

# Coping and Helping to Cope: Perspectives of Children of Palestinian Political Detainees

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*This qualitative study investigates how children of Palestinian political detainees in Israeli detention cope with their fathers' absences. Researchers conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with children, mostly aged 15 and older in the West Bank. Three themes are discussed that emerged from the interview data: how children cope with their sadness; the children's perspectives on community support; and older children's support to siblings and parents. Practitioners can support children by providing counselling to mothers and organising interventions, which give children the opportunity to connect. It is important that the agency of the older children is taken into account and built upon. © 2018 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau*

**Keywords:** coping, Palestinian children, political detainees, sadness, support.

## Introduction

Since the Oslo accords in 1993, a national Palestinian Authority (PA) holds limited governing power over part of the Israeli occupied Palestinian territory (the West Bank and Gaza Strip). The PA's sovereignty does not extend to control over borders or the protection of its subjects from arrest and imprisonment by the occupying power. Since 1967, there have been an estimated 800 000 cases of Israeli incarceration of Palestinians (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Although Israel accuses them of committing 'security' offenses, for Palestinians these men, and a small number of women, are part of a long-term resistance against occupation and regarded as political prisoners or detainees (Rosenfeld, 2011).

Early research on how Palestinian children and adolescents cope with traumatic experiences in the context of Israeli occupation has tended to employ psychopathological frameworks, emphasising the prevalence of symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other mental disorders in children and youth following their exposure to traumatic events. Others note, however, that the local meanings that children attribute to the conflict may protect them from mental harm (Barber, 2009). This latter literature aligns with documentation in the resilience literature of children's ability to develop into well-functioning adults despite having grown up in highly aversive circumstances (Rutter, 2012), and with growing evidence that in demanding circumstances, people are more adept in finding resources to cope positively than previously assumed (Aitchison and others, 2016; Hobfoll and De Jong, 2014; Ungar, 2011; Veronese and others, 2012). Nguyen-Gillham and others (2008), however, document how Palestinian teenagers in the West Bank demonstrate the complexity of the concept of resiliency, with their ability to 'normalise the abnormal', while at the same time expressing their emotional distress with the dehumanising conditions and economic misery of living under Israeli military occupation. Barber (2013) also cautions against applying vaguely

defined constructs of resilience in research on youth in political conflict and emphasises that most studies tend to be cross-sectional. This implies that the effects on the population of fluctuations in economic and political conditions over time are not addressed, whereas the focus on exposure to war or conflict-related trauma as the independent variable may render other important factors affecting well-being or functioning invisible, for example family violence (Panter-Brick and others, 2011).

Research on the impact of parents' political detention on their children tends to be conducted either out of the country, for example following migration to Canada (Allodi, 1980), or after the fall of the oppressive regimes (Protacio-Marcelino, 1989). However, where the oppressed group can openly provide services to victims of oppression, a window of opportunity for research arises, as has been the case in Northern Ireland and the occupied Palestinian territories. Findings in both regions emphasise the importance of political ideology as a protective factor. Rather than suffering stigma associated with criminal imprisonment, families of politically motivated prisoners can benefit from community support (Murray and Farrington, 2008; cf McEvoy and others, 1999). The research in Northern Ireland mostly relies on the perceptions of the prisoner's partner. And whereas research on Palestinian political prisoners has focused largely on the impact of detention on the (ex-)detainee (Punamaki and others, 2010), it also highlights good parenting, children's cognitive capacities and social support as key factors enhancing children's resilience in coping with their father's absence (Qouta and others, 2008).

In particular, two qualitative studies have highlighted the social aspects of political detention affecting the lives of mothers and wives of detainees, with community and in-laws control severely restricting their freedom of movement and behavior (Buch, 2010). Wives of political prisoners must engage with their husband's incarceration, the overall prison-like conditions under occupation, and the social isolation imposed by the absence of their husband: a so-called 'triple captivity' (Giacaman and Johnson, 2013). In a quantitative study, children of political detainees were 'four times more likely to develop psychological difficulties and hundred times more likely to develop symptoms of posttraumatic stress, compared to peers whose fathers were not imprisoned' (Shehadeh and others, 2016). In relation to post-traumatic stress, it is debatable whether the measured observations reflect symptoms of a mental disorder or a degree of sadness (Horwitz and Wakefield, 2007).

This paper amplifies the voices of Palestinian children within existing research on children's coping with parental political detention and explores the following questions: How are children of Palestinian political detainees affected by their father's detention? How do they cope? What types of support are available within their community? Do available support resources match the needs of the children? What (more) can be done?

At the time of data collection, in March 2012, male Palestinian political detainees in Israeli detention numbered 4006, of whom 1250 were married. Sentences varied from 0 to 9 years for about half of the married men, to 10–20 years for another quarter, and 20 years to multiple life sentences for the remaining group. Of the married men 1065 had children, varying in numbers between one and ten, and with an average of three children per detained father. The total number of Palestinian children with a detained father was 3041 (Palestinian Authority Ministry of Detainees and Ex-detainees, 2012, unpublished data).

## Methods

Researchers conducted 16 in-depth interviews with children of Palestinian political detainees using Glaser and Strauss (1967) grounded theory for guidance in sampling, data collection and management, and comparative analysis.

Two Palestinian research assistants coordinated with the Ministry of Palestinian Detainees and Ex-detainees (MoDE deals with all issues related to the welfare of Palestinian political

detainees in Israeli detention and their families) to recruit interviewees, set up the interviews, and took turns in asking questions and taking notes during the interviews. Permission to audiotape the conversation was requested and granted in all but two interviews. The research assistants translated the notes from Arabic into English and used the audiotapes to complete any parts missed in the note taking.

None of the research team had experience in interviewing young children. Thus, to prevent unintentional harm, we aimed to interview children aged 15 or older. The study received approval from the Birzeit University Ethical Review Committee. Researchers obtained names and telephone numbers of families with children aged 15 or older from MoDE and contacted them by telephone to explain the research objectives and obtain oral consent from the mother, after she had consulted with her children. As little is known about Palestinian children's own perspectives on their experiences of growing up with their father in political detention, we employed purposive sampling for coverage of a relevant range of contexts and phenomena to enable strategic and cross-contextual comparison of data (Mason, 2002). After the first five interviews, we adjusted our sampling strategy to ensure we also included children of political prisoners who had been detained for less than 10 years, because they receive less financial support from the MoDE.

Table 1 provides interviewee characteristics. One mother did not want her children to participate and one child (18) did not agree to the interview, although his younger brother then did. No reasons for denying participation were given. All interviews except two were conducted in the children's family homes. Interview 4 took place at the university and interview 16 at the local Prisoners Club, a space used for social activities for families of detainees and ex-detainees, and were not audiotaped. Interview duration varied from one to almost three hours.

Although we had intended to limit our interviews to children aged 15 and older, the cultural context of the family homes meant that we seldom sat in an isolated space with our interviewee. Mothers tried to allow their children the space to speak freely, but came in to offer refreshments and sometimes briefly joined the conversation. Younger siblings of our interviewees sometimes joined and participated in the interviews. This spontaneous self-inclusion of younger siblings in four of the interviews enriched the data and helped to make the original interviewee(s) feel more comfortable. The importance of such serendipitous moments in qualitative research has been well explained by Akerstrom (2013).

The semi-structured interviews included: (i) introductions and explanation of the research project; (ii) demographic questions (age, school grade, number and sex of siblings, rank within siblings); small talk, for example related to school, to make the interviewee more comfortable and engaged in a 'conversation' rather than a formal 'question-answer' format (Mason, 2002); and (iii) the main topics of the research questions: experiences and feelings; coping; support; and resources.

All research members wrote initial notes following each interview. Following discussion of these notes, the lead author initiated thematic analysis, using open and axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), and iterative comparison with analyses of prior interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Research assistants contributed to the final analysis.

## Findings and discussion

Bemused by 'this interview with researchers from Birzeit University', some children were initially reserved, but generally warmed to us and were happy to talk about their lives. At the end of interviews, some mothers expressed their happiness that their children had been able to open up about their feelings in a friendly atmosphere.

Table 1: Characteristics of interviewees

No.	Date, d/m/y	Name <sup>a</sup>	Sex	Age	Rank/siblings	Locale type <sup>b</sup>	Detention <sup>c</sup>	Income
1a	21/1/12	Samia	F	19	1 of 5	U	sy2000; mult;	MoD + mother's work
1b		Lama	F	16	2 of 5		adm; yrs<10	
2a	24/1/12	Ruba	F	19	4 of 6	C	sy1992; s-life	MoD
2b		Salma	F	18	5 of 6			
3	24/1/12	Ahmed	M	16	1 of 4	U	mult; s-2x life; yrs25	MoD
4a	30/1/12	Saleem	M	21	2 of 5	C	sy1987; mult; adm; yrs15+	MoD + family shop
5	2/2/12	Taima'	F	19	1 of 4	V	sy2002; s-25	MoD
6	11/2/12	Ramah	F	15	1 of 2	V	sy2005; s-life + 80	MoD + mother's work
7(4b)	18/2/12	Halimeh	F	19	3 of 5	C	sy1987; mult;	MoD + family shop
7(4c)		Duja	F	16	4 of 5		adm; yrs15+	
8	10/3/12	Tarek	M	15	3 of 5	V	sy1990; mult; adm; yrs10+	MoD
9	10/3/12	Omar	M	15	2 of 3	C	sy2003; yrs5.5	MoD
10a	5/4/12	Basel	M	20	1 of 5	V	sy2011; adm;	MoD
10b		Souzan	F	18	2 of 5		REL2012	
11a	7/4/12	Manal	F	17	1 of 5	V	sy2000; mult;	MoD + mother's occasional
11b		Abed	M	14	2 of 5		adm; yrs<10; 2011	work + child summer work
12a	7/4/12	Kawther	F	19	1 of 5	C	sy1990; mult; adm;	MoDAgriculture + mother's
12b		Nayrouz	F	17	3 of 5		yrs15+; rel2009	seasonal and artisinal work
13	22/5/12	Ramzi	M	14	1 of 4	U	sy2002; yrs10, rel2012	MoD through brother in law
14a	22/5/12	Sameh	M	19		U	sy2002; yrs15	PA security forces +
14b		Khaled	M	16				mother's salary + son's
14c		Noor	F	15				salary
14d		Reem	F	11				
15a	24/5/12	Jihan	F	18		U	sy2002; yrs10;	MoD
15b		Adam	M	14			rel2012	
15c		Hilmi	M	13				
15d		Hala	F	11				
16a <sup>d</sup>	1/12/12	Lo'ai	M	16	1 of 6	U	sy2003; s-life+20	MoD + child summer work
16b <sup>d</sup>		Kamal	M	15	2 of 6			
16c <sup>d</sup>		Jamileh	F	15	2 of 4	U	sy2001; s-22	MoD + child summer work
16d <sup>d</sup>		Khadijeh	F	13	3 of 4			

<sup>a</sup>Pseudonyms.

<sup>b</sup>Type of locale: U = urban; V = village; C = refugee camp.

<sup>c</sup>Sentence: sy = sentencing year; s = sentence; mult = multiple sentences; yrs = number of years spent in prison; adm = including administrative detention for all or portion of sentence; rel = release year. Data related to sentences in based on information as provided by the interviewees.

<sup>d</sup>Qalqilya group interview.

We present and discuss the data according to three themes that children expressed as salient.

### *Missing their father and coping with sadness*

For Ahmed (16) the experience of missing his father started early. Before his arrest, Ahmed's father had spent five years as a fugitive, coming home to his wife and children often, but almost never sleeping there. Ahmed cherishes the memory of one special night when he was a little boy:

I remember one night my dad slept with us in the house. He slept next to me and I woke up and he was there with me. I felt secure and safe ('bi aman').

(Intv3)

Ahmed's words emphasise that for children of political detainees, the feeling of safety and security in their parents' presence is the exception rather than the rule. Like many of the interviewees, Ahmed told us he became accustomed to his father's absence, that it is 'normal' for him. Yet, in sharing this recollection, he alerted us to the fact that coping with a father's absence means a reversal of norms: the father's absence becomes the normality of daily life, while the presence of his warmth is a cherished memory or a hopeful dream.

The reversal of norms is also illustrated by Halimeh (19), who speaks about her father who has spent 24 years in prison interrupted with short periods of release:

He is not out a month and then they are already back for him [re-arrest]. Our routine changes for a month or a month-and-a-half and then everything is back to normal.

(Intv7)

But no matter how 'normal', children develop their personal ways of dealing with their feelings about their father's absence: some mentioned that they would go to their room and cry. One girl said that every night before falling asleep she 'talks to her father' and tells him about her day. Others mentioned writing poems or little stories.

Ramah (15) shares a creative way of coping with the father's absence when she speaks about her younger brother Saed (13):

He didn't live with my father. He doesn't remember him in the house. He was too young. He doesn't know what it means to have 'baba' in the house [...] But he asks about baba a lot: 'If baba was here. . . .', and so on. Sometimes when we make tea or watch TV, we pretend and tell each other that we have to pour some tea for him; we act as if he is with us.

(Intv6)

Adam (14) explains that accepting the reality of living without your father's presence takes time:

I did not really understand that he was in prison. I was only four years old. We would visit [him] with my mother and my grandmother, and I thought he was working there. After about a year my mother explained about the detention. She said, "They have occupied our land. Your father resisted the occupation, and they put him in prison."

Interviewer How did you feel when you realised that?

Adam At first we took it 'adi' [normal] . . . Then I began to miss him a lot. For example when I would see another boy walking with his father, I would feel very sad. But now I am older and I know how to deal with the sadness. When I feel it coming I go out to play with other boys.

(Intv15)

As the words 'normal' and 'got used to' figured prominently in the interviews we asked when the children missed their father most. All mentioned the religious holidays. The *Eid al-Adha* (Feast of the Sacrifice) and the *Eid al-Fitr* (end of Ramadan) for Muslims, and Christmas and Easter for Christians, are times when families spend time together. For Palestinian children these feasts are high points of the year and it is then that the children of Palestinian political detainees feel the absence of their father most keenly. While other children boast their new clothes accompanying their fathers on visits to relatives, the children of detainees

stay at home with their mother. Some children also spoke about the end-of-school terms, when other children's fathers would attend teacher-parent meetings, and how they wished that their father too would hear how they do their best at school and receive compliments about their performance. The children's insistent use of the words 'used to' and 'normal' when talking about their situation, and then acknowledging their sadness and personal ways of dealing with it, testify to what Nguyen-Gillham and others (2008) have called 'the importance of positioning resilience within a context of "social suffering"' (p. 292). Being used to the absence of the father, normalising the abnormal, helps these children to cope, but it does not take away the sadness.

### *Community and support*

While the mother's support was referred to often, children also explained how important their father's support is to them, even while in prison.

Many showed us items their father had made for them: a pen, or a copybook entitled '*For my dear daughter*'. Samia (19) says:

My father always encouraged me to be strong and patient. Since detention is a fact of our life, he taught us to deal with it as best as we can.

(Intv1)

Although we heard of one teenage girl and an eight-year-old boy who had received professional psychological treatment for shock and behavioural problems, most children found solace (some more than others) in the support of friends and family.

In Palestinian households, the mother is traditionally responsible for housekeeping and children, while the father takes care of most external affairs. When both of these responsibilities fall upon the wife of the detainee, relatives offer a helping hand. Almost all children spoke with fondness of grandparents, uncles and aunts. At times involvement of relatives, however, could be irritating. Taima's (19) uncle is stricter than her father and does not allow her to go out with girlfriends or to dress the way she likes:

*My uncle says 'Once your father is out, he can deal with you however he wants, but right now you are my responsibility!' It makes me miss my father even more* (Intv5). Taima's complaints about her paternal uncle's restrictions, seem to support Shehadeh and others (2016) suggestion that interference by extended family members may be a factor in higher rates of distress in children living with their extended families. Importantly, Taima's narrative suggests that community and family restrictions on mobility and behaviour of wives of political prisoners' discussed by Giacaman and Johnson (2013) can extend to their teenage daughters.

(Intv5)

Many such girls find friends whom they can talk to. Duja (16) spoke about her closeness to a friend whose father was not a political detainee but who lives far away in the US. Boys also seek out friends who can understand their situation. Adam (14):

This year I found out that one of my classmates' father is also in prison, so we became friends. He is the only one who understands.

(Intv15)

The fact that Palestinian political prisoners are regarded as activists in the resistance against the occupation means that their children may feel pride, but Ahmed (16) revealed a qualifier that was echoed in subsequent interviews:

Yes, you feel pride, but only with certain people who understand and who care: my uncles, aunts and close friends of the family. Other people don't care.

(Intv3)

Children appeared happiest with the attention of people they considered genuinely interested and caring towards them, but felt annoyance towards people claiming to 'know' their feelings.

Ramah (15), indignantly: *Those who haven't lived it should not say they know how we feel!*

Interviewer But don't you think they say this because they mean well?

Ramah Yes, but they could just say that they hope our father gets out safe and sound.

(Intv6)

The reservations about 'pride' and community support voiced by Ahmed and Ramah, can be interpreted as the children's intuitive perception of the limitations of community solidarity; limitations more poignantly expressed by mothers and wives of political detainees, who compared the impersonal institutionalised support of the PA with the previous strong communal solidarity which was the norm in the period up to and during the first intifada (Giacaman and Johnson, 2013). Unlike their mothers and grandmothers, our interviewees were too young to be able to compare community support with what it had been in the 1980s and before the Oslo Accords of 1993, a period of time when the prisoners' movement had played an important role in the leadership and development of a unified Palestinian national movement. The prisoners' movement declined in importance when in early 1994 it integrated in the PA, which initially seemed to take over the leadership, but which ultimately devolved into a 2006 division of Palestinian society with the political movement of Hamas controlling the Gaza Strip and the Fatah party-dominated PA controlling the West Bank (see Rosenfeld, 2011). In addition to the Israeli occupation authorities, these parties detain critics and political opponents (Amnesty International, 2017).

We never asked the children about political details in relation to their father, but some children's narratives made it clear that their father belonged to a party opposing the PA. All through the interview, Manal had been dignified about her father and his detentions by Israel, but she cried speaking about visiting him in a PA prison:

The Israelis are our enemies here; I never expected that one day, that they [Palestinians] would be like this!

(Intv11)

Ahmed (16) spoke with great emotion about a summer camp for children of Palestinian detainees and martyrs that he had attended in Ramallah some years ago. He said he had loved the drama lessons and performing in theatre, but most of all that all the children were like him.

Very few children had heard of activities organised specifically for detainees' children but many expressed enthusiasm for the idea. Some older children said they would participate as 'leaders'. We asked whether it would not be just as nice to attend the regular summer camps open to all children, but 14-year old Adam was quite outspoken:

*No, specifically for children of prisoners is better.* His older sister Jihan (18) then explained:

Children appreciate being with others who are like them, and who share similar feelings and experiences.

(Intv15)

### *Children as a source of support for parents and siblings*

Observations of homes and furniture indicated that families with fathers serving particularly long prison sentences appeared to have better material living conditions than households where fathers were serving shorter sentences. Financial stipends provided by the MoDE to families of Palestinians detained by Israel increase with duration of detention. This means,

however, that for families where the father serves a relatively short sentence his absence also results in a substantial loss of income.

Questions about the key change in children's lives following their father's detention identified a third essential theme. Our interviewees discussed how they care for younger siblings when their mothers assumed their father's external duties and share more in the household chores. Some children help to alleviate the financial burden: Abed (14) has worked as a painter during his summer vacation, and Sameh has had after-school jobs since he was 16. Often, the older boys and girls become the right-hand confidant of their mothers, even her representative when she has no permission to visit her husband in prison. They accompany their younger siblings on the visit to their father in the company of another relative, or alone (if they are over 16), and thus become the conduit for communication between their parents. This may contribute to a feeling of importance, but also requires diplomatic skill. Regarding the problems with her uncle referred to earlier, Taima (15) says:

We don't tell my father everything; we tell him the nice things, the good things, but the not so nice, no . . . .

(Intv5)

Omar, whose mother is not allowed to visit her husband, explains:

You know, this visit is only 45 minutes, and then there are the searches [. . .] We speak about the [refugee] camp, the family, if anything has changed. [. . .] He also asks if we take care of my uncle and my grandmother. He tells me to walk her around [she is in a wheelchair]. I don't like it much, because she talks to everybody we meet on the street, but I do it because he asks me and he cannot do it [. . .] We talk only about the urgent things. I like to talk to him about sports, but they [his uncle and grandmother] tell me this is not important. I like to talk to him about football because we both love it, but there is not enough time.

(Intv9)

Ahmed confided to us that when he was younger, he did not like to go on the visits, . . . but now I go every time because I feel for him. It is already bad enough that he has to spend his life in prison . . . .

(Intv3)

Male children may become 'the man' of the house, or even the substitute father:

Question to Sameh (19): *Did you take on the role of the father?*

Reem (11), before her brother had a chance to respond: *Yes, I see him as my father! [. . .]*

Sameh (laughing): One day the neighbour's son came and said: 'Your daughter beat me!' Many think that I am her father, and that my mother is my wife!

(Intv14).

Some of the slightly younger children expressed distress:

Ahmed (16): When my younger siblings do something wrong, my mother wants me to discipline them. But I do not like it. I feel it is not my responsibility to do this

(Intv3).

And Ramah (15): In certain situations I want the responsibility and in other situations, I don't want it at all

(Intv6).

When mothers give responsibility to children, it may also be a conscious attempt to help them deal with the sadness of missing their fathers, as we heard from Ramzi's mother:

*In the first year of his father's detention, I was having a very difficult time with Ramzi, who was only three. He took it very badly. I asked our family doctor about him and he told me 'you have to take him out of this situation'. I started dealing with him in a different way. I would take him with me when I went shopping; I would make him feel that he has a responsibility. I would talk to him about many things, even though he was very young. It made a real difference.*

Ramzi: My mother is my friend. I tell her my secrets, and she tells me

(Intv13)

The confusion felt by very young children at the sudden disappearance of their father (like Ramzi and Adam) is confirmed by Shehadeh and others (2015), whose survey of mothers of children whose father is in prison showed that younger children tended to display more emotional and behavioural stress than older children. Helping young children to understand and cope with the father's sudden absence is difficult. Several mothers mentioned that psychosocial guidance in supporting their children as they attempt to deal with the sudden absence of their husband, could help.

Limiting the conceptualisation of coping to a one-way process in which children negotiate their needs with the resources available to them, obscures the fact that these children are not only receivers of support but also extend support to their mothers, siblings, and even their father in prison. Our interviewees' descriptions of how they try to help their mother in sharing responsibilities related to home, siblings, and sometimes financial burdens, reflected a positive commitment rather than resentment in the majority of cases. Rutter (2012) explains resilience as a dynamic process in which exposure to stress or adversity may also decrease vulnerability through a 'steeling' effect. Finding satisfaction in extending support to loved ones also echoes ethnographic evidence from research into children's coping with parental absence in AIDS-stricken families in Africa. For example, Skovdal and others (2009) working in Western Kenya, found that adolescents engaged by circumstances in the care of their HIV-AIDS affected family are generally able to construct a positive social identity around their caring roles. Research into the active role of children in helping the family deal with difficult situations complements the more common focus on individual coping. This is also evident in the growing body of research focusing on children's roles as carers in families in which parenting by one or both parents is compromised, for example as a result of mental illness (Aldridge, 2006; LeFrancois, 2010). In qualitative case studies in five countries, Ungar and others (2011) found that for adolescents who were identified as coping well with chronic adversity, making a contribution to the welfare of their family was advantageous to their own well-being. They also found that acknowledgment or 'positive regard' of that contribution by an adult was an important factor in the adolescents' well-being. The question that remains is whether children who are playing an important role in helping their family cope with a sad and difficult situation, and who find some relief and satisfaction in this positive contribution, are or are not able to deal with their own grief as well. The recommendation that 'young carers' need both support AND recognition for the tremendous role they take on, for example in the form of 'young carers projects' (Aldridge, 2006), resonates well with our interviewees' opinion that special activities for children of Palestinian detainees in the form of summer camps or other periodic events would comfort both the younger and the older children. An evaluation of 'young carer' projects in the UK emphasised the value of peer support, the common affinity of being a 'carer', and the knowledge that other young people share a common experience as important support mechanisms (Richardson and others, 2009).

### Concluding remarks

Although the relatively small number of interviews may be considered a limitation of our study, it allowed the researchers to spend more time with the children eliciting deeper ethnographic material than a larger sample might have allowed. The positive roles children play in supporting family members during times of crisis or hardship, are not restricted to families

of political detainees. What we have learned from these Palestinian children may equally apply to other contexts where families deal with the long-term absence of a parent, for example when one of the parents is working abroad or when parents suffer from chronic health problems. Our paper draws special attention to children's positive contributions to the welfare of their families, while at the same time it is clear that they also grieve. Support organisations, such as Prisoners' Club or psychosocial health care providers could provide counselling to mothers on helping their children deal with the sudden and often long-term absence of their father as well as with the sometimes interfering and negative attention of relatives or community members. It is important that the contributions of children of Palestinian political detainees be acknowledged, and that opportunities to connect to others like them are facilitated, whether the children belong to the older or to the younger age group.

For children of political detainees in the occupied Palestinian territories and elsewhere, the ultimate solution lies in ending the political conflict and oppression that is the origin of the absences inflicted on them and their families.

### Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the children, the mothers and the Ministry of Detainee and Ex-detainees Affairs for their enthusiasm, support and active participation in this study. We thank Cory Balsam for his enthused co-operation with us in reading and commenting on notes and analysis at the early stages of this study. The encouragement of a Sudanese and two Turkish colleagues, who personally experienced growing up with a parent in political detention has added to our determination to publish this paper. We thank our reviewers for the comments and suggestions, which helped to improve the paper. We thank UNICEF for their financial support.

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Accepted for publication 5 December 2017