



Emancipatory Disability Research EDR

West Bank - Palestine

The emancipatory research implemented by EducAid, in the framework of the project **“Particip-Action”** funded by Italian Cooperation, directly involved two groups of women with disabilities and one group of mothers of persons with disabilities, both of whom played a leading role in the process of knowledge production about their own condition. Thus, during the emancipatory research activity on disability in the Palestinian context, the slogan: “Nothing about us without us” has been directly applied.

A total of **60 women** have been involved in Bethlehem-Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah areas. **Professor Mario Biggeri** and **Federico Ciani**, PhD from ARCO (Action Research for Co-Development - University of Florence) facilitated the emancipatory research process.

Three different research protocols have been elaborated through a participatory strategy. The women involved took part in the identification of well-being dimensions that play a major role in their lives, as well as of the hindering factors preventing them to equally participate in society. The identification of causal relationships among barriers represented the starting point to identify the research questions. Even if the data were analysed as a whole, each group of women developed distinctive research protocols, which can be summarised as follows:

- **Bethlehem/Hebron group:** the research focused on inclusion of women with disabilities on the job market and on the transition from education to employment. The group conducted a quantitative survey, during which 200 working age women have been interviewed.
- **Ramallah group:** the group focused the research on the relation between women with disability and their families. Wishing to analyse gender in a comparative perspective, we opted for conducting life-course interviews to both women and men with disability. Focus groups discussions with relatives of people with disabilities have been conducted as well. Moreover, teachers has been interviewed in order to get a different perspective on the family.
- **Nablus group:** the group consisted of female care-givers (i.e. mothers of persons with disabilities), who represented the subject of the research. In particular, the use of time has been analysed by applying a quantitative methodology. During the survey, the women from Nablus interviewed 160 mothers of persons with disabilities.

The emancipatory research produced very satisfactory results in terms of both outputs and process.

As far as the process is concerned, the participants confirmed **the value of the research as an experience of empowerment, awareness, and skills acquisition**. In addition to valuable moments of collective reflection, research activities - such as interviews, transfers within West Bank, management of logistics issues - allowed participants to overcome most of restrictions imposed by society or self-stigmatisation.

With regard to the outputs, the assessment of contextual challenges made it possible to shed light on the on-going processes of marginalization in Palestine. The exclusion from the labour market is due to very diverse factors, which range from social stigma to the lack of physical accessibility to everyday-life spaces and means of transport.

Since job seeking activities are predominantly based on social networks and patronage mechanisms, especially women from poor families with a lack of social capital generally suffer the labour market exclusion.

The role of family might appear ambiguous: the research suggests rejecting a stereotyped vision of traditional families, which are not necessarily overprotective and constraining. Notwithstanding, quantitative and qualitative data allow identifying different situations. Indeed, while there are families enhancing the development of self-independence and emancipation to facilitate the full participation in society, there are also families inclined to segregate and overprotect vulnerable members – especially in case of cognitive and psychosocial impairments. Families and – particularly – female care-givers are extremely under pressure. Since caring activities are highly time-consuming, there is a significant reduction of other activities related to personal care and empowerment. Nevertheless, care-givers are often keen to rely only on other women within the family circle. Such result reveals the need to readjust the role of informal solidarity networks (friends, neighbourhood, extended family), as well as to promote activities aimed at improving families' receptiveness toward external support.

Moreover, gender issues represent a significant cross-cutting issue: all the analysed phenomena present intersectional discrimination dynamics, especially with regard to entering the labour market and sharing care related duties. On the same lines, the persistent weakness of Palestinian institutions affects all the areas of our analysis. Indeed, the lack of both a consistent policy on disability and a legislative framework intensifies a perception of vulnerability suffered by women with disabilities and female care-givers.

Finally, the military occupation strongly affects mobility and, consequently, working and education opportunities.

Generally, the emancipatory research affirms itself as a valuable tool. If it is true that emancipatory research is a high-quality research methodology that provides the instruments to the beneficiaries for self-empowerment, it might also be a very efficient instrument for policy design. Indeed, the promotion of change towards the development of more inclusive societies is possible only involving the interested parties: in this sense, the emancipatory research confirmed itself to be an essential tool by providing an insight into society from the point of view of persons with disabilities.