

‘I Thought I Would Die’: Testimony From Palestinian Women Jailed by Israel

Oqab Jabali  | Saqer Jabali 

Dr. Oqab Jabali is an associate professor of cultural studies in the Language Center, Faculty of Humanities and Education Sciences, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine. Dr. Saqer Jabali is an assistant professor of political sciences in the Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, An-Najah National University.

Correspondence

Oqab Jabali
oqab.jabali@najah.edu

Abstract

After the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, Israel sharply expanded the arrest and detention of Palestinian women, resulting in allegations of violence, torture, and enforced disappearance. This study explores the experiences of 50 formerly imprisoned Palestinian women, drawing on their own words and reports by human-rights organizations. Many interviewees describe beatings, strip searches, solitary confinement, and denial of medical care, often in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions with little access to legal support. Pregnant women and minors were especially vulnerable. Many also report enduring trauma, stigma, and economic hardship following their release. The findings suggest that Israel’s carceral practices involve the use of gender-based violence as a tool of domination, which may constitute violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention and other international laws. The authors call for global action to ensure accountability, protect detainees’ rights, and secure the release of all Palestinian female prisoners. Reforms are required to prevent any further Israeli violations as the Gaza war ceasefire slowly takes hold.

Israel’s incarceration of Palestinian women reflects a deeply entrenched system of racialized and gendered control, rooted in the logics of domination and occupation.¹ Since the late 1960s, Palestinian women have taken part in political resistance, and many have been imprisoned as

¹ Lana Tatour, “Citizenship as Domination: Settler Colonialism and the Making of Palestinian Citizenship in Israel,” *Arab Studies Journal* 27, no. 2 (2019): 8–39.

a result.² Although they are often portrayed by Israeli authorities as “security threats” or “terrorists,” their detention functions as part of a strategy to fragment Palestinian society, suppress collective resistance, and inflict psychological and social harm.³ While a substantial literature has documented the political motivations behind these detentions and the legal irregularities of Israel’s prison regime, few studies have examined the lived experiences of currently or recently incarcerated Palestinian women—particularly after the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023.

These female detainees are subject to Israel’s dual legal system, which applies military law to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip while reserving civil protections for Israeli citizens.⁴ This system enables practices that breach international human-rights standards, including arbitrary detention, administrative imprisonment without charge or trial, and delay or denial of access to legal counsel.⁵ Incarcerated women endure gender-specific forms of abuse—including verbal harassment, invasive body searches, and threats of sexual violence—that function not as punishment but also as mechanisms of humiliation and control.⁶

Even before October 2023, human-rights organizations documented systemic abuses in Israeli prisons, including overcrowding, denial of health care, prolonged isolation, and the erosion of legal safeguards.⁷ But the eruption of the Gaza war intensified the scale and severity of these violations. Reports indicate a sharp rise in detainees, from about 5,300 before the Hamas attacks to more than 9,000 by mid-2024—including women and minors, many held incommunicado and under administrative detention.⁸ UN bodies and rights groups have further substantiated arbitrary detention, ill-treatment during transfer, lack of access to medical care, and the erosion of legal and family-visitation rights.⁹ The prison system has intensified its role as a mechanism of collective punishment and political suppression.¹⁰

² Nahla Abdo, *Captive Revolution: Palestinian Women’s Anti-Colonial Struggle within the Israeli Prison System* (London: Pluto Press, 2014).

³ Sahar Francis, “Gendered Violence in Israeli Detention,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 4 (2017): 46–61, <https://doi.org/10.1525/JPS.2017.46.4.46>.

⁴ Ron J. Smith, “A Danger to the Region: Subaltern Geopolitics of Palestinians Detained in Israeli Prisons,” *The Arab World Geographer* 16, no. 1 (2013): 75–100, <https://doi.org/10.5555/ARWG.16.1.51U37280H7746X3U>.

⁵ Ramly Makhlof, “The Legal Status of Palestinian Prisoners in Occupation Prisons and the Guarantees of Their International Protection,” *International and Political Journal* 56 (2023), <https://ipj.uomustansiriyah.edu.iq/index.php/political/article/view/259>.

⁶ Francis, “Gendered Violence,” 53.

⁷ Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, “Five Jordanian prisoners on hunger strike in the Occupation’s prisons,” June 5, 2013, <https://addameer.ps/ar/node/394>; B’Tselem—The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *2018 Annual Report*, https://www.btselem.org/download/2018_activity_report.pdf.

⁸ Physicians for Human Rights–Israel, “Systematic Violation of Human Rights: The Incarceration Conditions of Palestinians in Israel Since October 7,” February 2024, https://www.phr.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/5845_Imprisoned_Paper_Eng.pdf; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, “Socioeconomic situation of Palestinian women and girls,” E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/7, December 8, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/E/ESCWA/C.7/2024/7>.

⁹ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Thematic Report—Detention in the Context of the Escalation of Hostilities in Gaza (October 2023–June 2024),” July 31, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/thematic-report-detention-context-escalation-hostilities-gaza-october-2023-june>; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, “Detention and alleged ill-treatment of detainees from Gaza during Israel-Hamas War,” April 16, 2024, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/summary_on_detention_and_alleged_ill-treatmentupdated.pdf; International Institution for Solidarity with Palestinian Prisoners, “A Comprehensive Overhaul: The Conditions of Palestinian Prisoners in Israeli Prisons after October 7,” November 11, 2024, https://www.solidarity-ps.org/en/%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%89_%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%B6%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%B1%D9%89-.

¹⁰ Sobhi Albadawi, “Palestinian Political Prisoners: Hunger Strikes and the Battle for Dignity,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 69, no. 2 (2023): 283–301, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12825>.

Studies across a range of imprisoned populations show that detainees experience disproportionate social disadvantage and complex challenges to their well-being.¹¹ Women, especially minors, face unique and often more severe health problems than men, including chronic illness, mental-health disorders, and reproductive vulnerabilities.¹² These issues are compounded by prior histories of trauma, violence, and marginalization, which exacerbate health disparities inside prison walls.¹³

Palestinian women held in Israeli prisons face severely limited medical care due to inadequate resources, overcrowding, and allegedly deliberate neglect. Systematic medical deprivation affects treatment for chronic illnesses and pregnancy care, while poor hygiene and lack of emergency services increase health risks. Harsh conditions also compromise detainees' mental health.¹⁴ Although detention may provide some women their first access to health services, this is rarely sufficient or tailored to their needs.¹⁵ The high turnover of captives, particularly those held under administrative detention without clear sentencing, further disrupts continuity of care.¹⁶ Incarceration therefore tends to aggravate pre-existing physical and psychological conditions, adding another layer of neglect to the broader repression.¹⁷

Despite these hardships, Palestinian women resist through acts such as hunger strikes, refusal to comply with prison regulations, and documentation of abuses—affirming collective identity, dignity, and agency.¹⁸ And while human-rights reports have increased awareness of Israel's carceral practices, there is a lack of research on these experiences from women's own perspectives.

This article examines how recently imprisoned women have experienced and navigated such conditions, especially how the detention system has affected their health, dignity, and resistance, and how they exercised resilience while in custody. The study draws on testimony from 50 women released from Israeli prisons after the October 7 attacks. Participants describe beatings, strip searches, solitary confinement, and denial of medical care, often in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions with little access to legal counsel. Pregnant women and minors were especially vulnerable.

¹¹ Megha Ramaswamy and Nicholas Freudenberg, "Health Promotion in Jails and Prisons: An Alternative Paradigm for Correctional Health Services," in *Public Health behind Bars: From Prisons to Communities*, ed. Robert B. Greifinger (Cham: Springer, 2022), 219–38, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-0716-1807-3_14.

¹² Ingrid A. Binswanger, Joseph O. Merrill, Patrick M. Krueger, Michael C. White, Robert E. Booth, and Joanne G. Elmore, "Gender Differences in Chronic Medical, Psychiatric, and Substance-Dependence Disorders among Jail Inmates," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 3 (2010): 476–82, <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2008.149591>.

¹³ Stéphanie Latte Abdallah, *A History of Confinement in Palestine: The Prison Web* (Cham: Springer, 2022).

¹⁴ Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Israel's Policy of Deliberate Medical Neglect Aggravate Epidemics and Skin Diseases Among Palestinian Prisoners and Detainees," November 16, 2024, <https://www.mezan.org/en/post/46574>; United Nations Human Rights Council, "Written submission by the Independent Commission for Human Rights of the State of Palestine," A/HRC/53/NI/2, July 14, 2023, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/53/NI/2>; B'Tselem, "Prisoners and Detainees," n.d., https://www.btselem.org/topic/detainees_and_prisoners.

¹⁵ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees: Ongoing Human Suffering and Escalating Retaliatory Measures," April 13, 2025, <https://mowa.pna.ps/uploads/1744784583900128695.pdf>.

¹⁶ Al-Haq, Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, and Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, "Arbitrary Arrests, Enforced Disappearance, Inhumane Treatment, and Torture of Palestinians by the Israeli Occupying Forces," April 17, 2024, https://www.alhaq.org/cached_uploads/download/2024/04/17/240321-joint-urgent-appeal-on-torture-final-1713368023.pdf.

¹⁷ Belal Aldabbour, Amal Abuabada, Amro Lahlouh, Mohammed Halimy, Samah Elamassie, Abd Al-Karim Sammour, Adnan Skaik, and Saralees Nadarajah, "Psychological Impacts of the Gaza War on Palestinian Young Adults: A Cross-Sectional Study of Depression, Anxiety, Stress, and PTSD Symptoms," *BMC Psychology* 12 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02188-5>.

¹⁸ Albadawi, "Palestinian Political Prisoners."

Many also recount trauma, stigma, and economic hardship after release. By centering their voices, the analysis offers insights into the prison system not only as a tool of repression but also as an arena of physical suffering, political action, and health injustice.

ISRAELI INCARCERATION AND DETENTION OF PALESTINIANS

Israel's carceral system has evolved into a mechanism of governance and control over Palestinians, having expanded since the first intifada in 1987.¹⁹ Mass arrests prompted the construction of major detention centers like Ofer and Ketziot; the latter held more than 7,000 Palestinians, including more than 1,000 administrative detainees, at its peak in 1991.²⁰ In addition to incarceration, punitive measures like home demolition and deportation were widely practiced. A notable example is the 1992 expulsion of more than 400 Palestinians to southern Lebanon, which bolstered Hamas politically and militarily.²¹ The scale of imprisonment triggered overcrowding and other human-rights concerns, leading Israeli lawyers to challenge the transfer of detainees from the occupied territories into Israel.²²

Mass incarceration increased sharply during the second intifada in 2000. More than 8,500 Palestinians were arrested in the first months of 2002 after the launch of Operation Defensive Shield.²³ Prisons like Ketziot and Ofer were reopened, and the numbers of Palestinian prisoners rose from about 1,854 in 2001 to more than 9,100 in 2006.²⁴ By that time, responsibility for Palestinian detention had been consolidated under the civilian Israeli Prison Service (IPS), while the military retained authority over arrests and prosecutions through its own court system.²⁵

After the October 7 attacks, the number of incarcerated Palestinians surged.²⁶ By the end of December 2024, Israel was holding 9,619 Palestinians on "security" grounds, with large numbers taken from Gaza and the West Bank after October 7.²⁷ Israel also used Sde Teiman in the Negev and Anatot in the West Bank as large-scale detention sites.²⁸ As of September 2025, rights groups esti-

¹⁹ Malaka Shwaikh and Rebecca Gould, *Prison Hunger Strikes in Palestine: A Strategic Perspective* (Washington: ICNC Press, 2023).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Minna Saarnivaara, "From Terrorists to Celebrities: Deportation as a Political Opportunity for Palestinian Islamic Hamas," *Studia Orientalia* 114 (2013): 274.

²² Leslie Sebba and Roni Er'el, "Imprisonment and Human Rights in Israel: Uncertainty and Volatility," *Law & Social Inquiry* 50, no. 4 (2024): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1017/lsi.2024.43>.

²³ Amnesty International, "Israel and the Occupied Territories: Mass detention in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions," May 22, 2002, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/074/2002/en>.

²⁴ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Press Release on the Occasion of Palestinian Prisoners Day," April 17, 2006, [https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/E-Prisoners%20Day%202006\(1\).pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/E-Prisoners%20Day%202006(1).pdf); Smadar Ben-Natan, Dana Boulus, and Shirley Le Penne, "The 'One Carceral State': Prison and Military Power in Israel/Palestine," *Social Justice* 49, no. 3 (2023): 379–406.

²⁵ Smadar Ben-Natan, "The boundaries of the carceral state: Accounting for the role of military incarceration," *Theoretical Criminology* 28, no. 1 (2023): 5–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13624806231163109>.

²⁶ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees."

²⁷ B'Tselem, "Statistics on Palestinians in Israeli custody," as of March 3, 2025, https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners.

²⁸ Reuters, "Israel to phase out use of military detention camp," June 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-phase-out-use-military-detention-camp-2024-06-05>; Addameer, "Anatot Camp," March 6, 2025, <https://addameer.ps/sites/default/files/publications/anatot%20camp.pdf>.

mate, Israel held approximately 11,000 Palestinians, including about 3,600 under administrative detention—an all-time high.²⁹

Many confinements after October 7 relied on Israel's 2002 Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law, which allows prolonged detention without trial. The Gaza war spurred new amendments and practices. Detainees were frequently held incommunicado, with extended delays in access to lawyers and judicial review.³⁰ After October 2023, further emergency measures prolonged detention timelines and restricted Palestinians from legal counsel and family visits; reports of torture, abuse, and degrading conditions became widespread.³¹ Amid legal petitions and media scrutiny, many detainees were transferred from military camps to IPS facilities.³² As of May 2024, about 90 percent of Palestinians classified as "security" prisoners in IPS custody were held in subminimum living spaces.³³ The military continued to operate camps, including Anatot near Jerusalem. Human-rights groups reported in 2025 that it was still holding detainees from the West Bank and Gaza.³⁴

Palestinian Women in the Israeli Carceral System

Reports show that since October 7, 2023, Palestinian women and girls have faced intensified campaigns of incarceration, including house arrest, enforced disappearance, and detention under degrading conditions.³⁵ Rights organizations have documented arbitrary arrests, torture and other physical violations, sexual harassment and abuse, solitary confinement, and denial of legal counsel and family visits, with cases often prosecuted in military courts.³⁶ These practices have affected female students, journalists, and activists, and include the detention of ill women—such as a prisoner with cancer—amid reports of medical neglect.³⁷

²⁹ Middle East Monitor, "Israel holds record number of Palestinian prisoners, rights group reports," September 3, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250903-israel-holds-record-number-of-palestinian-prisoners-rights-group-reports>.

³⁰ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Thematic Report."

³¹ Gisha—Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, "Habeas Corpus," April 24, 2025, <https://gisha.org/en/habeas-corpus>; Amnesty International, "Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza," July 18, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/israel-must-end-mass-incommunicado-detention-and-torture-of-palestinians-from-gaza>; B'Tselem, "Welcome to Hell: Torture, Abuse, and Inhuman Conditions in Israeli Prisons," August 2024, https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/202408_welcome_to_hell_eng.pdf.

³² Reuters, "Israel to phase out."

³³ Ben-Natan et al., "'One Carceral State.'"

³⁴ Addameer, "Anatot Camp."

³⁵ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees."

³⁶ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Thematic Report"; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN report: Palestinian detainees held arbitrarily and secretly, subjected to torture and mistreatment," July 31, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/un-report-palestinian-detainees-held-arbitrarily-and-secretly-subjected>; B'Tselem, "Welcome to Hell"; Human Rights Watch, "Israel: Palestinian Healthcare Workers Tortured," August 26, 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/26/israel-palestinian-healthcare-workers-tortured>.

³⁷ International Federation of Journalists, "Palestine: Three Women Journalists Released from Israeli Jails in Ceasefire Deal," January 21, 2025, <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/palestine-three-women-journalists-released-from-israeli-jails-in-ceasefire-deal>; The Episcopal Church General Convention, Resolution D075, "The Immediate Release of Ms. Layan Nasir, 24 from Administrative Detention in Israel," House of Deputies, General Convention Virtual Binder, June 26, 2024, <https://www.vbinder.net/resolutions/743/explanation?house=HD&lang=en>; WAFA News Agency, "Palestinian female detainee faces severe health deterioration in Israeli prison," July 3, 2025,

Before the Gaza war, there were about 33 Palestinian women in Israeli prisons.³⁸ However, as of spring 2025, the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs has documented more than 500 such detentions.³⁹ This includes minors, pregnant women, and those held under administrative detention.⁴⁰ Twenty-nine women remained in custody.⁴¹ Later that year, trackers maintained by rights groups showed that between 49 and 53 women were being held at any given time.⁴²

According to prisoner-rights monitors, 21 Palestinian women were held in Israel's Damon Prison as of March 2025. They included 12 mothers, one of them pregnant; seven women with medical conditions, including a cancer patient; seven schoolteachers; four university students; two women held under administrative detention; and two serving prison sentences.⁴³ These violations not only endanger the lives and dignity of detained women and girls but also inflict long-term physical, psychological, and social harm, impeding their reintegration into society. The gendered dimensions of Israel's carceral regime are part of a broader strategy of occupation.

This study adds depth to existing knowledge by foregrounding women's accounts of how detention affected their health, dignity, and ability to reintegrate into society—especially amid the aggression and mass arrests of the Gaza war. Drawing on in-depth interviews, it documents the lived experiences of Palestinian women recently released from Israeli prisons and examines the psychological and physical toll of arrest, detention, and release. The study further highlights the intersection of gender, health, and the violence of occupation, indicating the need for culturally and politically responsive support systems for formerly incarcerated Palestinian women.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted within a restrictive and politicized environment marked by ongoing military occupation, where detention practices were embedded within broader systems of control and repression. The participants were Palestinian women who had been imprisoned by Israeli authorities. To capture a range of experiences, interviews were carried out in community settings across Palestinian cities, villages, and refugee camps. This geographical and sociopolitical context is essential for understanding the institutional abuse, gendered violence, and challenges faced by incarcerated women in the West Bank and Gaza.

Primary data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with a purposive sample of Palestinian women released from Israeli detention. Selection criteria

<https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/158984>; Wafa, "Female detainees facing inhumane, unbearable conditions in Israeli detention, says Prisoners Authority," April 21, 2025, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/156648>.

³⁸ Addameer, "Statistics," September 19, 2023, <https://addameer.ps/statistics/2023/09>.

³⁹ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees."

⁴⁰ Ibid.; FEMENA, "Femena Alarmed by Israel's Expanded Powers of Detention and Abusive Treatment of Palestinian Women since October 7," August 12, 2024, <https://femena.net/2024/08/12/femena-alarmed-by-israels-expanded-powers-of-detention-and-abusive-treatment-of-palestinian-women>.

⁴¹ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees."

⁴² Addameer, "Statistics," October 5, 2025, <https://addameer.ps/statistics/2025/10>; Wafa News Agency, "49 Palestinian women currently detained by Israeli authorities, says Palestinian Prisoners' Society," October 26, 2025, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/163714>.

⁴³ Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, "On International Women's Day. . . The occupation detains 21 Palestinian female prisoners in its prisons," March 7, 2025, <https://addameer.ps/ar/node/5518>; Palestinian Prisoners' Society and the Commission of Detainees' Affairs, "International Women's Day 2025 Report: Female Palestinian Political Detainees," March 8, 2025, <https://cda.gov.ps/images/2025/documents/932025en.pdf>.

prioritized diversity in age, length of incarceration, and type of charges—whether political, administrative, or related to public-order offenses. The interviews, between May and July 2025, were carried out in Arabic by experienced female interviewers to ensure cultural sensitivity and build trust. Sessions were held either in person at confidential locations arranged through partner organizations or remotely through secure video calls when necessary.

Each interview focused on participants' detention experiences, including physical and psychological conditions during incarceration and the challenges of reintegration after release. To enhance data reliability, interviewers used open-ended prompts and follow-up questions for clarification. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized. Large language models were used solely to translate Arabic into English.

To ensure accuracy and authenticity, a triangulated verification process was used. Participants were encouraged to provide available documentation, such as release orders, court papers, or official notices. These materials were cross-checked against databases maintained by collaborating organizations, including the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club, and Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association. Testimonies describing arrest circumstances, detention conditions, and release processes were reviewed systematically, and researchers consulted relevant authorities within these organizations to corroborate detention status when needed.

A thematic analysis was used to ensure the credibility, reliability, and depth of the findings. The process began with repeated readings of interview transcripts to build familiarity with participants' narratives. An initial codebook was developed inductively from the data. These codes were then refined, merged, or separated through team discussions to establish clear definitions and ensure conceptual coherence.

To strengthen reliability, two researchers independently coded an initial subset of transcripts using the draft codebook. Coding discrepancies were identified and discussed collaboratively, leading to refinements in code definitions and inclusion/exclusion criteria. Once a high level of agreement was achieved, the finalized codebook was applied systematically to all transcripts.

Throughout the analysis, the research team met regularly to compare interpretations, validate emerging thematic categories, and ensure that themes remained grounded in the data. Theme saturation was reached when additional transcripts yielded no new codes, insights, or interpretive patterns.⁴⁴ At this point, the research team confirmed that the thematic structure was sufficiently comprehensive and reflective of the diversity of participants' experiences.

To contextualize interview findings within broader legal and policy frameworks, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on archival and contemporary documents from human-rights and prisoner-support organizations:

- Al-Haq
- Addameer
- the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
- Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
- the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling
- B'Tselem
- the Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine)
- the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs (Ramallah).

⁴⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

These sources included legal reports, testimonies, press releases, policy briefs, and statistical profiles related to incarceration trends, gender-based violence, administrative detention, and post-release conditions. Documents were selected based on their relevance to formerly incarcerated women and analyzed through thematic coding to triangulate and strengthen the study's findings. The data and codebook that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Population, Recruitment, and Verification

The research focuses on Palestinian women detained by Israel between 2019 and 2025, encompassing a range of ages, geographic locations, and social backgrounds.

Eligible participants were women who had been imprisoned by Israeli authorities and released between October 7, 2023, and April 30, 2025. Respondents were included if they consented and were physically and psychologically able to complete the interview. Women still under investigation were excluded. Interviews were conducted in safe, confidential, and familiar settings to ensure privacy and emotional comfort. All participants gave informed consent after being fully briefed on the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. They also consented to the publication of anonymized quotations, with identities protected through pseudonyms, secure data storage, and restricted access to research materials.

All research involving participants under the age of 18 was conducted with full ethical safeguards. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and verbal assent was obtained from the minors themselves. Upon completion of the interviews, all participants were offered post-interview support information and provided with contacts for local counseling and community support services.

Participants were recruited through collaboration with the Palestinian Prisoners Club, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and other local organizations supporting the incarcerated and their families. These groups facilitated access to women with documented histories of imprisonment. Recruitment used a combination of purposive and snowball sampling.

Detention status was verified through a rigorous process. Participants were asked to provide official documentation such as release orders or court papers whenever available. These records were then cross-checked by consulting experts and databases of partner organizations. Researchers also reviewed personal accounts describing the circumstances of arrest, detention conditions, and release processes.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the institutional review boards of the authors' universities. The research was classified as minimal risk, involving semi-structured interviews. Approval covered all aspects of recruitment, data collection, and analysis. All procedures adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

The Sample of Formerly Incarcerated Women

The resulting sample reflects a diverse cross-section of Palestinian women incarcerated by Israeli authorities during a turbulent five-year period (see Table 1). Participants ranged from 15 to 65 years old, with most between 19 and 39. Women in this age group are typically active in education,

TABLE 1 Sample of 50 Palestinian women arrested between 2019 and 2024

No.	Age	Residence	Year arrested	Detention length	Facility
1	45	Ramallah	2024	8 months	Hasharon
2	23	Nablus	2023	18 months	Damon
3	37	Jenin	2024	6 months	Ofer
4	33	Jerusalem	2022	13 months	Jalameh
5	34	Hebron	2019	23 months	Ramleh
6	23	Jericho	2021	16 months	Moskobiya
7	17	Jerusalem	2023	12 months	Hasharon
8	43	Tubas	2021	17 months	Jalameh
9	46	Jerusalem	2023	14 months	Ramleh
10	35	Tulkarem	2022	17 months	Ofer
11	55	Hebron	2022	18 months	Hasharon
12	62	Ramallah	2021	42 months	Damon
13	34	Hebron	2023	14 months	Ofer
14	22	Jerusalem	2023	11 months	Jalameh
15	32	Nablus	2022	19 months	Ramleh
16	42	Hebron	2023	12 months	Moskobiya
17	15	Ramallah	2022	15 months	Hasharon
18	33	Jerusalem	2023	20 months	Hasharon
19	25	Jericho	2022	11 months	Damon
20	26	Salfit	2023	9 months	Ramleh
21	24	Ramallah	2024	4 months	Ofer
22	33	Gaza	2023	16 months	Hasharon
23	43	Jerusalem	2024	14 months	Damon
24	26	Jericho	2023	15 months	Ofer
25	24	Gaza	2023	22 months	Jalameh
26	33	Hebron	2021	15 months	Ramleh
27	23	Ramallah	2023	22 months	Moskobiya
28	16	Hebron	2023	17 months	Hasharon
29	45	Gaza	2023	19 months	Hasharon
30	37	Jerusalem	2022	17 months	Damon
31	44	Tulkarem	2023	16 months	Jalameh
32	36	Jenin	2023	13 months	Hasharon
33	26	Hebron	2021	9 months	Damon
34	25	Salfit	2022	6 months	Ofer
35	35	Rafah	2023	16 months	Jalameh
36	46	Gaza	2023	17 months	Ramleh
37	24	Ramallah	2023	8 months	Moskobiya
38	25	Birzeit	2023	7 months	Hasharon
39	27	Tubas	2023	15 months	Damon

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

No.	Age	Residence	Year arrested	Detention length	Facility
40	24	Jericho	2024	13 months	Ramleh
41	27	Hebron	2023	12 months	Ofer
42	19	Jerusalem	2022	11 months	Hasharon
43	20	Nablus	2021	6 months	Damon
44	52	Gaza	2023	16 months	Ofer
45	65	Ramallah	2024	14 months	Jalameh
46	32	Hebron	2023	8 months	Ramleh
47	46	Ramallah	2024	14 months	Moskobiya
48	17	Ramallah	2022	16 months	Hasharon
49	53	Gaza	2023	19 months	Hasharon
50	36	Nablus	2023	7 months	Damon

employment, and family life, though the data do not indicate systematic targeting based on social roles.

Respondents came from across the West Bank, including major cities such as Hebron, Ramallah, Jerusalem, Nablus, and Jericho. Hebron and Ramallah, known for political activity and frequent military incursions, were heavily represented. The inclusion of women from Gaza, Tubas, Salfit, Jenin, Rafah, and Birzeit underscores the national scope of incarceration.

Although all participants were released after October 7, 2023, at least 16 had been seized between 2019 and 2022. Arrests spiked in 2021 due in part to political conflicts such as the May uprising. More than 70 percent of the sample was arrested in 2023 or later, and all 26 women arrested in 2023 were detained after October 7. Lengths of imprisonment ranged from four to 42 months, with most spanning 12 to 20 months. Several women experienced long periods of incarceration due to administrative detention, under which no formal charges are brought.

Commonly cited detention facilities include Hasharon (formerly Tel Mond), Damon, Jalameh, Ramleh, Moskobiya, and Ofer. Many participants described poor living conditions, inadequate medical care, and limited access to legal representation or family visitation—especially at Damon and Hasharon. The latter facility held at least three adolescent girls in the sample.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This study reveals the abuses experienced by Palestinian women under Israeli occupation. Participants in the study reported physical violence, psychological torture, gender-based abuse, and inhumane detention. Table 2 presents the complaints of these women. Six principal categories of maltreatment are identified:

- Physical abuse
- Isolation
- Psychological impact
- Inhumane conditions
- Gender-based violence
- Medical neglect

TABLE 2 Allegations of abuse from Palestinian women in the sample

No.	Complaints	Category	Charges
1	Beaten during arrest; deprivation of food and water	Physical abuse	Affiliation with a banned movement
2	Detained in a small cell; complete isolation	Inhumane conditions; isolation	Participation in protests
3	Electric torture; threat of rape	Gender-based violence; physical abuse	Incitement against the State of Israel
4	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact; physical abuse	Affiliation with a banned movement
5	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Committing an indecent act
6	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Participation in protests
7	Complete isolation; deprivation of food and water	Isolation; inhumane conditions	Affiliation with a banned movement
8	Beaten during arrest	Physical abuse	Facebook post
9	Threat of rape; deprivation of food and water	Gender-based violence; inhumane conditions	Incitement against the State of Israel
10	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Participation in protests
11	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact	Affiliation with a banned movement
12	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Committing an indecent act
13	Deprivation of food; lack of hygiene items	Inhumane conditions	Administrative detention (no charges)
14	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Affiliation with a banned movement
15	Complete isolation; deprivation of food and water	Isolation; inhumane conditions	Security-related charges
16	Beaten during arrest; deprivation of food and water	Physical abuse	Participation in protests
17	Threat of rape; deprivation of food and water	Gender-based violence	Affiliation with a banned movement
18	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Facebook post
19	Deprivation of food; lack of hygiene items	Inhumane conditions	Affiliation with a banned movement
20	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact	Committing an indecent act
21	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Incitement against the State of Israel
22	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Affiliation with a banned movement
23	Complete isolation; deprivation of food and water	Isolation; inhumane conditions	Administrative detention (no charges)
24	Beaten during arrest; deprivation of food and water	Physical abuse	Participation in protests
25	Threat of rape; deprivation of food and water	Gender-based violence	Incitement against the State of Israel

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

No.	Complaints	Category	Charges
26	Deprivation of food; lack of hygiene items	Inhumane conditions	Affiliation with a banned movement
27	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Administrative detention (no charges)
28	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Incitement against the State of Israel
29	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact	Participation in protests
30	Beaten during arrest; deprivation of food and water	Physical abuse	Affiliation with a banned movement
31	Threat of rape; deprivation of food and water	Gender-based violence	Committing an indecent act
32	Complete isolation	Isolation	Affiliation with a banned movement
33	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Facebook post
34	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Participation in protests
35	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact	Affiliation with a banned movement
36	Beaten during arrest	Physical abuse	Security-related charges
37	Threat of rape; deprivation of food and water	Gender-based violence; inhumane conditions	Incitement against the State of Israel
38	Complete isolation	Isolation	Affiliation with a banned movement
39	Deprivation of food; lack of hygiene items	Inhumane conditions	Administrative detention (no charges)
40	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Participation in protests
41	Dampness in cell; lack of blankets	Inhumane conditions	Affiliation with a banned movement
42	Beaten during arrest	Physical abuse	Facebook post
43	Threat of rape	Gender-based violence	Participation in protests (no charges)
44	Complete isolation	Isolation	Affiliation with a banned movement
45	Deprivation of food; lack of hygiene items	Inhumane conditions	Security-related charges
46	Electric torture	Physical abuse	Incitement against the State of Israel
47	Deprivation of food and water	Inhumane conditions	Administrative detention (no charges)
48	Threat of rape	Gender-based violence	Affiliation with a banned movement
49	Complete isolation	Isolation	Security-related charges
50	Stress positions for hours	Psychological impact	Facebook post

Note: The charge of “Facebook post” refers to alleged incitement. See Addameer, “Annual Violations Report 2019,” 2020, https://addameer.ps/sites/default/files/publications/v2020_online.pdf.

The practices indicated by this study's participants, illuminated by Table 2, align with previous findings that show a pattern of ill-treatment employed by Israeli authorities against Palestinian detainees. The advocacy group B'Tselem has documented prolonged isolation, deprivation of food and sleep, forced stress positions, beatings, humiliation, threats, and other techniques that target the body and psyche.⁴⁵ Moreover, many legal analyses indicate that these practices have been institutionalized and authorized through internal guidelines, as the Israeli Supreme Court has upheld the use of "special interrogation measures" if they are deemed necessary.⁴⁶ This has been criticized by human-rights organizations as a de facto loophole that permits justifications of ill-treatment after the fact.⁴⁷

Formerly Incarcerated Palestinian Women Speak Out

Since October 7, 2023, Israeli forces have arrested large numbers of Palestinian women, including students and minors, according to Palestinian prisoner-rights groups. Rights groups report more than 500 detentions, with many held without charge or trial under administrative detention orders.⁴⁸ The number of women from Gaza remains uncertain due to opaque detention practices and cases of enforced disappearance.⁴⁹ Arrests commonly occur during nighttime home raids, at military checkpoints, and in sweep operations.⁵⁰

Detainees in this study's sample reported trauma from the moment of arrest. This includes physical violence, such as rifle butts to the ribs, dragging by hair, beatings to the abdomen, and prolonged shackling. "I was beaten on my stomach during arrest; my clothes were torn, and I

⁴⁵ B'Tselem, "Distant relatives: Severe restrictions imposed on prison visits by immediate family to Gazans held in Israel," January 22, 2018, https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20180122_restrictions_on_gazans_prison_visits; B'Tselem, "Prisoners and Detainees"; B'Tselem, "Welcome to Hell"; B'Tselem, "Absolute Prohibition: The Torture and Ill-Treatment of Palestinian Detainees," May 2007, https://www.btselem.org/publications/summaries/200705_utterly_forbidden; B'Tselem, "Statistics on Palestinians in Israeli custody," November 26, 2025, https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners.

⁴⁶ Public Committee Against Torture in Israel v. Government of Israel, 53(4) P.D. 817 (Isr. Sup. Ct. 1999), https://versa.cardozo.yu.edu/sites/default/files/upload/opinions/Public%20Committee%20Against%20Torture%20in%20Israel%20v.%20Government%20of%20Israel%281%29_0.pdf.

⁴⁷ Smadar Ben-Natan, "Revise Your Syllabi: Israeli Supreme Court Upholds Authorization for Torture and Ill-Treatment," *Journal of International Humanitarian Legal Studies* 10, no. 1 (2019): 41–57.

⁴⁸ Addameer, "The mass arrest and systemic torture of Palestinian detainees in the West Bank, the hidden side of Israel's ongoing genocide," 2025, 5, <https://addameer.ps/sites/default/files/publications/The%20mass%20arrest%20and%20systemic%20torture%20of%20Palestinian%20detainees%20in%20the%20West%20Bank%2C%20the%20hidden%20side%20of%20Israel%E2%80%99s%20ongoing%20genocide.pdf>; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "OCHA: Humanitarian Situation Update #350—West Bank," December 23, 2025, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/ocha-humanitarian-situation-update-350-west-bank>.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees"; OHCHR, "UN experts call for end to anguish of families seeking truth about disappeared loved ones in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel," July 18, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/07/un-experts-call-end-anguish-families-seeking-truth-about-disappeared-loved>; Amnesty International, "Israel must end mass incommunicado detention and torture of Palestinians from Gaza," Amnesty International, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/07/israel-must-end-mass-incommunicado-detention-and-torture-of-palestinians-from-gaza>.

⁵⁰ Wafa, "Israeli occupation forces arrest Palestinians in overnight raids across the West Bank," May 26, 2024, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/144449>; Palestinian Prisoners' Society (PPS), "Brief on arrest campaigns implemented by the Israeli authorities," November 10, 2023, <https://www.ppsmo.ps/home/news/10941?culture=en-US>.

bled heavily for 20 days,” recounted a 29-year-old mother of two from Hebron. “I was denied medical attention despite repeated requests and held in solitary confinement in a filthy cell without food.” A 17-year-old student from Ramallah thoroughly described a similar experience: “I was shackled for hours, deprived of sleep as loud music played nonstop, and then strip searched and electroshocked after refusing to comply.” Participants’ descriptions of electric shocks and stress positions align with patterns of ill-treatment documented by UN bodies.⁵¹ “They didn’t ask questions first,” one 21-year-old student explained. “They broke you first.”

The freed women reported that they were subjected to solitary confinement as a form of collective punishment. A 41-year-old teacher was isolated for returning a meal in protest of another woman’s confinement. “I was denied clean clothes and held in the bathroom during raids,” she alleged. Detainees described dark, suffocating cells without access to family, lawyers, or other prisoners. This meshes with other published accounts of sleep deprivation, blaring noise, and sensory isolation that induce anxiety, depression, and dissociation.⁵² These accounts indicate practices that violate international standards prohibiting prolonged solitary confinement, which UN experts have stated may amount to torture.⁵³

About 20 percent of this study’s participants reported being victims of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, threats of rape, and strip searches. “During interrogation, a soldier touched my head and feet inappropriately,” one interviewee recalled. “I was beaten several times, and when I refused the strip search, they shocked me with electricity.” A 35-year-old woman released in a prisoner exchange described being held in a room covered in water, beaten on the face by a female guard, and subjected to naked searches by multiple jailers. Other rights monitors have also found credible allegations of rape against women from Gaza. Taken together, the practices appear to be systematic tools used against women to silence dissent and reinforce the hierarchy of the occupation.⁵⁴

Detention conditions compound the detainees’ suffering. Cells are overcrowded, humid, poorly ventilated, and unsanitary. “I spent the night in a cell with surveillance cameras, where I couldn’t even relieve myself,” one 22-year-old student from Nablus alleged. “They later gave me a blanket soaked in urine.” Another detainee from Jerusalem described standing water on the floor and guards shouting, “Death to Islam!” Food and water were denied for more than 20 hours.

⁵¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, “Detention and alleged ill-treatment”; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Thematic Report”; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls,” February 19, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/israelopt-un-experts-appalled-reported-human-rights-violations-against>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, “United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules),” 2015, rules 44–45; OHCHR, “United States: Prolonged solitary confinement amounts to psychological torture, says UN expert,” February 28, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2020/02/united-states-prolonged-solitary-confinement-amounts-psychological-torture>.

⁵⁴ OHCHR, “Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled”; OHCHR, “Israel’s escalating use of torture against Palestinians in custody a preventable crime against humanity: UN experts,” August 5, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/08/israels-escalating-use-torture-against-palestinians-custody-preventable>; United Nations Human Rights Council, “Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General,” June 14, 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/56/26>; United Nations Human Rights Council, “‘More than a human can bear’: Israel’s systematic use of sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023,” March 13, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session58/a-hrc-58-crp-6.pdf>; United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, “Detention and alleged ill-treatment.”

According to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, B'Tselem, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs, detainees with chronic illnesses—alongside older women and pregnant detainees—frequently receive inadequate medical care, including delays in treatment and medication disruptions.⁵⁵ Rajaa Karsoua, a woman with a mobility disability who was arrested in February 2024, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs, was denied necessary assistive devices and adequate medical treatment throughout her detention. Her health worsened significantly as a result of this deprivation.⁵⁶ In some cases, medical inattention has proved fatal. The widely reported death of Saadia Farajallah, a 68-year-old detainee from Hebron who died in Damon Prison in July 2022, exemplifies the consequences of delayed or denied medical intervention. Rights organizations concluded that her death was preventable and stemmed from chronic medical neglect.⁵⁷

Our participants experienced similar systemic failings. A 43-year-old diabetic arrested in 2024 and held at Damon claimed she was denied her necessary medications. "I asked for my insulin for three days, but they ignored me," she told us. "My vision blurred, and I felt my body shutting down." Another former prisoner described severe abdominal pain that went untreated. "I begged the clinic to see a doctor, but they only gave me painkillers," said a woman arrested 2021. "I was in agony, and no one listened." Another, arrested in 2023 and incarcerated at Moskobiya, recounted the denial of mobility aids: "I cannot walk long distances, but they refused to give me a wheelchair. I had to crawl to reach the bathroom, and my legs weakened so much that I could barely stand afterward."

Respondents also reported mistreatment in "bosta" vehicles that are used to transport Palestinian detainees. Females held by Israeli authorities—including minors and the sick—are handcuffed to metal chairs for up to eight hours without food, water, or bathroom access. "I was handcuffed all the way, denied any food, and told I would be raped if I cried or asked to use the bathroom," reported a 20-year-old from Jenin.⁵⁸

Several interviewees illustrated inhumane conditions and gender-based mistreatment. A woman held at Hasharon reported being forced to stay outdoors in the cold for two days during her arrest. "They left us outside without blankets or jackets; my body was numb, and I could not stop shivering," she said. "We had nothing to eat or drink." Others said they were denied menstrual products. "During my period, they did not give me pads. I had to use my clothes, and I bled through them," alleged a female detainee at Jalameh. "I felt humiliated and degraded." Added another: "I asked for sanitary products several times, but they ignored me. I had to change in the cold cell, and I developed infections because of this neglect." A 36-year-old woman from

⁵⁵ Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Israel's Policy"; B'Tselem, "Welcome to Hell."

⁵⁶ Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees"; Palestinian Prisoners' Society (PPS), "الأسيرة رجاء كرسوع تواجه التحقيق والمنع من لقاء المحامي منذ (22) يوماً," ["Prisoner Rajaa Karsoua Faces Interrogation and a Ban on Meeting Her Lawyer for 22 Days"], February 27, 2023, <https://www.ppsmo.ps/home/news/8581?culture=ar-SA>; Wafa News Agency, "Occupation Releases Prisoner Rajaa Karsoua from Balata Camp," May 22, 2023, <https://www.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/71759>.

⁵⁷ Wafa News Agency, "Palestinian woman dies in Israeli prisons at 68; PM, Foreign Ministry hold Israel responsible," July 2, 2022, <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/129920>; Al Jazeera, "Palestinian Female Prisoner, 68, Dies in Israeli Jail," July 3, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/3/palestinian-elderly-female-prisoner-dies-in-israeli-prisons>; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Press Release: Israel must respect the human rights of Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons and open an investigation into the death of Saadia Farajallah," July 3, 2022, <https://mezan.org/en/post/33211/Press-Release%3A-Israel-must-respect-the-human-rights-of-Palestinian-detainees-in-Israeli-prisons-and-open-an-investigation-into-the-death-of-Saadia-Farajallah>.

⁵⁸ Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Thematic Report."

Nablus who accused the Israeli authorities of leaving her outside in the cold with no food, drink, or blankets said simply, “I thought I would die.”

Pregnant detainees told of enduring cruel treatment. A woman from Tulkarem, three months pregnant, was interrogated for hours while shackled, denied prenatal vitamins, and refused water. “They knew I was pregnant but made me stand for hours,” she said. Other published accounts have shown that women giving birth while in detention have been shackled during labor, and in some cases separated from their newborns shortly after delivery.⁵⁹ These practices violate the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and international humanitarian law—and potentially inflict generational trauma.⁶⁰

Some detainees were compelled to perform physically demanding tasks despite their weakened or injured state. “They made me carry heavy boxes to the kitchen after I had been beaten,” one participant recalled. “My arms shook, and I almost collapsed, but they didn’t let me stop.” Another alleged, “I was forced to walk long distances between cells while shackled. Each step was agony, and I felt like my legs would give out.” A third recounted, “Even though I was recovering from an injury, they made me clean the floors. I was exhausted and in pain, but they yelled at me to keep going.”

Interrogators also allegedly used threats against detainees’ relatives. “They told me that if I didn’t confess, they would take my children away,” one former prisoner told an interviewer. “I couldn’t eat or sleep, I was so terrified for them.” Another female detainee testified to the practice: “They threatened to harm my husband and parents if I didn’t answer their questions. I felt paralyzed with fear and couldn’t think straight.” Those facing this treatment had similar reactions. “They said they would punish my family in front of me and demolish our house,” one woman claimed. “I was crying and shaking, feeling helpless.”

A common form of physical abuse is electric torture, and many in the study vividly described pain and fear, which endured long after the interrogations. “I lost feeling in my hands temporarily, and my whole body shook uncontrollably,” one woman said in an interview. Another recounted: “They shocked my hands and feet repeatedly. I screamed, but they did not stop. My body ached for days afterward.” The lasting effects of this practice were a common experience. “I felt my whole body burn, and I could barely move afterward,” a former prisoner explained. After being tied to a chair and subject to electric shocks, recalled another Palestinian held by Israeli authorities, “I was terrified, and my muscles cramped so badly that I could not stand for hours.” The punishment often continued despite the anguish, according to an ex-detainee: “I begged them to stop, but they kept shocking me. The pain was unbearable and left marks on my skin.”

⁵⁹ Addameer, “Imprisonment of Women and Girls,” November 2018, https://addameer.ps/the_prisoners/women; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, “Israel’s Policy.”

⁶⁰ Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted November 20, 1989, 1577 UNTS 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted December 18, 1979, 1249 UNTS 13, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>; Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Fourth Geneva Convention), adopted August 12, 1949, 75 UNTS 287, <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/gciv-1949>; International Committee of the Red Cross, *Customary International Humanitarian Law: Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/customary-ihl>.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the institutionalized and gendered violence inflicted on Palestinian women detained by Israeli authorities, with a focus on the post-October 7, 2023, escalation in arrests. Using thematic analysis of interviews and human-rights reports, the study finds repeated and credible allegations of violations of international law, including medical neglect, physical abuse, and infliction of psychological distress.

The findings reaffirm the existence of systematic and gender-specific forms of oppression within the Israeli carceral regime. Palestinian female detainees—including minors, pregnant women, and the elderly—have been consistently subjected to degrading treatment, including beatings, strip searches, denial of healthcare, and prolonged solitary confinement. Many have been held incommunicado without access to lawyers or family. If substantiated, such cases may constitute enforced disappearance, recognized as a crime under international law and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Others, including minors, have been threatened, tortured, and faced psychological harm during interrogations, often without formal charges or trial.

These conditions constitute cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment. The interviews and reports suggest they are not isolated incidents but systematic abuse by Israeli authorities, especially against women who are activists, students, and mothers. The intention appears to be silencing dissent and fragmenting Palestinian social and political life. This is corroborated by reports from Al Mezan, B'Tselem, Addameer, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.⁶¹

These documented practices could constitute grave violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the Nelson Mandela Rules, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.⁶² To address violations faced by Palestinian women in Israeli detention, urgent international action is needed across legal, humanitarian, and political fronts.

First, Israel must be held legally accountable as an occupying power. International justice mechanisms—including the International Criminal Court and national courts applying universal jurisdiction—should investigate alleged crimes against Palestinian detainees, including torture and enforced disappearance.

Second, immediate humanitarian measures are essential. Israel must disclose the status and location of all detainees, especially women from Gaza, and grant them access to families, lawyers, and independent medical care. Minors, pregnant women, and those in poor health should be released immediately. All detention facilities, including undisclosed sites, must be opened to inspection by UN human-rights bodies.

Last, an international investigation into gender-based abuse and violence is urgently needed. UN agencies should document and report on sexual harassment, strip searches, and the physical and psychological harm to women and girls, with findings reported to the secretary-general and Human Rights Council.

This study provides critical insight into the gendered violence and human-rights violations faced by Palestinian women in Israeli detention, but it is limited by restricted access to current detainees, particularly those held in undisclosed locations or under enforced disappearance. Reliance on secondary sources, institutional reports, and testimonies from recently released

⁶¹ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, "Detention and alleged ill-treatment"; B'Tselem, "Welcome to Hell"; Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Israel's Policy"; Ministry of Women's Affairs (Palestine), "Palestinian Female Detainees."

⁶² Abdo, *Captive Revolution*; Francis, "Gendered Violence."

detainees, while credible, may not fully capture the scope and variation of abuse across all detention centers. The rapidly shifting political and military context since October 2023 has further complicated data collection, with communication blackouts and limited access leading to incomplete or inconsistent reporting. Additionally, the focus on female detainees, though essential, does not reflect the broader context of male and nonbinary detainees or community-level impacts, and the psychological effects described remain largely qualitative without clinical validation.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies to assess the long-term mental health consequences of detention, including trauma from torture, solitary confinement, and sexual violence. Comparative analyses across detention facilities can reveal systemic patterns of abuse, while legal investigations should examine administrative detention practices and due process violations.

ORCID

Oqab Jabali  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1156-6205>

Saqer Jabali  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4087-9051>

How to cite this article: Jabali, O., Jabali, S. 'I Thought I Would Die': Testimony from Palestinian Women Jailed by Israel. *Middle East Policy*. 2026;1–18.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.70028>