



When we asked students whether their academic performance affects their aspirations, the students in general reported that their academic performance directly affects their chances to fulfill their aspirations. On the other hand, most of them aspire to obtain a bachelor's degree, even when they have medium or low academic achievements. One young female student said, "if I don't get good grades, I will not reach what I like to be." A young male student said, "if my grades are high, I will be able to enter whatever specialization I want at the university."

When we asked students whether they have role models who affect their aspirations and who they were, the results showed that those who have high aspirations for their education have role models among family members (uncles, aunts, cousins and sometimes brothers and sisters). One young female student said, "my uncle has a Master's in mathematics. He is also a writer and I would like to be like him." A young male student said, "my aunt is a lawyer; I would like to be like her." Another young male student said, "my uncle is an engineer; I want to be like him and this is normal."

When we asked students what their parents' aspirations were for their own educational attainment, the results in general revealed that the parents of most students, and even those parents who themselves have low levels of education, want university education for their sons and daughters. The findings were similar for boys and girls. These results reflect that Palestinian society values education in general, as has been noted elsewhere. There were no real differences between mothers' and fathers' aspirations. A young female student said, "my mother wants me to be an engineer in order to be the first engineer in the family." One young male student said, "my parents want to be proud of me and for me to be a doctor or an engineer."

Conclusion

There is a gap between aspirations for education and realistic expectations among the study participants. However, girls have higher aspirations than boys to reach bachelor's education. The gap between youth aspirations and expectations was more evident among boys than girls. The constraints of low grades on the Tawjihi examination, the need to work and the financial situation were reported as reasons for not achieving youth aspirations for education.

Policy implications

Given these initial observations, it is clear that more research about the gap between youth aspirations and realistic expectations toward education should be conducted.

• A special focus should be made on identifying the problems behind boys' low grades at school and looking for ways to improve them through concerted efforts made at all levels involving the Ministry of Education, school principals, teachers, parents and school counselors.

• New strategies should be explored to help students complete their education, especially for those who lack money, through scholarships and other possible financing methods.

• Boys should be encouraged to continue their education as their dropout rates are higher than girls and their grades and expectations are lower. This can be accomplished by targeting boys from more marginalized socio-economic strata for assistance.

Youth Aspirations toward their Future Education

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this policy brief is to draw attention to the importance of youth aspirations (wishes) and how these relate to their realistic expectations given their living conditions. The brief findings are based on our analysis of the 2006 Palestinian Family Health Survey (Pan Arab Project for Family Health). 25 qualitative interviews were conducted with students enrolled at two governmental schools in the Ramallah District town of Birzeit in the fall of 2011.

The most important observation of this study was that the aspirations of young boys, in particular, do not reflect the reality of their expectations. Although many boys have high aspirations with respect to education, high educational attainment is not necessarily the result. One of the boys interviewed summarized it adequately: "I don't think that a high percentage of youth are educated, especially boys. Girls like to study and have high aspirations while boys leave school without finishing." The boys reported several reasons for their academic expectations not matching their aspirations for education.

They included: having low grades on their Tawjihi (university placement) examination, the financial situation of their families and the need to work instead of attending school.

Statement of the problem

Do aspirations (wishes) for education among young Palestinians match realistic educational expectations?

Background

This policy brief is based on a national sample of 13,238 households in which 11,661 were interviewed.

The focus of the policy brief is on unmarried youth aged 15-29 years old (n=6470) where one youth was selected from each household with youth members in this age bracket. The following figures describe the educational status of these youth:

Figure 1: Enrolment status of youth (15-29) in the occupied Palestinian territory by age group and sex (Family Health Survey, 2006)



Based on the Palestinian Family Health Survey, enrolment status of youth in the oPt (currently attending any educational institution) is relatively high among the age group 15-17 (82.8% of boys and 94.2% of girls, total 88.4%), which is expected considering that education is compulsory and free of charge until age 16. Percentages of enrolment dropped for the older age groups 18-22 and 23-29 as shown in figure 1 (total of 54.2% and 17.9%, respectively). The enrolment rate for Gazan boys was higher for the three age groups compared to West Bank boys. The enrollment patterns are the same for girls except for the age group 23-29 where slightly more girls in the West Bank are enrolled than girls in the Gaza Strip.



The overall dropout rate among youth is 28.9% (attended educational institution and dropped out without receiving a degree). The dropout rates are high among youth in the age group 23-29 (33.3%) compared to 25.7% and 8.7% for the age groups 18-22 and 15-17, respectively. Figure 2 reveals the differences in drop rates based on age and sex. Dropout rates are higher among boys than girls for all the age groups. The differences by region showed that girls and boys in the West Bank have a higher percentage of drop out compared to their peers in the Gaza Strip.

Figure 2: Dropout rates of youth (15-29) in the occupied Palestinian territory by age group and sex (Family Health Survey 2006)

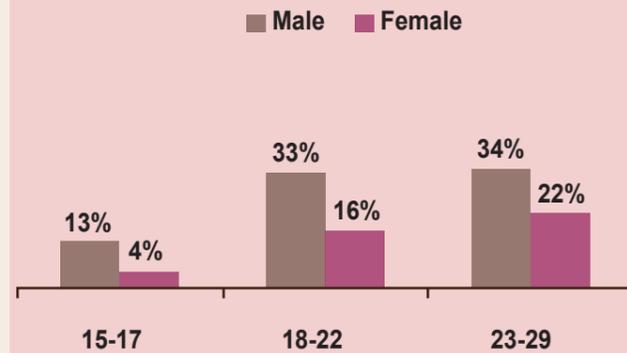
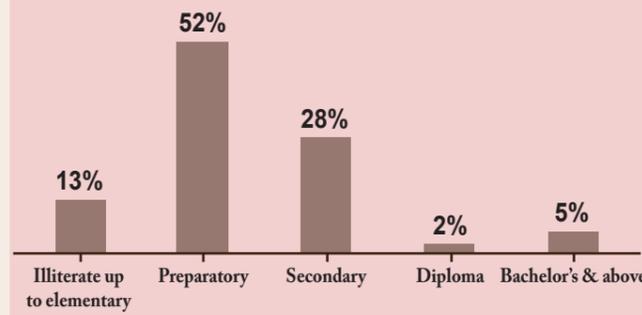


Figure 3 shows the current educational status for youth (15-29). The percentage of youth enrolled in educational institutions is high for those with less than secondary education and considerably low for university education and above.

Figure 3: Percentage of youth (15-29) by their current educational status (Family Health Survey 2006)



Results

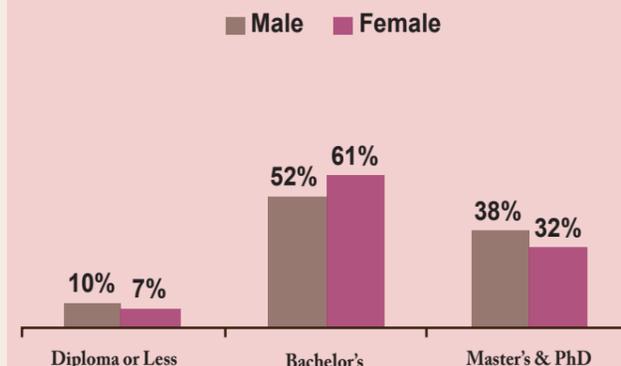
Educational aspirations for persons currently enrolled in school (Family Health Survey 2006 results)

The results are based on an analysis of youth (n=4025) who were enrolled in schools at the time of the survey. The analyzed question was: "What is the highest desired level of education?"

Educational aspirations for persons currently enrolled in school, by sex

Overall, slightly more girls than boys expect to complete at least a college education. Among those with aspirations for higher education, girls more often aspire to complete bachelor's degrees (total of 56.6%), while more boys aspire to complete Master's and PhD education (total of 35%). Figure 4 summarizes the overall gender differences of youth educational aspirations for education. 52.2% of boys aspire to finish bachelor's degrees compared to 60.9% of girls, while 38.4% of boys wish to finish Master's and PhD degrees compared to 31.8% of girls.

Figure 4: Youth aspirations for education by sex.



Educational aspirations of youth by region

The 2006 Palestinian Family Health Survey reveals that differences in educational aspirations based on sex in the West Bank are relatively small when compared with the Gaza Strip, as shown in figure 5. In Gaza, more girls (67.9%) aspired to finish their education with a bachelor's compared to 53.3% of boys (total of 60.5%), while more boys (35.6%) than girls (23.8%) aspired to Master's and PhD level education (total of 29.8%).

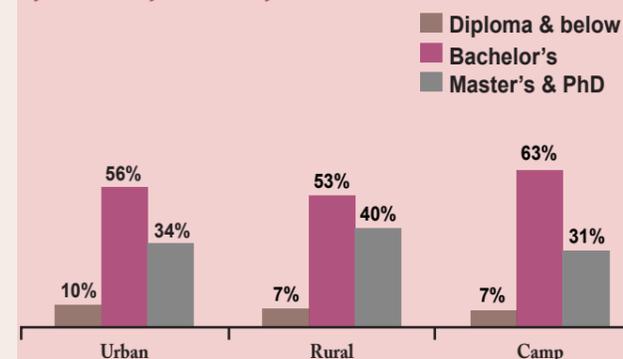
Figure 5: Educational aspirations for youth in Gaza Strip by sex.



Educational aspirations for youth by locality - Percentage of Locality

Refugee camp residents were more likely to desire bachelor degree education compared to other localities, while youth in rural areas were more likely to aspire to Master's and PhD education, as shown in figure 6. Girls in refugee camps are less likely to desire Master's and PhD education compared to other localities (27% of females in camp compared to 37.1% in rural areas and 30.6% in urban areas).

Figure 6: Educational aspirations for youth by locality



Educational aspirations of youth by parents' education

Father's education has a positive impact on educational aspirations; the higher the education of father, the higher the aspiration for higher education for both boys and girls. 52.4% of boys and 42.6% of girls with fathers that have bachelor's degrees and higher (total of 47.3%) desire to have Master's and PhD education. One of the girls interviewed said "I like to be as my father. He is an educated person and all people like him." Youth aspiration for higher education is different in the West Bank and Gaza Strip regardless of the educational attainment of their parents. Youth in rural areas likewise aspire more to have Master's and PhD than the other localities irrespective of parent education.

A mother's education has a similar effect on youth aspirations as the father's education. Around half of girls and boys with mothers that have bachelor's degrees and higher desire to have Master's and PhD education (55.2% of boys and 49.7% of girls, a total of 52.2%).

Insights from interviews with high school students

Further research was conducted to better understand factors affecting youth aspirations. A total of 14 interviews with boys and 11 with girls were conducted in Birzeit secondary schools between October and November 2011.

We asked students what aspirations they have for their education, why they hold such aspirations, and what realistic expectations they have and why. The results have shown that there is a gap between their aspirations and realistic expectations. Their aspirations were much higher than their realistic expectations and the gap seemed to be bigger among boys than girls. One explanation mentioned was not getting high grades in the high school Tawjihi examination. A second explanation was the need to work, which was more evident among boys than girls. A third explanation was the financial situation. One young male student said, "I want to study only bachelor's as I want to work." One young female student said, "I want to study law but I may not get a high grade at Tawjihi. I expect to get 74 only and then I will change my plan as I will not be able to study law."