

Palestinian motherhood in Israel and welfare-to-work program

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Abstract

This study analyzes the experience of Palestinian mothers in Israel participating in a non-mandatory welfare-to-work program. Our goal is to explore the perceptions of these women and their trainers about the ways the program helps enhance the mothers' social capital. The study is based on in-depth interviews of 30 mothers and 3 trainers who participated in the program. Our findings expose a range of mothers' voices. The three main ones are: encouraging empowerment more than Work First; encouraging "maternal" jobs; and encouraging partnership and group cohesion. The combined voices of participants and trainers deepen the significance of these findings, as the latter play a meaningful role in enhancing the social capital and networking capabilities of the former, who suffer from multiple sources of exclusion, including a vulnerable ethno-national status, poverty, low income and gender.

Keywords: motherhood, welfare-to-work, Israeli-Palestinian mothers, social capital, low-income individuals

Introduction

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) extended the concept of “capital,” which is usually related only to economics, to include social, cultural and symbolic resources. Since then, “social capital” has been commonly used as an analytical term to explain stratification. Briggs (2003) points out that differential coping or mobility prospects can be explained by access to social connections, knowledge, income and other factors.

In research in other contexts, Warr (2006) and Briggs (1998) argue that seeking and building informal networks outside the family and community enables individuals to share information, gives them access to new ideas and generates heterogeneous social ties, which translate into social capital and social leverage. For women, such networks also facilitate acquisition of an alternative language that allows them to name hidden experiences, process emotions differently and find their voices (Benjamin, 2003).

Gender differences have been discerned with respect to the development of social networks. Women’s networks consist mainly of relatives, whereas those of men tend to be more varied and embedded more in working relationships (Lowe, 2014). Studies have also shown that having a young child reduces the size of a woman’s network, but does not affect the size of the male network. Moreover, the people and organizations in women’s social networks are less likely to provide access to quality professional opportunities (Lowe, 2012). On the other hand, Gallagher’s (2007) study of women in Damascus noted that those who participated in the work force could improve their bargaining power in the family because they earned a livelihood, had new experiences, formed ties and participated in new social networks that provided them with assistance.

The current study intends to expand understanding about the way programs aimed at integrating women in paid work can create a social capital network, by analyzing a local program in Israel. Specifically, the study focuses on the participation of Palestinian women in Woman of Valor, a non-mandatory welfare-to-work (WTW) program. Its non-

mandatory nature means that welfare allowance is not revoked from participants who reject jobs offered to them (Author et al., 2016). Woman of Valor operates in dozens of communities across Israel, combining group instruction with personal guidance aimed at job market integration. The program has evolved as a “culturally sensitive” activation project operating on a community level. Groups are formed in communities with high rates of families from a specific ethnic background. Almost all trainers share the same ethnic background as participants, and all participants are mothers. The program is under the auspices of Israel’s Ministry of Welfare and is de facto commissioned and operated by NGOs.

In this study we present the words of both trainers and program participants, as the resonance of their combined voices deepens the significance of the findings. Our research questions are threefold. First, can WTW programs provide social capital for participants? Second, how do trainers broker WTW imperatives for participants? Third, can participants negotiate the type of jobs available to them as mothers?

Exploring how a WTW program enhances women’s social capital and their integration into the work force has implications on theoretical and empirical levels. Our study hopes to add a layer of theoretical knowledge about the intersection of WTW programs and social capital. On the empirical level, we take advantage of a unique opportunity to examine a program for a group of Israeli-Palestinian mothers and thus enhance our understanding of WTW programs for women from multiple marginal positions.

Palestinian mothers in paid work in Israel

Israeli-Palestinian women are part of a national minority that suffers discrimination and oppression and is deeply divided from Israeli-Jewish society (Smootha, 2001). This is compounded by the gender discrimination that permeates the patriarchal hegemony typical

of Israeli and Palestinian societies (Hasan, 2002; Herzog, 2010; Sa'ar, 2007). Over the past three decades, Palestinians in Israel have undergone various types of changes, including considerable improvement in the educational gains and paid employment of women, as well as changes in family formation and gender relations (Author et al., 2017). The significant increase in Palestinian women's educational attainment has brought more women into the labor market and has changed perceptions about their ability to earn a living and improve their family's financial situation (Abu-Baker, 2016).

Despite these changes, researchers (Abu-Baker, 2016; Author et al., 2017) claim that the extended family continues to be the central source of support and supervision in Israeli-Palestinian society. Family relationships are typified by interdependence and a low level of differentiation and dominated by a sense of collective family identity. Researchers have shown that familial support for Palestinian women in Israel is contingent on their conformity to the "traditional" expectations of wives and mothers (Haj-Yahia, 1995; Sa'ar, 2001).

The multiple marginality of Palestinian women in Israel (Abu-Rabia-Queder, 2019) affects the employment opportunities to which they are exposed. Although the percentage of Palestinian women in Israel who participate in the work force has increased in recent years, their employment rate remains substantially lower than that of Israeli-Palestinian men and Israeli-Jewish women. In 2018, the employment rate was 82.2% for non-ultra-Orthodox Jewish women, 73.7% for ultra-Orthodox Jewish women and only 39.6% for Palestinian women (ICBS, 2018).

The low employment rate among Palestinian women, despite moderate increases, is of such significance that many scholars have investigated it (Kraus & Yonay, 2018; Miaari & Khattab, 2013; Offer & Sabah, 2011). Working outside the home often represents part of a patriarchal arrangement that remains in force only if the women uphold their modesty and family honor and submit to stringent family supervision (Abu-Baker, 2016; Author,

2018). Structural explanations highlight that most Palestinians in Israel (men and, more so, women) have limited opportunities in the labor market. Their socioeconomic disadvantage has been attributed to their segregation in towns and villages in the country's periphery, where education and employment opportunities are scarce, in addition to discriminatory policies favoring investment in the Jewish sector (Haidar, 2005). Kraus and Yonay (2018) emphasize that the Palestinian population receives far fewer public service resources from the state than the Jewish population. As a result of Israel's development policies, Palestinian localities have underdeveloped infrastructures and limited industrial and commercial space, yielding fewer local job opportunities and compelling many to work outside their place of residence. While men work wherever they find jobs, Palestinian women – like their Jewish counterparts and those in other Western societies – do so only if they find suitable jobs near their homes so that they can tend to their families (Kraus & Yonay, 2018). Those who do seek jobs outside their home area encounter numerous difficulties, partly because of the lack of suitable public transportation (Malki, 2011), the paucity of social ties and discrimination.

Theoretical framework

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, the shift to a neoliberal ideology in many Western countries, including Israel, has led to a reduction in the socioeconomic rights of people who are vulnerable to poverty (Abramovitz, 2006; Author, 2013). Neoliberalism and its accompanying WTW programs have gone hand in hand with the denial of socioeconomic rights to low-income mothers, justified by negative imagery that deepens the women's delegitimization (Abramovitz, 2006). The neoliberal demand for economic autonomy is reflected in the implementation of WTW programs, which are aimed at integrating allowance recipients into the labor market.

A considerable number of researchers have criticized the limited ability of WTW programs to generate stable working lives for those whose welfare support has been substantially restricted by neoliberal policy (Albelda, 2011; Bennett, 2017; Breitreuz & Williamson, 2012; Korteweg, 2003; Pulkingham, Fuller, & Kershaw, 2010; Wright, 2012). Most of the critiques indicate that participating mothers are offered part-time, low-wage jobs and given little additional help with childcare, occupational training and other issues, such as housing, education and health (Albelda, 2011; Millar & Ridge, 2009). Researchers have found, for example, that WTW programs pressure women to prioritize employment even when they have very young children to care for. Some have even defined this as a form of erasure that renders maternal care invisible (Pulkingham et al., 2010). Indeed, Weigt and State (2006) revealed that participants in WTW programs saw the modelling of employment to be a more important aspect of maternal care than their ability to care for their children. Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that mothers of young children usually pay the heaviest price for WTW policy (Breitreuz, 2005; Dodson & Zinzavage, 2007; Korteweg, 2006).

Several studies have highlighted the role of trainers in the WTW program. Whitworth (2013) emphasized the focus of WTW trainers on participant behavior instead of policy issues; and Pulkingham et al. (2010) suggested that WTW trainers were indifferent to participants' occupational needs and aspirations. Morgen (2004) showed how trainers take an active part in disparaging participants. It is crucial for trainers to offer poor mothers "sympathetic motivation" (Dodson, Freeman, & Sattar, 2012: 49), as their support and empathy provides recognition of the significant burden placed on these mothers.

Though poor mothers sometimes need support to make ends meet, they are often reluctant to ask for help for fear they will be judged and criticized for their inability to meet their needs independently (Domínguez & Watkins, 2004). Women who live in poverty suffer not only from a lack of material capital (e.g., adequate housing, education and

health), but also a lack of symbolic capital, manifested in stigmatization, discrimination, othering, lack of voice and disregard of their knowledge (Krumer-Nevo, 2016).

Warr (2006) posits that labeling has negative implications for mobility and the generation of social capital. Social skills are often outside the familiar experience of women living in poverty, and their social capital depends on the ability to learn to apply skills and practices based on bold and deliberative intention. Warr suggests that “opportunities for social contact and connection are ... modified” for such women according to their class and ethno-national position (2006: 502). The situation is exacerbated for Palestinian women because of severe difficulties finding work in Israeli-Jewish society as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kraus & Yonay, 2018; Malki, 2011).

For minority groups with limited resources, discussion of access to capital is particularly critical. Bourdieu's (1986) work emphasizes structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender and race. Social capital is not uniformly available to members of a group or collective, but rather is mainly available to those who make an effort to acquire it by achieving positions of power and status and by developing good will. The reproduction of social capital assumes an unceasing effort of sociability, an ongoing series of exchanges in which consciousness is constantly being affirmed and reaffirmed (Bourdieu, 1986). Domínguez and Watkins (2004) claim that social capital which improves opportunities for upward mobility can be obtained from relationships that provide advice, contacts and encouragement to get ahead. They argue that social support and social leverage networks can help with day-to-day survival, but can also hold up social mobility by imposing time-consuming and professionally limiting expectations on women.

One of the resources available to vulnerable populations is neighborhood organizations, such as childcare centers that provide parents with access to information and direct services (Small, 2006). Indeed, for those who are socially isolated, organizations

can serve as the only access point for critical resources. Organizations with ties to businesses, non-profit organizations and government agencies can serve as resource brokers for their participants. When resources are channeled through organizational bureaucracies, neighborhood institutions in underprivileged areas serve as critical bridges to populations that are otherwise often difficult to reach (Small, 2006). Such organizations can also present low-income individuals with the opportunity to expand and diversify their social networks, which tend to be limited and isolated. Networks that provide advice and encouragement to get ahead can generate social capital that creates opportunities for mobility. The incorporation of socially excluded women into heterogeneous social networks (from a class perspective) allows them access to more diverse resources and information on jobs and education – access which is especially important in an unstable job market (Domínguez & Watkins, 2004).

Method

The study is part of a larger research project involving in-depth interviews, held between November 2011 and July 2015, of 20 trainers and 105 mothers (62 single, 43 married) participating in the Woman of Valor WTV program. The program serves as a neighborhood institution with ties to businesses, non-profit organizations and government agencies and thus brokers resources for its participants. Interviewees were Israeli Palestinians, immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and Mizrahi Jews (Jews originally from Asia and Africa and their descendants). This article focuses on the 30 Israeli-Palestinian mothers and the three Israeli-Palestinian trainers. Most of the mothers live in poverty. In addition to their vulnerable ethnic status, most reside in Israel's periphery, characterized by less accessible public transportation, generally higher unemployment, and fewer available jobs than in the center of the country.

This study applies in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews as is common in the feminist literature. This allowed us to raise and explore ideas, thoughts and experiences of women in their own words, rather than in those of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992). Data from the mothers was collected through two-part narrative interviews, where the first part focused on their personal background, inquiring about age, number of years of schooling, marital status, number of children, employment status and place of residence. The second part solicited employment history, as well as how the mothers perceive the assistance they receive from their community and the program trainers. Sample questions (worded slightly differently for non-working mothers) included: How do your family and relatives accept your being a working mother? Do you encounter negative opinions about working mothers? What kind? Can you give me an example? Why do you think this happened? How does this affect you? What kind of negotiations – such as working outside your village or town and in non-traditional occupations, receiving help caring for your children – do you conduct, if any, with your family and neighbors to assist you in balancing work and family? Trainers were asked such questions as: Do you feel that the surrounding environment – family, neighbors, acquaintances – supports or inhibits mothers who participate in the program? How do you envision success for the participants? Can you describe your own difficulties, dilemmas and insights?

Individual interviews, lasting one to two and a half hours, were mainly carried out in participants' homes; some were held at the local community center or at the women's workplace. The majority were conducted by the leading investigator; the rest were performed by six research assistants. We all introduced ourselves personally and explained the research project, guaranteeing the respondent's confidentiality (see Monroe & Tiller, 2018). Most interviews were held in Hebrew, but some were in Arabic and translated into Hebrew for data analysis. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Following grounded theory, the recorded interviews were analyzed thematically (Charmaz, 2006). We conducted multiple readings and, based on systematic repetition in the data (Lieblich et al., 1998), identified several units of prominent meaning, which became the main themes. This process of repetition allowed us to make implicit connections between the daily lived experiences of study participants and the outcomes of the WTW program (see Breikreuz & Williamson, 2012).

Findings

The interviews revealed that the interaction between the mothers themselves and between the mothers and the trainers created social capital and a support network. Three main themes emerged: encouraging empowerment more than Work First, encouraging “maternal” jobs and encouraging partnerships between participants.

Encouraging empowerment more than Work First

The trainers reported that they focused their attention on the WTW participants themselves, seeking to use the program as a tool for improving the lives of these low-income mothers. They talked about motivating the women to take care of themselves, strengthening their independence and improving their quality of life. In the words of Ulfat:

I'm also interested in the women, especially the women. The women in the villages ... she'll be twenty years old or less and she just has to be married and have children. She begins to think only of her children and only of her husband and only of her house. She does not think of herself at all, does not even think of herself. It's not good, not good at all (Ulfat, trainer).

The supportive stance that the trainers took also emerges in the course of Nagham's interview, where she describes the meaning of the support she has received from her trainer, Laila. She speaks of her harsh life as a victim of violence from her former spouse,

his lack of support while married and after the divorce, and the fact that Laila has been a source of support for her and constantly encourages her to start college.

I broke down, I told Laila that I couldn't do it anymore, like it was a dead end for me. So she pushed me on and on. Otherwise I would have given up on the whole plan. But that's how she is all the time ... when there's someone who backs you up, really, like, backing from all sides. When there's someone behind you who pushes you more and more, then you can really achieve. But when you don't ... then life is very, very difficult. [People] do not always help. And even those around you are not always supportive. And it's good that there's a program that always supports those who don't have backing (Nagam, dental assistant, divorced, 1 child).

Other participants describe similar feelings about the personal empowerment they have experienced during the training period. Like the trainers, mothers perceive the program as facilitating improvement in their whole lives, beyond the main purpose of finding paid work. Referring to her participation, Rynal relates:

That's how you know yourself more, yes. Like, before, I thought it was obvious that I had to be like that [unemployed] ..., and really ... yes, to know yourself more ... That is, what you did in your life, what your successes were, what your difficulties were. You begin to understand that this should not be taken for granted, as if you've invested in reaching something within a certain time frame, to understand yourself more ... It really strengthens you [and allows] me to be calm with myself (Rynal, unemployed, married, 2 children).

Similar feelings are voiced by Rimas. Responding to a question about the program's contribution for her, she says:

Participation [in the program] gave me self-confidence ... in front of everyone, for me and for my children I feel stronger thanks to the program, and my studies [in the program] increased my self-confidence (Rimas, unemployed, widow, 4 children).

In other interviews, mothers in the program indicate that it adds emotional value, and some note that participation has equipped them with many tools that could improve their integration into the labor market. However, a critical reading of the interviews shows that, alongside the desire for women to be integrated into paid work, the perception remains that they are primarily mothers. Therefore, they are directed to jobs where they can better combine their identity as mothers and as working women.

Encouraging “maternal” jobs

Surprisingly, the program trainers do not follow the neoliberal logic of ignoring caring work, but rather note that they know the population with which they work and therefore attempt to ease their integration into the labor market slowly and cautiously:

What we do with them is find a job that matches the hours of leaving [kindergarten and schools] ... and we talk about half-time jobs. ... We have very few full-time jobs. We're talking about twenty percent [who work] full-time, eighty percent [who work] half-time. They talk about mother's jobs; mothers also talk about jobs as kindergarten assistants. Work [hours] that match the times of the children [in kindergarten and school]. We take it into consideration, we understand it (Laila, trainer

These intentional practices of routing the women to “maternal” jobs are also reflected by the interviewees, who suggest that participation in the WTW program has not changed traditional frameworks of thought. The ideology of differential gender roles and preservation of the “gender contract,” whereby women continue to be the main person responsible for childcare, is embedded. The responsibility of mothers to raise their children even when they integrate into the labor market is anchored not only in the patriarchal culture, but also in socioeconomic conditions. In many communities, children do not have long school days and the mother’s job needs to be adapted to the short hours when the children are in childcare or educational frameworks. The lack of public daycare centers is

particularly acute in Israeli-Palestinian towns and villages (Shavit, Friedman, Gal, & Vaknin, 2018).

Rihan, married with four children, works as a pre-school assistant in the mornings and does an afternoon shift driving children for a transport service. She would prefer to find another job that fits her maternal role:

A mom's shift is more suited to me as a job. Because now in my work I have a transport at four o'clock. My boys have to wait for me until after four for lunch instead of having it directly when they return from school. I want a job that suits me as a mother.

During her interview Rihan relates that there were also periods in the past, before she attended the program, when she was employed. She specifically notes that she comes from a family-based urban background in which it is accepted that women work for wages. Nonetheless, her remarks imply that, even after participating in the program, she wishes to integrate in employment tracks adapted to mothers.

Mysoon also seems to accept the notion that motherhood requires her to build her career in keeping with her children's needs:

I told you that I started an aerobics course and I stopped. Why? Because the kids are more important to me than anything else.... I don't know how my child will start kindergarten next year.... I can work in the mornings, yes, I don't want to leave them with someone else ... [I would like to work] until three o'clock, that I can do. But the children are in first place.

... The working hours, there's no place for women to work only morning shifts, all the jobs have mixed shifts [mornings, afternoons and evenings], In every workplace they tell you there are shifts. And this is not at all suitable for mothers with children (Mysoon, unemployed, married, 2 children).

Like many other interviewees, Mysoon does not voice indignation about a situation in which she can integrate into the labor market only in a "maternal" job.

Similarly, Renee describes an ongoing search for work that fits her children's needs:

My youngest boy is in nursery and the older boy is in kindergarten. So they have a place where they are cared for. But [I have] to find a job that fits [the children's schedule]. I went to a thousand and one job interviews (Renee, unemployed, married, 2 children).

Having to work "maternal" jobs is even more of an issue for single mothers. Single mothers are the primary caretakers and breadwinners and depend more on the assistance of others to allow them to do both. For them, low-paying work has even more serious consequences.

For instance, Nagam works as an assistant in two dentist offices. She works mornings in a public clinic where she gets minimum wage, but the hours suit her as a divorced mother, and she supplements this one afternoon a week with work in a private dental office, where she gets much better pay. She tells of the negotiations she conducted over her work hours in the private office, where she was unable to work full time and still meet her children's needs:

From the first interview I said ... I don't work evenings. I prefer mornings. And then she said it was impossible, as if there should be an evening and a morning as well, as if, at such a [pay] rate. I told her: "So I can't and I give up" (Nagham, dental assistant, divorced, 1 child).

In short, the mothers' negotiations are sharply focused on their primary responsibility: motherhood. Even though the program trainers would like to encourage participants to take on better paying jobs, they support this approach, as they understand the delicate situation in which these mothers are living, where they lack childcare options, as well as community and institutional recognition of their right to work.

Encouraging partnership and group cohesion

Social capital comes not only from resources that each participant receives from the program personally, but also from the reinforcement that the participants give to each other in the group. The trainer Laila explains how she leads the group:

It's connections that are made within the group. It's a group that talks about trust in the beginning, really about trust, about confidentiality, discretion, support for each other, being there for each other. And then there's a group and there's something very special. If one of them finds a job and doesn't want it, she calls and says to the others, "There is such and such a place to work, so come." If one of them works in a place that needs another employee, she will recommend one of the other women. They are very helpful, here they find something they never had, support they had nowhere else.

[Most of the women] will work only in their village.... Or women who are more like, ready, have their car, are ready to go out.... And sometimes they get organized. When they go to work in a certain place outside the community, we send more than one. Then two or three women ... work together and then they go out together and come back together. So it makes it easier for them to travel and also makes it easier for them to deal with their husbands and the community. This eases the situation (Laila, trainer).

The idea that participation in the group strengthens women and creates a sense of partnership and identification with the stories of others is repeated in many interviews. Rihan describes the atmosphere of partnership and encouragement that develops among the mothers:

The group gives examples of successful women, and when I see a successful woman, I want to be like her [Each woman in the group] sees this as an example of success, and the women in the program encourage one another (Rihan, pre-school assistant and driver for transport service, married, 4 children).

The meaning of the group activity is also highlighted by Bayan, who describes the importance of participating in an empowering and supportive group:

This is first of all an opportunity to get out of the house. This is the first step, to leave the house and meet new people, to learn new things too ... and to be with other women. ... It's actually fun and interesting.... Personally, I was like I was at home and that's when I left the world out of loneliness and then I went out into the world of meeting people and talking to them and making WhatsApp groups and that, that's very ... very helpful to get out of the situation I was in (Bayan, secretary, married, 2 children).

The chance for familiarity and social cohesion with a group of women in a similar position is also expressed by Mysoon, who describes the added value of the meetings:

Now I have girlfriends – one of them, Rynal, I wouldn't know her at all [if it weren't for the program]. She lives here, next to my house, and now we're friends. ... And I also go out of the house to a different atmosphere, feeling that I am doing something, not home and children all the time, home and children ... and I know people, my friends who I wouldn't even know. We make dates to go for walks together.

The group, we're really very very connected, they also gave us a workshop on personal empowerment, and we talked a lot, we were free to speak. It also strengthened us, our personal empowerment. ... Yes, yes, it really molded us together.

...[In the group] one strengthens the other. Women are more ... Men, you can't be as close as a woman to a woman, a mother to a mother. Like, there is another mother who doesn't work and she wants to work, not just me. I want to work, but it's hard, the kids, it strengthens me, it's not just me who doesn't work and I have kids and I want to work and I can't, there are more [of us], so we reinforce each other. All of us have the same goal (Mysoon, unemployed, married, 2 children).

Insaf explicitly expresses the advantage of a program with such a group format:

I thought I didn't need [the program], but I understood in the group that that's what I need. That's what happened, even though there were gaps between them and me They were really religious, their husbands didn't allow them to leave the house ... or someone who doesn't want to work outside the village, there were gaps. Really, this project really suits them ... empowers them to come out. ... [B]ut it still helped me to sit in a circle, to express myself, [there were] a lot of things that I was lacking, like, weak in it, and they helped me (Insaf, unemployed, married, 2 children).

Lizet explains how friendship in the group is converted into help and support for integration into the labor market:

There is a feeling of solidarity and sisterhood in the group. There are twenty five girls plus the trainer. We always call each other and we have a WhatsApp group, we care about each other. I love the feeling that there's someone I care for and she cares for me and I have concern for the others. If one woman in the group finds a job and it doesn't suit her, she gives information about the job on WhatsApp so another woman can apply. There is a very nice feeling in the way it is done (Lizet, matriculation supervisor, married, 3 children).

The meetings also provide perspective and offer a source of comparison that leads to self-examination of the situation in which each woman is located. Nabila says:

[In the meetings] first of all, I saw more difficult stories, not just my story. [And] I have friends ... The fact that I go to [their] homes to hear these difficult stories makes me feel good (Nabila, unemployed, married, 3 children).

Rimas expresses similar feelings:

From the day I was in the group, I returned home in a better mood, and in the group I made social connections. For example, Nur, my closest participant, is my friend, even though she was my neighbor, I never knew her before I came to the group. Through the group we have come to know

each other and strengthened our relationship and we spend time together and there are strong ties between us, all thanks to the group (Rimas, unemployed, widow and 4 children).

The story of the friendship between Rimas and Nur is touching. Rimas was widowed at a very young age and left alone with four small children. The chances of Palestinian women in Israel to remarry are virtually nil; it is not considered acceptable for a widow to wed again, and these women are condemned to the loneliness imposed upon them. Though Nur (unemployed, mother of two) is still married, her husband is in jail. In her interview, she sadly recounts the limitations his family imposes on her, to the point where she feels doomed to a life in prison. Her story is difficult and sad, and in this cruel life, the friendship between the two of them provides them both with joy and support.

Coming from a disadvantaged context, the women describe the change they experience by participating in the WTW program. The friendships they create within the group can be understood, in Bourdieu's (1986) terms, as noneconomic resources that are transformed into material, economic, social and personal benefits.

Discussion

The current study sheds light on the experience of Palestinian mothers in Israel participating in a non-mandatory welfare-to-work program aimed at integrating them into (the lower end of) the Israeli labor force. With regard to the first research question – can WTW programs provide social capital for participants? – we found that the interviewees recognize the support they receive from the program, and a considerable portion of them describe a significant change in their lives following participation.

Specifically, the mothers talk about the support they receive from trainers, particularly at times of crisis, and the sense of confidence that the trainers give them, helping them slowly discover the best way for them to move on. The mothers also relate how these unique groups of women provide sisterhood and significant friendships.

Moreover, the trainers try to provide a protected place where the women can make their voices heard, not unlike the findings of Benjamin (2003) and Dodson et al. (2012), and they attempt to create partnerships between participants in order to strengthen them. In this way, trainers and participants alike help women in vulnerable situations who are generally reluctant to seek support for fear of being criticized (Warr, 2006). As Domínguez and Watkins (2004) claimed, social capital that improves opportunities for upward mobility is based on relationships that provide advice, contacts and encouragement. In this study we found that the support of trainers, together with strong group cohesion and partnerships between participants, advanced the women's social capital.

With respect to the second research question of how the trainers broker WTW imperatives for program participants, we found that they ignore the dominant voice of neoliberalism demanding Work First, unlike the findings of previous studies (Morgen, 2004; Pulkingham et al., 2010; Whitworth, 2013). Indeed, the Palestinian-Israeli trainers in the Woman of Valor program are highly empathetic and do not send participants to work at any cost. Instead, they help them find intermediate solutions, such as “maternal” jobs, taking small steps with participants rather than forcing them to change all at once.

As Palestinian women themselves, the trainers understand the complex situation of these mothers – indeed, their words seem to reflect covert criticism of the program – and they can therefore take into consideration the barriers that stand before participants. This is in contrast to studies that have shown WTW program workers to ignore structural barriers and focus on personal weaknesses (Morgen, 2004; Pulkingham et al., 2010; Whitworth, 2013). We found that trainers recognize the difficulty of Palestinian women in Israel meeting the imperative of “economic citizenship” through access to the labor market, which is key for social and civic participation, due to the structural and cultural barriers they face (Lewis, 2002; Kraus & Yonay, 2018). The trainers also recognize the barriers created by family and the community and attempt to stretch those boundaries

gently. In this way, they manage to mediate between the structural barriers imposed on Palestinian women and their desire to be both good mothers and financially independent.

Regarding the third research question – can participants negotiate the type of jobs available to them as mothers? – we found that mothers interpret paid work as their right, along with their right to care for their children. As Sa'ar (2016) points out, disadvantaged women are eager to be paid workers. They imagine that employment, even in low-paying jobs that do not allow for mobility, will give them not only a degree of economic independence, but also a sense of identity, satisfaction, respect and interest. At the same time, the mothers insist on their right to work in jobs that enable them to perform their role as primary caretaker of their children.

In short, the Woman of Valor program under study was found to indeed provide social capital to participants, enabling mothers to become more confident and aware of their rights and providing a safe and secure space in which to do so, creating a sense of sisterhood and taking into account the structural barriers that participants face. This paper thus contributes to existing research on several levels. First, it expands the theoretical field of knowledge on WITW programs and the provision of social capital, showing how trainers reinforce personal ties between participants and connections with employers, provide shelter from community criticism and help the women cope with obstacles. Second, the research expands knowledge about WITW programs as resource brokers, revealing how participants survive in a highly complex world in which they suffer discrimination and many institutional barriers. Our findings show that trainers recognize and respond to this problem, helping the mothers to negotiate with their families, communities and employers. Finally, this study provides empirical data on a unique group: Palestinian mothers in Israel, who suffer from multiple vulnerabilities. Clearly, support and recognition of mothers' rights and the need to realize them is particularly crucial for vulnerable groups of this kind.

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Appendix

Table 1: Employment characteristics of participants (Palestinian mothers, $N=30$)

Variables	<i>N</i>	%
Employment Status		
Unemployed	12	40%
Employed ¹	18	60%
Occupation		
Caretaker of elderly	1	
Cleaner	4	
Dental assistant	2	
Driver (children's transport service)	2	
Hairdresser	1	
Housemother at boarding school/after-school care	2	
Matriculation supervisor	3	
Pre-school assistant	3	
Saleswoman in store	2	
Secretary	2	

¹ Some working mothers had multiple jobs.

Table 2: Demographics of participants (Palestinian mothers, N=30)

Variable	N	%
Age (mean = 37.7)		
20-29	7	
30-39	18	
40-49	4	
50-59	1	
<hr/>		
Marital status		
Married	17	57%
Single	13	43%
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Religion/Ethnicity		
Muslim	23	
Druze	5	
Bedouin	2	
<hr/>		
Number of children		
1 child	4	
2 children	11	
3 children	7	
4 children	7	
5 children	0	
6 children	1	
<hr/>		
Education		
High school or below	14	47%
Post-secondary (no college degree)	16	53%

