

Background: Detention of children in the West Bank

- Israel is the **only country in the world that systematically prosecutes children**
- Approximately 500-700 Palestinian children come into contact with the Israeli military court system every year.
- **More than 160 Palestinian children remain in detention in Israeli prisons.**
- **Out of the children consulted for our reports, the majority maintained their innocence but entered a guilty plea in order to reduce their sentence**
- **Nearly 60% of Palestinian child detainees are transferred out of the West Bank to prisons inside Israel, in violation of Article 76 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.**

Overview of Research

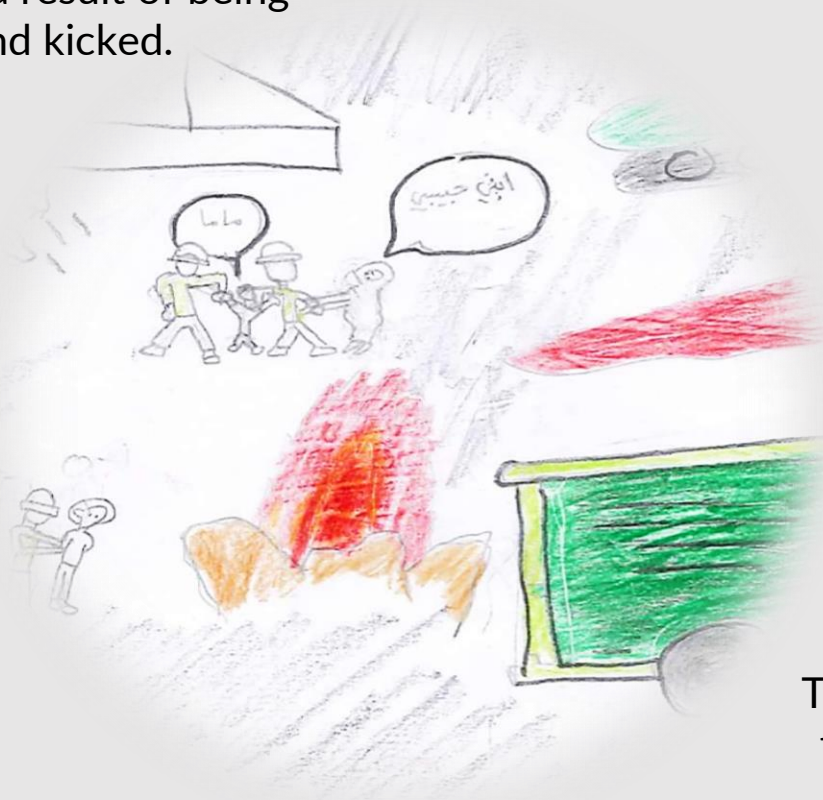
- In 2020 SCI produced a report, *Defenceless*, where children were asked to detail their experience through the Israeli military detention system and to share the repercussions on their lives after release.
- Again, in 2022 SCI is launching another report on the impact of family separation on child detainees and their families.
- **A surveys, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews** were conducted with **over 800 children and young people** across eleven governorates of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem for these reports. All interviewees had been detained as children.
- The young people were between 12 and 26 years old at the time of consultation. In-depth interviews were carried out with **mothers, fathers and caregivers** of children who have been detained.

Report Findings - Arrest

During arrest, almost a quarter of children (24%) reported that they were physically injured. The most common injuries were a result of being punched, slapped, pushed, and kicked.

99% had their hands tied behind their backs, mostly by plastic ties.

Most children (89%) report being blindfolded or hooded, either during the arrest or the subsequent transfer to a prison or an interrogation centre.



More than half of children (53%) were arrested during night raids at the children's home, between the hours of midnight and dawn.

They were rarely read their rights, including their right to silence and to legal assistance.

Report Findings- Separated from the moment of arrest

85% were detained without being summoned in advance, with most being taken from their home in the middle of the night.

This highly distressing experience resulted in many children reporting feeling unsafe (75%), anxious or afraid (68%).

Two-thirds of children (66%) felt that their life was in danger during the arrest.

“You can’t help but feel bad about what you are putting your parents through. When I was detained, sadness took over our house. My parents slept in my room, missing me and feeling sad that we were apart.” Khaled, 15 years old

Children also reported that these distressing experiences during arrest resulted in them feeling:

- **guilt that they exposed their family to danger (66%)**
- **they caused harm to their families (64%)**
- **their parents cannot protect them (61%).**

Report Findings – Transfer & Interrogation

During **transfer**:

- strip-searched
- being handcuffed to metal chairs
- forced to lie face-down on the metal floor of military vehicles
- denied bathroom breaks
- denied food and water
- physically assaulted
- physical violence and frequently being subjected to humiliation and degrading taunts

"[Interrogators] wanted me to confess to a crime I did not commit, and they wanted to put pressure on me so that I would confess false crimes about my friends." Sami from East Jerusalem*



During **interrogation**:

- 52% were threatened with harm to their family
- 89% reported experiencing verbal abuse
- 86% reported being strip-searched
- 56% were held in solitary confinement

Report Findings – Detention

They described detention as:

“torturous”

“one of the most difficult experiences a person can endure”

“dehumanising”

“humiliating”

“confusing”



- 81% were being physically beaten
- 47% were denied contact with a lawyer at least once during their detention
- 88% did not receive the healthcare that they required
- 46% were deprived of food and water.
- 27% had dogs released on them
- 22% had a bag placed over their heads or were blind folded
- 51% were not allowed to see their families while they were detained



Report Findings- Family Visits

54% of parents consulted reported that they were **not approved to visit** their child in prison

22% receiving permission a few times for rare visits

“I felt sad when I heard good or bad news related to my family. I couldn’t be a part of it.” – Salem, 17 years old, from Bethlehem

“My sister got married when I was in prison and I couldn’t participate with my family’s happiness. But I danced with two friends in prison to try and share the happy event.” – Tareq, 17 years old, from Bethlehem

Children reported long periods of time – weeks or months – passing before they were able to contact their parents, either over the phone or in person. Some children can serve their **entire sentence without seeing their families**

Report Findings – Mental & Physical Health

85% said that they have **irreversibly changed due to their experiences.**

- 49% cannot express their emotions and feelings
- 53% experience tantrums and anger
- 47% experience insomnia or difficulties sleeping
- 39% have recurring or frequent nightmares
- 29% lose their appetite

Children reported frequently suffering from the following **physical symptoms** after release, none of which they routinely experienced prior to detention:

- 26% experience chest pains
- 38% feel extreme exhaustion
- 35% experience headaches and dizziness
- 30% have chronic muscle pains
- 20% feel numbness or loss of sensation across different parts of their body



Report Findings – Looking to the Future

The traumatic experiences that many children experience in detention have not dimmed their **hope for the future** and determination to have a productive and fulfilling life:

- 96% strongly care about their futures
- 95% are determined to make the right decisions in their lives
- 96% still feel joy and a sense of accomplishment when they succeed in school or work

Recommendations



Save the Children believes that **no** child should be prosecuted in a military court, or any court that lacks comprehensive fair trial rights and juvenile justice standards.

Save the Children is calling on the Government of Israel to respect international law and to end the detention of children under military law and their prosecution in military courts.

Recommendations

Save the Children calls on the international community to:

- Urge the Government of Israel to take steps to **adopt practical safeguards to protect children who are currently in detention, including:**
 - I. Ensuring that children are detained only as a measure of **last resort** and for the **shortest time** possible, in line with their obligation outlined in the UNCRC
 - II. **Ending the systemic ill-treatment** of children, establishing **protection and safeguards** for detainees, and providing **adequate services** to help children recover from their experiences.
 - III. Immediately **end the practices of night-time arrest**, and ensure that in all other cases arrest summonses are used.
 - IV. Ensure that children have timely access to an independent lawyer of their choice, as well as a parent or guardian, prior to and during interrogations.
- Call on Israeli authorities to implement effective accountability measures to ensure all credible reports of ill-treatment are properly investigated in accordance with international standards and that perpetrators are brought to justice.