

An adaptation of the Arabic Communicative Development Inventory for monitoring early vocabulary development in Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon

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Abstract

This paper reports on early vocabulary development in Palestinian refugee children in Lebanon and compares their results with those of Palestinian children living in the West Bank. The work forms part of the Bulbul research project, which aims to reduce inequalities in early language and education opportunities in the Middle East. Given the scarcity of early language assessment tools for Arabic-speaking children, the Communicative Development Inventory (CDI) was adapted to various Arabic dialects (Abdelwahab et al, 2021) and used in stable and mass displacement contexts, enabling a direct comparison. In collaboration with the Women's Palestinian Programme, an NGO serving Palestinian camps in Lebanon, fieldworkers from within the communities were trained to support 201 families to fill the toddler version of the CDI (along with other questionnaires probing social and emotional wellbeing which are not reported on here). Comparable data in terms of age from 357 families in the Westbank were also obtained (Table 1).

Table 1: Samples of CDI toddler data collected from Palestinian families in Lebanon and the Westbank. Education scale is 0 to 8.

	N	age (in months)	% of girls	maternal education
Palestinian refugees	201	19.4 (6.3)	54.2	2.7 (1.6)
Palestinians in the West Bank	357	20.1 (6.7)	44.5	5.4 (1.4)

Results suggest that children from refugee backgrounds understand and produce fewer than in the West Bank. However, when gender and maternal education are entered into the model, the effect of context disappears; instead, maternal education predicts comprehension scores while gender predicts production scores. These results are crucial for identifying the key stakeholders for supporting children's early language development in crisis contexts. Given the mitigating role of maternal education, interventions are needed which increase formal and informal education opportunities for parents in displaced contexts, along with parent programmes which raise awareness of the importance of early oral language development and the role of the caregiver in these. We report on ongoing work to achieve both, in collaboration with NGOs.