# The Humanitarian Impact of Gaza's Electricity and Fuel Crisis on Gender-based Violence and services

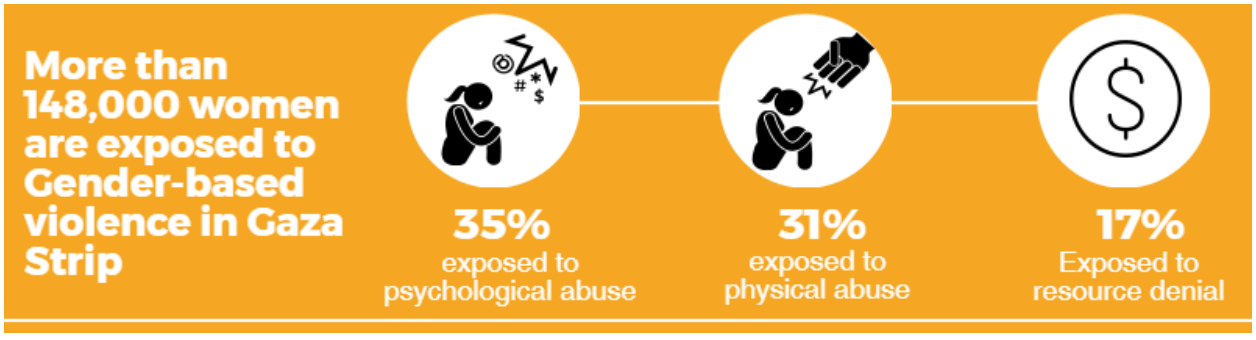


Photo: Union Health Work Committees

More than 148,000 women[i] are exposed to gender-based violence (GBV) in the Gaza Strip, thereby being a key protection concern. The protracted humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory and its impact on especially Gaza Strip due to the blockade, has exacerbated GBV in all its forms, including sexual violence, domestic violence and child marriage. According to 2016 data from the GBV Sub-Cluster, more than 35 per cent of GBV survivors were exposed to physiological abuse, 31 per cent to physical abuse and 17 per cent resource denial.

Recent studies[ii] clearly show the negative impact of the blockade on women's conditions in the Gaza Strip especially concerning psychological stress which threatens the stability of the family. The recent increased electricity and fuel crisis has only further intensified the situation making the living conditions of women worse, disrupting almost all aspects of daily life, especially the household tasks, which by society are considered the job of women.

61 per cent of women believe the blockade and electricity cuts have contributed to a higher rate of domestic violence against women[iii]. The psychological effects of the crisis on women are lager as they become more exposed to tension, depression and violence compared to others as women are considered the corner stone of the family. The structural, cyclical and hierarchal nature of violence, therefore, means women often become "shock-absorbers" of the crisis.



The electricity shortage with limited electricity till up to four hours per day has increased the uncertainty for women according to two focus groups interviews conducted in May 2017[iv], thereby turning women's lives upside down. Women, therefore, often have to ensure the electricity required household tasks such as washing, laundry, ironing, cooking and ensuring children studying all have to be completed during the four hours of available electricity, which usually is during the night.

Additionally, households are not able to refrigerate food items from one day to another due to the limited electricity, therefore, increasing the work load as women have to cook daily or make use of canned food. Internally displaced women in temporary caravans are at higher risk of increased GBV as the economic hardship makes it more difficult to cope with the energy crisis. These particular household suffer from extreme heat due to the absence of functioning ventilation and their search for alternative methods such as battery-run fans are practically unreachable as these are considered a high cost alternative.

---

*'The situation is extremely bad. This is not life, it is like living in hell every single day. The electricity cuts have increased my suffering. It is too hot in the caravans where we live. My kids have trouble studying and it creates much more stress for me and my family'*

*A.M, Internally Displaced Women*

---

## *The crisis effect on GBV services*

GBV services have been negatively affected by the long hours of power cuts. Organisations such as Union of Health Work Committee and Women Health Center – Jabailya has reported an increased financial burden in order to guarantee the continuity of services to the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls. This has resulted in cancelled activities and reduced working hours. Some hospitals are expected to close in order to preserve energy for the central hospitals with a larger catchment population. This will affect women, especially pregnant, elderly and those with chronic illnesses as well as GBV survivors as health is the culturally accepted entry point to detect, treat and refer cases.

Many GBV Sub-Cluster partners are suffering from overcrowdings in their facilities. Women Health Center - Jabailya have more than 150 women visiting the centre daily to escape from their home due to the electricity cuts and the absence of recreational activities for them and their children, which cause more depression and tension in the family.

## *Action to be taken by GBV Sub-Cluster*

1. Provide regular briefing to the Protection Cluster and other clusters to identify GBV needs and solutions due to the energy crisis.

2. Prepare regular update on women's and girls' situation in the light of the energy crisis

3. Advocate partners to focus on providing any required support for women

4. Conduct regular assessment on the impact of power cuts on GBV survivors and services.

5. Conduct ad-hoc meetings to receive update on the crisis and to redesign activities to respond more effectively to GBV.

6. Advocate for funds being allocated to enhance mental health and psychosocial interventions

7. Increase the level of coordination between partners in order to agree on a diagnosis of the crisis and to find solutions to mitigate the severity impact of the electricity cuts problem.

## *Background on the crisis*

Gaza's sole power plant (GPP) was forced to shut down completely after exhausting its fuel reserves and being unable to replenish them due to a shortage of funds. Prior to this, the GPP was operating at only approximately half of its capacity, producing nearly 30 per cent of the electricity supplied to the Gaza Strip. On 20 April 2017, electricity supply from Egypt, which accounts for 15 per cent of Gaza's supply, also came to a halt due to technical malfunctioning that is yet to be repaired.

Gaza is currently supplied only with electricity purchased from Israel (some 55 per cent of the previous supply), resulting in electricity blackouts of 20 hours per day, up from 12 hours previously, further undermining the delivery of basic services.

*OCHA Flash Update (April 2017)*

[i] Calculation based on PCBS Violence Survey (2011)
[iiii] Women and Men's Study (2016) supported by UNESCO
[iii] Women and Men Voices Study (2014) supported by UNESCO
[iv] Focus group interviews conducted by RCS and CFTA in north and south of the Gaza Strip to assess the impact of power cuts on women and girls (40 women in total).