

Political Imprisonment and Adult Functioning: A Life Event History Analysis of Palestinians

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Political imprisonment is a traumatic event, often accompanied by torture and deprivation. This study explores the association of political imprisonment between 1987 and 2011 with political, economic, community, psychological, physical, and family functioning in a population-based sample of Palestinian men ages 32–43 years ($N = 884$) derived from a dataset collected in 2011. Twenty-six percent ($n = 233$) had been politically imprisoned. Men imprisoned between 1987 and 2005 reported functioning as well as never-imprisoned men in most domains, suggesting that men imprisoned as youth have moved forward with their lives in ways similar to their nonimprisoned counterparts. In an exception to this pattern, men imprisoned during the Oslo Accords period (1994–1999) reported higher levels of trauma-related stress ($B = 0.24, p = .027$) compared to never-imprisoned men. Men imprisoned since 2006 reported lower functioning in multiple domains: human insecurity ($B = 0.33, p = .023$), freedom of public expression ($B = -0.48, p = .017$), perceived government stability ($B = -0.38, p = .009$), feeling broken or destroyed ($B = 0.59, p = .001$), physical limitations ($B = 0.55, p = .002$), and community belonging ($B = -0.33, p = .048$). Findings pointed to the value of examining the effects of imprisonment on functioning in multiple domains.

Political imprisonment is a traumatic event, often accompanied by torture, material deprivation, overcrowding, solitary confinement, and the fundamental denial of civil rights (El Sarraj, Punamäki, Salmi, & Summerfield, 1996; Mollica et al., 1998; Quiroga & Jaranson, 2005). Because political imprisonment is due to ideological resistance to the ruling government, it may be experienced by the prisoner as both a severe act of oppression and as a further act of resistance (McEvoy, Shirlow, & McElrath, 2004; Nashif, 2008). The exact number of political prisoners worldwide is unknown, but a simple summation of existing estimates puts the number in the millions over the past several decades (Addameer, 2014; Amnesty International, 2013).

Political imprisonment has been studied much less than other forms of political violence (Barber, 2014). Research has demonstrated psychological suffering among former political prison-

ers from South Africa, Turkey, Tibet, Vietnam, and the occupied Palestinian territory (Basoglu et al., 1994; Crescenzi et al., 2002; El Sarraj, Punamäki, Salmi, & Summerfield, 1996; Halvorsen & Kagee, 2010; Mollica, McInnes, Pham, Smith Fawzi, & Murphy, 1998), as well as evidence of successful coping (Punamäki, 1988) and even positive effects of political imprisonment on social development (Nashif, 2008; Quota, Punamäki, & El Sarraj, 1997).

One key limitation of the foregoing research is that few studies actually compared former prisoners to nonprisoners (for exceptions, see Crescenzi et al., 2002; Maerker & Schutzwahl, 1997; Mollica et al., 1998; Punamäki, 1988). This comparison is crucial in contexts of widespread political conflict where non-prison adverse events (e.g., home raids, restrictions on movement, humiliation) could lead to the same types of suffering that prison experience might create. A related issue is the lack of representative samples in the published work. Even for studies with comparison groups, they were primarily convenience samples.

A second key limitation is that few studies have examined outcomes other than psychopathology. A few ethnographic studies have reported developmentally positive effects of imprisonment, in addition to mental and physical suffering. For

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example, former prisoners talked about gaining literacy in prison, strengthening commitments to their political cause, and gaining a sense of identity and esteem (Hammond, 1996; Nashif, 2008; Qouta et al., 1997). As these studies suggest, studying psychopathology alone can miss the potentially wide-ranging consequences of political imprisonment and can lead to policies that overemphasize particular mental health problems that may not be the most important issue to the population (Barber, 2013, 2014). Humans function, and suffer, in an array of domains—political, physical, economic, social, psychological, family—and any or all of these domains may be impacted by political imprisonment.

Moreover, solely focusing on mental health problems risks pathologizing normative stress responses to harsh experiences (Horwitz & Wakefield, 2007). This focus can isolate the individual from the context of political oppression and can characterize him or her as ill rather than as suffering the consequences of political occupation and conflict (Giacaman et al., 2011). Furthermore, focusing on mental health problems privileges Western conceptualizations of mental health over local understandings of distress.

A third key limitation of extant research is that it has not taken a life course approach to examining how the timing of imprisonment impacts functioning. Consistent with classic life course theory (Elder, 1974), two dimensions of imprisonment are relevant: (a) when in the person's own life the imprisonment occurs, and (b) when in the sociohistorical context of the political conflict the imprisonment occurs. For example, while being imprisoned as a young man may enhance self-esteem and foster commitments to political activism (Nashif, 2008), imprisonment later in life may be quite different as the prisoner must balance his personal sacrifice against his adult roles and obligations as breadwinner, husband, and father. Relative to the sociohistorical context, political imprisonment during a time when the broader society views politically imprisoned activists as heroes may be experienced quite differently than political imprisonment during a time when the society views politically imprisoned activists as victims (Giacaman & Johnson, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2011).

The present study addressed these limitations by exploring the association of political imprisonment over 25 years with multiple dimensions of functioning in a population-based sample of Palestinian men in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Palestinian context makes it possible to study political imprisonment in community samples due to the frequency with which Palestinian boys and men are imprisoned. An estimated 750,000–800,000 Palestinians, mostly males, have been detained or imprisoned by Israel for political reasons since 1967 (Addameer, 2014). There are few families that have not had at least one male family member imprisoned (Rosenfeld, 2011). Indeed, political imprisonment has become endowed with particular significance to Palestinians, whether as an ultimate symbol of resistance to Israeli military occupation of Palestinian land or as evidence of the invasive military occupation (Giacaman & Johnson, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2011).

In previous stages of this project, we developed locally relevant assessments of adult functioning through group interviews (Barber et al., 2014) and constructed or identified quantitative items and pilot tested them (McNeely et al., 2014). We assessed measures of adult functioning in the political, economic, community, family, psychological, and health domains. In the present study, we tested whether political imprisonment in four politically demarcated periods was associated with functioning in these six domains. The four periods—1987–1993, 1994–1999, 2000–2005, and 2006–2011—correspond with the periods of the first Intifada, the Oslo period, the second Intifada, and the period since the second Intifada. Although these periods differed in terms of levels of political activism and economic conditions, they were all characterized by military occupation. We expected political imprisonment in all four periods to be associated with worse functioning in all six domains.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data were collected in 2011 from a representative sample of 1,778 men and women ages 32 to 43 years in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The sample for the present analysis consists of all men in the sample ($N = 884$). This age cohort was in their teenage years during the first Intifada, during which a high percentage of youth participated in political activism (Barber, 1997).

The clustered three-stage probability sample was drawn from all Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics enumeration areas from updated 2007 census bureau maps. Kish tables were used to select one eligible adult per household. All interviews were conducted in Arabic by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (Ramallah, West Bank). Interviews were conducted in the person's household. Of those who were approached for an interview, 97.0% completed the study.

Interviewers administered an event history calendar covering 25 years, from 1987 to 2011. Event history calendars overcome the subjective and elusive nature of memory through having the respondent use salient events such as marriages, births, or episodes of political conflict to help remember the timing of less-salient events such as dates of employment (Belli, Stafford, & Alwin, 2009). The mean age of the sample was 36.83 ($SD = 3.53$); 94.9% were or had been married; they had, on average, 4.03 children ($SD = 2.16$). About a quarter (25.9%) had obtained education past high school and 54.4% reported that their family income was at or below the poverty level. During 2011, 47.5% had been employed the entire year, 22.6% reported inadequate food, and 42.6% reported inadequate water.

Measures

For each of the 25 years of the event history calendar, respondents were asked whether they were imprisoned and if it was for political or nonpolitical reasons. We created four dichotomous

variables indicating whether the respondent was ever imprisoned for political reasons in each of the four periods (first Intifada, Oslo, second Intifada, and recent period).

Within the political domain, freedom of public expression was assessed with a 2-item measure ($r = .61$) ranging from 1 to 5. The two items asked to what extent respondents felt freedom “To express your ideas and opinions outside of your home” and “To express your political opinions.” Responses ranged from *not at all* = 1 to *completely* = 5. Perceived stability of the government was measured by the question, “How stable do you feel the Palestinian government in your area is right now?” Responses ranged from *very unstable* = 1 to *very stable* = 5.

Two measures of economic functioning were assessed. Resource adequacy, which ranged from 1 to 5, was measured with three questions asking respondents to rate how frequently they had adequate food, clothing, and housing during the last 6 months. Response categories ranged from *never* = 1 to *regularly* = 5 ($\alpha = .81$). Work security was measured with the question: “How confident are you about where you will be working six months from now?” Response categories ranged from *not at all confident* = 1 to *very confident* = 5.

Community belonging was a 3-item scale ($\alpha = .74$) ranging from 1 to 5. Respondents were asked their satisfaction with “The extent you feel like you belong in your community,” “The extent you are involved in your community,” and “The social support you receive from your community.” Responses ranged from *very dissatisfied* = 1 to *very satisfied* = 5.

Two measures of family functioning were assessed. Positive marital functioning was a 3-item scale ($\alpha = .94$) ranging from 1 to 5. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statements: “Our marriage is happy and harmonious,” “I feel that I have enough freedom and independence in our relationship,” and “My spouse and I understand each other well.” Responses ranged from *strongly disagree* = 1 to *strongly agree* = 5. Satisfaction with family was a 2-item measure ($r = .52$) ranging from 1 to 5. Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their relationship with their children and with their family members. Responses range from *very dissatisfied* = 1 to *very satisfied* = 5.

Four measures of psychological functioning were assessed. Feeling broken or destroyed ($\alpha = .84$) was a locally defined measure of mental suffering (Barber et al., in press; McNeely et al., 2014) that ranged from 1 to 5. With reference to the past 2 weeks, respondents were asked how often they felt “That your spirit or morale is broken or destroyed?,” “That your ambitions and hopes for the future are destroyed?,” and “Emotionally or psychologically exhausted?” Responses ranged from *never* = 1 to *regularly* = 5. Human insecurity was assessed with a 5-item scale ranging from 1 to 5 ($\alpha = .82$; Ziadni et al., 2011). An example item was “To what extent do you fear for yourself or your family in your daily life?” Responses ranged from *not at all* = 1 to *an extreme amount* = 5.

Feelings of depression consisted of five items of the 8-item Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-8; $\alpha = .83$; Kroenke & Spitzer, 2002) and ranged from 0 to 3. Participants were asked

how often in the past 2 weeks they had been bothered by trouble falling asleep, feeling tired or having little energy, poor appetite or overeating, trouble concentrating, and moving or speaking slowly/being fidgety or restless. Responses ranged from *not at all* = 0 to *nearly every day* = 3. In a pilot survey of 508 of the same respondents as in the present survey, the correlation between this reduced set of items and the full PHQ-8 was $r = .95$.

Trauma-related stress was measured with five items of the self-reported 17-item PTSD Symptom Scale (PSS; $\alpha = .90$; Foa, Riggs, Dancu, & Rothbaum, 1993). The scale ranged from 0 to 3. Participants were first asked to think about harsh events they experienced during the political conflict over the course of their lives. Then, with reference to the past month, they were asked to indicate whether they had experienced recurrent or intrusive thoughts, sudden reliving of the event(s), being emotionally upset when reminded of the event(s), persistently made efforts to avoid thought or feelings associated with the event(s), and persistently made efforts to avoid activities, situations, or places that reminded them of the event(s). Responses ranged from *not at all* = 0 to *nearly every day* = 3. In the pilot survey, the correlation between the reduced set of items and the full 17-item PSS was $r = .87$.

A single item assessing physical health was included. Functional limitations were measured with the question, “How often does your physical health limit your ability to meet the other demands in your life such as financial, education, or family responsibilities?” Responses ranged from *never* = 1 to *regularly* = 5.

Four measures of exposure to political violence were included. Ever verbally abused was a dichotomous indicator of whether the respondent answered yes to the question, “Have you ever been verbally abused due to political conflict?” across the 25 years of the calendar. Similar questions were used to create indicators for ever witnessed others humiliated, ever been hit or kicked, and ever been shot at due to political conflict. The time frame for each of these questions was 1987 to 2011.

Three demographic variables were assessed: respondent’s age (range = 32 to 43), region of the occupied Palestinian territory (East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip, and the West Bank), and refugee status, measured as a dichotomous variable based on self-report.

Data Analysis

We used ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses to estimate associations between period of political imprisonment and the 12 measures of functioning. To account for the complex survey design, we used `svy` commands in Stata 12.0. Given the low amount of missing data (less than 1% for all variables), complete case analysis was used.

To test for the possibility that political violence exposure (i.e., being hit or kicked, being shot at, being verbally abused, or witnessing others being humiliated) mediated the association between political imprisonment and functioning in each of the four periods, we followed procedures recommended by

Table 1
 Descriptive Characteristics of the Sample by Period of Imprisonment

Variable	1 st Intifada (n = 145)		Oslo (n = 91)		2 nd Intifada (n = 53)		Recently (n = 46)		Never (n = 651)	
	M or n	SD or %	M or n	SD or %	M or n	SD or %	M or n	SD or %	M or n	SD or %
Age (years)	38.58 ^{***}	2.82	37.20	3.13	36.21	3.69	35.6	3.42	36.60	3.57
Refugee status	73	51.7 [*]	32	35.2 ^{**}	19	34.8	12	26.2 [*]	273	43.8
Territory										
West Bank	97	65.0	60	64.3	38	71.9	33	71.1	340	48.6
East Jerusalem	11	7.8	10	11.2	6	11.4	2	4.3	62	9.6
Gaza	37	27.3	21	24.4	9	16.7 [*]	11	24.6	249	41.8
Political functioning										
Free expression	3.32	1.27	3.08	1.31	3.09	1.15	2.68 [*]	1.12	3.14	1.08
Perceived govt. stability	2.66	1.09	2.43	1.05	2.58	1.01	2.25	0.99	2.54	1.04
Economic functioning										
Resource adequacy	4.01	1.00	4.06	0.94	4.07	0.99	3.96	0.89	3.99	0.94
Work security	2.47	1.12	2.38	1.09	2.37	1.12	2.35	1.05	2.52	1.16
Community belonging	3.40	0.85	3.40	0.85	3.40	1.02	3.13	0.90	3.42	0.81
Psychological function										
Broken or destroyed	3.02	1.23	3.10	1.18	3.37	1.10	3.66 ^{***}	0.93	2.91	1.15
Human insecurity	3.65	0.94	3.66	0.96	3.76	0.93	4.00 ^{**}	0.83	3.58	0.89
Trauma-related stress	1.38 ^{***}	0.97	1.47 ^{***}	0.93	1.21	0.93	1.48 [*]	0.99	1.04	0.88
Depression	1.04	0.79	1.01	0.73	1.25	1.00	1.28 ^{**}	0.76	0.96	0.74
Physical limitations	2.56	1.14	2.22	1.13	2.16	1.06	2.66 [*]	1.01	2.28	1.11
Family functioning										
Satisfaction	4.26	0.58	4.21	0.68	4.23	0.65	4.21	0.60	4.17	0.56
Positive marriage	4.30	0.68	4.22	0.88	4.27	0.64	4.31	0.54	4.28	0.62
Political violence										
Verbally abused	138	95.1 ^{**}	84	91.9	45	84.3	42	90.4	501	77.0
Witnessed humiliation	123	86.7 [*]	71	80.2	42	78.5	36	77.4	483	74.6
Hit or kicked	136	93.1 ^{**}	79	86.9	44	82.1	37	79.3	429	66.3
Shot at	124	85.7 ^{***}	74	81.7	40	74.0	36	78.6	443	68.4

Note. All sample sizes are unweighted; all other entries are weighted values. Statistical tests compare each of the four periods to never politically imprisoned. govt. = government.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

MacKinnon, Fairchild, and Fritz (2007). First, we regressed each of the four violence exposure variables on the four imprisonment periods and the demographic variables using logit models. We then regressed the measures of functioning on imprisonment period and the demographic variables using OLS models. Finally, we regressed the measures of functioning on both period of political imprisonment and the political violence variables, again using OLS models. Mediation was determined by testing whether the difference between coefficients from the latter two models for the imprisonment variables was statistically different from zero.

Results

Among this sample of men, 26.4% ($n = 233$) had been politically imprisoned between 1987 and 2011. The mean duration

of imprisonment was 12.57 months ($SD = 18.52$), with a median length of 6.00 months. Of the men ever imprisoned, 61.3% were imprisoned during the first Intifada (1987–1993), 38.5% during the Oslo period (1994–2000), 22.7% during the second Intifada (2000–2005), and 20.2% in the most recent period (2006–2011). The majority of ever-imprisoned men (67.3%) were imprisoned during a single political period, 23.8% were imprisoned during two political periods, 7.8% were imprisoned during three political periods, and 1.1% were imprisoned during all four political periods.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics by period of political imprisonment. Not surprisingly, the men who were imprisoned in the earliest period are slightly older. Men imprisoned in the first three periods reported similar levels of functioning compared to never imprisoned-men except for trauma-related stress. Men imprisoned in both the first Intifada and the Oslo period

Table 2
Weighted Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Political, Economic, and Community Functioning on Period of Imprisonment

Variable	Political				Economic				Community	
	FPE (<i>n</i> = 883)		PGS (<i>n</i> = 872)		RA (<i>n</i> = 882)		WS (<i>n</i> = 885)		CB (<i>n</i> = 883)	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Imprisonment period ^a										
1st Intifada	0.14	0.14	0.11	0.13	-0.02	0.08	0.09	0.10	-0.00	0.07
Oslo	-0.12	0.14	-0.20	0.12	0.04	0.10	-0.15	0.16	0.02	0.10
2 nd Intifada	0.09	0.17	0.09	0.19	0.02	0.14	-0.11	0.16	0.09	0.15
Recent	-0.48*	0.20	-0.38**	0.14	-0.14	0.14	-0.12	0.20	-0.33*	0.17
Political violence										
Verbally abused	-0.10	0.10	-0.09	0.12	-0.16	0.09	-0.07	0.10	0.02	0.10
Witnessed humiliation	0.23*	0.09	-0.17	0.10	-0.03	0.08	0.07	0.11	0.08	0.07
Hit or kicked	0.01	0.08	0.06	0.09	0.00	0.10	-0.09	0.09	-0.11	0.06
Shot at	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.08	0.17	0.09	-0.04	0.10	0.01	0.10
Age (years)	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.01
Refugee	0.16	0.12	0.15	0.08	-0.17*	0.08	-0.30**	0.09	-0.01	0.06
Territory ^b										
East Jerusalem	-0.15	0.15	-0.50***	0.14	-0.35*	0.15	0.27	0.17	-0.15	0.12
Gaza Strip	-0.18	0.14	-0.60***	0.12	-0.42***	0.08	-0.14	0.14	-0.06	0.15
Constant	2.36***	0.32	2.69***	0.33	4.39***	0.38	2.72***	0.40	3.43***	0.28

Note. *n* is unweighted. FPE = freedom of public expression; PGS = perceived government stability; RA = resource adequacy; WS = work security; CB = community belonging.

^aReferent category is never imprisoned. ^bReferent category is the West Bank.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

reported higher levels of trauma-related stress. In the first Intifada: *M* = 1.38, *SD* = 0.97 versus *M* = 1.04, *SD* = 0.88; *F*(1, 88) = 13.74, *p* < .001; Oslo: *M* = 1.47, *SD* = 0.93; *F*(1, 88) = 18.95, *p* < .001. Men politically imprisoned in the most recent period reported worse functioning on an additional five outcomes: freedom of public expression—*M* = 2.68, *SD* = 1.12 versus *M* = 3.14, *SD* = 1.08; *F*(1, 88) = 4.71, *p* = .033; feeling broken or destroyed—*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.93 versus *M* = 2.91, *SD* = 1.15; *F*(1, 88) = 26.15, *p* < .001; human insecurity—*M* = 4.00, *SD* = 0.83 versus *M* = 3.58, *SD* = 0.89; *F*(1, 88) = 7.95, *p* = .006; feelings of depression—*M* = 1.28, *SD* = 0.76 versus *M* = 0.96, *SD* = 0.74; *F*(1, 88) = 11.26, *p* = .001; and physical limitations—*M* = 2.66, *SD* = 1.01 versus *M* = 2.28, *SD* = 1.11; *F*(1, 88) = 5.48, *p* = .022. Levels of exposure to political violence were elevated among ever-imprisoned men imprisoned during the first Intifada compared to never-imprisoned men.

The multivariate results in Tables 2–4 showed that imprisonment during the first three periods was unrelated to current functioning, with one exception: Men imprisoned during the Oslo period reported higher trauma-related stress than never-imprisoned men. Men imprisoned in the most recent period (2006–2011) reported lower functioning than never-imprisoned men across multiple measures: freedom of public expression, perceived stability of the government, community belonging, feeling broken or destroyed, human insecurity, and

limits on physical functioning. Just two of the six domains of functioning—economic and family—were unassociated with political imprisonment during the most recent period. We also tested for the possibility that exposure to political violence mediated the association between the imprisonment variables and the outcomes and found that the political violence variables mediated the association between imprisonment during the first Intifada and trauma-related stress.

Discussion

Globally, millions of people have been politically imprisoned over the past several decades. In this representative sample from the occupied Palestinian territory, 26% of men aged 32 to 43 years were imprisoned for political reasons between 1987 and 2011. This equates to nearly 48,000 men in the full population (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Relatively little is known about either the short- or long-term consequences of political imprisonment. This study was one of the few studies to employ a comparison group of those not politically imprisoned and a population-based sample that allowed for prevalence estimates of political imprisonment and generalizable results. Moreover, by not restricting the scope of adult functioning to the narrow lens of psychopathology, we were able to achieve a broad view on how life-long experience with political

Table 3
 Weighted Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Community and Psychological Functioning on Period of Imprisonment

Variable	Community				Psychological			
	CB (<i>n</i> = 883)		HI (<i>n</i> = 883)		BD (<i>n</i> = 883)		TRS (<i>n</i> = 883)	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Imprisonment period ^a								
1 st Intifada	-0.00	0.07	0.01	0.12	-0.04	0.12	0.13	0.09
Oslo	0.02	0.10	-0.01	0.10	0.01	0.12	0.24*	0.11
2 nd Intifada	0.09	0.15	0.04	0.13	0.26	0.15	-0.13	0.13
Recent	-0.33*	0.17	0.33*	0.14	0.59**	0.16	0.27	0.15
Political violence								
Verbally abused	0.02	0.10	0.16	0.09	0.17	0.10	0.06	0.08
Witnessed humiliation	0.08	0.07	0.12	0.09	-0.06	0.08	0.27**	0.09
Hit or kicked	-0.11	0.06	0.06	0.08	0.20*	0.09	0.13	0.08
Shot at	0.01	0.10	-0.10	0.07	-0.02	0.10	0.16	0.08
Age (years)	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01
Refugee	-0.01	0.06	0.03	0.09	-0.06	0.11	-0.14	0.11
Territory ^b								
East Jerusalem	-0.15	0.12	-0.45*	0.18	-0.44**	0.14	-0.21	0.14
Gaza Strip	-0.06	0.15	-0.01	0.10	0.16	0.13	-0.08	0.10
Constant	3.43***	0.28	4.06***	0.38	2.53***	0.46	0.89*	0.42

Note. *n* is unweighted BD = broken or destroyed; HI = human insecurity; TRS = trauma-related stress; FD = feelings of depression.

^aReferent category is never imprisoned. ^bReferent category is the West Bank.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

imprisonment reflected itself in the lives of individuals. There were three main findings.

The broadest finding was that most of the imprisoned men were indistinguishable from nonimprisoned men. With the key exception noted below, having been imprisoned between 1987 and 2005 was associated with doing as well (or as poorly) as having never been imprisoned. In other words, we did not find traces of imprisonment as youth on adult functioning. Naturally, this does not mean that early imprisonment and its associated hardships were experienced neutrally. Rather, over time men who were imprisoned as youth appear to have moved forward with their lives in ways similar to their nonimprisoned counterparts. The few other studies that report on the long-term effects of political imprisonment have not examined a broad range of functioning (Maercke & Schutzwohl, 1997; Mollica et al., 1998). This finding of resilience afforded by a broad assessment of functioning offers good support for the admonishment that research better acknowledge the capacity of individuals to function in the face of political conflict (Barber, 2013).

The second main finding was a key exception to this pattern of resilience. Men imprisoned during the first Intifada of 1987–1993 and the Oslo Accords period from 1994–1999 reported higher levels of trauma-related stress than did never-imprisoned men. In multivariate results adjusting for exposure to political violence and demographic characteristics, imprisonment

during the Oslo period remained associated with trauma-related stress. The association between political imprisonment during the first Intifada and trauma-related stress was mediated by exposure to political violence. The findings related to imprisonment during the early periods and trauma-related stress were consistent with another study of Palestinians (Punamäki, Qouta, & El Sarraj, 2010). Studies of former prisoners in other contexts also found long-term associations between political imprisonment and trauma-related stress (Basoglu et al., 1994; Crescenzi et al., 2002; Halvorsen & Kagee, 2010; Maercke & Schutzwohl, 1997; Mollica et al., 1998). The unique persistence of trauma-related stress over many years—but not other forms of mental suffering—was consistent with a study of Cambodian refugees who experienced political violence (Savin, Sack, Clarke, Meas, & Richart, 1996). We described the measure as trauma-related stress (instead of PTSD) to deny any implication that it assesses a clinical disorder. Rather, the feelings captured by this scale were interpreted by Palestinians to be symptoms of social suffering associated with the injustice and violence of the Israeli military occupation (Giacaman et al., 2011).

The relevance of the timing of imprisonment was evident in another way: Those most recently imprisoned reported lower levels of functioning across most of the functioning domains. This was evident in the several statistically significant differences denoted in Tables 2–4. But, keeping in mind that the

Table 4
Weighted Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Physical and Family Functioning on Period of Imprisonment

Variable	Physical		Family			
	LH (<i>n</i> = 881)		SF (<i>n</i> = 883)		PMF (<i>n</i> = 848)	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Imprisonment period ^a						
1 st Intifada	-0.17	0.16	0.13	0.07	0.10	0.08
Oslo	-0.05	0.15	-0.03	0.09	-0.09	0.14
2 nd Intifada	-0.26	0.14	0.01	0.11	0.00	0.11
Recent	0.55**	0.17	-0.03	0.09	0.02	0.10
Political violence						
Verbally abused	-0.00	0.11	-0.04	0.04	-0.04	0.08
Witnessed humiliation	0.09	0.09	-0.07	0.06	0.09	0.08
Hit or kicked	0.20*	0.10	0.07	0.05	-0.05	0.05
Shot at	-0.06	0.09	-0.05	0.04	-0.08	0.05
Age (years)	0.03**	0.01	-0.02*	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Refugee	0.21*	0.08	-0.02	0.05	-0.09	0.06
Territory ^b						
East Jerusalem	-0.32*	0.15	-0.22***	0.06	-0.41***	0.11
Gaza Strip	-0.04	0.10	-0.15**	0.05	-0.10	0.07
Constant	1.01**	0.38	4.97***	0.31	4.81***	0.27

Note. LH = limits due to health; SF = satisfaction with family; PMF = positive marital functioning.

^aReferent category is never imprisoned. ^bReferent category is the West Bank.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

sample size for recent imprisonment was quite small, power to detect other effects was small.

There were a few possible reasons for why recent imprisonment was related to wide-ranging challenges in functioning. It might have been due to the fact that the imprisonment was recent. That is, there also may have been decrements in functioning immediately after the imprisonments during the earlier periods, but the respondents rebounded. Unfortunately, prior studies of such groups have not focused on the broad realm of functioning, so there were no data to compare these findings.

Alternatively, the broad negative effects of recent imprisonment could have been due to the changing historical and political context. The little that has been written about prison experiences after the first Intifada described a time of attenuated political activism in prison and a decline in the extent to which political prisoners were viewed as heroes by the broader society or supported by a culture of solidarity and resistance (Giacaman & Johnson, 2013; Rosenfeld, 2011). Therefore, to the extent that positive social and political support protected against negative outcomes of imprisonment, recent imprisonment may have been uniquely harmful.

A third potential explanation was the timing in the life course of men imprisoned during the recent period. By 2006, the start of the most recent period, most men would have married, had children, and would have been striving to provide financially for their families. Thus, relative to being imprisoned

when younger, later political imprisonment may have disrupted their lives more. Finally, it also may have been that more of the imprisonments during this period were at the hands of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank or Hamas in the Gaza Strip. If so, it might have been particularly distressing because those prisoners would not have benefited from the prestige of sacrificing against the Israeli occupation, and they may have felt disillusioned by the Palestinian leadership that also dealt with dissent by imprisoning people.

Of note, two domains of functioning were not affected by recent imprisonment: economic and family. Economic functioning may not have been worse because the Palestinian Authority provided financial support to families of prisoners during the imprisonment period. Family functioning may not have been worse, compared to never-imprisoned men, because wives and mothers of political prisoners worked hard to maintain family cohesion and support for the prisoner (Giacaman & Johnson, 2013).

The finding of the widespread suffering of the recently imprisoned illustrates the value of searching beyond the conventional focus on psychopathology to include functioning across the multiple contexts affected by political conflict. In terms of practice, the findings suggest that efforts to support former political prisoners in the occupied Palestinian territory pay particular attention to those who have been imprisoned most recently.

Along with the particular strengths of the study, there were limitations. First, we could not distinguish whether the men were politically imprisoned by the Israeli government, by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, or by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Second, we had no measures of the men's experiences during imprisonment of torture, overcrowding, material deprivation, civil rights abuses, or conversely, educational opportunities and social solidarity. Third, although this study explored many more outcomes than are typically examined, there may have been other consequences of political imprisonment that we did not measure.

Finally, political imprisonment was but one of many life events that could have shaped the current functioning of this sample of Palestinian men. Examples of other events include the achievement of culturally valued statuses of education, employment, and family formation, as well as other harsh and constraining elements of being politically subjugated, such as exposure to persistent humiliation (Barber, McNeely, Olsen, Spellings & Belli, 2013). Future analyses might elaborate predictive models that incorporate multiple salient events over time. Given the paucity of research on political imprisonment—particularly post-first Intifada for Palestinians—the concentrated focus on imprisonment in this study was warranted.

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