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**Coping with COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts and Coping Strategies among Palestinians**

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# Introduction

As the Palestinian population and its respective governing authorities prepare to enter their third month of combating the COVID-19 pandemic and “flattening the curve” of infection, there is justified interest in the effects of the pandemic on the economy, mental health, and how individuals have managed to cope with the rapid and drastic changes, uncertainty, and risk brought about by the crisis. The survey conducted by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), provides data and insights in order to further understand the situation as it continues to unfold. The questions discussed in this review fall into five main categories: a) personal actions to combat COVID-19; b) jobs and income; c) household duties; d) emotional wellbeing; and e) coping strategies.

The present poll was conducted through an online survey, and it was answered by 650 socially and economically-active Palestinians, 74% from the West Bank and 26% from the Gaza Strip. More women (52%) than men (48%) participated in this survey. The vast majority of the participants (89%) have some level of university education, with 30% of them holding an MA or more. As for age distribution, 27% were 18-30 years old, 56% were 31-50 years old, and 17% were older than 50. The questionnaire was presented to a wide sample of socially active Palestinians through social media platforms and groups, while ensuring the largest possible representation of all geographical regions and socio-economic variables. The survey was open for a period of 5 days (13-17, April).

Highlights

* 27% of Palestinian respondents report completely or partially losing their job due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
* Young people are most affected, with 36% of 18-30 year-olds reporting job loss.
* An additional 35.6% of the respondents expect to lose their jobs in the coming period due to the pandemic.
* 71% of the respondents report losing family income (fully or partially) due to the crisis, including 84% of 18-30 year-olds.
* 78% of respondents report feeling significant or partial levels of emotional stress.
* 84% of women respondents and 88% of 18-30 year-olds report feeling emotional stress.
* As much as 79% significantly or partially suffer from anxiety and 61% from anger.
* 80% of respondents feel that household duties had increased partially or significantly.
* 68% of women report a significant increase in household duties, compared to 44% of men.
* 63% of respondents report an increase in childcare tasks.
* 51.5% of women report a significant increase in child care, while 30% of men reported the same.
* 54% of respondents report gaining significant or some weight: 57% of women and 51% of men.
* 34% resort to smoking as a coping mechanism; 50% of men and 20% of women.
* 52% of respondents report being fully committed to the government stay-home order; Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were less committed than those in the West Bank.

# Section 1: Personal Actions to Combat COVID-19

Two questions of the survey pertain to the actions that respondents have taken in combating the spread of the novel coronavirus, including “I am committed to the stay-home order from the government” and “I quarantined myself at home.”

## Commitment to Government’s Stay-Home Order

More than one half (52.2%) of Palestinians were fully committed to the government’s stay-home order, while 33.8% were committed to some extent and 13.1% were not committed.

Commitment to the stay-home order varied across gender, age, and regional groups. Men showed lower rates of commitment to the government stay-home order with 81% responding that they are committed (43.5% fully, 37.5% partially) and 18.4% not committed. Comparatively, 91% of women (60.7% fully and 30.4% partially) were committed and only 8.3% not committed.

The youngest respondents between 18-30 years of age were more committed to the stay-home order with 89% reporting commitment (50.9% fully, 38.0% partially), compared to 85% of 31-50 year-olds (51.3% fully, 34.2% partially) and 84% of those 51+ (59.2% fully and 25.2% partially). Only 9.9% of 18-30 year-olds reported not being committed while 14.0% of 31-50 year-olds and 15.5% of those over 50 years old report not being committed. Interestingly, as age increases so does the ratio of full to partial commitment.

The largest differentiation in the stay-home responses was seen in the regional breakdown. Those in the Gaza Strip were notably less fully committed to the government stay-home orders, with only 29.1% expressing full commitment compared to 60.3% of respondents in the West Bank. The majority of Gaza Strip’s respondents (53.2%) were somewhat committed while 17.7% were not committed, compared to 27.4% and 11.6%, respectively, in the West Bank.

**Figure 1: Commitment to Government’s Stay-Home Order by Region**

Self-Quarantine Similar results were observed in regards to those who had quarantined themselves: 46.1% had quarantined themselves, 34.2% had done so to some extent, and 18.9% had not done so.

Data also showcases gender variations. Women were more likely to respond that they had fully (53.7%) or to some extent (32.2%) self-quarantined, while men’s percentages were notably lower (37.8% and 36.5%, respectively). Meanwhile, younger respondents aged 18-30 were more likely to have self-quarantined fully or somewhat (52.0% and 32.2%, respectively) than the older age groups (43.6% and 34.5% for 31-50 year-olds; and 44.7% and 36.9% for those older than 50).

## There were also slight variations in levels of self-quarantine across the different geographical locations. In the West Bank, slightly less than half of respondents reported fully quarantining themselves (48.5%) and 30.9% were doing so somewhat, while the percentages in the Gaza Strip were 39.2% and 44.3%. However, for those reporting not quarantining themselves, the West Bank showcases higher rates (19.7%) than the Gaza Strip (16.5%).

## Section 2: Jobs and Income

The survey’s next set of questions focused on the effects of the pandemic on household economic conditions and people’s work. Indicative statements were:

* I do my work from home instead of the workplace;
* I lost my job due to the coronavirus pandemic;
* I may lose my job in the coming time period due to coronavirus;
* Family income has decreased due to the crisis.

## Working from Home

At the time of the survey, as many as 58% of Palestinian respondents said that they are doing their work from home instead of at their workplace (41.3% completely, 16.3% partially). While 47.5% of women respondents report doing their work completely from home instead of the workplace, 34.1% of male respondents report the same. Men were much more likely to respond that working from home applies to them somewhat (22.7%) or not at all (40.1%) than women (10.4% and 34.0%, respectively). Meanwhile, almost 7.7% of women responded “I do not know / No answer.” Similar trends are observed in female respondent answers to questions asking about losing jobs completely (9.5%) or expecting to in the future (14.7%), likely stemming from the overall lower rates of female participation in the workforce.

**Figure 2: Working from Home (Percentage stating applicable or somewhat applicable by gender)**

Results also showcase that despite differences in age groups, trends in completely working from home were similar (41.5%, 41.3%, 40.8% for groups 18-30, 31-50, 51+, respectively). However, the oldest age group was more likely than the others to answer that they were working from home to some extent (26.2%) compared to 15.2% for 18-30 and 14.0% for 31-50. Those in the middle age group (31-50) were as likely to completely work from home as they were to not work from home (41.3% each). Differences across the West Bank and Gaza Strip as it relates to completely working from home were marginal (42.1% in the West Bank and 39.2% in the Gaza Strip).

## Loss of Jobs and Income

More than a quarter (26.9%) of respondents said that they had completely (15.7%) or partially (11.2%) lost their jobs due to the pandemic, and more than a third (35.8%) feared they may lose their job in the coming time period. To add to the foreboding economic figures, about half (49.6%) of respondents reported losing family income due to the crisis, and another 21.4% said they had lost family income to some extent; only 26.7% reported not seeing a decrease in income.

### Younger People are More Economically Vulnerable

Across the board, it appeared that older respondents have a more stable economic and employment situation. The oldest age group (51+) was least likely to report having lost their job fully (6.8%) and partially (7.8%). The oldest age group, however, was more likely to expect losing their jobs in the future (11.7% fully and 13.6% partially), or to report a loss of family income due to the pandemic (29.1% fully and 27.2% partially). Overall, this group reported higher rates of not experiencing such losses, wherein 81.6% did not lose a job, 66.0% do not expect to, and 41.7% did not lose income.

Contrastively, those in the youngest age group (18-30) were more likely to report losing a job (23.4% fully and 12.3% partially), expect to do so in the future (27.5% fully and 12.9% partially), or have seen a loss in family income due to the pandemic (62.6% fully and 21.1% partially). Overall, this age group was more likely to experience such losses: 53.2% report that they had not lost a job (fully or partially) and less than half (43.9%) did not expect to lose their job in light of the pandemic, while only 12.9% reported no losses in household income.

For the middle age group (31-50), responses ranged between the percentages of the youngest and oldest group. Given the current economic conditions, the data implies a relational standing between age and the stability of one’s job and income. This also showcases that younger workers are especially vulnerable in the face of the looming economic crisis.

**Figure 3: Percentage reporting loss of jobs and incomes by age**

### Women Feel the Impact of Income Decline More Than Men

As mentioned above, a notable fraction of women responded “I don’t know / No answer” to statements about losing a job (9.5%) or expect to in the future (14.7%). While this leaves the remaining percentages skewed and a direct comparison to men’s percentages less precise, men and women seem to have been affected relatively equally in terms of job loss, noting that men’s percentages are slightly higher. As much as 29% of men reported that they lost a job completely (17.1%) or partially (11.7%), whereas 25% of women had lost a job (14.4% completely and 10.7% partially). Looking toward the future, 38.2% of men felt that they may lose their job in the coming time period due to the pandemic (21.1% completely, 17.1% somewhat), while 33.7% of women felt the same (19.6% completely, 14.1% somewhat).

Notably, data patterns diverge in the responses to the decrease of families’ income due to COVID-19. About three-fourths (76%) of women reported that family income had either decreased (56.4%) or decreased to some extent (19.6%). Almost two-thirds of men (65.5%) reported the same (42.1% and 23.4%, respectively). For men, 33.1% reported that family income had not decreased, compared to 20.9% for women. These divergent findings of household income are surprising, given assumptions that a large majority of households participating in this survey contain a husband-wife pair. On that note, possible explanations could be that women may be more responsible for household shopping, and thus are more attuned to fluctuations in household income and expenses, and/or and female-headed households may be seeing a greater drop in household income relative to other less vulnerable households.

**Figure 4: Loss of jobs and incomes by gender**

### Largely Equal Regional Impact

# The geographic breakdown revealed that the effects on jobs and income were largely the same between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, in regards to future job loss, negative effects were observed to be higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank. Almost 34% in the West Bank believe they may lose their job in the future (19.1% completely, 14.5% partially) and 56.4% do not believe so. In the Gaza Strip, however, 42% believe the same (24.7% completely, 17.7% partially) while 46.8% do not believe they may lose their job in the future.

# Section 3: Increasing Household Duties and Childcare Tasks

A vast majority (80%) of respondents reported that their household (HH) duties had increased significantly (56.0%) or increased somewhat (24.2%), and only 19.0% said household duties had not increased. A comparatively smaller percentage of respondents (65.5%) reported that childcare tasks had increased significantly (41.3%) or increased to some extent (21.4%), while 31.4% reported that childcare tasks had not increased.

### Gender

In regards to increases in household duties and child caretaking tasks, women were notably more affected than men. As many as 86.8% of women said that their household duties had increased or somewhat increased while 72.9% of men responded the same. When disaggregating the responses, discrepancies further increase. Of women, 67.5% responded that household duties had increased and only 19.3% thought they had increased to some extent, however 43.5% of men reported an increase and 29.4% reported an increase to some extent. Only 12.6% of women reported that their household duties had not increased whereas 26.1% of men reported the same. Although slightly lower in variation, similar patterns were reported for increases in childcare tasks: 51.5% of women responded that childcare duties had increased, 12.6% to some extent, and 28.8% reported no increase. The responses from men were nearly evenly split across the three options (30.1%, 31.1%, and 34.1%, respectively).

**Figure 5: Percentages reporting increase in household duties and child care by gender**

### Age

It appears that as respondents increased in age, the likelihood of reporting increased household duties declines. For those between 18-30 years of age, 83% reported that household duties increased (62.0% completely, 21.1% somewhat) while for those between the ages of 31-50, 81% report the same (56.4% completely, 24.8% somewhat). Comparatively, 72% of respondents 51 years or older reported an increase in household duties (44.7% completely, 27.2% somewhat). For those reporting that household duties had not increased, the youngest age group had the lowest rate (15.8%), while the oldest age group had the highest (27.2%) and the middle age group was in between (18.2%). Similar trends for the oldest age group were also observed in regards to childcare tasks, with almost half of them (48.5%) responding that childcare tasks had not increased, versus 25.4% of 31-50 year-olds and 33.3% of 18-30 year-olds. Those in the middle age group seemed most affected, with 69.8% responding that childcare tasks had increased or increased to some extent versus 58.5% of 18-30 year-olds. The patterns observed in the childcare data may reflect the assumption that older respondents have older children who are more likely to be adults or largely independent adolescents, while the youngest respondents have yet to start families or have children still too young to have sent to school or daycare before the pandemic.

### Region

# There were slight differences in response patterns between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank for the questions on household duties and childcare tasks. The West Bank reported an increase in household duties a bit more than the Gaza Strip (58.3% increased, 22.6% increased somewhat, and 18.0% no increase in the West Bank; 49.4%, 28.5% and 22.2% in the Gaza Strip, respectively). Conversely, the Gaza Strip reported a slightly greater increase in childcare tasks (42.4% increased, 26.6% increased somewhat, 25.9% no increase) than the West Bank (41.4%, 20.0%, 32.7%, respectively).

# Section 4: Emotional Wellbeing

The survey also investigated the pandemic’s effect on respondents’ psychological and emotional wellbeing. Indicative statements included:

* I feel emotionally stressed;
* I feel anxious with what’s going on around me; and
* I feel angry with the people around me.

As many as 41.6% of Palestinians reported feeling deeply stressed and 36.0% reported feeling so to some extent. Similarly, 40.2% said they felt anxious with what was going on around them while 39.0% said so to some extent. Rates for feeling angry with others around them were lower overall, with 29.0% feeling angry and 31.5% feeling angry somewhat. Only about one-fifth of respondents reported not feeling emotionally stressed (21.9%) or anxious with what was going on around them (20.3%).

## Women Report Greater Negative Emotional Effects

Women reported larger increases for all three statements than men did. This indicates that, overall, the pandemic has had a greater impact on the emotional health of women. Women responded that they felt deeply stressed or felt so to some extent 81.9% of the time, compared to men at 72.9%. This gap further widens when considering only those who fully felt emotionally stressed (47.5% of women and 35.1% of men) and those who reported not feeling stressed (17.8% of women and 26.4% of men).

A similar pattern was seen in the results on feelings of anxiety, with nearly half of women (48.8%) reporting feeling anxious, 35.6% feeling anxious to some extent, and 15.6% not feeling so. Men’s percentages were lower, at 30.8%, 42.8%, and 25.4%, respectively.

A slight majority of men (53.8%) reported feeling angry to a large extent (22.7%) or somewhat angry with those around them (31.1%). Still, more women reported such a feeling (66.6%; with 34.7% feeling angry to a large extent and 31.9% somewhat). The greater emotional toll of the pandemic on women may be, in part, a reflection of the greater household and childcare responsibilities that were necessarily taken up, as mentioned above.

**Figure 6: Percentage reporting psychological impact by gender**

## Younger People See Greater Negative Psychological Effects

Across all three emotional measures, the youngest respondents were most affected and the oldest respondents were the least affected. As many as 52.0% of 18-30 year-olds reported feeling deeply stressed and 35.7% somewhat stressed, while those rates decreased to 42.7% and 33.9% for 31-50 year-olds and 20.4% and 43.7% for those over 50. Meanwhile, only 12.3% of the youngest group reported not feeling stressed while 22.5% of the middle age group and 35.9% the oldest age group reported the same.

Similarly, data shows comparable rates for feelings of anxiety. Survey results show that 85% of the youngest age group, 78% of the middle age group, and 72% of the oldest age group reported feeling anxious or anxious to some extent. This trend is more visible when focusing only on those who reported high levels of anxiety: 54.4% of 18-30 year-olds, 38.7% of 31-50 year-olds, and 21.4% of those over 50. Only 14.6% of the youngest age group did not feel anxious, compared to 20.8% of the middle age group and 28.2% of the oldest.

Notwithstanding that percentages for feelings of anger were lower, the same pattern as it relates to age persists. Almost 72% of 18-30 year olds reported feeling angry with those around them (46.2% fully and 25.7% somewhat), compared to 60% of those 31-50 (26.2% and 34.2% somewhat) and only 42% of those over 50 (9.7% and 32.0% somewhat). Among the same age groups, those who reported that they did not feel angry were 26.9%, 39.0%, and as high as 58.3%, respectively.

This relationship of better emotional outcomes with increasing age resembles the data gathered in regards to job and income loss. This suggests that pandemic-related health may not necessarily be one of the main driving factors of emotional distress among respondents and instead it may be personal financial uncertainty.

## Higher Emotional Effects in the Gaza Strip

Feelings of stress, anxiousness, and anger were all found to be higher in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank, although differences between the two regions varied in magnitude. In the West Bank, 75.6% of respondents felt psychologically stressed (39.9% deeply and 35.7% to some extent) while 24.1% did not feel stressed at all. In the Gaza Strip, however, 82.9% felt stressed (48.1% deeply and 34.8% to some extent) with 15.8% reporting that they did not feel stressed. Differences were observed to be slightly lower in measuring levels of anxiousness. In the West Bank, 78.1% reported feelings of anxiousness (39.9% fully, and 38.2% to some extent) while only 21.5% reported not feeling anxious. In the Gaza Strip, 82.9% reported feelings of anxiousness (42.4% fully and 40.5% to some extent) while 16.5% did not. The largest regional difference was seen for the statement about feeling angry with others, wherein 56.8% in the West Bank reported feeling so (28.9% fully and 27.9% to some extent) while 42.5% did not feel angry. In this regard, percentages in the Gaza Strip were comparatively higher standing at 73.4% (30.4% fully and 43.0% to some extent); while only 25.9% reported not feeling angry with others.

# Section 5: Coping Strategies

The final set of questions looked into individuals’ coping strategies. Indicative statements included:

* I have resorted to smoking;
* I’ve gained weight;
* I do gardening;
* I do sports / go walking;
* I read books; and
* I volunteer in the local community.

## The survey showcases that the most popular coping strategies were reading books and practicing sports / going walking. As many as 27.2% read books and 32.6% read somewhat (60% total), and 23.4% practiced sports / went walking and 30.1% did so to some extent (54% total). Moreover, high levels of respondents (54.1%) reported gaining weight: 28.5% said they had and 25.6% said they had to some extent. Less popular coping strategies were gardening and volunteering in the local community. Around a third of respondents practiced gardening (17.9%) or practiced it to some extent (17.4%). Similar to gardening, almost 17.0% reported volunteering and 20.8% reported volunteering to some extent. Meanwhile, 33.9% of Palestinians have resorted to smoking (20.8% fully and 13.1% to some extent) as a coping mechanism.

## Physical Health Consequences

These research findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic may have health effects beyond the immediate illness caused by the virus, especially by affecting health habits that contribute to non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer, which ordinarily make up the majority of causes of death in Palestine.[[1]](#footnote-1)

### Smoking

Half of the surveyed men reported higher levels of resorting to smoking (30.0% frequently and 20.0% to some extent) than women – 20.0% (13.0% frequently and 7.0% to some extent). Rates across age groups were relatively flat; 30.4% of those 18-30, 35.0% of those 31-50, and 35.9% of those over 50 said that they had resorted to smoking or had to some extent. More respondents in West Bank (37.1%) said that they had resorted to smoking (22.6% frequently and 14.5% to some extent) while in 24.7% report the same in the Gaza Strip (15.8% and 8.9%, respectively). The 2010 PCSB Palestinian Family Survey found that 42.2% of Palestinian men were smokers, while only 2.3% of Palestinian women were.[[2]](#footnote-2) Comparing these rates to the survey results reveals a relative increase in smoking among women. The data does not allow us to determine if the men who reported resorting to smoking are new smokers or habitual smokers who find themselves smoking more.

### Gaining weight

Over half of women (57.4%) reported having gained weight (32.2% having gained and 25.2% to some extent), which was a bit higher than the reported 50.5% of men (24.4% having gained weight and 26.1% to some extent). The shares of those who had gained weight were broadly even across the different age groups, wherein 56.2% of 18-30 year-olds, 53.0% of 31-50 year-olds, and 54.3% for those 51 and older had either gained weight or gained to some extent. Likewise, there was little variance between regions, where 53.3% of West Bank respondents and 58.2% in the Gaza Strip report weight gain.

### Exercise

The rate of respondents practicing sports or going walking was relatively even when broken down by gender (54.8% of men reported doing so or doing so somewhat and 52.2% of women reported the same). In terms of age, however, the oldest age group was more likely to practice sports / go walking (26.2%) or to do so to some extent (41.7%) than the two younger age groups (22.5% and 26.2% for 31-50 year-olds and 23.4% and 31.0% for 18-30 year-olds). While the combined percentages for practicing sports / going walking and doing so somewhat were relatively close between the West Bank (53.5%) and the Gaza Strip (51.3%), a notable difference is observed when disaggregating the responses. In the West Bank, 25.4% of respondents said they practice sports or go walking while 28.1% said they did so somewhat. The breakdown was more skewed in the Gaza Strip, with 17.1% practicing sports or going walking and 34.2% doing so only somewhat. This may be due to the availability of resources, as well as the difference between spatial availability between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Moreover, restrictive cultural norms as it relates to young women and girls being able to walk and play sports outside the home in Gaza compared to the West Bank may be one reason for lower rates in the Gaza Strip.

**Figure 7: Reported coping mechanisms by gender**

## Other Coping Strategies

### Gardening

Gardening was one of the least common coping strategies reported, with not much more than a third of respondents claiming to practice it. It was slightly more popular among men, who practice it (18.7%) or practice it to some extent (20.7%) than women (17.2% and 14.4%, respectively). There was, however, a strong relationship to the practice of gardening with age: 18-30 year-olds reported practicing gardening 23.4% of the time (10.5% practicing it and 12.9% to some extent), 31-50 year-olds at 36.7% of the time (19.9% and 16.8%), and those older than 50 at 50.3% of the time (23.3% and 27.2%). This may be simply due to preferences, or it could be a reflection of access to land and property in which to garden. This access to land may also be a factor in the difference seen between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; about 4 out of 10 respondents (39.9%) in the West Bank reported practicing gardening (20.8% practicing it and 19.1% to some extent) whereas the rate for those in the Gaza Strip (20.9%) was approximately half of that (8.2% practicing it and 12.7% to some extent).

### Reading

Reading books was the most popular coping strategy, with around 6 in 10 respondents saying that they did or did so somewhat. Almost 64.9% of men reported reading books (29.8% reading and 35.1% to some extent). Women respondents showcase lower rates at 55.2% (22.4% read and 29.8% to some extent). There was a strong trend of more frequent reading following increasing age, as 48.6% of 18-30 year-olds reported reading books or reading to some extent, 60.7% of 31-50 year-olds did so, and 75.7% of those older than 50 did so. Reading books was more popular in the Gaza Strip, with 63.3% reading or reading to some extent versus 57.9% in the West Bank.

### Volunteering

Only about a third of respondents reported volunteering in their local community. Men show notably higher percentages (52.5%), with 24.1% volunteering and 28.4% doing so to some extent. Only 24.2% of women, on the other hand, noted the same (10.4% volunteering and 13.8% doing so to some extent). Once more, there appeared to be a relationship between age and likelihood of volunteering, with volunteering becoming more common as age increased. Around 28.1% of those 18-30 had volunteered or volunteered to some extent, while the 39.9% for those 31-50 and 46.6% for those over 50 reported the same. Volunteering was more popular in the Gaza Strip (17.1% had volunteered and 27.8% had somewhat) than in the West Bank (16.7% and 18.4%).

# Section 6: Conclusions and recommendations

Several patterns and trends emerged in the results, which highlight groups most vulnerable, collateral health consequences of the pandemic, and other points of focus for mitigation and recovery policies.

## Alarming Population-Wide Economic and Psychological Effects

Future policy interventions will have to contend with both the immediate economic effects of this health crisis, which has led to over a quarter of Palestinians losing their job partially or fully and over two thirds of households losing income, as well as the inevitable downstream economic effects of such an immense systemic shock. Additionally, only a minority of Palestinians report being emotionally unaffected by the pandemic. Prioritization of finding effective ways to assist the four fifths of Palestinians who feel emotionally stressed or anxious in coping and ultimately recovering from the crisis is necessary.

## Younger People Are Particularly Vulnerable

Being younger seems to be related to increased vulnerability in experiencing the adverse impact of the pandemic across several fronts. The younger the respondent is, the higher her/his likelihood of losing family income and jobs. In addition, younger respondents reported higher levels of deep stress, anxiety, and anger. The disproportionate negative mental health effects on younger people may be a reflection of their precarious economic circumstances in the face of a looming economic crisis.

Moreover, another major age-related trend emerged after comparing all coping strategies: younger respondents were less likely to report partaking in almost all coping strategies, namely gardening, doing sports / going walking, reading books, and volunteering. This may reflect differing levels of access (such as access to land and property for gardening); differing amounts of spare time left over after caring for children, keeping house, or working (such as that which would be needed to volunteer in the community); or differing levels of life experience in coping with crises and curfews (considering older Palestinians have lived through several periods of curfews and political crisis). It may also be that younger individuals are instead using coping strategies not investigated by the survey, such as using technology to converse with friends and family or watching TV or movies from home. Regardless of the reason, the fact that younger respondents consistently scored lower on coping strategies suggests that they are less emotionally equipped to deal with an economic uncertainty that disproportionately affects them, further compounding their vulnerability amid the COVID-19 state of emergency.

Data and analysis highly suggests that pandemic policy interventions to lessen economic impacts and bolster mental health resilience should take age into account as a major factor of vulnerability.

## Women’s Mental Health

Like younger people, women seem especially vulnerable to the psychological effects of the pandemic. Some of this stress may be economically related, considering that women were more likely to report losses of household income than men. However, higher levels of stress and anxiety may also be due to increased loads of household duties and childcare tasks under the stay-home order, as women were evidently disproportionately affected by the increased workloads. Women’s mental health must be a focus when designing policy in the wake of COVID-19.

## Physical Health Consequences

Over half of respondents in the study reported gaining weight to some extent or more and a third had taken up smoking to some extent or more. Additionally, close to half of respondents reported not exercising or going walking during the stay-home order. Considering that lack of physical activity, being overweight, and smoking are major risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, cerebrovascular disease, and diabetes (the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 5th most common causes of death in Palestine, respectively[[3]](#footnote-3)), the findings within this survey indicate that the pandemic may have significant public health effects aside from the direct effects of COVID-19. Policy interventions should take such public health consequences into account.

## Decreasing Commitment to Stay-Home Order

By bringing in data from AWRAD’s first COVID-19 survey, it can be noted that fewer Palestinians are committed to the government’s stay-home order than before (a drop from 59% to 52.5% fully committed and an increase from 6% to 13.1% not committed between the first and second rounds of the survey). While overall commitment rates are still high, if this decreasing trend continues it may create difficulties for the government to enforce public health measures should the need for physical distancing continues. This reduction in commitment was seen especially in the Gaza Strip, where only 29.1% expressed full commitment compared to 60.3% of respondents in the West Bank.

1. Palestinian Health Information Center (2019). “Health Annual Report: Palestine 2018.” p. 93 <http://healthclusteropt.org/admin/file_manager/uploads/files/1/Health%20Annual%20Report%20Palestine%202018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. PCBS (2013). “Palestinian Family Survey 2010: Final Report.” p.21 <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Downloads/book1941.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Palestinian Health Information Center (2019), op. cit. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)