

# **Life and Health during the Israeli Invasion of the West Bank The Town of Tulkarem**

Rita Giacaman and Abdullatif Husseini  
Institute of Community and Public Health  
Birzeit University  
May 25th, 2002

This is the fourth brief statistical report focusing on the daily life and environmental conditions of families living under curfew and in fear and in danger, during the latest Israeli invasion of the West Bank. The towns included in these series are Ramallah/ al-Bireh, Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarem and Bethlehem. While these reports are being dispatched separately, ideally they should be considered together. A final report will follow the individual town reports and will focus on the summary results for all the towns combined. This report pertains specifically to Tulkarem, with a population estimated by PCBS in 1997 to be around 33949, and 6141 households.

At the time of writing this report, a damage assessment had already been conducted by a group of international donors, including the World Bank, the European Union, the United Nations and others. This damage assessment focused on physical damage to infrastructure, property and homes. It placed the highest level of this type of damage as having been incurred in Nablus. According to this assessment, the town of Tulkarem suffered damages amounting to \$8,881,493, the lowest of our surveyed towns. In our previous report on the town of Jenin, which did not include Jenin refugee camp, we demonstrated that social and humanitarian costs were perhaps highest in Jenin among the surveyed towns. This survey hopes to address at least to some extent the humanitarian and social costs paid by the people of Tulkarem during the re-invasion. It focuses on households and individuals, offering quantitative indicators of their situation generalizable to all of the population, and confirming to a good extent impressions and observations made in rapid appraisal and through interviews by journalists, researchers and institutions. The invasion of Tulkarem began on the 29th of March and ended on the 22nd of April, 2002. However, periodic re-invasion and curfew placed on the town where the Israeli army comes in, destroys homes and infrastructure, arrests or kills selected individuals then leaves, continue up till the time this report was written.

At this writing, news of a new Israeli control regime leading to long term bantustanization of the West Bank was beginning to appear in the local press, with territorial divisions expected to have even more severe effects on the Palestinian economy and humanitarian situation than during the first 19 months of the current Uprising. The Tulkarem area, already disadvantaged by virtue of its distance from the center of the West Bank, its proximity to the borders with Israel and its previous dependence on work inside Israel, is expected to be harder hit than other regions of the West Bank. That is, some of the difficulties faced in living in Tulkarem town that will be outlined in this report are expected to continue, and perhaps become even more severe, even if the invasion is now 'technically' completed, as it has been replaced instead by a serious intensification of closures and siege, making it impossible for people to earn livelihoods and seek services in places other than their town of domicile.

## **Data Collection**

A sample of 154 households was selected utilizing stratified cluster sampling techniques. The city was divided into 5 strata, whereby 2-3 random starting points were selected. From each

starting point a systematic sample of every 10th household was selected. In this survey, the expected maximum margin of error at the city level is:

$$E = 1.96 * DE * \sqrt{(P) * (Q) / (n)}$$

P= the percentage of a certain attribute.

$$Q = 1 - P$$

DE=Design Effect due to clustering.

The estimated value of DE=1.1.

$$E = 1.96 * \sqrt{(0.5)(0.5)(1.1)/(150)} = 8.8\%$$

## **Data Entry**

Data entry was completed using the ACCESS database. Proper control structure was defined on closed questions. Data was transferred to SPSS using "StatTransfer" software. Double entry was conducted for a sample of the questionnaire to check for errors that could not be detected by the control structure defined in ACCESS. One out of 50 questionnaires experienced swapping values like 1 entered instead of 2 or visa versa.

## **The Results**

One hundred and fifty-five adult household heads or family members were interviewed. The mean age of respondents was 38 years, slightly less than the mean age for the other surveyed communities. Forty six percent of the respondents were females and the rest were males. Of the total 2% were illiterate, 7% with elementary schooling, 17% with primary schooling, 32% with secondary schooling, 8% with postgraduate diplomas, 30% with Bachelors degrees and 4% with Masters Degrees or above. These results indicate a higher level of educational attainment for Tulkarem's population (Census 1977), notably in the high levels of post secondary education: in the census, 9.3% were found to be illiterate, 13.2% could read and write, 24.4% with elementary schooling, 22.9% with preparatory and 15.1% with secondary schooling; 6.9% were reported to have associate Diplomas, 6.8% Bachelors degrees, and 1% an educational level higher than the Bachelors degree. Caution should be made however when comparing with PCBS figures, as those pertain to the population 10 years or over. The differences may also be due to a bias in favor of educated respondents in our survey.

A high average family size was noted for Tulkarem, at 6.94, even higher than the highest report pertaining to our survey, that of Ramallah (6.84), and higher than that quoted by PCBS 1997 for Tulkarem at 5.5 persons per household. Here, the smallest household was composed of one person and the largest a high of 30 persons /household. Of the total households, a high of 81% was composed of nuclear families and 19% extended. These results are very close to those of PCBS (1977) that place the percentage of nuclear families at 79% for Tulkarem Town.

## **Family composition: change during exceptional circumstances**

As is the case with the other towns surveyed so far, the higher than expected average household size found in this survey seems to be related to families housing other families during the siege, where families moved out of dangerous areas to perceived less dangerous locations for the duration of the Israeli invasion. In Tulkarem, 23% of the households housed people other than those who normally live in their households during the invasion, a rate that is the lowest for the towns that we studied so far ( Jenin: 37%, Ramallah: 30% and Nablus 29%). Of those taking in people, over half reported them as relatives, a quarter reported them as friends, and the rest reported neighbors and other stranded people.

When asked why these people moved out of their homes and sought shelter in the surveyed household, a surprising almost half reported that the guests moved out because the army has taken over their homes, compared to one tenth each in Ramallah and Nablus respectively and the half in Jenin who reported that guests had sought shelter because army destroyed their homes. Over a quarter of Tulkarem houses sheltering guests denoted fear as the cause for this internal migration, around a fifth explained that their guests could not get home as the road was closed and curfew was imposed, and the rest provided for scattered answers mainly dealing with feeling safer where they moved. On the whole, judging from this set of data alone, it appears that Tulkarem homes were occupied by the army to a larger extent than the other towns, forcing them to seek shelter elsewhere, and suddenly inflating household size in the sheltering households.

Again here, given generalizability for Tulkarem's population, these results are significant in that they indicate a major shift in household composition, as was the case in other towns, although temporarily, during the invasion, with a consistent pattern emerging for all the towns surveyed so far, leading us to strongly suspect that this was probably a generalized phenomenon, probably influencing family life and influencing the consciousness of household members, especially children, in important ways requiring further investigation.

### **Loss of Work**

Of the female respondents, only 55% were housewives, and the rest working women. These results indicate the presence of a strong and unexplained bias in favor of working women respondents in our sample, and contrasts with the results obtained by PCBS in 1997 for working women in Tulkarem (14%). Given that the PCBS results are relevant to all females over ten, and our sample is composed of adults, these differences remain unexplained.

Of the male respondents, 21% engaged in private work, either owning a shop, or running a private operation, 7% were professionals (academics, teachers, lawyers, doctors, nurses), 27% were white collar workers (office workers, technicians, Palestinian Authority functionaries) and 28% were semi skilled and unskilled workers. Thirteen percent reported themselves as being unemployed just preceding the invasion, and only 1% reported farming as a profession, in a once well endowed agricultural area.

Of those working just before the invasion, a high of 28% reported that they are no longer holding a job, compared to 23% for Ramallah, 27% for Nablus and 24% for Jenin. In explaining why they are no longer working, over one quarter blamed the closures, a bit less than half reported the collapse of the market and job unavailability as a cause, and the rest denoted injury, having been arrested, and the destruction of the workplace during the invasion as the main cause of unemployment. While one has to be cautious against over-interpreting the available data, it may well be that the Tulkarem households will suffer from a higher level of unemployment as a result of the invasion and its aftermath combined with the strict closures and siege, especially as Tulkarem, unlike Nablus, for instance, is not able to generate employment within its district immediately and without substantial support because of the history of dependence on work in Israel. Indeed, Tulkarem has always suffered disproportionately from the impact of the political situation, being situated right at the border with Israel, and relatively far away from the main center of the West Bank, where work opportunities have been relatively more abundant than in other towns. On the whole, the loss of means of livelihood as a result of the latest events appears to be a consistent feature of our findings for all the towns that we have surveyed so far, and call for attention to be paid not only to infrastructural damage and rehabilitation, but perhaps, above all, assisting people, especially in the hinterland, through the generation of employment, to help themselves.

## **Unavailability of basic services**

As with the other towns, reports of electrical cuts during the invasion were widespread for Tulkarem. Here, respondents indicated that 44% of households faced electrical supply shortages largely most of the time, 54% some of the time, and the rest did not have a problem in this area. These results indicate that the electrical cuts were more severe than in Ramallah (20% most or all of the time), but less severe than in Nablus (47%) or Jenin (at a high of 96%). This may have been due to various factors, including the severity of the curfew, initiation and success of coordination efforts with the Red Cross to allow for the fixing of damage, and perhaps the insufficient infrastructure and human resources required to fix damages in the Tulkarem area. Note also that electrical cuts have affected not only the people of Tulkarem town, but also the surrounding villages and camp that are served by the Tulkarem Electricity Company, a population estimated based on PCBS census figures of 1997 to be around 27,000 persons.

The tubed water situation seems to have also been less severe than elsewhere, with 23% reporting no water supply most of the time, and 68% some of the time, compared to Ramallah with 37% reporting cuts most or all of the time, 39% for Nablus and Jenin at a high of 92%. Again, however, the clean water shortage did not only affect the residents of town, but also the villages and camp that are served by the Tulkarem Water Company, estimated based on the PCBS census of 1997 to be around 21,000 persons. Only very few faced the problems of the phone lines being cut with 8% most or all of the time and 24% only some of the time, again, denoting that the services situation in Tulkarem during the invasion was less severe than elsewhere.

In Tulkarem, the large majority did not have a problem in disposing of sewage, with 92% reporting no problems and the rest reporting problems with blown off pipes or cesspools not emptied because the municipal services came to a halt during the invasion and curfew. Once again, garbage disposal was an important problem, with 70% reporting having difficulties in getting rid of the household garbage, a situation somewhat less severe than in the other towns. Here, over three fourths of the respondents with garbage problems reported not being able to dump their garbage outside the home, with garbage piling up inside, apparently because the curfew was quite severe, and the rest reported garbage collection by the municipality as being the problem.

## **Low on food and cash**

The food availability problem at home seems to have been serious in Tulkarem, with 50% reporting this problem, compared to 43% in Ramallah, 37% for Nablus, and a higher 64% for Jenin. Likewise, a very high 74% reported food shortages in the market, that is, when the curfew was lifted and they tried to seek basic provision, higher than the 69% reported for Ramallah and the 43% Nablus, but lower than reports from Jenin (89%), once again, reinforcing the emerging picture of Tulkarem as harder hit than an assessment of physical damages can show.

In response to this food availability problem, families coped in similar ways to the other towns, with one twentieth reporting to baking and other traditional methods of making food, about a quarter receiving help from neighbors and friends, another quarter reporting that they in fact ate less, one fifth relied on substitution, using canned foods in and eating more rice and lentils than usual, and an additional fifth reported that they did nothing and waited for the curfew to be lifted, with the rest relying on food distribution, and buying on account from stores that they know.

Reports of cash shortages stood at 39% in Tulkarem, compared to a higher 54% for Ramallah, 33% in Nablus and 34% for Jenin. Coping with situation, we find that over half borrowed money from relatives and friends, about one quarter economized and spent less, and some even began to request payment of loans they had given to others previously, as well other answers such as using money that was saved for other purposes.

### **Shooting, explosions and destruction of property and institutions**

When asked about shooting, explosions and destruction in their area, a high 85% heard shooting either all or most of the time, 12% a little, and only 3% none at all. In response, households coped by 49% hiding in fear and suffering lack of sleep and mental distress; 33% reported specifically paying attention to children who were in great fear, crying, and needed comfort, 8% reported that the family hid in one room at times, and the rest either reported that they took sedatives, wished to die, waited in anguish until the army came to the house or encouraged themselves with saying that they should have patience and withstand.

For hearing or seeing destruction in their neighborhood, 87% reported witnessing such events, compared to a lower 78% in Jenin, 67% in Nablus and a lower 52% in Ramallah. It is not clear why this in, given the severity of home destruction in Jenin, but this could be due to Jenin's destruction being more concentrated around the camp area, and Nablus' around the old City, when in Tulkarem, it may have been more widespread, including more neighborhoods, even though perhaps less severe than in both Jenin and Nablus.

In reporting types of destruction, three-quarters (75%) reported rampant destruction of retaining walls, telephone and electrical poles, shops, pavements, and traffic signs, 13% reported the destruction of homes, doors, the breaking of furniture and windows as well as water pipes; 10% the destruction of institutions around them such as public centers, schools and police stations. The rest reported minimal levels of destruction of cars and other public property.

Of the total, 28% reported that their home was directly exposed to shooting, bombing and destruction. This is the same as that in Ramallah (28%), but lower than that of Nablus (34%) and Jenin (59%). Of those, over half reported that the shooting was directed to their home's walls, glass, home entrances and retaining walls, with an additional fifth reporting that bullets reached the walls of their homes only, but did not penetrate inside; less than one twentieth reported that the army occupied the building, and broke into and damaged the home and its interior property, and others provided reports pertaining to some destruction in their homes because the homes were searched. Of the total who have cars, 12% reported that their cars were directly exposed to shooting, bombing or total destruction.

Forty five percent of respondents reported that their home were searched, a rate that is higher than that of Jenin (30%) or Ramallah (41%) but lower than in Nablus (50%). Searching homes is quite a terrifying experience, not only because of the usual destruction of property that ensues, but also because usually families are all placed in one room and locked up, as the army searches, while families experience worry and fear not only in relation to their property but also in relation to the potential arrest of a family member. Of those reporting army searches of their homes, over a quarter reported that the army created a mess out of the house, almost one fifth reported that the army broke things inside the house, and almost one sixth reported that the army stole their belongings as they searched, again confirming the consistency of the stealing episodes, and in contrast to the IDF claims of incidental occurrences. Overall, 12% reported that one or more members of their families were arrested.

The place of work of respondents was not spared, with 13% reporting that their places of work were destroyed or damaged during the invasion, a rate that is lower than in Ramallah (41%) and

Jenin (29%) but higher than in Nablus (12%). Of those reporting such events, over one third reported the destruction of doors, windows, offices, files, computers in their work place, a quarter reported shooting directed at their place of work and the destruction of the materials inside, including stealing of items inside, one tenth reported the total destruction of their work place and the rest reported the invasion of schools, theft of various items, the destruction of agricultural land and the use of premises as barracks, destroying or damaging them in the process. These results indicate that perhaps Ramallah was most hard hit in terms of institutional infrastructure, and that in this particular type of destruction, Tulkarem and Nablus were the least affected.

## **Medications**

Of the total respondents, 34% reported a medication availability problem at home, exactly as in Jenin, but lower than Ramallah (49%) and higher than Nablus (22%). Again, it is difficult to explain these variations in need for medication, as possible explanations include a variety of answers ranging from the severity of the curfew, availability of medications in stores, ambulance services as well as the relative dependence on medications as a way of life that we suggested as a possible explanation for the high Ramallah results, which are interesting in view of the fact that ambulance services providing medications to the people that needed them were certainly more active in Ramallah than elsewhere. How they reacted to this need included the following: about one fifth resorted to indigenous medical practices, over one quarter did nothing and just waited until the curfew was lifted and the medication was available, about one tenth substituted one medication with another, or reduced the dose of the needed medication in an attempt to stretch what was remaining, and the rest managed to transport the person affected to hospital, called ambulances which reached them with the medications, and in one case, the person in need received the medication from the IDF!

Consequences of the lack of medication from those who suffered it included: about one tenth reported the deterioration of a diabetic or hypertensive case, about a quarter reported that in consequences, the illness episode was extended beyond its normal course, an additional tenth reported the condition began to affect others in the family – presumably, it was communicated to others, and the rest reported a deterioration in the health of children, fainting as a result, eventual transfer to hospital or living with pain.

## **Mental health**

Respondents were asked to report on any problems they observed in their family related to mental health during the period. Of the total, only 10% reported no mental health problems at all in their households, results that are comparable to the reports from the other towns, and again clearly denoting the need for family assistance on a large scale in these communities. Reports pertaining to symptom of psychological distress management were also interesting. Among those who reported mental health problems in their families, we found that only 9% reported that they tried to entertain themselves with playing cards, watching television, and playing computer games and entertainment with the neighbors, in contrast to the 24% in Ramallah. On the other hand, only 2% resorted to praying, in contrast to 22% in Nablus. For the rest, a high of 23% reported that they used sedatives or used sedating indigenous herbs as tea, 22% reported lack of sleep, and waiting and attempting to control one's fear, 9% focused on dealing with and helping children cope, and the rest gave a range of answers: slept at the neighbors, nervousness and boredom, trying to forget, sleeping early, helping each other cope and other such answers.

## **Views on current conditions**

As is the case with the other towns, a high of 77% reported their views on the current conditions that have damaged their lives in terms of despair and misery, and the rest reported their feelings in terms of 'grave violations of human rights', the need to go back to God, the need to withstand as this is a war, it is getting worse all the time, and there will be no peace. Of the total 53% directly blamed Israel for what is happening, explaining events in terms of an attempt to destroy Palestinian life, 11% pointed to America and Israel as the cause of what is taking place around them and in the country, 5% blamed Israel and the Arab leaders, and the rest pointed to the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian leaders, and that this is a reaction to resistance and suicide bombing incidents.

## **Conclusion**

This report helps in consolidating an image of household and personal tension, fear, danger and damage that accompanied the Israeli invasion of the towns of the West Bank during April of 2002. By examining responses in relation to social, human and health conditions, we observe that Tulkarem residents were seriously affected, even though the physical damage in their area was reported as being less severe than in other towns. While more analytical work is required to demonstrate this point further, as it stands now, it seems to be that Tulkarem may be the second hardest hit, after Jenin, in humanitarian and social terms, while Ramallah was hardest hit in relation to the destruction of the institutional and cultural infrastructure, and Nablus the physical infrastructure. What remains now is an initial analysis of Bethlehem town to be completed in order to confirm these observations. These results once again call for the construction of more than one definition of the scale of damage severity, important for understanding the impact and damage of these recent events on the population, and equally important for the formulation of future policies.

In estimating the numbers of households and people that were affected by specific serious difficulties in dealing with daily life as a consequence of this invasion, we can note the following based on 1997 PCBS Census data of 6141 households and 33,949 persons living in Tulkarem town:

1- Family composition: change during exceptional circumstances a- 23% of the households housed people other than those who normally live in their households that is, 7,808 persons or 1,412 households.

2- Unavailability of basic services 44% of households faced electrical supply shortages largely most of the time that is, 14,938 persons or 2,702 households. 23% reporting no water supply most of the time that is, 7,808 persons or 1,412 households. 70% reporting having difficulties in getting rid of the household garbage that is, 23,764 persons, or 4,299 households.

3- Low on food and cash 50% reported food availability problem that is, 16,975 persons or 3,071 households. 39% reported cash shortages that is, 13,240 persons, or 2,395 households.

4- Shooting, explosions, and destruction of property and institutions 85% heard shooting either all or most of the time that is, 28,857 persons or 5,220 households. 87% reported witnessing (hearing or seeing) destruction in their neighborhood that is, 29,536 persons, or 5,343 households.

5- Medications

34% reported medications availability problem at home that is, 11,543 persons, or 2,088 households.

6- Mental health

90% reported mental health problems at all in their households that is, 5527 households.

**References:**

1. Damage to Civilian Infrastructure and Institutions in the West Bank Estimated at US\$ 361 Million, Press Release, Local Aid Co-ordination Committee, Jerusalem, May 15, 2002.
2. Hass, Amira, Israel Forces Internal Movement Permits on Palestinians, Palestine Monitor, May 19th, 2002.
3. Information Brief - Israel Imposes New Control Regime Leading to Long Term Bantustanization of the West Bank, Palestine Monitor, May 21st, 2002.
4. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistic, PCBS, 1999. Population of Palestinian Communities, 1997-2010. Ramallah - Palestine
5. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistic, PCBS, 2000. Census for Population, Housing and Establishments -1997: city report series, final results, Tulkarem city, Ramallah - Palestine.