



THE REALITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AMONG CHILDREN IN PALESTINE IN LIGHT OF THE WAR ON THE GAZA STRIP FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF PARENTS

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Palestinian Context:

The children of Palestine have endured unimaginable hardships through the current war – suffering from injury, disease, hunger, ruptures of social bonds, and the loss of loved ones and displacement. The deaths of children in Gaza have numbered, according to Oxfam, at least 11,000 in the year since October 7th (Oxfam, 2024).

- The worsening situation for children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, such as the increase in the rate of bombing and destruction is leading to a rise in the rate of trauma in children. Such situations present children with increased vulnerability to psychological trauma and a greater propensity to develop maladaptive patterns, a range of negative health outcomes, and diminished quality of life (UNICEF, 2005).





Study problem:

- The research problem asks **What is the reality of psychological trauma among children in Palestine in light of the war on the Gaza Strip?**





Research Objectives:

- This study seeks to identify the impact of challenges experienced by Gazan children because of this war, particularly among children aged 5-9 years old. The study aims to look at this dimension through the eyes of their parents/caregivers. The research problem is presented through the lens of the tumultuous political conditions experienced by the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.





Importance of the study:

- **Practical importance:** The findings will benefit decision-makers in the Ministry of Education in identifying the reality of psychological trauma in the kindergarten stage and the lower primary stage, and thus help in developing guidelines and strategies for these groups as well as being useful for kindergarten principals and primary school principals. It may also provide some recommendations and suggestions that will work to support the role of parents, teachers and counselors in how to deal with children at the time of trauma.
- **Theoretical importance:** The results will help to inform counseling practices and may be a knowledge base for subsequent studies. Finally, the results and recommendations may contribute to improving methods and practices for dealing with psychological trauma into the future



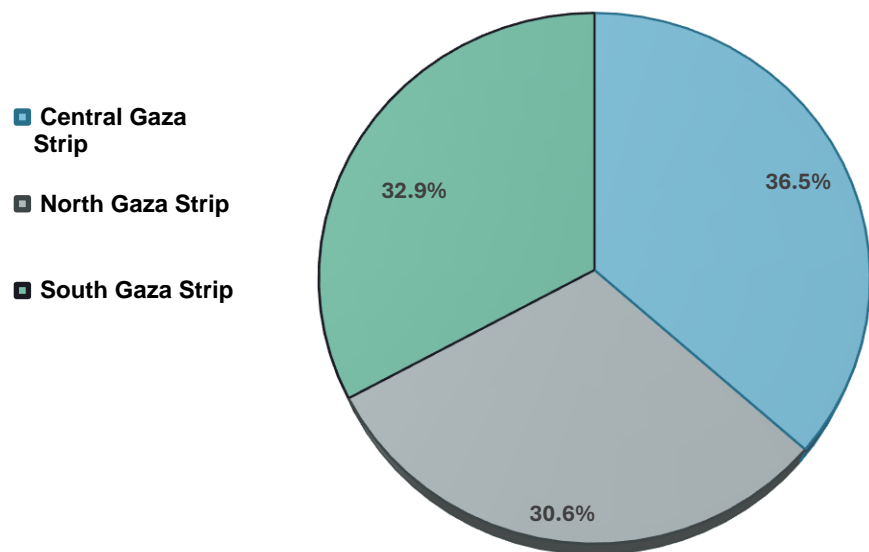


Study limitations

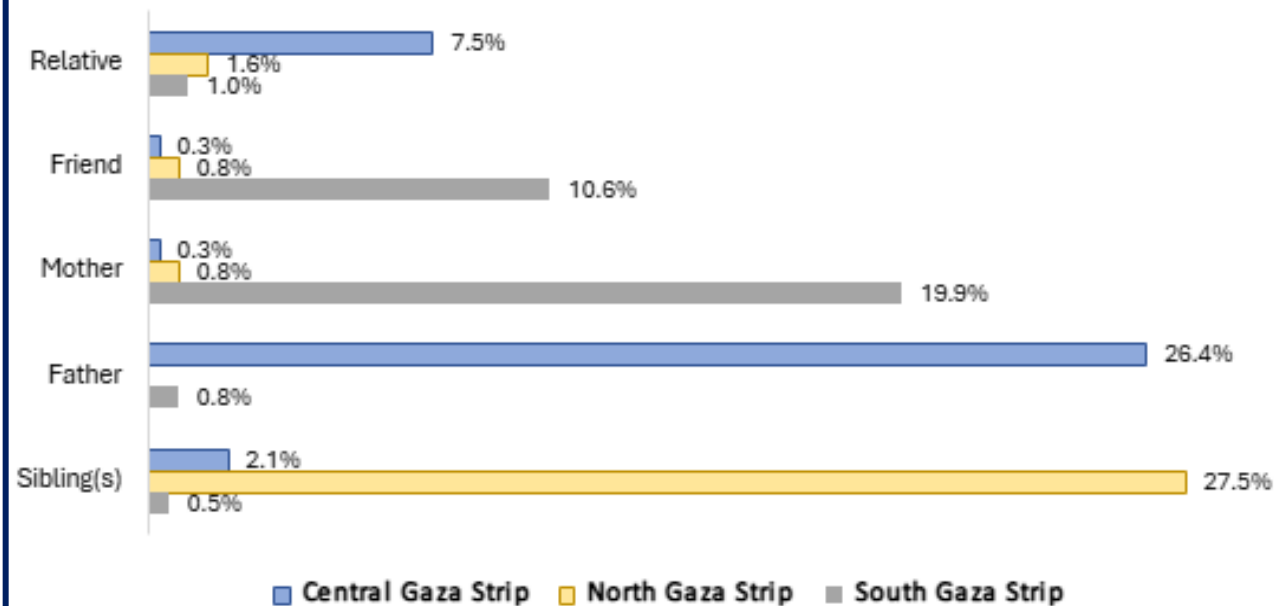
- **1.5.1 Objective limit:** The study was limited to identifying the reality of psychological trauma among Gazan children in light of the war on the Gaza Strip.
- **1.5.2 Conceptual limit:** limited to the terms and concepts contained in the study.
- **1.5.3 Procedural limit:** Limited to the use of the questionnaire, to collect data that determine the results of the study in light of the validity and stability of the scientific tool used.
- **1.5.4 Human limit:** The study was limited to children aged (5-9) years in the Gaza Strip, their number exceeded (284,458), based on the statistics of the Palestinian Central Agency for 2023 and the sample size obtained was 386 parents.
- **1.5.5 Spatial limit:** The study was limited to the Gaza Strip.”.
- **1.5.6 Time limit:** This study was carried out during the second half of 2024.
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Respondent by Region



Distribution of Respondent by Location





RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Research context

- The research was conducted under a state of active war, with bombings, devastation, death and absence of basic humanitarian necessities, such as food, water, power. This necessitated a change of strategy regarding data collection.
- **3.1.1 Study Sample Population:** The study population consisted of children aged (5-9) years in the Gaza Strip. The total population was 284458, the recommended sample size for that population would be 386 responses. The survey collected 386 responses.
- **3.1.2 Data collection tools:** Because of the challenging circumstances regarding Wi-Fi and power outages, interviewers were recruited who conducted in-person interviews with parents.
- **3.1.3 Survey:** The survey questions used in the interviews sought to elicit accurate information regarding the trauma effects being displayed by the children, as witnessed by parents and carers.





Analysis Methodology

- The Survey Responses were gathered and analysed using the SPSS Statistical Programme. Validity and reliability were assessed using recognized tools. The full SPSS report is in Appendix 1.





- The distributions of the study sample members were monitored according to the qualitative variables in the questionnaire, namely: age, gender, place of residence, number of family members, number of displacements. Some examples of the results are shown here, full results are in the appendix:
- The highest percentage of children are males, reaching 57.0%, while the percentage of females was 43.0%, 220 males to 166 females.
- The highest percentage of children are concentrated in the age group (5 - less than 6 years) by 35.8%, and in second place came children who are concentrated in the age group (8 - less than 9 years) by 28.2%.
- The majority of children in the study sample reside in the middle of the Gaza Strip by 36.5%, with the southern Gaza Strip in second place by 32.9%, and in third place came the northern Gaza Strip by 30.6%.
- The highest percentage of families have four or more children by 66.8%, in second place were the families with three children by 31.1%.
- The highest percentage of households were displaced three times, 49.0%; more than three times came in second place by 30.6%.





Narrative Impact on the children as reported by parents

- Parents were asked to provide examples of the types of trauma and its effects as experienced by the children. A large number of responses referred to the effects of noise, such as explosions, bombs, buildings collapsing, those sounds induced traumatic responses and in many cases hearing any loud noise would bring back the reaction, for example one child had *“Repeated panic attacks and screaming”*, and another *“Severe fear when hearing the sound of explosions, rapid heartbeat, and sudden screaming”*. Fear of death was prevalent, leading to sleep issues, for example through fear that the building would collapse on them whilst asleep, with one carer stating that the child was impacted by *“The death of the mother and father after the house collapsed on them”*.





Narrative Impact on the children as reported by parents

- One response described a strong trauma impact observation *“The trauma reflects the size of the unexpected accumulations the child is experiencing, which causes him to feel unable to express or deal with reality”*. Several responses described particular challenges facing children, these reflected the real horror of the situation, showing that children are witnessing situations that will be difficult to erase or manage in their memories, for example *“Seeing corpses and explosions in the area where we used to live before the displacement”* and especially *“Watching my brother as animals eat corpses during the displacement”*. (in: Excel Summary of Responses)





DATA ANALYSIS, AND RESULTS

4.1 Scale of Trauma

- The research question sought to establish the reality of the psychological trauma among children in Palestine. The results showed that the percentage of average parents' approval of the total score of the scale of psychological trauma among children in Palestine in light of the war on the Gaza Strip amounted to **87.32%**, this result indicates the high level of psychological trauma among these children. The highest degree was in accordance with statement No. (1), which states: **The cause of the child's trauma is exposure to direct or indirect shooting**, with a very high approval rate of 97.52%,; **The child has difficulty sleeping**, ranked second in approval with a rate of 95.93%, **the child's fears / of the dark** ranked third with a parental approval rate of 95.15%.
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- In the penultimate place came the statement **(the child feels upset and tantrums)** with an approval rate of 75.24%, and the statement **(the child's inability to express emotions)**, had an approval rate of 81.75%.





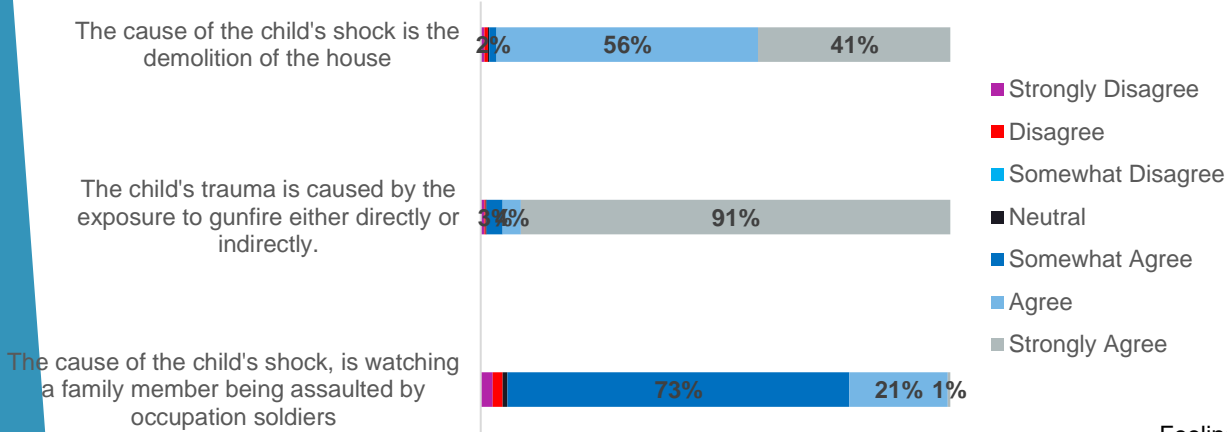
- The effect of variables including age, gender, place of residence, number of family members, number of displacements were examined, some examples of these show:
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- There are statistically significant differences between the average prevalence of psychological trauma among the sample of children due to gender variables, with a clear difference in favor of male children.
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- There are statistically significant differences between the average prevalence of psychological trauma among the sample of children in the Gaza Strip according to the age variable.



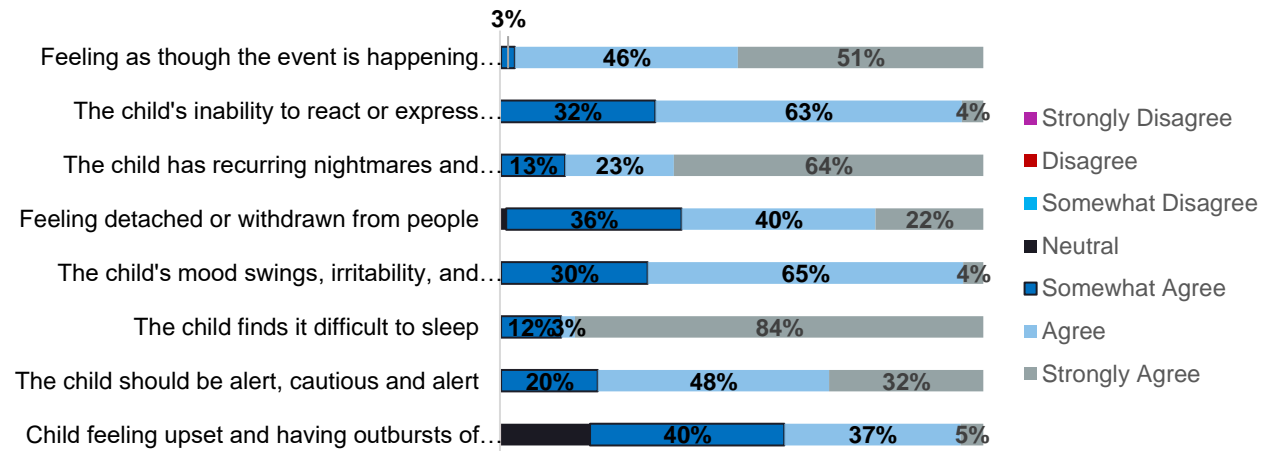


CAUSES AND FEELINGS RE TRAUMA

Cause of trauma



Feelings related to traumatic events

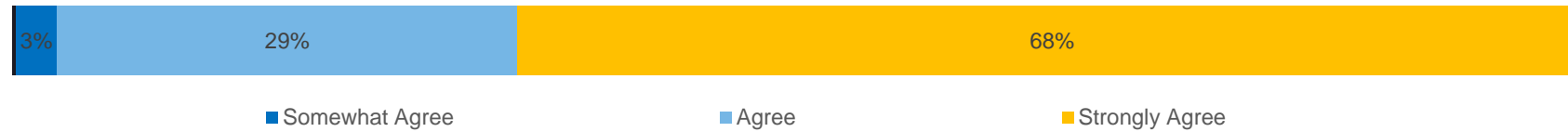




EXAMPLES OF ANALYSIS

- One concerning response in relation to PTSD is the strong majority of children feeling that they do not have a future and expecting bad things to happen

Child feels he does not have a future



The child is expecting bad things to happen





The effect of variables including age, gender, place of residence, number of family members, number of displacements were examined, some examples of these show:

- There are statistically significant differences between the average prevalence of psychological trauma among the sample of children due to gender variables, with a clear difference in favor of male children.
- There are statistically significant differences between the average prevalence of psychological trauma among the sample of children in the Gaza Strip according to the age variable.
- There were statistically significant differences between the average prevalence of psychological trauma according to place of residence. The source of the differences is between the category of place of residence (in the center of the Gaza Strip) and in the north and center of the Gaza Strip, and in favor of the residents of the central Gaza Strip. This could indicate increased instances of bombing in one region more than another.
- **For the variable of displacements there were also differences**, the main source of the differences is between the category **of the number of displacements** (twice) and each of the categories (three times) and (other) and in favor of the category (twice) (further figures in the appendix). Multiple displacements can be seen to be excessively disruptive for the families, especially the children, with the ensuing uncertainty and repeated losing of familiar surroundings and people.
- In summary, the parents included in the study sample, which consists of 386 parents, see to a high degree that there are many negative psychological, social and health effects on children in Gaza, , as a result of the war that has been going on in the Gaza Strip for more than a year.





Recommendations

- The findings of the survey indicate a serious level of trauma among the Gazan children. Recommendations fall into short-term mitigation measures, and longer-term actions, these will support educators, parents in responding to the needs of the children in their care, they will also and importantly offer ideas to enable professional counsellors and therapists to gain detailed knowledge and experience. In addition, it is vital that policy makers prioritise this area, both through provision of adequate mental health supports, and supportive educational tools and activities in the relevant settings, whether school or kindergarten.





Recommended Actions

- Bring this report to the attention of decision makers
- Develop Training Courses for kindergarten staff on becoming Trauma Aware
- Develop training for kindergarten staff on play-based mitigating activities
- Develop training courses for primary school teachers on becoming trauma aware
- Develop training courses for teachers on appropriate mitigating measures in the classroom
- Develop parenting supports to help deal with trauma in children with ideas for activities and how to get support
- Develop resources for kindergarten staff, teachers and parents on communicating on difficult topics, such as discussing death.
- Plan for grief counselling for families and children, with counselling also in schools (as also suggested by Shaeen and Attia, 2024)
- Repeat this survey after six months/one year to determine the longer term impact and to identify the comparative statistics after a period of time.
- Use the data collected to conduct further studies on the variables identified.





In Conclusion

The researchers pay tribute to the parents and families that responded to this survey under such arduous circumstances. It is hoped that the recommendations will be implemented, as soon as possible, enabling these children to begin to heal from the trauma.





Thank You!

Date

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