

Community Strategies Confronting Organized Crime Targeting Palestinian Citizens of Israel

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Introduction

Organized crime has become one of the most pressing challenges facing the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel. The rapid proliferation of criminal networks, the normalization of armed violence, and the erosion of traditional social control mechanisms have created a climate of chronic insecurity. These developments have profound implications for mental health, social cohesion, and the long-term sustainability of community structures.



This article argues that strengthening community psychological resilience is not merely a theoretical aspiration but an existential necessity. It proposes a structured, culturally informed program designed to enhance resilience at the individual, family, and community levels.

Theoretical Framework: Community Psychological Resilience

Community psychological resilience refers to a community's capacity to withstand adversity, adapt positively to threats, maintain essential social functions, and reorganize its resources to promote collective recovery. Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes resilience as a dynamic, multi-layered process rather than a static trait.

Core Pillars of Community Resilience

Resilience is grounded in several interdependent pillars, including:

- Mutual trust among community members and between the community and institutions.
- Social capital, including bonding, bridging, and linking networks.
- Reciprocal support and shared responsibility.
- A positive collective identity that fosters belonging and purpose.
- Active civic participation and engagement in public life.

Research demonstrates that investment in these pillars reduces psychological distress, enhances social stability, and supports sustainable development, particularly in communities exposed to chronic violence or structural marginalization.

Socio-Historical Context: The Rise of Organized Crime



The expansion of organized crime in the Arab Palestinian community cannot be understood without examining the broader socio-historical context. Over the past three decades, several structural shifts have converged to create fertile ground for the growth of criminal networks.

Origins and Structural Drivers of the Phenomenon

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, small groups involved in weapons and drug trafficking began to emerge, often linked to family disputes. A qualitative shift occurred after 2010, when hierarchical criminal organizations appeared, capitalizing on weak and inconsistent police presence in Arab towns, the widespread availability of illegal firearms, rising poverty and youth unemployment, and the erosion of traditional mechanisms of social regulation.

Consolidation into “Crime Families”

Over time, these networks evolved into powerful “crime families” that control extortion and protection rackets, debt collection outside legal frameworks, public tenders and local economic projects, weapons and drug markets, and usurious loan systems. Research estimates indicate that hundreds of millions of shekels circulate annually within these networks.

Escalation of Lethal Violence

The entrenchment of organized crime has resulted in unprecedented homicide rates. According to the Abraham Initiatives:

- 244 Arab victims were recorded in 2023.
- 255 victims were recorded in 2025, the highest number in Israel’s history.

These figures reflect a systemic crisis that transcends criminal activity and threatens the social fabric of the community.



Impact on Individuals

Individuals experience chronic fear, hypervigilance, and a persistent sense of vulnerability. Daily activities, such as opening a business or traveling at night, become potential risks. This environment contributes to anxiety and depressive disorders, post-traumatic stress symptoms, loss of personal agency, and diminished trust in institutions.

Impact on Families

Families face severe economic and emotional strain due to extortion, bereavement, or the recruitment of their children into criminal networks. These pressures lead to family fragmentation, reduced parental capacity, and forced helplessness or silent complicity.

Impact on Communities

Organized crime undermines community cohesion by eroding social solidarity, reducing civic participation, creating neighborhoods effectively controlled by criminal groups, and deepening distrust in state institutions, particularly the police.

Economic Impact

Extortion and protection rackets have caused closure of small businesses, withdrawal of investors, emergence of a shadow economy, and weakening of local economic resilience.

Impact on Collective Mental Health

Accumulated collective trauma has weakened the community's psychological resilience. The normalization of armed violence among youth poses long-term risks to identity formation and social stability.

The Structural Need for a Community-Driven Resilience Program



Given the limited governmental mobilization to address organized crime comprehensively and in culturally appropriate ways, a community-driven approach is essential. Resilience must be cultivated across three interconnected levels: individual (coping skills, emotional regulation, ethical decision-making, belonging), family (secure relationships, supportive communication, clear boundaries), and community (effective institutions, formal and informal support networks, anti-violence norms).

A multidisciplinary community team, comprising mental health professionals, educators, local authorities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations, is crucial for leading such an initiative. The High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel could assume this role, or alternatively, an independent multidisciplinary entity could be established.

Impact of Crimes on Palestinian Arab Women in Israel

Between 1980 and 2000, 85 victims were killed in the Arab community, averaging 4 victims per year. Between 2000 and 2020, the number rose to 1,600, averaging 80 victims per year. Between 2021 and 2026, 993 victims were recorded, averaging 198 victims per year. A Knesset study further indicates that approximately 143 Arab women were killed between 2015 and 2024.

These data show that women are victims both as those who were murdered and as those who became widows and bereaved mothers, some having lost a husband and more than one son due to organized crime.

Arab women in Israel have not merely participated in confronting violence; they have constituted the backbone of the broadest Arab social movement against violence in the past two decades. They have acted as leaders, organizers, healers, and influencers at every level. Their contributions include:

- Women's organizations specializing in violence (e.g., Women Against Violence, Siwar organization, and Kayan organization, which established hotlines and rapid-response teams).
- Protest movements (e.g., vigils at the entrances of Arab towns and in major Jewish cities, raising protest slogans).

Establishing local women's committees to combat violence.



- Therapeutic programs (for women at risk, survivors, bereaved mothers, widows, and their children).
- Public awareness campaigns.
- Political and legal advocacy (especially through specialized committees in the Israeli Knesset).
- Economic empowerment (through vocational training enabling victims to exit the cycle of violence).
- Youth and community initiatives aimed at prevention and protecting the younger generation.
- Direct confrontation with organized crime.
- Cultural and artistic activities aimed at preventing community violence and crime.

In confronting organized crime specifically, Arab women played key roles in exposing extortion and threats, as business-owning women revealed protection and extortion networks; leading anti-weapons campaigns, such as “We Want to Live” and “A Society Without Weapons”; supporting families of crime victims through legal accompaniment, psychological support, and memorial activities; and local initiatives to rebuild trust, including meetings between residents and police, youth anti-violence initiatives, and projects to revive public spaces.

The Proposed Comprehensive Program for Enhancing Community Psychological Resilience

Preventive and Developmental Components

- Establishing an emergency hotline providing parents with immediate consultations from legal experts, criminologists, and licensed mental health practitioners.



Assessing risk and protective factors among youth.



- Implementing resilience programs in schools and community centers.
- Creating alternative educational and vocational pathways for at-risk youth.
- Developing religious and ethical discourse tailored to youth.

Therapeutic and Rehabilitative Components

- Therapeutic and rehabilitative programs for youth involved in “crime families.”
- Individual and group psychological treatment, including home-visitation services.
- Social and legal accompaniment for delinquent youth and their families.

Family and Community Empowerment

- Programs to enhance parental skills.
- Culturally sensitive written and digital awareness materials.

Implementation requires a 6–12-month cycle for each target group, supported by volunteer engagement, private-sector contributions, and the integration of marginalized youth into the labor market. The program must align with the cultural values of the Arab community (Muslim, Christian, and Druze) and recognize the extended family as a central pillar of social reform. Constructive collaboration with the police is necessary where feasible.

Conclusion

The proliferation of organized crime poses an existential threat to the Arab Palestinian community in Israel. Strengthening community psychological resilience offers a strategic, culturally grounded pathway for confronting this crisis. The proposed program integra 

preventive, therapeutic, educational, and institutional interventions, emphasizing collective agency and multi-sectoral collaboration.

By investing in resilience, the community can restore its social fabric, protect its youth, and build a sustainable foundation for safety, dignity, and collective well-being.



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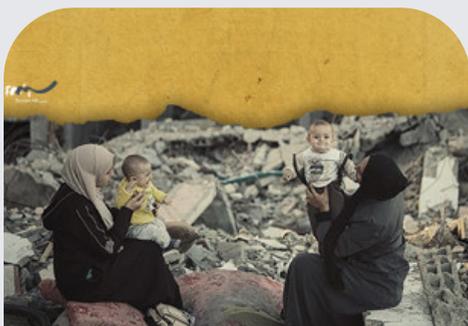
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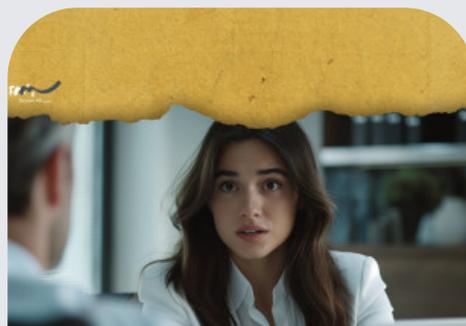


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