

# Improving Palestinian Women's Lives

# MAP

MEDICAL AID FOR PALESTINIANS



WOMEN'S LIVES IMPROVING PALESTINIAN WOMEN'S LIVES IMPROVI



Nahlah, pictured earlier this year.

## Women struggling to keep body, soul, home and families together in Gaza

In the aftermath of the war, women in Gaza face a daily struggle for survival; to find food for their family, to find money to keep their children in school and to find healthcare. Nahlah Jabir\*, MAP's Programme Officer in Gaza, describes her struggles after the war.

*"Women here have to be strong.*

*The day I returned to my house, after it had been destroyed by Israeli bombs, was the worst day of my life. Everything was burned or covered in rubble. It has been a nightmare for my four-year-old son who started having nightmares and kept asking, "When can we go home?". I decided that whatever happened, we had to move back for my son.*

*It took months, but we managed to clear the rubble, salvage a couple of pieces of furniture and borrow tools and paint. Eventually, last month, we moved back in and now my son can sleep again. Now other families are beginning to move back into the building. I don't know if life will ever be the same again, but we must try.*

*However, when I see how some other women have to struggle more than me, I know we have to work to give them the power to succeed. There is no money for food, for school-fees, for clothes and every day is difficult. In previous years the better-off in the community would help their neighbours, but now everybody is poor.*

*MAP is providing practical help to these brave women. Help for mothers with disabled children, psycho-social support for children with trauma and nutritional support for malnourished children; all these projects help the whole community and give women in particular the strength to continue. We cannot give up."*

# "For the sake of our families, we will always find a way to survive."

\* The names of individual women have been changed to protect their security. Their stories are true.



Nahlah's house suffered extensive bomb damage during the war in Gaza.



Nahlah's was just one of hundreds of homes destroyed during the war.

# PALESTINIAN TERRITORY



## Marginalised women in Yatta, near Hebron, are in desperate need of better healthcare

Yatta is a community devastated and impoverished by over 40 years of occupation. Since the Intifada in autumn 2000, conditions for women have deteriorated further as men were forbidden from travelling into Israel for the casual manual labour on which so many families depended. Women have had to bear the burden of earning money for their family at the same time as fulfilling their more traditional roles of home-makers.



Community nurses carrying out follow up appointments with post natal mothers.

Health services are scarce, and for many women the MAP supported primary healthcare clinic provides a rare chance of accessing specialist healthcare. Nurse Rawda Farahat described how important the clinic is for the women of Yatta:

**“Here, our crisis never ends.”**



Community Nurses bring healthcare into the heart of West Bank communities.

71% of women in the occupied Palestinian territories have not received any public health information about the need for self-examination to detect breast cancer.

Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

*“I have been a nurse for ten years now and have worked here for the last six. My job is to provide education to women both inside and outside of the clinic. So I will lead group discussions and I will also do one-to-one sessions. The women I see find it a relief to talk to another woman, and it often helps them to discuss issues that they would otherwise be unable to talk about.*

*I am also a midwife and I go into the community where we have an ante-natal group that can be 15-20 women at a time. Here we tell people what issues to be aware of during pregnancy. Because mortality rates are high; I try to encourage the mothers to go to the hospital, but it is not easy. Most people still want to give birth at home. There is still a high percentage of low-weight and premature babies. We also see a lot of children suffering from anaemia when they are between four and six months old, so we prescribe iron supplements.*

*We do outreach programmes in two small villages nearby as well. We have to physically carry the heavy, cumbersome ultrasound machine through the checkpoint and that can be very difficult.*

*Sometimes I feel like we are achieving a lot and sometimes it can be very frustrating. For instance, we need to work hard to encourage breastfeeding and build awareness that this is the safest way to feed their children, so their children will have stronger immune systems and fewer health problems.*

*We are helping. We can't end the occupation, but we can treat women if they are ill, and just as importantly give them the knowledge that means they can take more control of their health, lives and family.”*

# LEBANON



Fatmah is determined her children have the chance of a decent future.

## Palestinian refugee women in Lebanon are taking control of their futures

Like all Palestinians in Lebanon, the residents of the Sabra area and Shatila refugee camps exist in a kind of limbo, largely ignored by the outside world and excluded from mainstream Lebanese society.

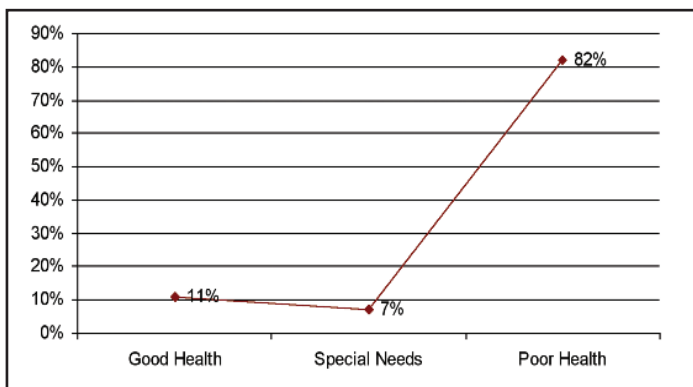
Fatmah Yousif Masaod, a 38-year-old mother of five, originally moved into the Gaza Buildings – a dilapidated, overcrowded, unsanitary former hospital in the heart of Sabra camp, that is now home to hundreds of Palestinian families – in 1988, to escape the fighting when the civil war hit where she lived. Twenty-one years later, she remains there. Here, Fatmah describes to MAP workers the daily challenges she faces.

*"It feels as if we are buried alive in this building. All of the children living here are sick. They have tuberculosis and respiratory infections and there are cockroaches everywhere. Two of my own children have hepatitis. My only hope is to give the children an education so they have greater opportunities of escaping to a better life.*

*But it is so hard. My husband was shot in the leg during the civil war and is not well enough to work all the time. So I must find the money from somewhere; the money to feed the children and to send them to school so they do not have to live like this forever. I live for the children.*

*My ten-year-old boy has a speech disability so must go to a specialist school next year. I don't know how I will do it, but I must find the money to pay. I don't want my children to spend their lives here and education is their only hope. I learned from my mother, and my daughters will learn from me, that we have to be strong. For our families, we have to be strong."*

MAP works in Sabra and Shatila, and in camps throughout Lebanon, to improve Palestinian refugees' access to healthcare.



*From: Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon: Conditions and Challenges in Bourj al-Barajneh Camp.*

*Study by the Palestinian Women's Humanitarian Organization, Beirut, Lebanon (December 2008).*



**"I struggle because I must keep my family together – and give my children the chances that I never had."**

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