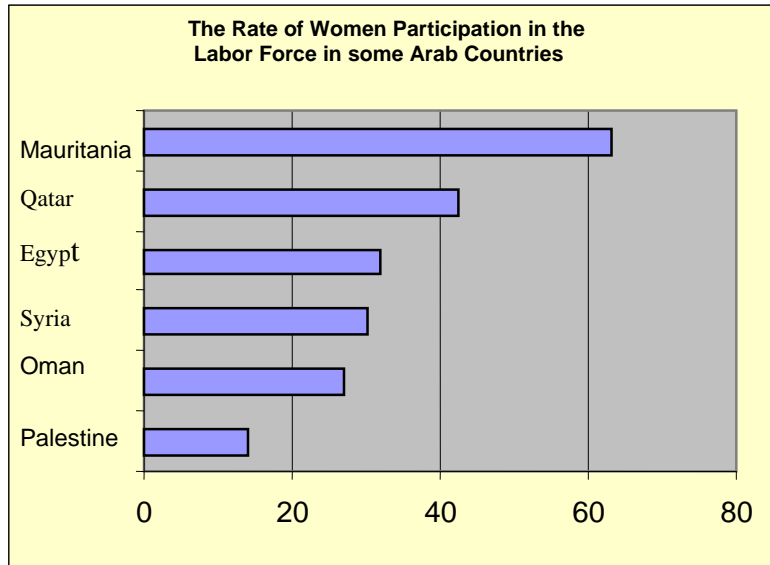


Women in the Palestinian Labor Market

“Work is the right of every citizen, as well as a duty and honor. The Palestinian National Authority seeks to provide work for every citizen who is capable of it” (The Basic Law-Art. 25). Items of this article regulate the relationship between laborers and employers. The law ensures the right to justice for all, provides laborers with health care, and the right to organize and associate as well as the right to strike within the limits of the law. Similarly, the Palestinian Labor Law asserts that work is the right of every capable citizen, and that the Palestinian National Authority seeks to provide it in a frame of equal opportunity and far from any form of discrimination. The Palestinian Labor Law regulates the work of women and prohibits discrimination between men and women. It prohibits hazardous or hard labor, as defined by the Minister, over-time during pregnancy and the first six months after delivery or night shifts, with the exception of jobs specified by the Council of Ministers. The Law ensures women a set of rights that take into consideration their needs, such as the right to provide certain means of comfort for female laborers, the right to a maternity leave, the right not to dismiss women from work because of delivery or leave and the right of a nursing employee to daily nursing leaves and hours. Women are also entitled to legal safeguards against prohibited jobs, and are entitled to their full rights in terms of wages and salaries as well as end of service compensation. The Palestinian Labor Law also grants a set of investment rights most notably, it entitles women to tax exemptions on production and net profit, and protects them against gender-based discrimination in identifying areas of investment.

Participation of Palestinian Women in the Labor Force is the Lowest among Arabs

Although the Palestinian Basic Law and Labor Law both acknowledge the right of women to work and prohibit gender-based discrimination, the rate of participation of Palestinian women in the labor force is low in comparison with males, as it does not exceed 14%. During the past decade, average male participation in the labor force reached 67%. It is worth noting that Mauritania has the highest rate of female participation in the labor force, 63%, while Palestine has the lowest. The rate of female participation in comparison with males is 36% in Jordan, 38% in Syria, 40% in Lebanon and 46% in Egypt.



These statistics indicate a blatant violation of the Labor Law. Exclusion of women from participation in the paid labor force not only violates her right to work, but also leads to a decrease in the national and per capita incomes. This also leads to an increase in the rate of sustenance, as one laborer in the Arab region provides for more than two unemployed persons, while the rate of sustenance in East Asia and the Pacific region is less than one person. Since the rate of participation of Palestinian women is less than half of Arab women (33.4%) and because of the high fertility rate (Palestine has the highest fertility rate of 5.6 children per woman), The rate of sustenance increases to 4.5 persons for every employed laborer.

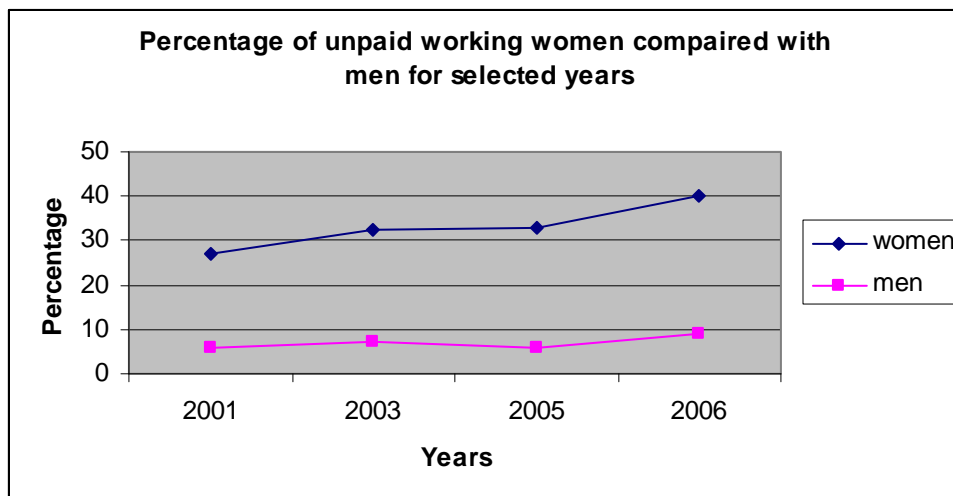
Gender-Based Labor Division

Women suffer from injustice as they lack appreciation of their work that provides welfare for the household, such as domestic chores, care, production of food and clothing, providing some income for the women themselves and for their households through working in the informal sector. Moreover, women participating in the labor market face various difficulties and obstacles, most importantly their restriction to certain areas of work, mostly services and agriculture sectors (41.4% and 45.1% respectively) in comparison with 32.3% and 15% for men.

Concentration of women in the agricultural sector is thoroughly related to the socio-cultural structure, where agricultural work constitutes a major part of women's responsibilities and is complementary to the domestic roles of rural women. They mostly do not receive wages in return for their work in agriculture. The rate of women receiving wages and working in the non-agricultural sector is 18% in comparison with men.

Most women Are unpaid working Women

According to the official definition, unpaid working women are continuously increasing, Unpaid working women from 26.9% in 2001, to 32.5% in 2003 and 33.3% in 2005, in comparison with 6.1%, 7.1% and 6.3% of men for the same years respectively. As the economic siege the Israeli occupation imposes on the Palestinian people aggravates, job opportunities decrease, and women are the first to lose job opportunities and the last to get them if available, because of the belief that the work of women is not essential in sustaining the household, and that men are responsible for providing for the households. This is definitely not true, where thousands of women are providing for their households, and their number is on the increase. The Human Development Report and the Poverty Report on Palestine indicate that women are the poorest among the poor, mainly because of the increase in unemployment among women, their low wages and the fact that a large number of women work without pay. **This requires a review of the definitions of each of unemployment, women as heads of households, the calculation of the women labor force in the informal sector and the methodology utilized in surveying the labor force.**



Women participation in other sectors, such as trade, industry, construction and telecommunications is very low. The rate of women participation is 9.8% in mining, quarrying and manufacturing, 0.8% in construction, 8.5% in trade, restaurants and hotels and 0.4% in transportation, storage and telecommunications. In these sectors, women work in an unfavorable environment that lacks sufficient insurance and social security, or workplace rights and benefits.

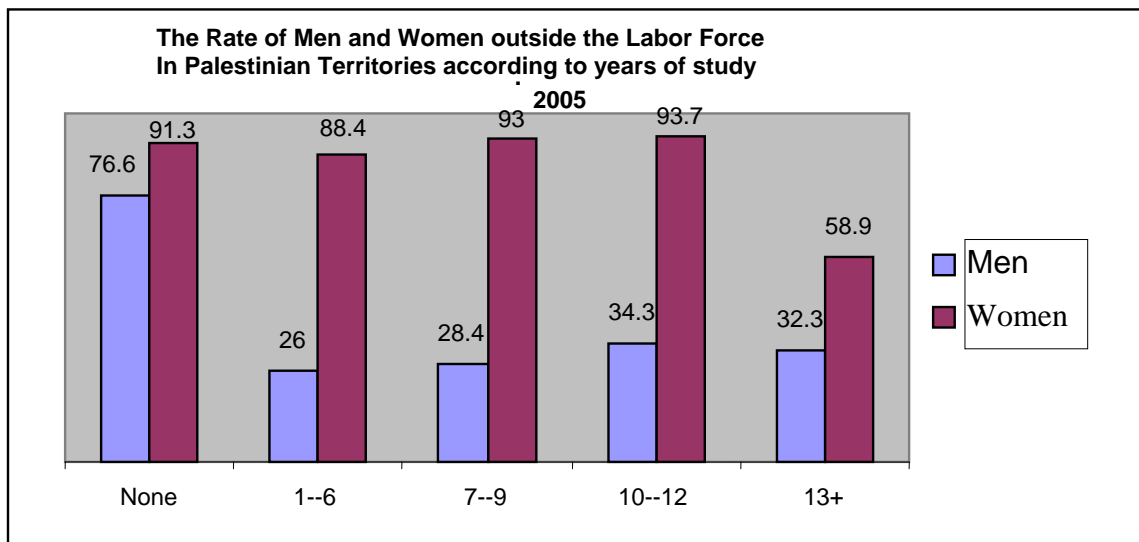
A high rate of women receives low or in-kind wages in return for their work because of dire need. Most employers ignore working women's rights, especially maternity leaves, or weekly or annual leaves.

Women are present at different levels of employment, but their rate decreases in upper management and decision-making levels, and increases in middle and low-levels. This reflects clear gender-based discrimination in employment, since women, regardless of their level of education, do not get equal opportunity in work.

The role of women and their participation in Palestinian development does not depend on their rate of participation in the work force only, but also on the seniority of the positions they occupy, the economic sectors they work in, their rate of representation in decision-making levels and their equitable access to resources and productive assets.

Gender Gap in Education and Labor

Education and training constitute major criteria for measuring human resource growth and development, which in turn is a basic factor that affects the labor market. The last decade has witnessed a remarkable increase in the enrolment of women in all levels of education. The overall rate of female enrolment in secondary education amounted to 75.7%, in comparison with 67.6% for males. Females constitute half the number of students enrolled in universities, as the rate of enrolment in higher education was 107 females for every 100 males in 2004-2005. This progress in women education, however, has not reflected on an increase in job opportunities, or on accounting for their participation in the labor force. The vast majority (86%) of women over the age of 15 are still outside the labor market in Palestine.

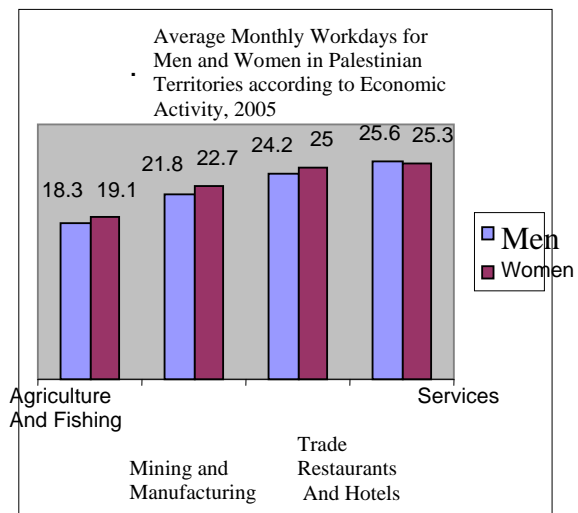


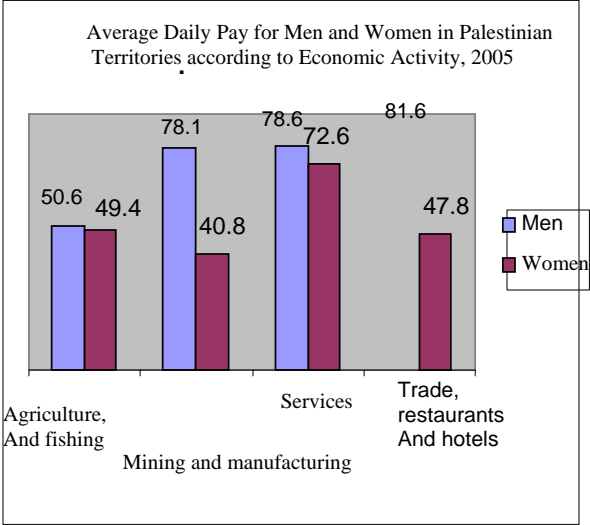
The rate of unemployment among women participating in the labor force is 35.7%. Surveys indicate that the rate of unemployment among women increases the higher their level of education is, while the rate of unemployment among men decreases the higher their level of education is. The rate of unemployment among women and men who have not received any form of training is 16.8% and 31.9% respectively, while the rate of unemployment among holders of Bachelor degree or higher is 37.2% and 14.6%.

Furthermore, a high rate of qualified women have been outside the labor market for 13 or more years, which means that they completed their education and stayed at home. Some of them gave up futile attempts to find a job, and others because of marriage. Gender-based discrimination in employment and low wages for women both discourage them from looking for jobs, amid the absence and high cost of support services, which make women balance between cost and revenue. Since the difference is negligible, they decide to stay home and care for their children.

Wage Gap

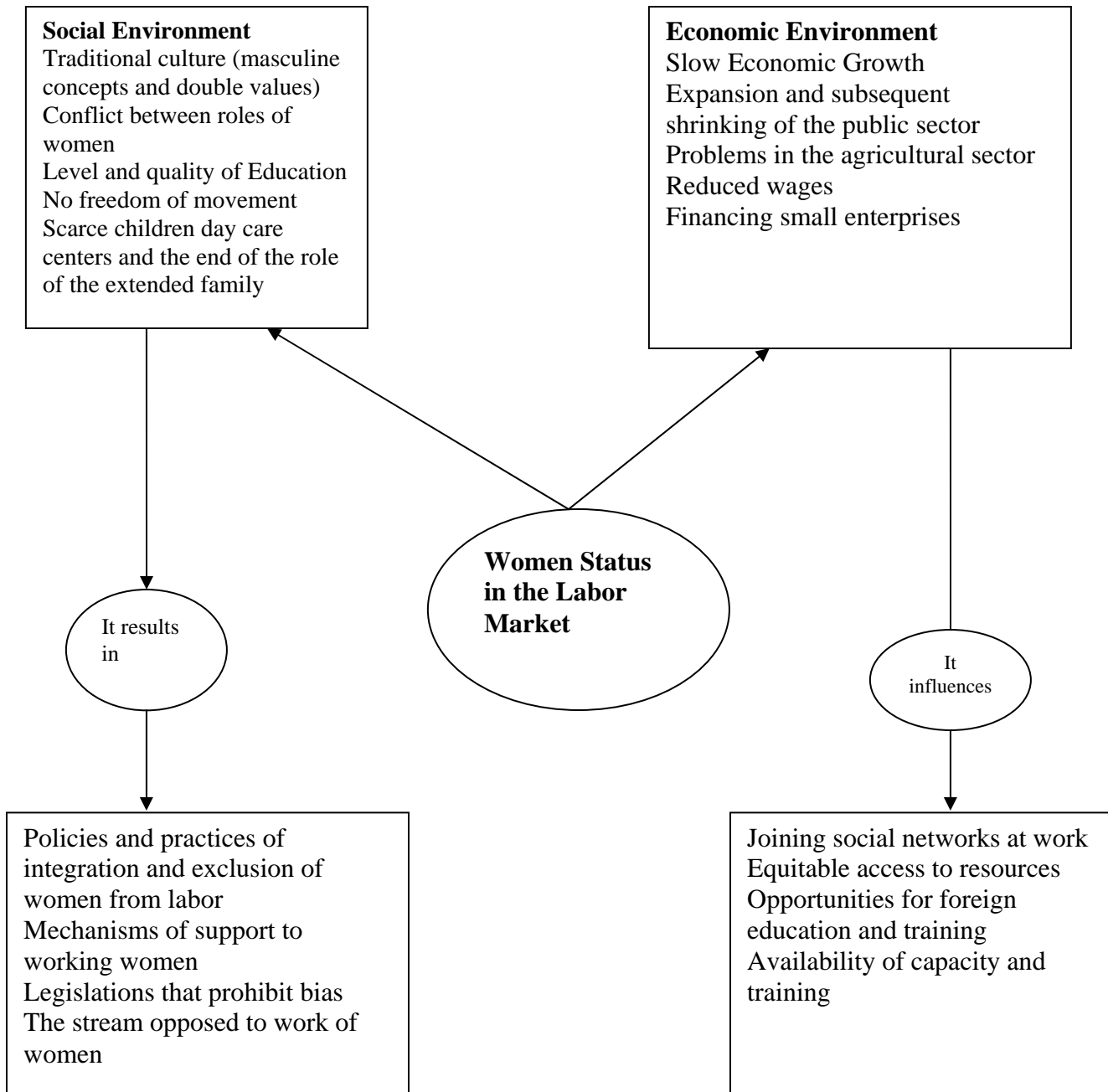
The Palestinian Constitution bans discrimination between men and women, hence equal pay for the same workday. Employers and establishments, however, mostly refuse to implement this legislation, as the daily pay for men and women in different economic activities is 79.8 and 67.9 NIS respectively, although the average number of workdays per month of women is greater or equal than workdays of men. Employers have several excuses to justify this, such as women do not accomplish as much as men because of frequent maternity leaves, as if she takes these leaves for herself, and not for reproducing labor force and as a right for the child. Employers also consider that men provide for families, while women provide for themselves only, ignoring that most working women contribute to supporting their families. These scientifically and practically baseless excuses constitute a form of discrimination between men and women in which employers exploit women.





Factors that Influence Women Participation in the Labor Market

A set of social and economic factors influences women participation in the labor market. The following diagram illustrates these factors:



This enables us to conclude a group of important activities and policies that enhance the role and status of women in the labor market, most significantly:

- Provide and create an enabling legal and legislative framework that empowers women economically, through amending or developing laws and legislations regarding Labor, Investment, Unemployment and Companies Laws and in a manner that serves the economic interests of women.

- Include households headed by women in a human assistance strategy, and build their capacity and skills in job creation programs.
- Formulate a strategy that comprises a number of programs and projects that provide for the transfer of Palestinian women from the services sector to the physical (commodity) productive activities, taking into consideration the need for a plan that balances the distribution of women on economic activities.
- Seek to increase the rate of women who benefit from sources of lending.
- Establish mechanisms and activities that assist rural women to market their products, provide support services, such as packing, simple economic studies, and other services that ultimately provide them with a successful marketing outlet.