

RESPONDING TO TRAUMA THAT IS NOT PAST

STRENGTHENING STORIES OF
SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE

An Arabic narrative therapy handbook

Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for
Victims of Torture, Ramallah, Palestine

In partnership with Dulwich Centre
Foundation International

THIS PUBLICATION IS IN
MEMORY OF JAMAL DAGLAS

This project has been coordinated by Cheryl
White, Khader Rasras and David Denborough.

This handbook was translated by Nihaya
Mahmoud Abu-Rayyan



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first Arabic handbook about narrative approaches to therapy, group work, and community work. This publication describes some of the key ideas and practices of narrative therapy and includes skilful and thoughtful examples of practice from Palestinian therapists.

The history of the work described in these pages goes back to 2005. This was the year when a partnership developed between The Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture¹(TRC) and Dulwich Centre Foundation International² (Dulwich Centre, in Australia, is one of the homes of narrative therapy). Since 2005, this partnership has involved building the capacity of TRC workers in relation to their use of narrative practices through regular trainings, supervision, documenting initiatives in TRC therapists' work, supporting TRC workers to become teachers of narrative approaches, and creating this handbook. From 2009-2011 this partnership was supported by the European Commission³.

TRC therapists are now offering trainings in narrative approaches not only in Palestine but also in other Arabic speaking countries. This handbook has been designed to be used in these training contexts and we hope it will assist Arabic therapists in different parts of the world.

This handbook consists of four parts. The first describes the broader context of the narrative therapy work of the counsellors of TRC in Palestine. The second documents a number of key narrative therapy practices and includes examples from Palestinian therapists. Part Three conveys how narrative ideas are being used with groups and communities. And Part Four describes how the TRC counsellors are trying to open possibilities for conversations around very difficult topics.

DR MAHMUD SEHWAIL
TRC

CHERYL WHITE
Dulwich Centre Foundation International

NOTES

1. See www.trc-pal.org
2. For more information about the work of Dulwich Centre see: www.dulwichcentre.com.au
3. The three year project funded by the European Commission was entitled: Sustaining and enhancing comprehensive, Community – based service delivery to victims of torture and politically motivated violence living in the north and south of the west bank.



PART FOUR:

Difficult topics

The final section of this handbook consists of three documents about difficult topics. The first two relate to ways of keeping Palestinian families strong by addressing violence within homes. The final document is addressed to those who may be losing the will to live.

To relate to women in our proper way: voices of Palestinian men

This document has been created from the words of male workers at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture in Ramallah, Palestine. It was been written in the hope of addressing gender-based violence in Palestine and beyond. It is to be read in conjunction with the document 'The journey of Palestinian women: Challenges and successes' which contains the words and perspective of the women workers at the TRC.

We are a group of men who work as counsellors at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture (TRC) in Ramallah, Palestine. Our work is about responding to families affected by the occupation. We meet with ex-detainees, with families who have lost loved ones as a result of the occupation, and with survivors of torture and trauma. And today we met together to talk about violence against women in families. This is an issue that we care about as men.

Here in Palestine, there are long traditions about how to be a good man, a good father, in families. A good father is one who takes up his responsibilities towards his wife and his children. He often takes primary responsibility for working outside the home and he has also responsibilities inside the home. He treats the children all the same way, the girls the same as the boys. He gives time and he cares if anyone is sick in the family. A good father is a good negotiator and he must teach his children patience, honesty and respect. As fathers, we teach our children through doing things together such as fasting. Fasting teaches you to be patient, to feel together and to consider others who cannot have regular food. Fathers show their children love through the tradition of fasting.

Here in Palestine, men, women and children also have to resist the occupation and we see the effects of occupation everywhere. We see the effects as we work with men who have been imprisoned and tortured. We see the effects in families whose fathers and sons have been killed by the Israeli military. We see the effects in the economy, the poverty and unemployment. And we see the effects of the occupation in violence in Palestinian homes.

Today we talked together about violence against women in Palestinian homes is a serious issue. Too many Palestinian women experience violence in the home and this violence increases or decreases depending on the political and economic situation. Sometimes the violence happens after men have been tortured in prison and then released. Or it occurs when men have been in prison for many years away from their families and when they are released they go back home and there is no work. This is the broader context of men and women's lives here in Palestine.

We hope this document might help us to work together with our women colleagues here at TRC to prevent violence in Palestinian families. We also hope it might be helpful to other Palestinian men who care about this issue and who also want to stop violence against women. Maybe it can also be helpful to people outside of Palestine. We know that violence against women occurs in every country of this world.

We would like to begin by saying that the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, spoke 1400 years ago about the importance of women's roles and women's rights. He said, 'Who deserves your friendship? Your mother, your mother, your mother, and then your father.' The Prophet Mohammed spoke always that women are the sisters of men.

We believe it is important to speak about violence against women. This is about following the lead of Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him.

As counsellors, we are trying to assist families who are living under occupation so we must find ways to respond to violence against women. This is a huge issue, but as counsellors responding to political violence, we are used to having to deal with huge issues.

HOW DO WE FACE THIS ISSUE IN OUR WORK?

Sometimes we meet with women who are experiencing violence from their husbands and they speak with us about this. Perhaps the woman or the man is an ex-prisoner. Perhaps their son is a martyr and we may discover that, not only is the family living with the effects of the occupation, but the woman is also experiencing violence from her husband. In the worst situations, the woman's life may be at risk. Sometimes there are beatings every day. Often when we meet with families they do not speak openly about violence

in the home. We try to help them to speak about these issues and we listen for the possibilities of violence between people's words.

When we meet with men who are being violent to their wives, sometimes the man thinks this is the proper role of the father in the family. It might be taken for granted or seen as normal life. Other times, he will know that it is wrong and wants to change.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THIS VIOLENCE?

When a husband is beating his wife we see many effects in the family. The children are affected. They may be hyperactive or angry. One child may start beating his brother or sister or other children in the school. We find that boys start using anger and violence more than girls. Some girls, if they see their father beating all of the family, they may become afraid of all men around them. This is a form of suffering.

The children in the family may feel no security and may be afraid of their father. They may speak always very quietly to their father, showing great respect because of their fear of his violence. Some children may experience bedwetting.

There are many effects on the woman too. She may have no trust in herself. She may have so much fear and be unable to speak. Sometimes a wife doesn't speak to her husband about their children or about what is happening at home because she is afraid of his anger.

Sometimes men who beat their wives may force them to have sex after they have beaten them. This can have very bad effects for women too.

Men's violence to women can also contribute to women's violence to children. And in some situations the wife may start being violent back to the husband.

We find that the relationship between the husband and wife always changes if there is violence. It becomes very weak and full of problems. They may live together but with no care. It's like there is no relationship between them.

There are effects on men's lives too. If they are violent in the home then the man's role in the house is changed. If he is all the time beating then he is no longer like a father. The role of

fathers is to take care of children ... but if a man is violent he will be unable to fulfil this duty of caring. This role will be lost. He may also lose his wife. She may leave the house.

WHAT ARE THE DILEMMAS OR CHALLENGES WE FACE IN TRYING TO RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

Every day in our work we are dealing with the effects of political violence on men, women and children. Life under occupation brings so much suffering. In this context, trying to address violence in the home is very challenging. There are particular beliefs that make it harder. Some people think that in the family it must be 'His word only', that the man must hold all the strength. This means that when working with men in some families they don't accept us to speak about the violence. They say, 'This is my life, this is my family.' We have to find ways of dealing with these attitudes.

And sometimes, wives cannot speak to us because they are so afraid. Some women who are exposed to violence do not even speak to their families. And because men do not talk about the violence then this silence makes it hard to deal with.

And when violence is occurring, we want to work with all of the family but it can be difficult to bring the husband and wife to the same session. We must find ways to ensure the safety of the woman is not compromised.

There are many challenges in responding to this issue. But we must find some ways.

HOW DO FAMILIES RESPOND TO TRY TO PROTECT WOMEN AND TRY TO PREVENT VIOLENCE?

In our experience there are many ways that Palestinian families try to respond to violence in the home and to prevent further harm. We have made a list of these.

Some of things the woman may do include:

- Some women may talk to their family.
- They may go to their father's home.
- They may talk to a counsellor.
- Some women might say, 'If there is violence, I will sleep in another room (no sex)'.
- Some women leave the house.
- Some women go to the police and seek a divorce.

- Some women may say 'If you don't stop beating me I will leave and leave the children with you'. But most women don't want to leave their children.
- Some wives go and work out of the home. This gives them some space and independence. It enables them to spend many hours out of home.

Some of the things the woman's family may do include:

- Building their home next door to their daughter. They may choose to live next door so that they can offer protection.
- Sometimes if the woman's family knows about the violence, if she has come to the family home crying, then her brothers might come and talk to the husband. They may speak with the husband to try to stop the violence.
- If this does not work, the brothers might come and beat the husband but this doesn't usually work. In fact, it can cause social problems between the families.
- In our tradition, if there is a problem in a family, then you may go to speak to the 'big one' in the family. This may be the woman's father or her uncle. The 'big one' is a person who is respected by all in the family. This is a person who listens and then does the negotiations. He has strong authority. He is respected and he has experienced life. The man and woman might go to him or he might go to their house to listen and then try to solve the problems. This is a part of our tradition.

Some things the husband and wife might do together include:

- Our religion says that men must respect women. So sometimes wives and husbands might read religious texts together about respecting each other.
- Sometimes the woman might know of other family members who have very good relations between husbands and wives. They might look around at these examples and talk with them.

We didn't talk about any things that the man might do to prevent his violence. We will talk about this and add this to the document in the future. We also know an organisation has set up

a safe house for women who are experiencing violence. Later we will talk more about what different organisations are trying to do to respond.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW AS WORKERS AND WHAT MORE CAN WE DO?

There are many different ways that we as workers try to respond to violence against women and there is more that we can do. This was our first conversation on this topic so these are starting points:

- We try to help families to speak about these issues and to keep speaking about them.
- We listen carefully as people are talking. We know they might not speak directly about violence so we listen for possibilities of violence between people's words. We listen for words like 'my husband does not understand me' or 'my children are suffering'. These might be signs of violence.
- We can talk with families about what is likely to happen to the family, the children, if violence in the home continues. How will your future be?
- We could be involved in raising community awareness about these issues. We could run workshops for men and for women.
- We can seek out ways that people in other Arabic countries are trying to respond to violence against women. One of us told a story about a man in Egypt. After this man had been violent, his wife asked him to create a banner acknowledging his responsibility and that he was sorry. He did this and the banner was shown publicly. We could explore our own Palestinian ways for men to take some action about men's violence.
- If it is hard to work together with the woman and the man, sometimes two therapists can work separately with the man and the woman.

- Sometimes when we know there is violence occurring, we have home visits with one male therapist and one woman therapist. The man sits with the man while the woman sits with the woman and then we can see if we can come together to talk about it.
- We must always try to find safety in the family for the women, the men and the children.
- Perhaps we can explore using documents in this work.

Here in Palestine, we work with families who have been affected by the occupation. There are so many forms of violence that Palestinian men and women face each day and every day there are new settlements on our land.

Here at the TRC we work to assist families to reclaim their lives from this violence.

As men, we are now trying to follow the lead of the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, as we seek to address violence against women here in Palestine.

We are also following the lead of men in our own families – grandfathers, fathers, uncles – who experienced so much violence in their own lives, who experienced the violence of generations of invasions, and yet who would sit with their families at night, talking and always remembering religious messages that offer encouragement, guidance and support.

And we are following Palestinian and Arabic traditions. When problems arise in families there is a particular way of responding in our village life. There is a tradition where others come to the family to talk, to safeguard all the members of the family, and to solve problems between family members. That is also our role now.

We hope you will join us.

*“As men, we are now trying to **follow the lead of the Prophet Mohammed, peace be upon him, as we seek to address violence against women here in Palestine.**”*

The journey of Palestinian women: Challenges and successes

This document has been created from the words of women workers at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture in Ramallah, Palestine.

Here in Palestine, we are living under occupation. There is so much political violence. There are so many pressures on our families and relationships.

Women have always played crucial roles in the Palestinian struggle. We share this struggle with our men and there is a long history to this. Looking back to 1948 and 1967 women have always been involved in the struggle for Palestine. More recently, women have been involved in the intifadas. Women have lost their lives in this struggle. Women have been imprisoned. And we have also offered our sons and husbands for the struggle and lost them. So many of us as Palestinian women dedicate ourselves to visiting our sons, brothers, fathers or husbands in prison, travelling far to do this, sometimes leaving home at 3am week after week after week for years.

Not only do we as women contribute to the struggle against the occupation, we also work to create Palestinian civil society. There are women who are village chiefs. There are women who work as doctors, engineers, as teachers in universities and schools, in every domain of public life. There are women in key leadership roles in the Palestinian Parliament. And there is also a Palestinian women's football team. Within our families and within society, as Palestinian women we are doing all we can to create a better future for our children.

We are group of women counsellors who work at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture (TRC). Our centre works with men and women and families who are affected by political violence. We work to address violence against men, violence against women, violence against children, and violence against young people and children.

As women counsellors, we work with the mothers of martyrs, women who are ex-detainees, and women whose husbands and sons are in prison. As we assist these women in dealing with the

effects of the occupation, we also try to assist them when they may be experiencing violence in their homes. Responding to violence against women when you are living under occupation can be very difficult.

We have put together this document to share what we have learnt along the way. We hope this document will assist us and other Palestinian women and Palestinian men to protect Palestinian families from violence in all its forms. And perhaps it will be helpful to those outside Palestine. We know that violence against women occurs in every country.

TALKING ABOUT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In our experience, Palestinian women who are experiencing violence in their homes are often very afraid to talk about this. Sometimes women have been threatened not to talk to anyone about what happens at home. The threat may be more violence, or the threat may be of being divorced or killed.

During our first meeting with women, we ask directly about violence and sexual abuse. As part of the TRC assessment we ask about violence from a family member, from local people, from teachers, and/or sexual abuse. Very often women deny any experiences of violence in the early interviews and only begin to disclose later in therapy when they experience our trust.

When women do talk with us they often say 'Please do not tell anyone. If anyone knows then the violence will increase, but I need to talk with you to break my fear.'

As we know that women may find it difficult to speak about violence in their home, we often ask about symptoms including anxiety, nervousness, and whether their partner is violent to their children. These are some ways to make it more possible for women to speak about violence in the home.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Just as there many different forms of political violence in Palestine, we have learnt that it is also important to be aware of many different forms of violence against women. These include violence in marriage as well as violence against single women.

Violence in marriage can include physical battering, isolating her from other people, calling her crazy or mad. Violence from husbands can also include economic control and being ordered and treated like a servant.

Single women are also exposed to violence. They can be forbidden from continuing their education, forbidden from travelling alone. Single women are sometimes forced to marry against their will or to enter forced sexual relationships. In the worst instances, single women or divorced women may be killed for being in a relationship with a man. This is called honour killing.

And both single and married women may be subjected to be watched all the time, placed under observation about how they dress and act.

We also think it is important to be aware of the sexual abuse of daughters. There may also be sexual abuse from husbands, relatives, fathers-in-law, colleagues, teachers, or family members. As workers we have learned that we must be aware of all these different forms of violence. We must find ways in which women can speak of these different experiences.

THE EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE ON MARRIED AND SINGLE WOMEN

We have also learnt a lot about the many different effects of violence against women.

There are physical effects such as severe headaches, abdominal pain, high blood pressure and nervousness. While medical tests show no reason for these, we know that experiences of violence may be the cause.

Violence also brings fear into women's lives. Women may become frightened all the time. They are afraid if the husband knows they are speaking, afraid of losing their children, afraid of social stigma. Sometimes this fear is so severe she may have thoughts to end her life. Men often accuse women of being crazy or mad when they speak about the violence from the man and this can lead to women becoming isolated.

Some women in these situations may come to hate all men and this can reflect negatively on her relationship with her male children. The violence from men to women can also lead to mothers' violence towards children.

And then there are the effects on the children. When children are exposed to violence this

affects their schooling and their psychological wellbeing. Sometimes it causes bedwetting. Often there are long-term effects on the family. If a woman leaves her home, her family may reject the children because the father uses violence. Or the father may refuse to allow the mother to take the children with her and uses the children as a way of placing pressure on the woman.

Just as there are so many effects of political violence and so many effects of the occupation on Palestinian men, women and children, we have also learned there are many different effects of violence on women in the home.

CHALLENGES WE FACE

As workers there are many challenges that we face. The biggest challenge is the occupation and the continuing political violence that our men, women and children are subjected to. As workers, we also live under occupation. Our lives are not separate from those with whom we work.

There are extra challenges when it comes to trying to stop violence against women in the home. In order to stop this violence we must find ways to work with the one who makes the violence. This can be difficult. Sometimes the woman is so fearful she does not want us to approach her husband.

One of the greatest challenges is the social stigma attached to divorce which is unacceptable in our society. The societal expectations that women should put up with violence is also a great problem. As is the fact that men and children may blame women if they do separate or end the relationship.

Some of the ways in which people use some religious beliefs can also be challenging. If women think 'This is my destiny' or 'if I become patient my God in heaven will reward me' then sometimes this makes it more difficult too.

So there are many obstacles. But we are Palestinian, so we know about finding a way around obstacles.

SOME OF OUR WAYS OF RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE HOME

In addition to the ways we are responding to political violence, as workers, there are also many things we are doing to respond to violence against women:

- Most importantly, we are trying to change our own thinking. We are trying never to blame the woman.
- We are looking for reasons that make violence against women acceptable in our society and we are questioning these.
- We ask questions with every new client to screen for violence and sexual abuse.
- If we meet with an unmarried pregnant woman, we make referrals to the Social Ministry who facilitate safe housing for her and who then seek to gain agreement from the family not to harm her.
- We work to find words for women to name violence. We acknowledge that sometimes women prefer to name violence indirectly (e.g. injustice, inhumanity). Other women prefer to name it directly.
- When working with women we use externalising conversations to explore what is going on, to name this, to explore the effects of the problem, and to ask women to take a position in relation to the problem.
- When we know violence is occurring in a home, we send two therapists on the home visit (one female, one male). They enter the house with a plan between the therapists to work individually with the husband and wife. Later, after many sessions, we may bring the husband and wife together. Later still we may suggest family therapy.
- We listen and acknowledge what the woman is suffering.
- We help women find their identity separate from working like a servant.
- We write letters to women who are survivors of violence which acknowledge their

alternative stories, for example, the ways the woman is honoured by others, all she is trying to do, and her skills in managing so much.

- Sometimes, when a family has lost their son as a martyr, we can organise for someone to visit the husband, to sit with him, without him knowing his wife has told us about the violence. This is an opening to build a relationship with the man and to assist him to reduce and stop the violence in the home.
- We run groups for the wives of prisoners and we run groups for men. In both these sorts of groups we try to find ways to talk about violence. We are going to explore further ways of doing this.
- And we are talking with our male colleagues and working together on this issue and all issues.

As Palestinians, we are proud of the ways in which we resist the effects of the occupation. We are proud of the ways our men, our women and our young people, resist the occupation and the political violence we are subjected to.

As well as dealing with the occupation, we are also trying to find ways to respond to and prevent violence against women. This is a great challenge. But as we are Palestinians, we are up for a challenge!

There is a saying in our culture, 'The woman is half of the society but because she is mother of the man she is all the society.'

We are finding ways to address violence against women, because violence against women is violence against Palestinian society.

*“The woman is **half of the society** but because she is mother of the man she is **all the society.**”*

SOURCES

PART ONE

'These are our truths: Special knowledge of three Palestinian psychologists' was written from the words of TRC psychologists by David Denborough from an interview by Stephen Madigan.

'When trauma is not past' by Dr Mahmud Sehwal and 'The links between healing, psychotherapy and human rights' by Khader Rasras are extracts from longer pieces by Dr Mahmud Sehwal and Khader Rasras that were published in *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2005, Nos. 3 & 4.

PART TWO

The narrative therapy charter of storytelling rights was developed by David Denborough (2014)

The narrative practices of externalising problems, re-authoring conversations, re-membering conversations, and outsider-witness practices, were all developed by narrative therapists Michael White and David Epston. For descriptions of these practices see White (2007). See also: www.dulwichcentre.com.au

The stories of narrative practice featured in this section are from the work of Sahar Mustafa Ismael Mohammed. Please note that all names of clients in this handbook are pseudonyms.

The extract 'Re-membering conversations' by Maryam Burqan was first published in Hassounh et.al (2005).

Sue Mitchell's writings about 'Re-membering conversations with children' also appear in Mitchell (2013).

'Heckmut's list of prison skills' was written by David Denborough from the words of Heckmut.

The document 'Skills in keeping a family connected while your husband is in prison' was written by David Denborough from an interview conducted by Sawsan Mohammad Yusef Tabanja. For information about the rites of passage and the migration of identity' see White (1995).

The full version of Nihaya Abu-Rayyan's Seasons of life can be found at Abu-Rayyan (2009).

PART THREE

More information about the forms of collective narrative practice described in Part Three can be found in Denborough (2008).

The document 'Dealing with life under occupation: The special skills and knowledges that sustain the workers of Nablus' was created from the words of was created during a workshop on 'Narrative approaches to working with children' hosted by Medecins Du Monde in Nablus on the 21st and 22nd of June 2006. This training was offered by Angel Yuen and David Denborough under the auspices of Dulwich Centre.

The Tree of Life narrative approach was developed by Ncazelo Ncube (2006) and David Denborough. For more information see: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/tree-of-life.html

The document 'We remember our friends and family' was created by David Denborough from the words of participants in a group facilitated by Sahar Mustafa Ismael Mohammed and AkramMusbahSobeh Othman in Jenin.

For more information about the Team of Life narrative approach see: www.dulwichcentre.com.au/team-of-life.html

The Kite of Life was originally developed in Toronto (see Denborough, 2010). It was the idea of Thilaka Xavier during a project Oolagen Community Services, Turning Point Youth Services and Dulwich Centre Foundation International. The letter included in this handbook to the Tamil community in Toronto was written by Palestinian teachers and workers who attended a workshop by Cheryl White and David Denborough in Gaza City, hosted by the Remedial Education Center and made possible by Guido Veronese. Some photographs from this workshop are also included in this section.

PART FOUR

The documents 'To relate to women in our proper way: voices of Palestinian men', 'The journey of Palestinian women: Challenges and successes' and 'A letter to those who are losing the will to live' were created from the words of workers at the Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture in Ramallah, Palestine, during workshops in 2011 and 2013.

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David Denborough wrote the English draft of this handbook (drawing together the work of TRC therapists).

This handbook was translated by Nihaya Mahmoud Abu-Rayyan. Nihaya has also played a key role in translating workshops and in innovating Palestinian forms of narrative practice.

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This first Arabic handbook about narrative approaches to therapy, group work, and community work describes some of the key ideas and practices of narrative therapy and includes skilful and thoughtful examples of practice from Palestinian therapists.

This handbook consists of four parts. The first describes the broader context of the narrative therapy work of Palestinian counsellors. The second documents a number of key narrative therapy practices and includes examples of Palestinian practice. Part Three conveys how narrative ideas are being used with groups and communities. And Part Four describes how Palestinian counsellors are trying to open possibilities for conversations around very difficult topics.

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P.O. Box 468, Ramallah,
West Bank, Palestine
www.trc-pal.org
info@trc-pal.org



Hutt St, P.O. Box 7192
Adelaide, South Australia, 5000
www.dulwichcentre.com.au
dulwich@dulwichcentre.com.au