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Palestinian Center for  
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The impact of life's difficulties resulting from the occupation in undermining mutual trust and support for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process:

*A case study on*

## **Settlers' Attacks in H2 in the City of Hebron**

**Alaa Lahluh, Jihad Harb, and Walid Ladadweh**



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## **Settlers' Attacks in H2 in the City of Hebron**

**Jehad Harb, Alaa Lahluh, and Walid Ladadweh**



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## Introduction

The difficulties and hardships of daily life and the violence that results from the conflict produce negative perceptions of the parties to the conflict towards each other. These perceptions in turn play a major role in undermining trust in the other party and making it difficult to reach a peace agreement between the two parties, as they lose trust in each other and in the other's intentions to reach a real peace that ends the conflict. In this study, we tried to focus on the areas most facing the difficulties of daily life left by the practices of the occupation authorities, to find out how this would affect trust and the peace process.

This paper aims to study the difficulties caused by the settlers' attacks on Palestinian residents of H2 area in the city of Hebron, which is one of the areas in which daily suffering and life difficulties arise as a result of the occupation and the attacks of settlers in particular, and how this affects the attitudes and perceptions of the people of the area towards the Israelis and the peace process. The difficulties of daily life and the exposure to violence resulting from the conflict play an important role in reducing trust and increasing opposition to the peace process, which is the conclusion we reached in this case study.

This is a policy paper aiming at findings policy measures that can help to alleviate the difficulties of daily life experienced by Palestinians in the H2 area of Hebron, in an attempt to present a set of recommendations to the Palestinian government, Palestinian civil society, the international community and the Israeli government. The paper's recommendations can be built upon in order to enhance trust between the two parties if they want to proceed with a serious peace process that ends all outstanding issues.

The findings presented in the paper are based on the results of two public opinion polls conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) on trust in the other party. The first poll was conducted in August 2020 among a representative sample of 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 120 population locations. The second poll was conducted at the end of October 2020, among a representative sample of 1,560 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Survey experiments were also conducted in January 2021 among a sample of 243 individuals, including 162 individuals in the H2 area (and in other areas that suffer from demolition of homes and lack of building permits and those areas close to the separation wall suffering from land confiscation) and 81 from areas characterized by less suffering are far from areas of friction. We also relied on the findings of two focus groups that were organized by PSR to discuss the results of the attitudinal surveys and the survey experiments. Moreover, interviews with decision - makers, specialists, and citizens were conducted for a better understanding of the underlying forces at play in areas of increased suffering and hardships. We also relied on a set of press and documentary reports that dealt with the subject in addition to reports issued by Palestinian and international institutions.

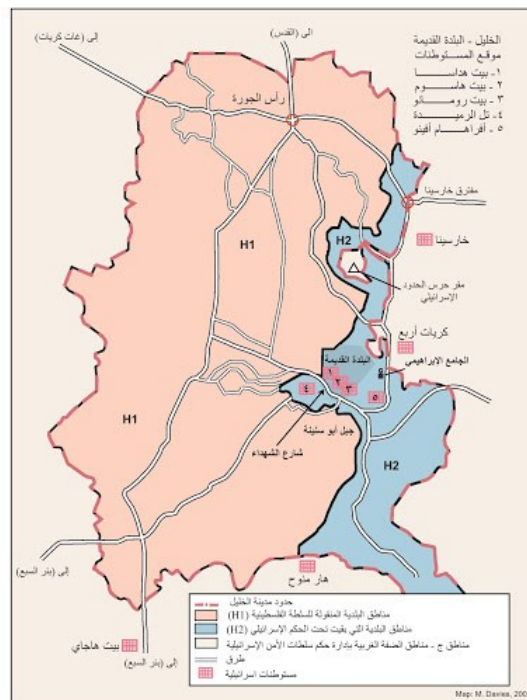
## Study background

There are about 250 formal and informal settlements in the West Bank, established since 1967. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the number of settlers at the end of 2019 in West Bank settlements, including East Jerusalem, exceeded 688,000 settlers of whom about 80% are in the central West Bank areas, especially in the Jerusalem governorate.

Settlement activity in the city of Hebron began in 1968, with the establishment of a settlement outpost in Kiryat Arba. The settlement process continued over the years in various forms, represented by a group of settlers seizing the Al-Dabweya building in 1979, then Osama Ibn Al-Munqith Elementary School followed by a building in the vegetable market. In that years, settlers took control of the archaeological site in Tel Rumeida installing mobile caravans in it.

In recent years, settlers' violent attacks against Palestinian citizens and their property have increased dramatically in different areas of the West Bank. The Israeli army responds to these attacks with apparent negligence, while at the same time the army responds to the Palestinians' defense of themselves and their property using violence, shooting and arrest. There are many types of attacks carried out by settlers against Palestinian citizens, from verbal attacks to insults and threats, to physical attacks, such as beatings, shootings, trampling, and others. Attacks are also carried out by settlers on private property such as burning trees or burning cars, as well as attacking public property such as places of worship and schools.

**Image (1): H2 map in the city of Hebron**



Palestinian citizens of H2 located in the heart of Hebron city indicate that they suffer from various forms of attacks. This has been evident in the survey research carried out by PSR 2017 (Settlers' attacks on Palestinian citizens, "Area H2 in Hebron City as a model.")<sup>1</sup>

## Forms of the difficulties facing the Palestinian citizens as a result of settlers' attacks:

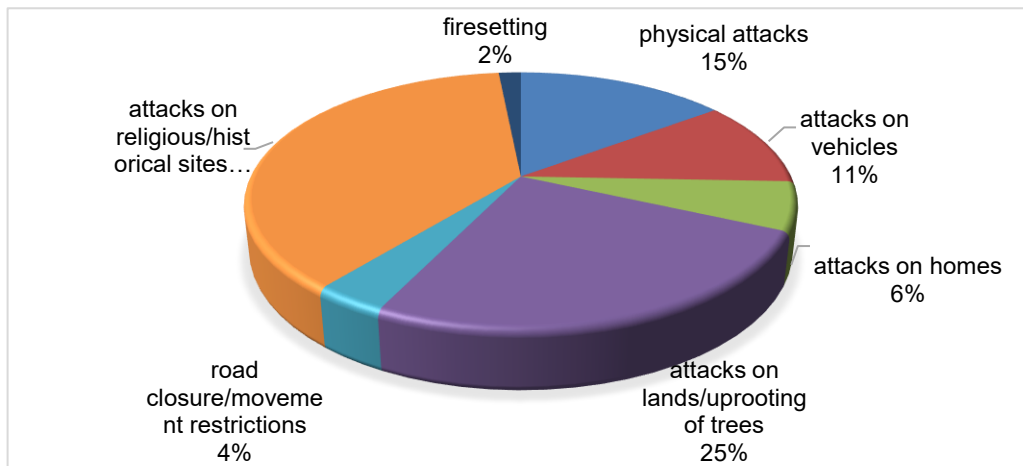
Palestinians suffers from various daily attacks by settlers and the Israeli army, which have physical and psychological effects on their life. The Palestinian group called the "Committee against the Wall and Settlements" has monitored 932 different attacks. These attacks were concentrated intensely in the governorates of Jerusalem, Nablus, and Hebron, which witnessed more than 63% of all attacks by settlers. These attacks were divided into two parts, the first part related to physical attacks, and the second part related to attacks on Palestinian movable and immovable property.<sup>2</sup> The following figure shows the different types and numbers of attacks that settlers carry out against Palestinian citizens.

During the past two years, the settlers attacked us several times. Twice they attacked my father's shop, located in the Ibrahimi Mosque area, and broke its contents, the Israeli police issued him a notice. After a second attack, my father complained to the Israeli police, but it did not move.

In the area where we live, we fear for our children from settlers' attacks, especially as they target children with their attacks to intimidate them and put pressure on the people in order to force people to leave this area and the settlers to seize it. All of these attacks take place under the watchful eye of the occupation soldiers who are quick to protect the settlers when we try to defend ourselves.

Telephone interview with Mr. Muhammad Al-Muhtaseb on 17/4/2021

**Figure (1):** Types of attacks carried out by settlers in 2020<sup>3</sup>



<sup>1</sup>The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Who Needs Security? <http://www.pcpsr.org/ar/node/699>

<sup>2</sup>The Settlement and Wall Resistance Commission, settlers' attacks during the year 2020, [settlers' attacks during the year 2020.pdf \(wafa.ps\)](#)

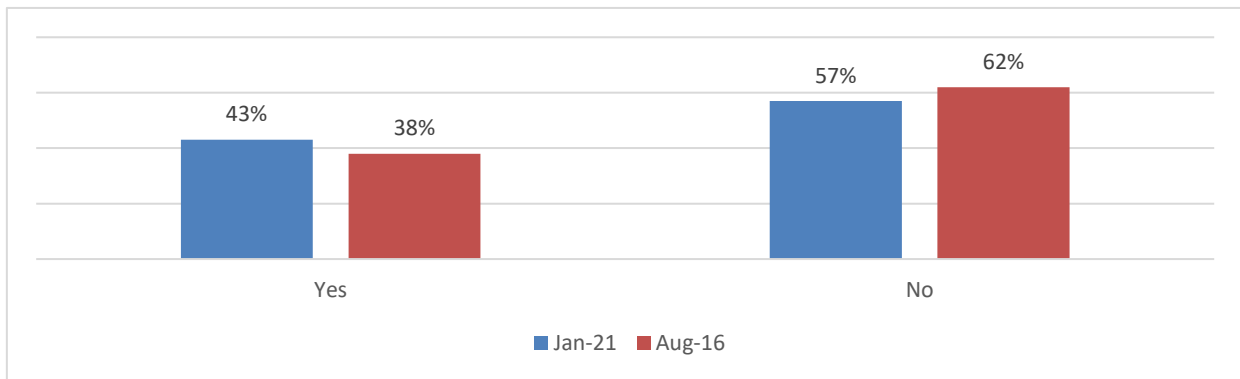
<sup>3</sup> Same source.

### Assaults on the population

The interviews conducted by PSR researchers in the city of Hebron revealed fears and other concerns that citizens suffer from, as the journey of fear for their children does not end with their going and returning from their schools but extends throughout the day. Parents, for example, in the Tel Rumeida neighborhood are afraid for their children to leave their homes on their own for fear of settlers' attacks and deliberate terror against children.

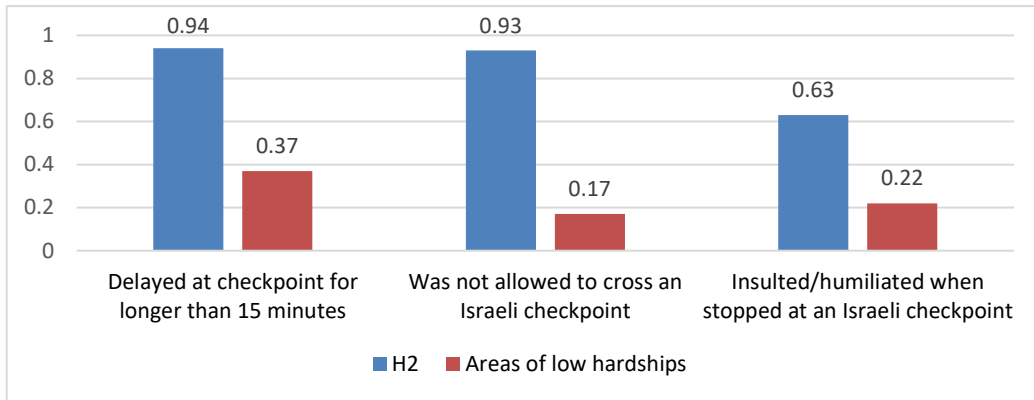
The results of a poll conducted by PSR on a sample of residents of the H2 area in August 2016 showed that 38% of the respondents or a member of their family who live in the same house during the past two years have been attacked by settlers. The percentage has increased To reach 43% in January 2021, as indicated by PSR's survey experiments in January 2021, as shown in figure (2) below.

**Figure (2):** Exposure to attacks by settlers during the past two years



Citizens living in numerous areas, such as the vicinity of the Ibrahimi Mosque, the Old City, Tel Rumeida, Wadi Al-Hussein and others suffer from difficulty in movement. For example, citizens living in Tel Rumeida live a prison-like life, where they cannot enter and exit the neighborhood except through military gates and checkpoints that delay them from reaching their places of work and residence sometimes for hours, and anyone who does not live in this neighborhood is prevented from entering it. PSR's January 2021 poll, as shown in figure (4) below, indicates that the vast majority of H2 residents suffer from harassment, delays, and humiliation at Israeli checkpoints when entering or leaving their residential areas.

**Figure (3):** comparing hardships and suffering at the checkpoints in H2 area vs. other areas “during the past year”



Participants in PSR’s focus groups and residents interviewed in this area confirmed the impact of these practices on the children’s physical and psychological lives in various forms, including involuntary urination and talking during sleep, in addition to their lack of a proper childhood life as a result of staying in their homes for long hours because their parents worry from settlers’ attacks.

### Attacks on homes

The results of the poll conducted by PSR in August 2016 indicated that 47% reported that their residential areas were attacked by settlers. This percentage rose to 54% in January 2021, as can be seen in figure 4.

During the Jewish Purim holiday, on Sunday, February 28, 2021, about ten settlers, men, women and children stood on the balcony of the “Beit Hadassah” settlement in the downtown area of Hebron city, and some of them started throwing stones and glass bottles at the neighboring house of the Abu Hayya family and insulting the residents.

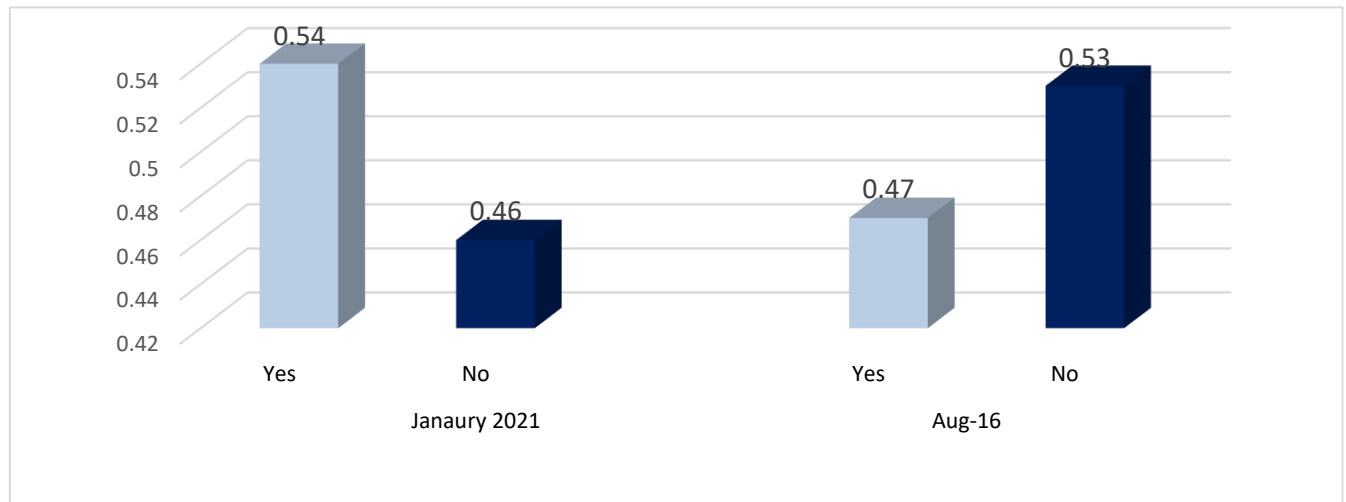
*Btselem report*

[https://www.btselem.org/arabic/settler\\_violence\\_update](https://www.btselem.org/arabic/settler_violence_update)

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**Figure (4):** H2 neighborhood's exposure to settler attacks during the past two years



The methods of attacking homes in the areas of contact vary, some of which are attacks by groups or persons. By reviewing the reports of human rights organizations, especially Btselem's, one can see hundreds of recorded reports against settlers' attacks on housing in the H2 area, especially the seam areas. This was confirmed by the participants in PSR's focus groups and in our personal interviews.

### Attack on schools

Palestinian children residing in this area are subjected to various types of violence by settlers and the Israeli army. On their way to school, children are exposed to harm, harassment and insults from

settlers and their children, in addition to being thoroughly searched by the Israeli army at the checkpoints in the area. They are also harassed while in their school. There are many cases of settlers attacking the school with stones while the students were inside. This is evident in the violations and insults faced by the students at the Cordoba school, as the school is located on Al-Shuhada street, opposite the settlements of Beit Hadassah and Beit Romano. Most of the 118 students in the school live in H2 or near Tel Rumeida in the Israeli-controlled area, and 22 of them are in the H1 area, and they must cross an Israeli checkpoint, which frequently searches children thoroughly and provocatively. As they enter the H2

Samah Al-Takruri, the psychological counselor at Cordoba School (H2), confirmed that the daily assaults by the occupation and settlers affect the students' psyche and their academic achievement, adding that some students have faced great psychological consequences such as panic, fear and involuntary urination .

*The website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates - Palestine.*

[Students in the Fire Department ... Cordoba School in Hebron - Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants \(pna.ps\)](#)

area, they are subjected to brutal treatment by settlers<sup>4</sup>. The educator, Feryal Abu Heikal, director of the Cordoba School until 2006, recounts chapters of the settlers' daily provocations, such as assaulting female students and teachers, throwing stones and other objects at the school, in addition to attempts to storm the school. The attacks continue while students leave the school, she reports.<sup>5</sup>

**Photo (2):** Israeli soldiers harassing teachers and students in H2<sup>6</sup>



### **The impact of life's difficulties on undermining mutual trust and support for the Palestinian-Israeli peace:**

Clearly, Palestinian residents of H2 suffer from a high degree of daily hardships as a result of the attacks of settlers and the occupation forces while residents of other areas with little friction with the army and the settlers suffer less difficulties. Our survey experiments were conducted in both types of areas, those exposed to hardships, such as H2, and those exposed to less hardships, as can be seen in figure (5) below.

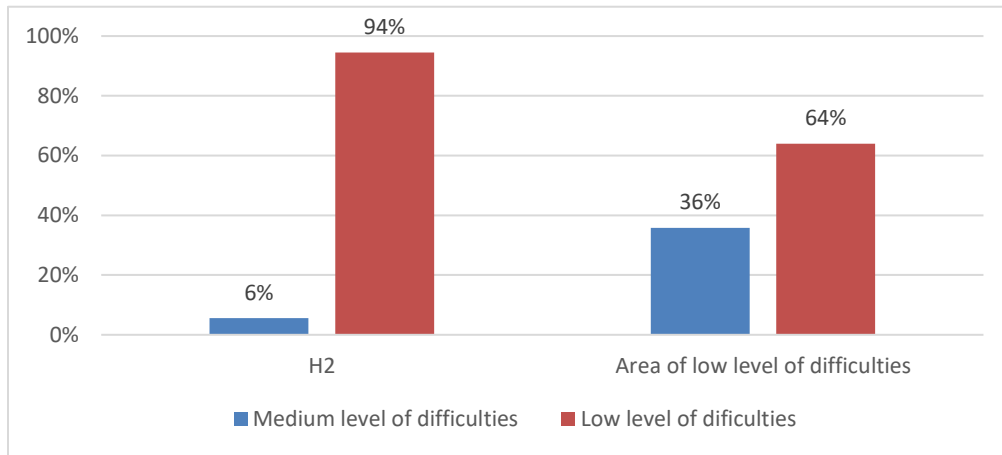
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<sup>4</sup> Defense of Children International: Settler Violence against Palestinian Children in the Occupied Territories, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> An interview with the educator, Ferial Abu Haikal, Tel Rumeida, Hebron, 6/12/2016.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.arab48.com>

**Figure (5):** Life difficulties in areas located in H2 compared to other areas



Evidence from our surveys and experiments make it clear that there is a relationship between settlers' attacks in H2 and the development of hardline attitudes among the Palestinians residing in H2. This is particularly evident in matters of mutual trust and support for the peace process and all its requirements. Various PSR polls show that the Palestinian public in H2 is the least trusting of the Israeli side and the least supportive of the peace process. Less hopeful than others of reaching a two-state solution, and their political orientations tend to take more radical positions towards ending the conflict with Israel.

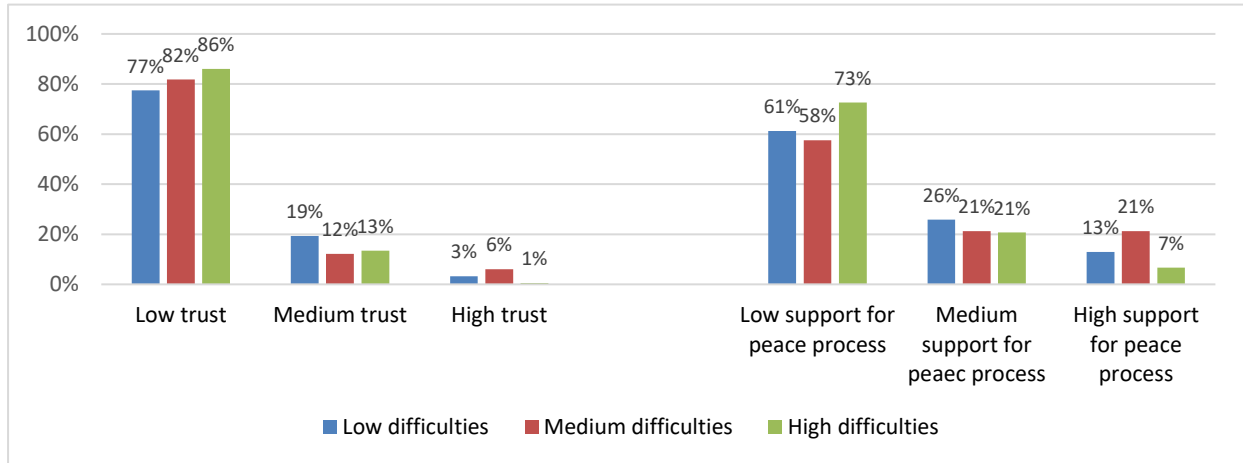
"What the occupation forces are doing in H2 is to erect barriers that obstruct the movement of Palestinians, even those who are going to perform prayers and visit the Ibrahimi Mosque. By contrast, they provide all the facilities, security and protection for the settlers, coming to the holy place. It is proven to us that they do not want peace. They make us convinced that under these circumstances there can be no peace, because we do not trust them, the peace agreements, or the international community that calls for peace."

*Nidal Irsheed, during his visit to the Ibrahimi Mosque, 20/5/2021.*

**The relationship between life's difficulties and loss of trust**

Most of the residents of H2 are more likely than others to be subjected to violence by settlers and the occupation, as we mentioned previously. The results obtained from a survey conducted for the residents of those areas indicate that the greater the difficulties, the less trust in the Israelis and the less support for a peace process between the two sides. As shown in fFigure (6) below, 86% of those who suffer from high difficulties have low trust in Israelis and only 1% of them have high trust and 13% have medium trust. Trust increases slightly among those who suffer from less difficulties, as 23% of them have medium trust and 77% have low trust. This is also reflected in support for the peace process. While 73% of those who suffer from high difficulties express low support for the peace process, 58% and 61%, respectively, of those who have moderate or little difficulties have low support for the peace process.

**Figure (6):** Correlation between level of difficulties and trust in the Israelis and support for peace<sup>7</sup>



Confirming the findings, one of the participants in PSR’s focus group meetings says that he was a supporter of the peace process and that he saw the peace agreements concluded between the Palestinians and the Israelis as an opportunity to achieve peace, but after a while, in light of the continuation of settlements and the settlers’ attacks under the protection of the Israeli army, he came to the conviction that the Israelis do not want peace and are not working for it. Rather, they are working to gain time: “The evidence is that since the signing of the peace agreements between the Palestinians and the Israelis, the settlements and the number of settlers have multiplied several times in the West Bank.”<sup>8</sup>

The results of surveys among young people (18-29) also showed that there is a close relationship between difficulties and trust. The greater the difficulty, the lower the trust. The same applies to the elderly (30 and over), but to a lesser degree. Figure (7) illustrates this result, as it shows that 92% of the youth who faced high difficulties had low trust in the other party, compared to 88% among the older age group.

<sup>7</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Survey of Survey Experiences.

<sup>8</sup> Focus group meetings, 1/3/2021.

**Figure (7):** Relationship between difficulties and trust and support for the peace process by age group

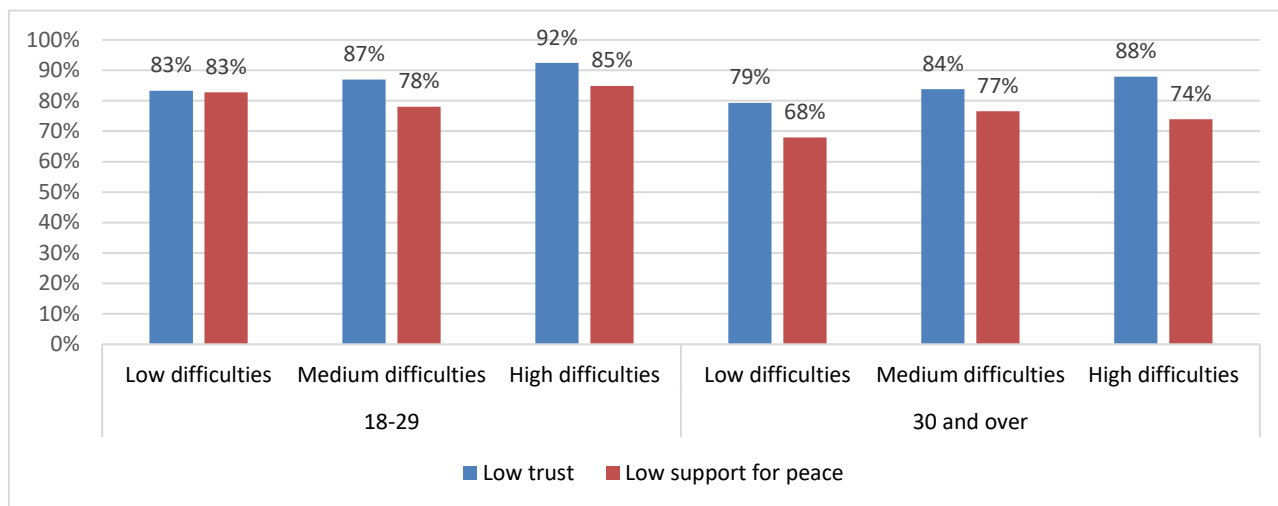


Figure No. (7) above also shows a relationship between the difficulties faced by young people as a result of the practices of settlers and the policies of occupation, and the support for the peace process. The greater the difficulties, the lower the support for the peace process among the youth. The same applies to the older age group, but to a lesser degree. The results show that 85% of the young people who faced high difficulties have a low level of support for the peace process, and 74% of the older ones, who faced the same high difficulties, have low support for the peace process. This was also confirmed by the speakers in PSR's focus group meetings. One of the young people participating in the focus group says that daily observing of settler violence "is enough to make us lose trust in everything related to the so-called peace process; so how can I trust them and their practices swing from bad to worse."

### The relationship between exposure to violence and loss of trust

Trust decreases, as shown in figure (8) below, among those who have been exposed to more violence at the hands of the Israelis. The results indicate an increase in the percentage of low trust, reaching 87% among those who have been exposed to a high degree of violence, and declining to 82% among those who have been subjected to a lower degree of violence.<sup>9</sup>

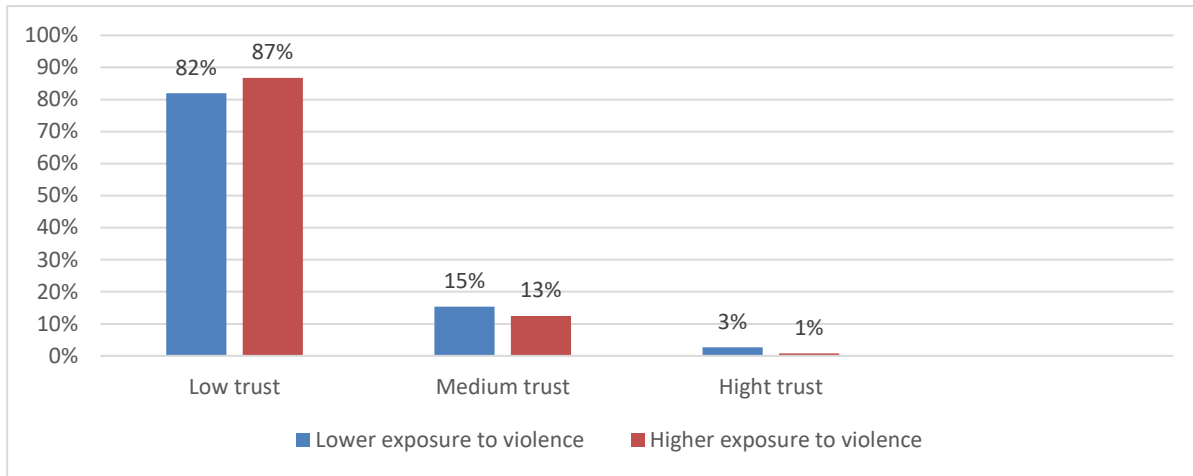
"I do not feel any kind of trust towards the Israelis, how can I trust them as they attack our homes and children and provide endless support to the settlers.

When you live in areas of contact with settlers, you realize the meaning of violence in all its forms that affect our lives and property, and how they pressure us by all means to leave our homes and land."

*Participant in the focus group meeting on 1/3/2021.*

<sup>9</sup> Survey experiments, January 2021. Previously mentioned source.

**Figure (8):** Relationship between trust in Israelis according to the degree of exposure to violence



One of the focus group participants says that the settlers' attacks, the army's assaults, and the checkpoints "have made our lives a living hell, making us make sure that there is no peace, and that it is impossible for there to be peace and for us to trust the Israelis, and experience is the biggest proof, and as the proverb says that "If you try what has already been tried, you'd be unwise."<sup>10</sup>

### **The relationship between loss of trust and support for the peace process**

The results indicate that there is a clear relationship between the level of trust in the other party and the percentage of support for the peace process. The greater the trust, the greater the support for the peace process; the more trust decreases, the lower the support for the peace process. An opinion poll conducted by PSR in August 2020 on a representative sample of all Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip showed that 50% of those who have low trust in the other side have low support for the peace process, 26% have medium support for the peace process, and only 24% have high support for the peace process. On the other hand, support for the peace process increases among those who have the highest trust, reaching 42%.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Focus group meetings, 1/3/2021.

<sup>11</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, trust poll, August 2020.

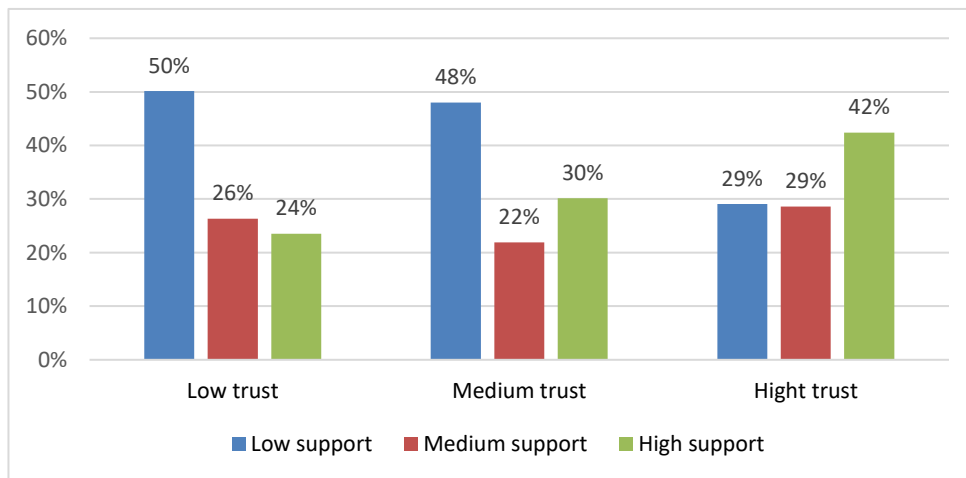
"The more the citizen suffers as a result of the difficulties imposed by the occupation, the more he loses trust in the peace process. They are doing this policy on purpose. They do not want peace and are not concerned with the positions of the Palestinian people on the peace process. They want to displace the Palestinian people. Most importantly, they have no actions that threaten their security."

*An interview with Minister Walid Assaf, head of the Wall and Settlement Resistance Commission, on 25/5/2021*

The focus group participants emphasized that the decline in their support for the peace process is due to several reasons, the most important of which is "the loss of trust in the Israeli side, which did not respect the agreements signed between the two parties." One of the participants said: "Every time the Palestinians signed agreements with Israel, Israel would retreat and not implement its commitments, and therefore I do not trust the Israelis, and any

agreement in the future must be sponsored by international parties that are not biased towards Israel. When we see peace achieved on the ground, our positions will change, but in the current situation, that is almost impossible."<sup>12</sup>

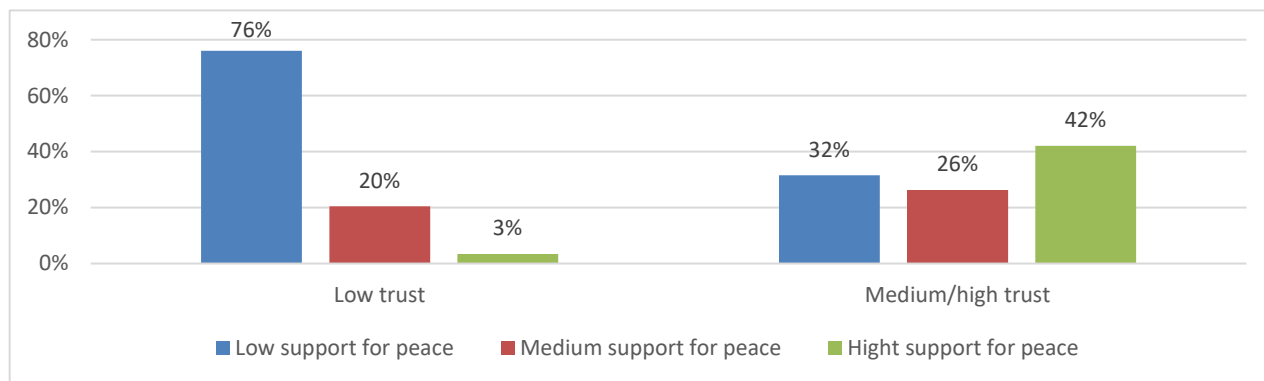
**Figure (9):** Relationship between level of trust and level of support for peace



As for those who live in the areas with the greatest hardships, such as those who live in H2, the matter seems clearer, as the results indicate that only 3% of those who have low trust have high support for the peace process, compared to 42% of those who have more trust. The results of the surveys also indicate that 76% of those who have low trust in the Israelis have a low level of support for the peace process, as shown in figure 10.

<sup>12</sup> Focus group meetings, 1/3/2021.

**Figure (10):** Relationship between trust and support for peace<sup>13</sup>



## Recommendations

Addressing the vital needs of Palestinians in H2 and reducing the burdens on the population stops the fear of forced displacement and helps build trust in the other side which, in turn, positively affects support for peace. In the context of rebuilding trust and providing the basis for restoring support for the peace process, this paper proposes a set of recommendations that alleviate the difficulties discussed in this paper as follows:

**(1) Palestinian government:** The Palestinian government should do the following:

- ✓ Recommit itself to the promises made to residents of H2 to provide the necessary support for this area. This should include a commitment to provide security by:
  - Opening of a police station or the presence of a Palestinian policemen in uniform and their weapons to enforce the rule of law. This requires the government to assume the responsibility of negotiating with the Israeli side and pressuring it to extend or at least grant the functional mandate of the Palestinian Authority, until a final agreement is reached, under which the Palestinian Authority will maintain public order in this area. It is the best option preferred by the majority of citizens who live in this area.
  - In the meanwhile, the government should strengthen its efforts in establishing a security force in civilian clothes, the so-called "inspectors", and to expand its scope of work to include all H2 areas.
- ✓ Provide direct legal interventions to protect citizens from demolitions or Israeli measures related to housing and commercial establishments.
- ✓ Provide financial assistance to help the population, especially families with low incomes, to enhance the resilience of citizens in the face of settlers violence.

<sup>13</sup> Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, Survey Experiments, aforementioned source.



- ✓ Strengthen production and marketing inputs by providing a package of exemptions for some materials that enter the economic activities of the population centers in this area, and providing mechanisms and means to market their products in fair ways with the aim of enhancing the resilience of H2 residents. This can be done by promoting domestic tourism and school trips to these religious and historical sites.
  - ✓ Continue and enhance the diplomatic effort by exposing the difficulties experienced by the citizens in this region, especially the lack of access to adequate housing and freedom of movement.
  - ✓ Develop the use of media outlets and social media to explain and clarify the processes of forced displacement and racial discrimination, as the clearest images of apartheid are evident in the H2 area.
- (2) **Civil society organizations and the private sector** should develop interventions on many levels such as:
- ✓ Providing assistance to facilitate daily life conditions, such as providing water and electricity networks, and developing social and economic life as a matter of social responsibility.
  - ✓ Developing coordination between civil society organizations to make a map of interventions in order to develop civil society interventions and coordinate their efforts and legal, health and educational services.
  - ✓ Providing legal support to protect the right of citizens to obtain building permits for their facilities and protect them from demolition and other occupation measures.
- (3) **The international community**
- ✓ The European Union and its states should pressure the Israeli government to respect international law and the facts that existed before the occupation.
  - ✓ In light of the continuation of settlement expansion in the heart of the city of Hebron, the international community should find ways to improve the living conditions of the area and pressure the occupation government to remove all obstacles that limit the freedom of movement.<sup>14</sup>
  - ✓ Providing an alternative to the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), which Israel suspended in 2019. Its mission should be to monitor violations and write reports on the situation in Hebron in the areas under the mission's work in order to create a sense of security and safety for Palestinians.
- (4) **Israeli authorities**
- ✓ The Israeli government should provide protection to Palestinian citizens living in H2 in accordance with international law and the agreements signed between the Palestinians and Israelis.
  - ✓ It should refrain from demolishing Palestinian facilities, whether private or publicly owned, and infrastructure aimed at developing daily living conditions in the area.

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<sup>14</sup> An interview with Minister Walid Assaf, a previously mentioned source.



**EUROPEAN UNION**

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