

The Transition to Adulthood among Palestinians Living in the occupied Palestinian territory

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Introduction

The Palestinian (West Bank and Gaza) population is demographically unique. It has achieved quite low rates of mortality, with CDR=4, an IMR=25, and an expectation of life at birth of 72 years (PRB Factbook, 2010). The West Bank population is 93% literate, with an average number of years of education expected=14 years (CIA World Factbook 2008). The population (West Bank 2008) is 88% urban, but poor with per capita income of \$2900, and 46% of the population living in poverty (CIA World Factbook). Even so, the West Bank and Gaza have a TFR=4.6, and 44% of the population is under age 15 (PRB Factbook 2010).

This paper investigates the transition to adulthood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip of the occupied Palestinian territory (this is the UN name for the Palestinian lands). Palestinian youth are a quite unusual group in that a substantial proportion (17%) are members of refugee families (from the aftermath of wars of 1948 and 1967) who remain resident in United Nations supported refugee camps. The refugee camps typically are crowded with inferior housing, irregular access to water, electricity, and other public health services. At the same time, the refugees have a fairly high level of education and good health care, thanks to activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The refugee families by now have been resident in camps for three, and even four, generations. While youth in the camps can aspire to live and work in other parts of the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, or other nations, their opportunities to do so are remarkably circumscribed.

The form of Sunni Islam practiced among Palestinians is relatively open in terms of the freedoms accorded men and does not exclude women from public life; however, the roles of women are more circumscribed and centered on the home and family. The highest educated professional women, women working in family businesses, and women whose families are economically desperate may work after marriage and while raising children, but for the majority of women there is no formal employment. Despite this, young women actually get more education than boys, and would presumably have better human capital skills for work; in practice they get married after completing school and being having children right away. Young men, on the other hand, get less education but delay marriage into their late twenties and their early thirties because of the difficulties in finding work and assuming a role of financial contributor to the family.

Large family sizes are the reality for Palestinian youth. Large extended families are the organizational basis for Palestinian life. The family, in the best interest of the family, typically decides the social roles,

aspirations, opportunities, and behaviors of youth. Marriage is a bonding of two families, not of two individuals, and is subject to considerable family scrutiny and the need for family approval. While it is unusual for young persons to stray from their families and lead independent lives, youth are included in family decisions, and can refuse to marry a particular suitor if they wish. At the same time, the extended family provides social and economic security for its members in times of social and economic stress, and it is their pooling of resources that allow investments in young persons. Families often do not limit the opportunities for youth, but make them possible, with many extended families pooling resources so young people can attend college, and they support the establishments of family businesses and professional practices. Families typically are closely linked geographically, with houses that include on the first floor the grandparents and other kin, with the married children with children in apartments on the second floor, and the youngest generation of the family (grandchildren) married and living with their families on the upper floor. They share families' meals, household tasks, and childcare. Those kin who do not live in the same house often live next door, except in cases of family members who have moved to Arab nations, Europe, or the United States for employment. Unlike in many more developed nations, individuals with economic resources do not build houses to increase their privacy; they build houses to provide homes for their extended family and to share all aspects of family life.

Finally, the military occupation and its daily restrictions on movement within and between the West Bank and Gaza, constraints on business development, interruptions in public utilities, and frequent arrests of young adults and boys by the Israeli military and security forces, means severe restrictions on young persons opportunities, a restriction that also is highly unusual for youth in the world today. (In 2004 it was estimated that as many as 40% of Palestinian men 25 to 44 had spent time in Israeli detention or prison.) As with many socially excluded populations in Europe and other more developed nations, the Palestinians (who are actually a socially excluded population in their own lands) have strong social solidarity and this, too, affects the aspirations and behaviors of youth.

This paper, then, looks at the transition to adulthood among young persons age 14 to 24) living in the West Bank and Gaza. With these many unusual characteristics and contradictions in Palestinian life, the transition to adulthood among Palestinians is like that nowhere else.

Methods

The Palestinian Family Health Survey (PFHS), conducted in 2006 by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in collaboration with PAPFAM, was based on a random sample of 13,238 households across the occupied Palestinian territory. The survey sample was a stratified two-stage design. In stage one, a random sample of 325 numerating areas (PSUs) was selected with probabilities proportional to size. In the second stage, a fixed number of 40 households were selected randomly from each enumerated area. The survey contained four instruments to obtain data on households, ever-married women aged 15-54 and their children (if any) below 5, unmarried youth aged 15-29, and older adults aged 60 and above. In addition, a total of 10,648 ever-married Palestinian women aged 15-54 were successfully interviewed, with a response rate of 98%. The collected data were of good quality, with an overall response rate of 88% (86% for West Bank and 93% for Gaza Strip). A total of 17,808 youth were selected for this study, of whom 53% are male and 47% are female. Of these youth, 58% were living in urban areas, 25% were living in rural areas, and 17% were living in refugee camps.

The pilot results shown here are restricted to those aged 14 and 24 years old; we will investigate expanding the population of age 29 as we proceed with analysis for this paper. We will examine three of the usual markers of the transition to adulthood - school enrollment, employment in the formal sector,

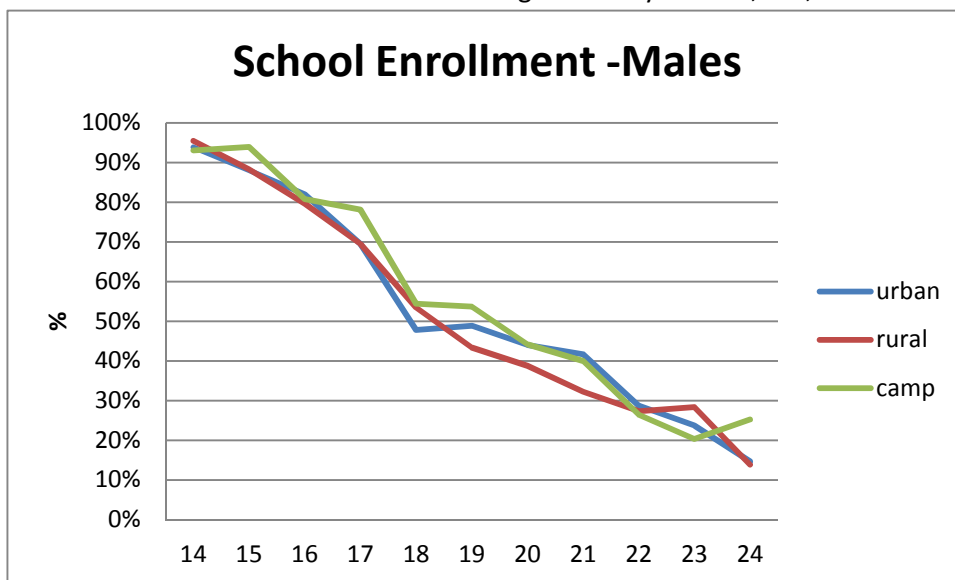
and marital status (ever-married). Youth activities at each year of age are examined. Populations that we hypothesize are subject to social exclusion (women and persons living in camps) are studied for differences (with men, and with rural and urban residents) in the transition to adulthood. After describing differences in age patterns of the transitions the paper will move on to identify combinations of life domains (social roles) in the population for these socially excluded groups, and for individuals. Finally, we will attempt to explain whether the differences observed by place of residence are unique to the refugee status of young persons in the camps or can be explained by a variety of demographic, and family statuses and resource, and chronic health and disability of the youth.

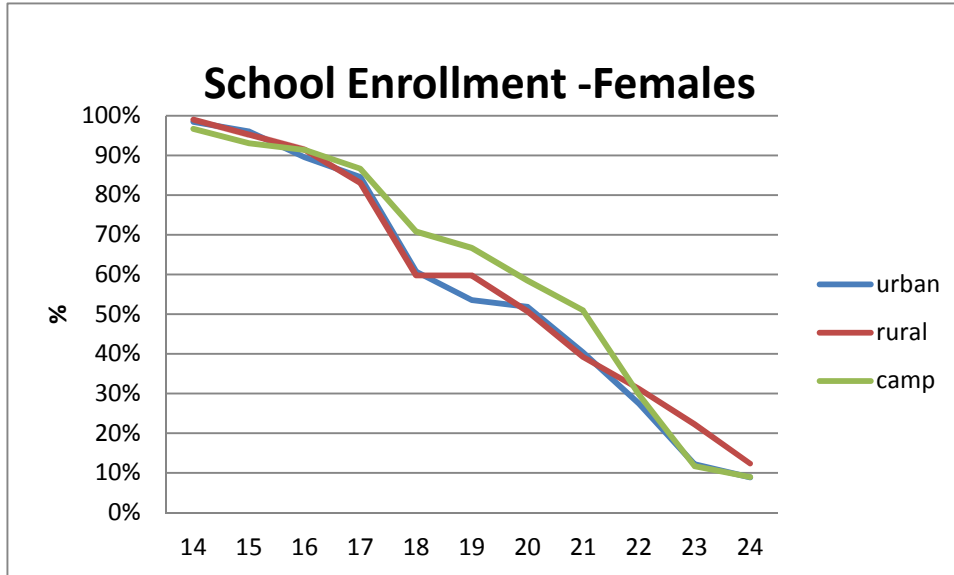
Preliminary Results

School enrolment

Youth enrolment was almost 100% for males and females living in the urban, rural, and camp areas at the age of 14 years. School enrolment decreases with age, with rapid decreases after age 17 with the completion of high school. School enrolment for both males and females living in camps was higher than in urban and rural areas in the ages 17 and 20. Even by age 24, about 12% of men are still enrolled in school full-time, and about one-quarter of men living in camps.

Figure 1. School enrolment for males and females aged 14-24 years old, oPt, 2006

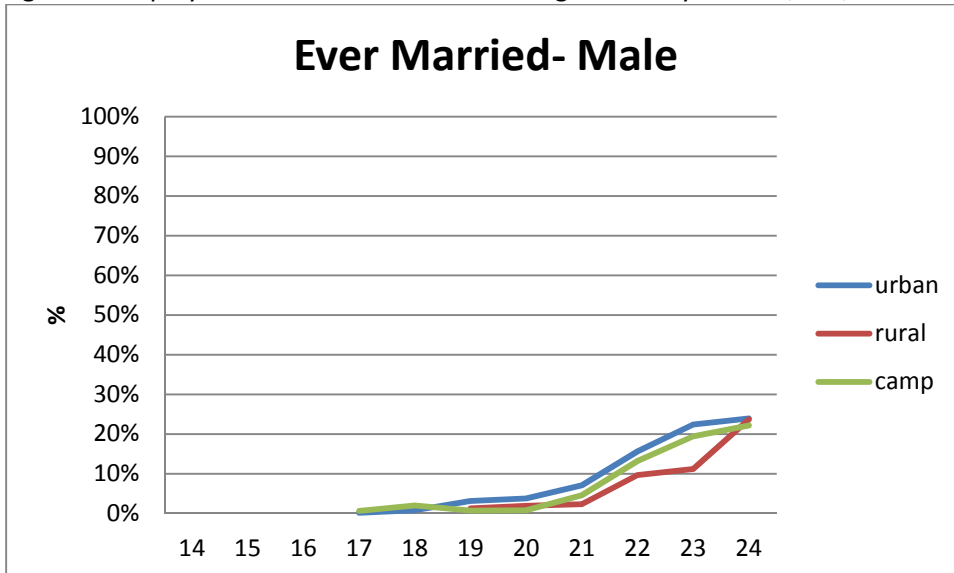


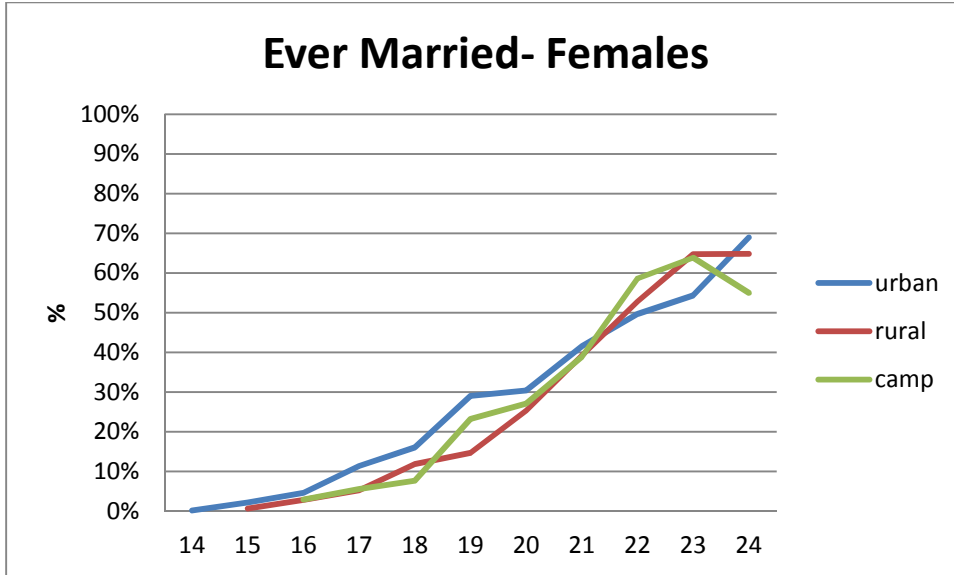


Marital status

Some girls marry before completing high school, but for most young women marriage occurs quickly afterward. By age 24, 70% of the females reported having ever married, compared to fewer than 25% of males age 24. Overall, the pattern of ever married was similar for youth living in urban, rural and camps areas, although there is some variation from age to age.

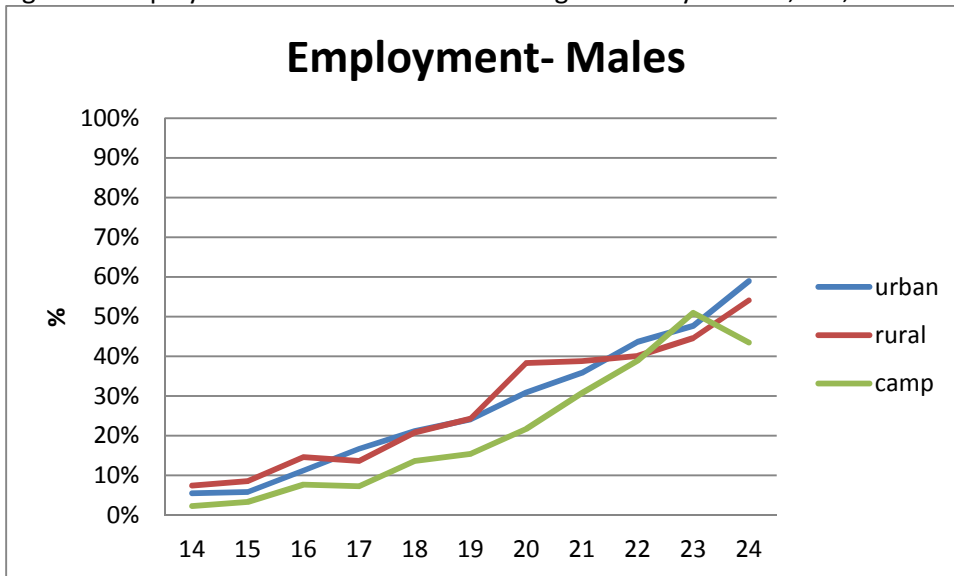
Figure 2. Employment for males and females aged 14-24 years old, oPt, 2006

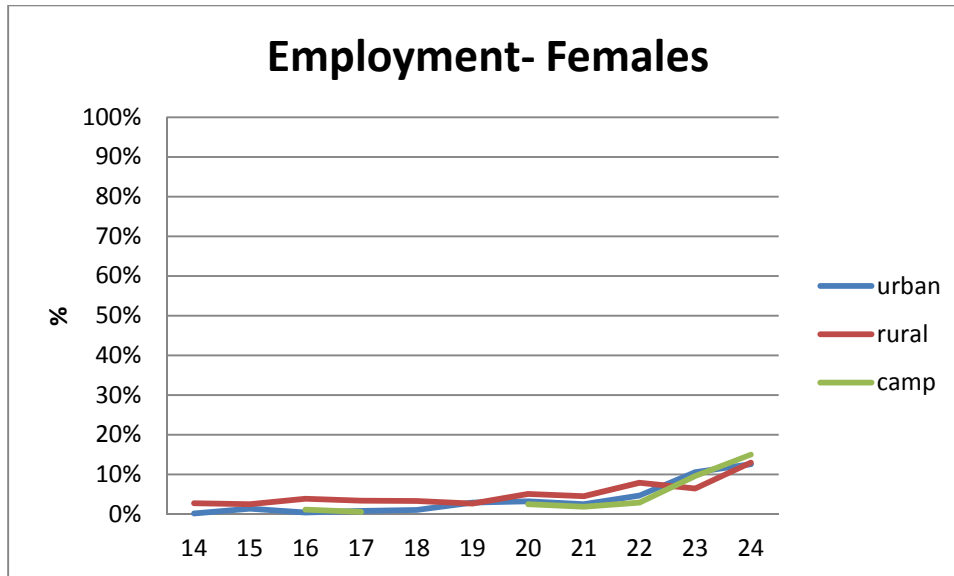




As expected, the employment rate was quite different among young Palestinian men and women, with about 55% of men and 15% of females employed. The difficulty in finding employment for men living in camps is apparent, with the employment of camp men nearly always lower.

Figure 3. Employment for males and females aged 14-24 years old, oPt, 2006





Interpretation

As anticipated, the transition to adulthood differs greatly from that of many other populations at similar levels of economic and health development, with a high value placed on education for both young men and women. However, women's education is somewhat higher, despite their low rates of labor force participation. For men, the transition to adulthood is quite delayed with about one-fifth still enrolled in school and nearly 45% not working at age 24. Marriage for men has been delayed until the late 20s and 30s, while the marriage age for women is quite. Refugees have a distinctly more difficult transition to adulthood, with delays in school completion and employment being pronounced even at age 24.

Further analysis will expand these preliminary figures to look at persons over the period of youth (15 to 24, as designated by UNESCO), and include information about parenthood. For Palestinian youth there are other important indicators of youth and adulthood that will also be explored. Our analysis will be expanded to identify risk factors and covariates for transition behaviors, patterns, and excess delays in becoming adults by life roles recognized worldwide.