

# **Understanding Men's Family Planning and Fertility Intentions in Three Palestinian West Bank Towns**

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## **Extended Abstract**

### **Background:**

Fertility trends in the occupied Palestinian territory have showed a steady decline over the last two decades. While the uptake of contraception has been on the rise, very little is known about how decisions about contraception are made at the household level as well as fertility intentions more broadly.

### **Methods:**

This paper is based on 35 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with men in three West Bank towns, Nablus, Hebron, and Ramallah. Male research assistants in each of the three towns conduct the interviews and transcribe them verbatim. The transcripts are then read and reread by the principle investigator and analyzed by themes. Since the analysis is still ongoing, the findings presented here are very preliminary in nature and will be refined before the revision deadline if the paper is accepted for presentation or in a poster session.

### **Findings:**

The interview data shed light on men's views of childbearing, family size, and contraception; views that have largely been outside the scope of studies on Palestinian fertility. The data also sheds light on perceptions of shifting gender roles

among some groups; more emphasis on children's rights as well as women's health in relation to fertility and fertility intentions. The preliminary findings also highlight the increasing role of economic and material considerations when it comes to fertility decision-making.

Tentatively, there is some evidence of variations in fertility behavior between the different regions of the West Bank in terms of lifestyles. Some of these differences are likely linked to socioeconomic characteristics that have existed for some time (e.g. women's education has been historically higher in Nablus; earlier ages at marriage in Hebron, and the presence of a greater proportion of migrants-both external and internal-in Ramallah). One theme that appears consistent from the interviews so far is that of economic concerns. In general, globalization has spread throughout the region and despite a slower pace of spread in Occupied Palestine; more people are connected to the outside world through satellite and Internet, which is also manifested in consumer behavior. Many of the men spoke of the increased demands made by their children, particularly for recreation and what they viewed as luxuries like laptops, iPhones, and iPads. Despite difficult financial circumstances, there is increased exposure to these material objects and increased emphasis on a comfortable life. Financial concerns appear to run across social class, both in terms of trying to meet children's very basic needs to emphasis on providing children with comfortable lives.

I generally have found decreasing fertility preferences compared to older generations. In some cases, there was greater emphasis placed on the impact of continued childbearing on women's health as well as from the standpoint of the child's rights to complete care,

which would not be possible if the parents' attention needed to be divided amongst numerous younger children. Interviewees did note that in cases where they did not have a son, there was a desire to continue having children until a son was born.