoken language, today" (King, Phillips, Walker & O'Toole, 2014, p. 151).

This critique of the scale can be relevant, but mostly when used in the western world and in English. Translated to Arabic the text is highly suitable and adequate in that it conforms to moral codes and sentiments and is sensitive to the prevailing general culture in the Middle East. Other instruments that address questions regarding attitudes toward topics as lesbianism, female sexuality, and other controversial themes, were considered not used as they could be regarded as provoking and possibly jeopardize the whole survey. In addition, both internal as well as construct validity and external validity are reasonably high. In addition, other researchers on attitudes toward women in the Middle East area in recent times have chosen AWS as their preferred instrument (Alibeli, 2015; Delevi & Bugay, 2013; Mostafa 2005; Schbley & Walton, 2014).

As discussed above, a well-known shortcoming of self-reporting surveys are the need to rely on data that is possible skewed in favor of answers more 'positive' than opinions what the respondents in reality have. The presented study may have the same bias toward a more positive answering than what reality dictates.

A same type of limitation is, as it is in Delevi and Bugay's 2013 study, that the assessment of SES is possible where the respondents subjectively self-report their SES. However, in practice one could not obtain "objective" income data. To achieve such objectivity is seen in reality as impossible due to ethical, societal, political, and logistic causes.

However, the problems faced in obtaining accurate information in surveys are the same problems we face in everyday communication and reliance on the self-report in surveys, therefore, offers research possibilities as well as research problems.

### *Recommendations for Further Research*

In order to get a more representative view of the average Palestinian attitudes towards women, the AWS should be applied to a larger scale population, representing not only urban, but also rural areas. It would also be interesting to compare attitudes towards women's rights to the

degree of egalitarian practices in the Palestinian community – as attitudes and practices are not necessarily the same. Lastly, it could be interesting to reverse the question about impact; what impact of Palestinian culture can be seen on Norwegian female students who spent their practice placement in Palestine?

### **Conclusion**

The attitudes toward women in Palestine are an interesting and highly controversial subject. The social, religious, political, and cultural realities conflate in addressing women's rights issues. This study tried to measure the influence of cultural contacts in altering attitudes toward women in a selected stratum of the Palestinian society where a group of Norwegian students spent their practice placement in Balata Refugee Camp. Counter to the researchers' expectations, the presence of the Norwegian students showed no influence on the respondents of the experimental group that can be attributed to age, sex, religion, or socio-economic status. It, however, showed a significant difference in favor of the positive attitudes toward women attributed to level of education.

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