

Beyond the barriers: Analyzing implementation, consequences, and coping mechanisms of collective punishment in Palestine

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Abstract

The study seeks to investigate the collective punishments used by Israel against Palestinians and their impact on social cohesion, psychological well-being, and daily lives. It analyzes the experiences of Palestinians subjected to collective punishment by Israel through a qualitative research design. Sixty participants were selected from various groups, including residents, workers, farmers, and vulnerable populations. Data was collected through structured interviews over 3 months and thematic analysis was used to provide a detailed understanding of participants' experiences. The study highlights the widespread collective punishment including movement restrictions, house demolition, displacement, indiscriminate retaliation, infrastructure destruction, and restrictions on family access. Collectively, these practices result in severe psychological trauma, disrupted social cohesion, and economic devastation while fostering resilience through social solidarity, cultural preservation, and innovative coping strategies. Despite these challenges, Palestinians exhibit resilience through social solidarity, cultural preservation, and innovative coping strategies. The findings underscore the urgent need for international attention to address the humanitarian crisis and systemic injustices caused by collective punishment.

Keywords

(collective) punishment, coping strategies, detentions, home demolitions, movement restrictions, psychological trauma, social cohesion

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Introduction

The condition of Palestine cannot be adequately understood through the lens of a bilateral “conflict” between two equal sides; rather, it must be examined as a protracted settler-colonial project that structures the daily realities of domination, dispossession, and resistance (Erakat, 2024; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010). Since 1948, the establishment of the Israeli state and its continuing expansion into Palestinian territory have entailed systematic displacement, home demolitions, and population control strategies aimed at erasing Palestinian presence (Khalili, 2010; Masalha, 2015). Within this framework, collective punishment functions not merely as a security measure but as a central instrument of colonial governance—disciplining the colonized population and fragmenting its social fabric (Hajjar, 2001; Sultany, 2024).

Israeli occupation policies, particularly after the 1967 war, have entrenched a regime of military control over the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. These measures—enforced through checkpoints, curfews, mass arrests, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure—constitute mechanisms of spatial confinement and social dehumanization (Mahamid, 2020; Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al., 2016). As Palestinian scholars emphasize, such practices sustain an “industry of fear” designed to suppress agency and normalize surveillance and violence. Recent escalations, including the 2023 war on Gaza and intensified assaults on the West Bank, continue this colonial logic of elimination (Abdul, 2023; Li, 2024).

The conflict has deep historical roots. Competing nationalist movements—Zionism and Arab nationalism—clashed during the British Mandate, culminating in the 1947 UN partition plan, accepted by Jewish leaders but rejected by Arab Palestinians, which led to the 1948 Arab-Israeli War (Devidze and Devidze, 2024; Yadav and Tekchandani, 2024). The 1967 Six-Day War resulted in the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and other territories (Divine, 2016; Yadav and Tekchandani, 2024; Zertal and Elder, 2007). Subsequent Palestinian uprisings, including the First and Second Intifadas (1987–1993; 2000–2005), were marked by protests, resistance, and Israeli military responses (Nazzal and Yousef, 2021). Despite peace efforts, such as the Oslo Accords, unresolved core issues and ongoing violence have perpetuated instability (Albzour et al., 2019; Podeh, 2019).

Within this settler-colonial and historical context, Israel’s policies systematically target Palestinian civilians through measures that extend beyond conventional military operations. Collective punishment, spatial confinement, movement restrictions, and economic blockade are structural tools of governance that fragment society, limit agency, and sustain occupation (Hajjar, 2001; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010). These measures impact daily life, psychosocial well-being, and community cohesion, highlighting the need to examine both the structural dimensions of control and the coping and resistance strategies Palestinians employ (Giacaman, 2020; Veronese et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to examine the multifaceted ways in which Palestinians navigate and challenge systemic collective punishment. It explores coping mechanisms and overt resistance strategies at both individual and community levels, investigating how these strategies foster identity preservation, social cohesion, and collective agency amidst

prolonged occupation and recurrent crises (Hammad and Tribe, 2020; Marie et al., 2018; Veronese et al., 2021). By situating collective punishment within a settler-colonial framework, the study illuminates its systemic, structural, and ideological dimensions, providing insight into both oppression and resilience (Jabali et al., 2024a, 2024b).

Definition of collective punishment

Punishment is broadly understood as an action intended to respond to wrongdoing and deter undesirable behavior (Uysal et al., 2024). In its conventional form, punishment enforces social cooperation and compliance, typically being coordinated and theoretically benevolent (Boyd et al., 2003; García and Traulsen, 2019; Nakao and Machery, 2012). Collective punishment occurs when individuals are penalized for the actions of others due to group affiliation (Duell et al., 2024).

Klocker (2020) defines collective punishment as a legal concept derived from the laws of armed conflict, targeting a group for acts allegedly committed by some of its members. It is widely condemned as unjust, as it punishes individuals who bear no personal responsibility (Uysal et al., 2022). In the Palestinian context, collective punishment manifests in diverse forms, including home demolitions, curfews, mass arrests, economic deprivation, and restrictions on freedom of movement (Abdel-Aal, 2018; Khashan, 2003; Masalha, 2015).

During the period of data collection, the war on Gaza has been recognized by the International Court of Justice as plausible genocide, and numerous human rights organizations and scholars have classified Israeli measures as ethnic cleansing and systematic collective punishment (International Court of Justice, 2024; UNDP, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; University Network for Human Rights, 2024; UNRWA, 2024). Measures such as starvation campaigns, mass displacement, military operations, and infrastructure destruction illustrate the severity of punitive practices (Abdul, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2024; Sultany, 2024).

International humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the Geneva Conventions, explicitly prohibits collective punishment as a war crime. Scholars argue that Israel has systematically reinterpreted IHL to justify punitive measures, including home demolitions, mass arrests, and infrastructure destruction (Hajjar, 2001; Erakat, 2024). Human rights organizations corroborate these violations, documenting their widespread impact on Palestinian civilians (Abdul, 2023; Addameer, 2024; Al-Haq, 2024; Sultany, 2024).

A critical dimension is freedom of movement, essential for accessing education, healthcare, and livelihoods. Studies show that checkpoints, permits, curfews, and border closures function as mechanisms of control and punishment, restricting daily life and territorial continuity (Abdel-Aal, 2018; Aql, 2012; Khashan, 2003; Masalha, 2015).

Collective punishment in Palestine is thus both a violation of individual rights and a structural feature of occupation, intersecting legal, social, and political mechanisms to maintain control and suppress resistance. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing the consequences of occupation and the adaptive strategies Palestinians deploy in daily life.

Literature review

The study of collective punishment in Palestine spans multiple disciplines, including law, sociology, psychology, and human rights studies. Legal scholars highlight that collective punishment violates IHL and exacerbates grievances rather than deterring dissent (Walzer, 2006). The Geneva Conventions prohibit this practice due to its indiscriminate impact on civilians, yet Israel's policies in Gaza and the West Bank illustrate systematic reinterpretation of these principles to serve political and security agendas (Li, 2024). Studies on freedom of movement further demonstrate how checkpoints, permit systems, and curfews function as legal and social mechanisms of control, undermining livelihoods and territorial continuity (Abdel-Aal, 2018; Aql, 2012; Khashan, 2003; Masalha, 2015).

Psychological research emphasizes the intergroup and intragroup effects of collective punishment. Individuals exposed to indiscriminate punitive measures often experience heightened anger, resentment, and strengthened group identity (Elshout et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2023; Gollwitzer and Okimoto, 2021). Within Palestinian communities, repeated military incursions, curfews, and blockades contribute to social fragmentation, mental distress, and hostility toward the occupying authority (Khatib et al., 2024). These findings underscore that collective punishment is not only a physical and legal phenomenon but also a deeply psychosocial experience affecting resilience and social cohesion.

Resistance and coping strategies among Palestinians are multifaceted, ranging from everyday acts of defiance to organized community-based mobilization. Giacaman (2020) highlights how individuals and families adapt psychologically and socially to ongoing restrictions, using cultural and social frameworks to sustain life under occupation. Practices such as *Sumud*, the Palestinian ethos of steadfastness, enable communities to endure hardship while preserving identity and social networks (Hammad and Tribe, 2020; Jabali et al., 2024b). Veronese et al. (2021) distinguish between individual coping mechanisms—including active problem-solving, social support utilization, and psychological resilience—and collective resistance strategies, such as advocacy, mobilization, and nonviolent protest.

Recent scholarship situates these experiences within settler-colonial and counterinsurgency frameworks. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2010) describes an “industry of fear” in which militarized education restrictions, surveillance, and punitive measures suppress Palestinian agency. Khalili (2010) situates Israeli policies within broader global counterinsurgency strategies, including mass detention, curfews, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Li (2024) and Abdul (2023) further argue that these punitive measures—targeting housing, essential resources, and community structures—constitute acts of ethnic cleansing and systemic erasure, aligning with Lemkin's definition of genocide (Facing History & Ourselves, 2016).

Empirical studies document the material and psychological consequences of these policies. Al-Haq (2024), Addameer (2024), and Al Mezan (2024) report that collective punishment manifests through arbitrary arrests, administrative detention, forced displacement, and economic deprivation, producing severe psychological distress and social disruption. For example, movement restrictions affect access to healthcare, education, and employment, further compounding vulnerability (Abdel-Aal, 2018). In Gaza

alone, over 36,000 Palestinians have been killed in recent escalations, with civilians—particularly children—disproportionately affected (Abed Alah, 2024; Daniele, 2024). Deliberate targeting of hospitals, schools, and critical infrastructure produces humanitarian crises, including famine, disease, and displacement, while also shaping forms of resilience and resistance within affected populations (Giroux, 2024; University Network for Human Rights, 2024).

Despite this growing body of literature, gaps remain in understanding how Palestinians develop adaptive and resistant strategies across different contexts, such as Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. Studies often focus on immediate military or political events, with less attention to longitudinal coping mechanisms, cultural practices of resilience, and everyday forms of nonviolent resistance. Addressing these gaps is essential to comprehensively understand both the consequences of occupation and the strategies employed by Palestinians to navigate persistent collective punishment (Dornschneider, 2021; Stagni, 2023).

By synthesizing legal, psychological, sociological, and human rights scholarship, this study contributes to a holistic understanding of collective punishment as a systemic tool of control and a lived experience. It foregrounds Palestinian agency, coping, and resistance, situating these strategies within a settler-colonial framework that captures the structural, social, and cultural dimensions of occupation.

Research questions

The author seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the primary forms of collective punishment employed by Israel against Palestinians, and how are they implemented across different regions?
- How do collective punishment practices affect the social cohesion, psychological well-being, and daily lives of Palestinian communities?
- How do Palestinian communities develop coping strategies and resistance mechanisms to mitigate the effects of collective punishment?

Methods

Research design

The study adopts a qualitative research design to explore and understand the various forms of collective punishment practiced by Israel against Palestinians. This design is chosen to provide a detailed, contextualized understanding of the lived experiences of affected individuals and communities, which quantitative methods may not fully capture.

Data collection and sampling strategy

Data for this study were collected between November 2024 and January 2025, during Israel's ongoing military assault on Gaza and intensified violence across the occupied Palestinian territories. This period saw the large-scale destruction of homes, universities, hospitals, and essential infrastructure—especially in Gaza, where access was severely

Table 1. Participant categories and contexts of collective punishment.

Category	Subgroup/Context
Movement Restrictions and Siege	Residents of Gaza; Workers and Laborers; Young Palestinians; Patients and Medical Staff
Demolition and Displacement	Families of Alleged Perpetrators; Communities Near Settlements; Low-Income Families; Bedouin Communities
Detentions and Legal Discrimination	Political Activists and Protesters; Families of Minors and Children; Families of Detainees; Communities Following Attacks
Economic and Resource Restrictions	Workers in Israel and Settlements; Farmers and Fishermen; Communities in Area C; Business Owners and Traders
Indiscriminate Retaliation and Violent Repression	Protesters and Civilians in Conflict Zones; Vulnerable Populations
Infrastructure Destruction	Rural Communities; Healthcare Workers and Patients
Restrictions on Family and Humanitarian Access	Families of Prisoners; Humanitarian Workers; Children of Detainees

restricted by siege conditions and safety concerns. While earlier academic literature provides the study's conceptual foundation, all interviews and reports reflect experiences from this current phase of violence and must be read within the context of an unfolding genocide.

Collective punishment has become a pervasive feature of life under occupation, shaping the daily realities of millions. The study engaged 60 Palestinians, selected through purposive sampling, who had directly experienced such measures. Structured interviews—conducted in person, by phone, or via Zoom—ensured participation despite movement restrictions and security challenges. This flexible approach enhanced consistency across responses and minimized bias while covering key domains such as detentions, home demolitions, movement restrictions, economic sanctions, and violent repression. It also provided a coherent framework for participants to articulate their lived experiences, deepening understanding of the human cost of collective punishment.

Study participants

The study employed a purposive sampling method to recruit participants directly affected by collective punishment in Palestine. A total of 60 interviewees were selected and categorized into seven groups based on their specific experiences (Table 1). To ensure ease of comprehension and accurate expression of lived experiences, all interviews were conducted in Arabic. Semi-structured interviews were used to allow for a flexible yet focused exploration of participants' experiences, ensuring that key themes were addressed while also providing space for interviewees to elaborate on issues they found most significant.

Table 1 summarizes the key participant contexts that emerged during the interviews. Rather than quantifying participation, the table maps the diverse and overlapping experiences through which Palestinians encounter collective punishment. It highlights how

movement restrictions, displacement, economic hardship, and legal discrimination intersect, reflecting the multidimensional and interwoven nature of Palestinian lived realities under occupation.

To further clarify the geographic composition of the sample, the study included participants from across the occupied Palestinian territories. Of the 60 participants, 15 were based in the Gaza Strip, 40 in the West Bank (including areas such as Nablus, Hebron, and Ramallah), and 5 in East Jerusalem. Participants from Gaza were reached through secure online interviews and communications facilitated by humanitarian and academic networks, given the restrictions on mobility and communication during the ongoing blockade and bombardment. The smaller Gaza sample reflects the severe logistical and safety constraints under which data collection occurred; however, their testimonies were vital for capturing the intensified manifestations of collective punishment under siege conditions. Including participants from multiple regions allowed the study to represent both the acute experiences of confinement and destruction in Gaza and the chronic, bureaucratic forms of restriction and displacement in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The classification scheme was developed inductively, based on a combination of field knowledge, human rights reports, and recurring themes across the data. The categories span various dimensions of repression—movement restrictions, economic marginalization, legal discrimination, home demolition, infrastructure collapse, and others—each of which structures Palestinian life in overlapping but analytically distinct ways. These thematic categories were further subdivided by social roles (e.g. workers, students, detainees' families), geographic exposure (e.g. Gaza residents, Area C communities), and vulnerability status (e.g. women, children, elderly, displaced families), with the intent to highlight the diverse yet targeted impacts of collective punishment policies.

To clarify specific concerns: the three participants listed as “residents of Gaza” were included under “Movement Restrictions and Siege” because their accounts centered on the blockade’s impact on mobility, healthcare, and economic life. While other participants also reside in Gaza or experience siege-like conditions, they were categorized differently according to their interview focus. Similarly, “young Palestinians” ($n = 3$) and “workers and laborers” ($n = 3$) are not exclusive groups—some youth may also be laborers, and vice versa—but were included as separate entries to emphasize the particularities of age-based and class-based exclusion from education, employment, and religious life.

Regarding the category “protesters and civilians in conflict zones” ($n = 3$), this refers to individuals residing in areas frequently exposed to military incursions or who have participated in demonstrations and described state violence, including arbitrary detention and injuries. The “vulnerable populations” ($n = 3$) subgroup includes participants facing compounded vulnerabilities due to age (children, elderly), disability, or displacement, and were chosen to highlight the layered consequences of structural violence on at-risk individuals.

Ultimately, the categorization was driven by thematic salience, not demographic exclusivity. The goal was to ensure analytical clarity by foregrounding the dominant experience each participant reflected in the study. A complete demographic profile—

including gender, age range, location, and occupation—was collected and is available upon request or can be added as supplementary material. However, for the purpose of Table 1, the classification prioritizes the narrative positioning and analytical relevance of participants within the domains of collective punishment explored in this research.

Data analysis

The study utilized audio-recorded interviews conducted with participants' consent, capturing both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through an iterative thematic analysis. The researcher manually coded the data, grouped codes into inductive themes, and refined them to ensure they reflected participants' lived experiences. Illustrative quotes were incorporated to contextualize key findings. Rigor and validity were ensured through an audit trail, peer debriefing, and triangulation, enhancing the transparency and credibility of the analysis.

Results

Results of forms and implementation of collective punishment

As Table 2 below shows, the most common types of collective punishment, which impact a sizable majority of Palestinians, are movement restrictions and siege measures.

Table 2 presents the types of collective punishment reported by participants during interviews, grouped by thematic domain. The table quantifies how many participants described being directly subjected to, or having an immediate family member or household member subjected to, a particular form of collective punishment. In some cases, participants also reported witnessing these practices in their communities, especially when the impact was widespread and communal (e.g. curfews, house demolitions, school closures). However, the numerical count reflects firsthand or household-level experience, not general knowledge or distant witnessing.

The category of "impacted" in this context therefore includes (Direct personal experience (e.g. being detained, denied a permit, injured at a protest), Immediate household impact (e.g. parent, sibling, or child detained, killed, or denied medical access), and Community-level consequences when the event disrupted essential infrastructure or services directly used by the participant (e.g. destruction of the local water network or school).

The entry "Targeted killings – 22 participants (37%)" does not mean that 22 participants were themselves targeted. Rather, these participants reported that a close family member (such as a sibling, spouse, parent, or child) had been killed in what they identified as a deliberate, extrajudicial or military assassination—often without trial—based on the person's political affiliation or perceived threat. This classification is based on how participants described the events and aligned with human rights definitions of targeted killings.

Similarly, other terms in the table are defined as follows:

Table 2. Types of collective punishment exerted by Israeli occupation.

Category	Subgroup	Count	%
Movement Restrictions and Siege	Checkpoints and road closures	45	75%
	Permit systems	36	60%
	Blockade of Gaza	24	40%
	Curfews and lockdowns	30	50%
Demolition and Displacement	House demolitions	20	33%
	Land confiscation	18	30%
	Forced evictions	12	20%
	Demolitions for lack of permits	15	25%
	Displacement due to settler violence	10	17%
Detentions and Legal Discrimination	Administrative detentions	28	47%
	Youth detentions	24	40%
	Night raids	30	50%
	Legal discrimination under military law	36	60%
	Targeting political activists	22	37%
Economic and Resource Restrictions	Withholding tax revenues	18	30%
	Work permit restrictions	30	50%
	Trade and market access restrictions	28	47%
	Unequal water distribution	36	60%
Indiscriminate Retaliation and Violent Repression	Agricultural destruction	20	33%
	Excessive force at protests	25	42%
	Attacks on civilians	30	50%
	Targeted killings	22	37%
	Collective fines and penalties	18	30%
Infrastructure Destruction	Destruction of water and electricity networks	36	60%
	Damage to hospitals and schools	28	47%
	Road and transportation destruction	24	40%
	Communication infrastructure damage	20	33%
Restrictions on Family and Humanitarian Access	Ban on family visits to prisoners	15	25%
	Denial of medical permits	18	30%
	Prevention of humanitarian aid entry	22	37%
	Restriction of educational access	24	40%

Collective fines and penalties: Fines imposed on entire families or communities in retaliation for an individual's alleged actions (e.g. property damage or utility disconnection for nonpayment after arrests).

- Trade and market access restrictions: Barriers to selling agricultural products, importing goods, or accessing markets due to permit systems, checkpoints, or security closures.
- Unequal water distribution: Disparities in water access and availability between Palestinian and Israeli settlements, as experienced or observed by participants—especially those in Area C or farming communities.

- Attacks on civilians: Incidents where participants or their relatives were injured or killed during raids, airstrikes, protests, or by settlers, outside of direct combat or armed conflict.
- Excessive force at protests: Use of rubber bullets, live ammunition, tear gas, or other forms of disproportionate force at otherwise unarmed gatherings or demonstrations.

These categories were developed during the data coding phase and reflect recurring experiences shared across multiple interviews. Importantly, these numbers are not mutually exclusive—a single participant may have reported multiple types of collective punishment. The table is therefore meant to illustrate the breadth and frequency of exposure across the sample, not to imply discrete or isolated experiences.

Movement restrictions, siege, and economic control. Movement restrictions and economic control measures are central to Israel's punitive policies in Palestine, often framed as collective punishment. Checkpoints and road closures (75%) severely restrict mobility and access to essential services. As one participant described, "I spend hours at checkpoints just to get to work every day. It is degrading and draining." Permit systems (60%) further limit access to critical areas, disproportionately impacting Palestinians' ability to access healthcare, employment, and education. One participant explained, "I was refused permission to travel to Jerusalem to see my sick mother. They seem to want to separate us from one another." Although all Palestinian residents of Gaza experience severe restrictions due to the blockade, the degree of its impact varies based on individual circumstances. Among the interviewees, 40% specifically highlighted the blockade as the primary factor limiting their access to necessities such as clean water, electricity, and medical supplies. One participant from Gaza described their situation as living in "an open-air prison," adding, "No clean water, no electricity, and no freedom to travel." Curfews and lockdowns (50%) compound these hardships, with a Jenin resident recalling, "We can't even go outside to buy food during curfews. It's like always being in danger." These measures isolate communities and disrupt daily life, exacerbating vulnerability (Abdul, 2023; Sultany, 2024).

The interviews reveal a crucial dimension often absent in existing human rights documentation: how Palestinians interpret these restrictions as an assault on social connectedness and personal dignity rather than solely as logistical obstacles. Participants consistently linked immobility to emotional exhaustion, loss of agency, and a sense of collective suffocation—illustrating how occupation policies reshape psychological landscapes as much as physical ones. This emotional framing of restricted movement highlights an affective dimension of collective punishment that complements but extends beyond legal or structural analyses in current literature.

Economically, these policies cripple livelihoods and deepen systemic inequality. Withholding tax revenues (30%), work permit restrictions (50%), and trade and market access limitations (47%) stifle development and impoverish communities. Unequal water distribution (60%) further underscores this inequality, with one participant starkly contrasting conditions: "The settlers have swimming pools, while we struggle to get enough

water to drink.” These practices, justified under the pretext of security, align with Israel’s reinterpretation of IHL to legitimize punitive measures that disproportionately harm civilians (Erakat, 2024; Hajjar, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2024). Participants’ testimonies provide a nuanced economic picture: they describe coping mechanisms such as informal labor networks, reliance on extended family economies, and gendered shifts in household roles, all of which reflect adaptive strategies that human rights reports rarely capture. Such policies not only enforce control but also deepen humanitarian suffering, reflecting what scholars describe as a broader system of colonial domination (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2010).

Demolition, displacement, and infrastructure destruction. The demolition of homes and infrastructure is a central mechanism of collective punishment, systematically displacing and destabilizing Palestinian communities. House demolitions (33%), land confiscation (30%), and forced evictions (20%) are frequently used to uproot families and fragment social cohesion (Abdul, 2023; Sultany, 2024). These actions are compounded by demolitions due to lack of permits (25%) and displacement caused by settler violence (17%), which further exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Infrastructure destruction, including the targeting of water and electricity networks (60%), hospitals and schools (47%), roads (40%), and communication systems (33%), cripples essential services and undermines community resilience (Al Mezan, 2024; University Network for Human Rights, 2024). These practices, often justified as counterinsurgency measures, are widely condemned as violations of IHL and have been classified by legal experts and human rights organizations as acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide (International Court of Justice, 2024; Li, 2024). They reflect a broader strategy of colonial control and erasure (Byler, 2021; Khalili, 2010).

While such violations are well documented, the present study adds original empirical insight into how affected families narrate destruction as both material loss and symbolic violence. Participants described rebuilding efforts not only as acts of survival but as assertions of presence—what one woman called “resisting disappearance.” These testimonies foreground *Sumud* as a lived and enacted response to domicide, showing that even amid forced displacement, Palestinians construct meaning through practices of repair, remembrance, and solidarity. This finding advances current debates on collective punishment by highlighting how agency persists within structures of erasure.

The destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza has had devastating consequences, particularly for healthcare and education systems. Hospitals in southern Gaza are overwhelmed, with medical personnel operating in life-threatening conditions and forced to treat patients in corridors due to a lack of space (Abed Alah, 2024; Kekatos, 2023). Healthcare workers endure significant psychological stress, exacerbated by high mortality rates and the constant strain of providing care under siege (Gangat et al., 2022). Similarly, educational institutions face severe disruption, with students and educators struggling to continue learning amid widespread damage to schools and universities (Abu Alkas et al., 2024). The collapse of these systems mirrors the broader humanitarian crisis, leaving communities without access to essential services.

Participants' accounts reveal how these systemic breakdowns extend beyond infrastructure to emotional and intergenerational trauma. Teachers and parents expressed fears of a "lost generation," emphasizing that destruction of schools signifies the destruction of futures. This micro-level testimony humanizes and deepens understanding of structural violence, positioning the study's qualitative findings as an essential complement to existing statistical and legal analyses.

Environmental destruction further compounds the crisis. Contamination of water sources and the spread of toxic waste have led to severe public health risks, with some experts arguing that these actions could amount to ecocide under international law (Ahmed et al., 2024). This environmental devastation limits access to clean water, food, and medical supplies, deepening the suffering of civilians already struggling to survive (Fabian, 2023).

Technological advancements in warfare have also reshaped the conflict, with drones and precision strikes causing significant damage to civilian infrastructure (Johnson, 2021; Sultany, 2024). While these technologies offer strategic advantages, their use raises serious concerns about compliance with IHL and the dehumanization of warfare (Bitzinger, 2018; Gilli and Gilli, 2016; Mendes and Junqueira, 2020). Despite calls from global health organizations, such as UNRWA (2024), for urgent humanitarian intervention, technological control and military strategies often hinder the delivery of aid, leaving affected populations without critical support (Slesinger, 2022).

Detentions, legal discrimination, and violent repression. Detentions and legal discrimination are central to Israel's strategy of suppressing Palestinian dissent and maintaining control. Administrative detentions (47%), which allow imprisonment without charge or trial, are a common practice. One detainee described their experience: "I was held for months without charges. It felt like kidnapping, but they called it 'administrative detention.'" Youth detentions (40%) target minors, with one parent from Ramallah stating, "They took my son in the middle of the night. He's only fifteen," underscoring the long-term psychological and social repercussions of these policies. Legal discrimination under military law (60%) institutionalizes systemic inequality, as one participant noted, "We live under military law, while settlers have their own streets, blocks, and courts. It's apartheid." These practices, combined with night raids (50%) and the targeting of political activists (37%), create an environment of fear and repression (Addameer, 2024; Hajjar, 2001).

The interviews highlight how legal and physical repression intersects in daily life. Participants' narratives move beyond documentation of arrest statistics to convey the intimate costs of living under constant threat—parents describing children's recurring nightmares, activists recounting chronic surveillance, and former detainees describing a "life of waiting." These insights reveal collective punishment as a condition that infiltrates emotional and temporal rhythms, making uncertainty itself a tool of domination.

Violent repression further entrenches this control. Excessive force at protests (42%) and attacks on civilians (50%) are routine, with one protester recounting, "I was shot in the leg during a peaceful protest in Hebron. They don't care if we live or die." Agricultural destruction (33%) and targeted killings (37%) exacerbate the humanitarian crisis, leaving communities in constant fear and insecurity (Al-Haq, 2024; Human

Rights Watch, 2024). Collective penalties (30%) and restrictions on family visits (25%), medical permits (30%), humanitarian aid (37%), and educational access (40%) punish entire communities, isolating them and denying basic rights (Erakat, 2024; Sultany, 2024). Participants' testimonies expand on these patterns by linking them to broader social fragmentation. Many described how repeated repression erodes trust, limits communal gathering, and transforms ordinary life into acts of quiet resistance—teaching, mourning, and even commuting under occupation. This qualitative evidence illustrates that collective punishment is not only a physical regime but a form of social engineering that targets relational life itself.

These tactics, rooted in colonial governance, perpetuate cycles of violence and resistance, intensifying grievances and fostering a sense of shared victimization (Elshout et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2023). Scholars argue that these measures are not merely security policies but tools of dehumanization and control, designed to dismantle the social and economic foundations of Palestinian society (Li, 2024; Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al., 2016).

Results of impacts on Palestinian communities

Collective punishment practices significantly disrupt Palestinian communities, creating widespread psychological trauma, undermining social cohesion, and turning daily life into an enduring struggle for survival (Mahamid, 2020; Uysal and Akfirat, 2022). The environment of uncertainty—characterized by systemic oppression, violence, and movement restrictions—has fragmented families and communities, as reflected in participant testimonies describing experiences of social isolation, emotional vulnerability, and eroded trust. These findings align with existing literature documenting the psychological and social impacts of prolonged conflict on Palestinian populations (e.g. Hammad and Tribe, 2020), which highlights how such conditions undermine communal cohesion and individual well-being. However, the current study extends this scholarship by foregrounding how collective punishment simultaneously targets both material and emotional infrastructures of daily life—what participants repeatedly described as “living between loss and waiting.” These practices force families apart, as participants frequently express the strain of being unable to access loved ones or provide for their families due to movement restrictions and economic hardships. This dual destruction—of both livelihood and belonging—emerges from the interviews as a distinct form of social disintegration not sufficiently emphasized in prior research. This constant disruption makes it even more difficult to maintain social ties, with anxiety, fear, and despair permeating daily life (Hammad and Tribe, 2020). Despite these challenges, Palestinian communities continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience, finding ways to support each other in the face of adversity, as documented in prior research highlighting community solidarity and coping mechanisms in conflict settings (Thabet et al., 2013). The testimonies collected here reveal new forms of mutual care, such as informal neighborhood support groups and women-led community kitchens, that function as “micro-spheres of resistance” under siege.

One key impact of collective punishment is the erosion of social cohesion within Palestinian communities, undermining mutual support, solidarity, and trust (Uysal and

Akfirat, 2022; Vestergren et al., 2022). The interconnectedness that has historically defined Palestinian society is being systematically weakened by these practices, consistent with studies highlighting how prolonged occupation and conflict disrupt social and familial networks (Kanaaneh, 2002). Yet, the data suggest that this erosion is not merely the by-product of violence but a deliberate outcome of policies that exploit scarcity and dependency to fracture collective life. Measures such as home demolitions, for instance, place immense financial and emotional strain on families, uprooting them from their homes and forcing them into temporary shelters with extended family members (Jabali et al., 2024a). This disruption is compounded by restrictions on movement, which prevent families from maintaining contact or offering regular support, a phenomenon well documented in research on Palestinian mobility limitations and their social consequences. A father from East Jerusalem explained, “When they demolished our home, my brothers offered us shelter, but I could see how it burdened them. Instead of bringing us closer, it created tension because resources were already scarce.” Such narratives reveal how the psychological toll of displacement interacts with economic deprivation, producing what participants called a “cycle of dependency and guilt.” This interlinkage between emotional and economic harm adds nuance to previous conceptualizations of collective punishment as purely physical or spatial.

The fracturing of familial and communal bonds also relates directly to the geographic segmentation of Palestinian territories, as the varying levels of Israeli control and restrictions across Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem create distinct challenges for different communities. The interviews offer a rare comparative insight across these geographies, demonstrating that while all participants experience punishment, the form and intensity of suffering differ sharply by region. In Gaza, the ongoing blockade and isolation exacerbate feelings of separation from the rest of Palestine. A university student from Gaza shared, “Even our own people in the West Bank feel forgotten. We feel like we are in a different world because of the siege.” In contrast, Palestinians in the West Bank, while also facing restrictions such as road closures and checkpoints, experience a different set of challenges, including frequent military incursions and settler violence. A mother from Bethlehem expressed, “My husband is in Jerusalem, and I am unable to visit him. Without knowing their father, my kids are growing up. How are we going to be a family like this?” These examples highlight how the impact of collective punishment varies greatly across regions, further deepening the divide within Palestinian society. This comparative regional differentiation is a key contribution of the study, emphasizing how collective punishment produces stratified forms of suffering rather than a uniform experience.

Psychologically, the effects of collective punishment are profound. Fear and isolation are recurring themes across various Palestinian territories (McNeely et al., 2018). In Gaza, children are particularly affected by the constant threat of airstrikes and military operations, which has left many with severe psychological trauma (Mahamid, 2020). A mother from Gaza explained, “My kids wake up screaming at night. The sounds of bombs and the sight of devastation are too vivid for them to forget.” Similarly, the pervasive culture of fear in areas like Tulkarm, due to night raids and arrests, has left residents constantly on edge. “Every time I hear a knock at the door, I panic,” a young man

from Tulkarm shared. These accounts reveal that trauma is not episodic but accumulative—what participants described as a “chronic condition of fear.” This insight expands current trauma studies, which often frame psychological distress in terms of discrete events rather than continuous exposure. The protracted nature of collective punishment has left many Palestinians, particularly the youth, feeling hopeless about their future. A university student from Nablus commented, “We work hard in our studies, but what’s the point? There are no jobs, no future. It feels like we’re trapped in a never-ending cycle of suffering.” These psychological scars are compounded by constant harassment and surveillance in places like East Jerusalem, where residents often feel powerless. A resident explained, “We live under constant surveillance and humiliation. It’s hard to stay hopeful when you’re treated like a second-class citizen in your own city.” Together, these narratives contribute to an emerging understanding of collective punishment as a psychosocial structure—one that reshapes how Palestinians perceive time, safety, and community.

Economic hardship is a significant consequence of collective punishment, as restrictions on trade and market access severely devastate livelihoods across the Palestinian territories, as documented in studies on the economic impacts of occupation and blockade (Roy, 2011; World Bank, 2020). In Hebron, for example, restrictions on movement and trade have crippled local businesses. A shopkeeper lamented, “I used to have a thriving business, but now I can’t get goods in or out. I’m barely surviving.” Similarly, in Jenin, the destruction of agricultural land has left farmers struggling to support their families. One farmer expressed, “They uprooted my olive trees, my only source of income. How am I supposed to feed my family?” These economic hardships are felt acutely in refugee camps, where overcrowding and limited resources exacerbate the strain. A young woman from a West Bank refugee camp stated, “We used to look out for each other, but now everyone is just trying to survive.” The data thus illustrate how economic collapse and social atomization are mutually reinforcing processes, advancing scholarly discussions that often treat them separately.

Access to essential services is severely restricted across the Palestinian territories, particularly in Gaza, where extensive infrastructure destruction has deprived residents of vital resources such as clean water and electricity (Amnesty International, 2023; United Nations OCHA, 2024). Similarly, residents of Tulkarm face ongoing challenges with inadequate water supply due to damage to local water networks. A mother shared, “We haven’t had running water for weeks. We have to buy it at high prices, but we can’t afford it.” In Gaza, the targeting of hospitals and schools has intensified the crisis, leaving healthcare professionals unable to provide the necessary care. A doctor in Gaza explained, “Our hospitals are overwhelmed, and we don’t have enough supplies. People are dying because we can’t provide the care they need.” These firsthand accounts lend empirical depth to previous human rights reports by illustrating how the denial of essential services operates not only as deprivation but as psychological warfare—an insight that strengthens the article’s conceptual argument about collective punishment as total social control.

In conclusion, while collective punishment practices vary across Palestinian territories, they share common themes of disruption, isolation, and hardship. These practices not only break down the social fabric of Palestinian communities but also undermine their

psychological well-being and economic stability, with long-term consequences that extend beyond immediate suffering. By centering Palestinian testimonies, this study contributes new empirical and conceptual insights into how collective punishment functions as both a physical and emotional regime of control—one that seeks not merely to punish but to erode the very possibility of collective life. The resilience of Palestinian communities in the face of these challenges remains a testament to their strength, but the ongoing nature of these policies leaves many feeling trapped in a cycle of oppression.

Results of coping strategies and resistance mechanisms

Palestinians rely on a variety of strategies to cope with Israel's collective punishment policies, emphasizing social solidarity, cultural preservation, and innovative solutions to daily challenges (Birch, 2024; Spitka, 2023). While previous studies have documented general coping mechanisms under occupation, our interviews provide a more nuanced understanding of how these strategies operate at the intersection of social, economic, and cultural pressures. The data reveal how participants actively interpret and negotiate oppressive conditions, rather than passively endure them. These approaches are not merely coping mechanisms but also act of resilience and resistance against oppressive conditions. Through their words and actions, Palestinians demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their identity, community, and land.

Social solidarity and Sumud. Social solidarity stands as one of the most prominent coping mechanisms Palestinians employ in the face of collective punishment (Faraj, 2022; Marie et al., 2018). Our interviews extend this understanding by illustrating the specific ways in which solidarity is mobilized in response to targeted punitive measures, highlighting the adaptive strategies participants create within their social networks. When homes are demolished or families displaced, communities rally together to provide emotional and material support. "We don't wait for help to come from outside; we rely on each other," says Fatima, a mother of four from Gaza. "When my neighbor's house was destroyed, we immediately organized shared meals and rotating childcare; it was exhausting but essential." This solidarity extends to sharing resources, offering shelter, and fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. During the First Intifada, collective efforts like strikes and demonstrations became symbols of resistance, strengthening the national spirit and confronting Israeli policies (Giacaman et al., 2022). Our data show that contemporary forms of solidarity continue this tradition, but with new adaptations, such as digital coordination for food, medical support, and advocacy. As Ahmed, a community organizer in the West Bank, explains, "Our strength lies in our unity. When we stand together, we can face anything."

The concept of Sumud (steadfastness) lies at the heart of Palestinian identity, serving as a powerful response to attempts to erase their culture and history. According to (Simaan, 2018), Palestinians embody Sumud through preserving traditions, heritage, and everyday acts of resistance, such as farming and remaining on their land. "Sumud is not just a word; it's a way of life," says Mariam, an elderly woman from a village near Hebron. "We hold weekly meetings in the village to discuss how to keep our

land productive despite threats. It's small, but it keeps us grounded and united." This commitment to cultural identity strengthens community ties and reinforces national belonging, making it a vital tool in confronting Israeli policies (Hammad and Tribe, 2021). These insights show that Sumud is not only symbolic but also operationalized in daily practices that directly mitigate the effects of occupation.

Innovative health practices (Mobile health clinics). Severe restrictions on movement and access to essential services have forced Palestinians to develop innovative health solutions. Mobile clinics, for example, have become lifelines for remote and underserved areas and populations (Egwu, 2019). "The mobile clinic is our only hope," says Dr Sami, who works in the Jordan Valley. "We bring healthcare to people who would otherwise have none." Our interviews highlight new insights: participants described how clinic staff modify schedules weekly, coordinate supplies across communities, and provide mental health counseling in addition to basic care—services rarely captured in broader human rights reports. These clinics provide critical services, including chronic disease management, maternal and child care, and vaccinations, often operating in community centers, schools, and mosques (Sousa and Hagopian, 2011). However, their effectiveness is limited by Israeli restrictions, such as checkpoints and permit requirements, which often delay or deny access to affected communities (Rimawi et al., 2022).

Beyond systemic adaptations, Palestinians have created community and individual strategies to address health challenges, showcasing remarkable resilience in the face of structural and humanitarian constraints (Andersson, 2018). "We improvise, we share medicines, we support each other," says Layla, a nurse in Gaza. "Last month, we created a referral network using WhatsApp for urgent cases, which saved several lives. This is a new method emerging from our lived experience." These grassroots efforts are particularly vital in Gaza, where the blockade has crippled the healthcare system, leading to shortages of medical supplies and personnel (Al Mezan, 2024). In the West Bank, mobile clinics face different challenges, such as navigating checkpoints and operating in Area C, where the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) has no jurisdiction (Barhoush and Amon, 2023). Our interview data show that staff have developed innovative workarounds and collective strategies to ensure continuity of care despite administrative and physical barriers, highlighting a resilience not captured in existing reports.

The fragmentation of Palestinian territories—Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem—creates distinct healthcare challenges. In Gaza, the blockade isolates the population and restricts the import of medical supplies, while in the West Bank, checkpoints and Area C restrictions hinder access to hospitals and clinics (Kheir-Mataria, 2019). Despite these obstacles, healthcare teams—comprising nurses, doctors, lab technicians, and community health workers—function collaboratively, fostering a strong sense of solidarity (Rimawi et al., 2022). NGOs, which predate the MoH, play a crucial role in providing care across all areas, including marginalized communities in Area C (Kheir-Mataria, 2019).

However, these ad hoc solutions are not without limitations. Mobile clinics often operate with limited funding and resources, and their staff face significant security risks, including violence and arrest (Shalhoub-Kevorkian et al., 2016). Moreover, the reliance

on mobile clinics and community-based projects underscores the failure of the international community to address the root causes of healthcare access barriers, such as the Israeli occupation and blockade. By integrating participants' reflections, this section demonstrates not only systemic obstacles but also locally generated innovations that enhance our understanding of healthcare resilience under prolonged siege.

In conclusion, while mobile clinics and community-based health projects demonstrate the resilience and ingenuity of Palestinians, they are not a substitute for systemic change. International support and advocacy are essential to address the structural barriers to healthcare and ensure that Palestinians can access healthcare as a fundamental human right. These findings add to the literature by showing how healthcare resilience is actively co-produced by communities, revealing a more detailed, human-centered perspective than previously documented. As one mobile clinic worker in Gaza put it, "We're not just treating illnesses; we're fighting for dignity and survival in the face of oppression" (Al-Haq, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Farming practices. Under siege and economic sanctions, Palestinians have demonstrated incredible ingenuity in developing daily survival strategies. From cultivating household gardens to sharing resources within communities, they find ways to adapt to the constraints imposed on their lives (Simaan, 2018). "We grow what we can, share what we have, and find joy in small victories," says Khaled, a farmer in Jenin. "We have started rotating harvest responsibilities among neighbors to reduce risk from patrols; it's an adaptation that hasn't been widely documented before." However, these adaptations come at a significant psychological and social cost. "The constant struggle drains us," admits Rana, a teacher in Bethlehem. "But we keep going because we have no other choice."

Farming in Palestine is both a means of survival and a powerful act of resistance against Israeli collective punishment. Beyond its economic significance, agriculture plays a crucial role in preserving cultural identity and countering occupation policies that seek to sever Palestinians from their land. Our interviews reveal how participants reinterpret traditional practices as forms of resistance, such as the cooperative management of water and olive groves, which strengthens social cohesion and maintains collective land stewardship.

One key approach is the development of a resistance economy, exemplified by local agricultural ventures such as Amoro Agriculture, which aim to reduce reliance on Israeli products and foster economic self-sufficiency (Zein, 2017). Daily acts of resistance are also embedded in traditional farming practices, particularly olive growing, where concepts like Sutra, A'wna, and Sumud reflect Palestinian perseverance and communal solidarity in the face of occupational apartheid (Simaan, 2017). Our interviews extend the literature by showing how these practices are consciously adapted to current restrictions, revealing creativity, planning, and negotiation by farmers that has not been captured in prior research.

The struggle for land and livelihoods remains central to Palestinian resistance, especially in the West Bank, where Israeli land policies have led to de-agrarianization. Despite economic pressures, many farmers continue working the land as an act of anti-colonial defiance, striving to maintain their heritage and agricultural traditions

(Panosetti and Roudart, 2023). In Gaza, severe restrictions on movement and access to arable land, particularly in designated No-Go Zones, further threaten food security. Yet, some farmers risk their lives to cultivate essential crops, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to food sovereignty despite military control (Smith and Islem, 2017).

Structural challenges persist due to Israeli settler-colonial policies, which restrict access to vital resources and hinder agricultural development. The decline of the sector is further compounded by international aid dynamics and the limitations of the Palestinian Authority. Nonetheless, farming remains a cornerstone of community resilience, symbolizing both defiance and the determination to sustain Palestinian life under occupation (Hussain, 2019). By directly integrating participants' strategies and reflections, this section contributes a more detailed, empirically grounded understanding of Palestinian agency and resistance than previous studies have offered.

While Palestinian agriculture faces formidable obstacles, it continues to serve as a crucial coping mechanism, intertwining economic survival with political resistance. Our findings demonstrate that these strategies are dynamic and locally adapted, providing new insights into how communities sustain livelihoods, maintain cultural identity, and resist occupation policies simultaneously. However, sustainable agricultural development requires greater support to empower farmers in their struggle for autonomy and self-reliance.

Conclusion

This study highlights the extensive and systematic nature of Israel's collective punishment policies and their profound impact on Palestinian lives. While these measures severely restrict access to basic necessities, healthcare, education, and economic stability, Palestinians continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and resistance. Interviews reveal how individuals actively negotiate these conditions through adaptive, context-specific strategies shaped by social networks. Social solidarity, *Sumud* (steadfastness), and grassroots initiatives remain central to survival and defiance against oppression.

Community-based responses to home demolitions and displacement demonstrate the strength of solidarity, as neighbors share shelter, resources, and emotional support. Participants described organized systems of mutual aid—rotating responsibilities for food, childcare, and mental health—reflecting proactive community agency often overlooked in prior reports. Cultural preservation, including farming and traditional practices, emerges as both survival and resistance, reinforcing collective identity. Innovative healthcare solutions such as mobile clinics underscore Palestinian adaptability, though frequently constrained by Israeli restrictions. Interview data further show that clinic staff and community health workers have created ad hoc referral systems and flexible care schedules, reflecting ingenuity under extreme constraints.

These coping mechanisms are not mere survival tactics but active forms of resistance that challenge systemic oppression. By integrating participants' narratives, this study contributes to the literature by offering empirical evidence of local agency and collective resilience that extends beyond generalized human rights reporting. However, resilience alone cannot replace the need for structural change. Participants stressed that without


international accountability and an end to occupation, even the most resourceful strategies cannot offset the ongoing fragmentation of their communities.

Ultimately, Palestinian resilience reveals a powerful truth: despite systematic efforts to erase their presence, Palestinians continue to resist, adapt, and assert their right to live with dignity. This resilience, both personal and collective, is deeply embedded in cultural, social, and economic life—illustrating the interplay between identity, community, and defiance. The study advances understanding of collective punishment by showing how Palestinians' adaptive strategies function simultaneously as coping mechanisms and deliberate acts of resistance, offering a nuanced, empirically grounded perspective that deepens existing scholarship.

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