

# The Psychological Impact of Conflicts on Education in Palestine: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Keywords

Psychological Conflict

Education in Palestine

Psychological Support in Schools

## Abstract

This article addresses the challenges faced by the education system in Palestine due to the ongoing conflict and the impact of these challenges on the psychological health of students and educators. It reviews the psychological and social effects of the conflicts, relying on previous studies that highlight issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, which negatively affect academic performance and students' well-being.

The article emphasizes the necessity of integrating mental health services into the educational framework as a fundamental solution to confront these challenges. It points to the importance of enhancing students' psychological and emotional resilience through programs such as group counseling, trauma-informed teacher training, and accessible psychological services.

Additionally, the article highlights the importance of community-based approaches and educational initiatives that promote community involvement, contributing to the creation of a sustainable educational environment. It also emphasizes the role of peace education as a means to foster a culture of understanding and conflict resolution and suggests utilizing technology and alternative learning platforms to ensure the continuity of education during crises.

The article concludes by presenting a set of recommendations that include enhancing mental health support in schools, encouraging community initiatives, implementing peace education programs, and supporting government-level policies, which contribute to strengthening the stability of education in Palestine and achieving its educational and psychological goals.

It asserts that education should remain a tool for transformation and empowerment and stresses the importance of coordinated efforts among all stakeholders to ensure a better future for upcoming generations amid the challenging circumstances facing Palestine.

## 1. Introduction

The ongoing conflicts in Palestine, including occupation and repeated wars, have created an unstable educational environment filled with psychological and social challenges for both students and teachers. Education in these areas is significantly influenced by economic, social, and political factors associated with the conflict, which hinders the educational process and adversely affects the mental health of students. According to Baba et al. (2024), armed conflicts deteriorate educational sustainability, rendering schools incapable of delivering effective education due to a lack of resources and infrastructure. A study by Abudayya et al. (2023) revealed that youth in Gaza suffer from severe psychological effects, such as anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which significantly impair their ability to focus and learn. Similarly, Kayyali (2024) highlighted that schools in refugee camps serve as safe gathering points but often lack adequate psychological support. Education in Palestine is not merely a tool for knowledge transfer but a vital mechanism for psychological and social resilience in the face of conflict.

Continuous exposure to violence and conflict leaves long-term psychological effects on children and youth, hindering their educational and psychological development. Students in conflict zones often experience disorders such as difficulty concentrating, anxiety, and learning challenges. El-Khodary & Samara (2020) found that repeated exposure to violence increases the likelihood of psychological and behavioral problems among Palestinian children. Similarly, Veronese et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of social support in fostering psychological resilience among children and youth. Education, when supported with appropriate psychological and social services, can serve as a pathway to healing and enhance educational performance.

Analyzing the psychological impact of conflicts on Palestinian education is critical to understanding the obstacles faced by students and teachers in achieving sustainable educational goals. Education in conflict zones can play a dual role: providing a safe environment for learning and helping students cope with the psychological pressures caused by conflicts. Karmakar (2022) argued that education can empower youth to overcome psychological trauma, enhancing

their social participation and personal development. Abdelaziz (2018) emphasized the importance of providing psychological support in schools to improve the quality of education and mitigate negative psychological effects.

This study aims to analyze the psychological impact of conflicts on education in Palestine by exploring the relationship between psychological trauma and academic performance. It also seeks to understand how conflicts affect the mental health of students and teachers, offering a deeper insight into the challenges faced by the educational process in conflict-affected areas. Furthermore, the study intends to propose effective educational and psychological strategies to address these challenges. These strategies are designed to support mental health and enhance academic performance while providing recommendations for developing an educational and psychological framework that fosters resilience and stability in such challenging environments.

The study provides both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it offers important insights into the relationship between education and conflict from the perspective of educational psychology. It highlights the role of education not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a crucial tool for fostering psychological and social resilience among students and teachers in conflict zones. Practically, the study focuses on improving the quality of education and psychological support in areas of conflict. It emphasizes the importance of designing interventions that address the unique needs of Palestinian students, aiming to create a supportive environment where education becomes a source of healing and empowerment despite ongoing challenges.

## 2. Methods

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize and analyze existing research on the psychological impact of conflicts on education in Palestine. This approach enables the identification of recurring themes, research gaps, and evidence-based recommendations, without the collection of primary data.

The research relied on a comprehensive review of the available literature addressing the impact of conflicts on education and mental health in Palestine. This review included several key elements. Firstly, peer-reviewed academic research formed the foundation of the study. Articles published in reputable journals such as *Frontiers in Psychiatry* and *PLOS ONE* were analyzed. These studies explored the psychological and social dimensions of conflicts and their influence on educational performance and mental well-being. For instance, El-Khodary & Samara (2020) provided a detailed analysis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Palestinian children and its correlation with their educational outcomes.

Secondly, international reports were an integral component of the literature review. Reports from organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Health Organization (WHO) offered both qualitative and quantitative data about the state of education and mental health in conflict-affected areas like Palestine. For example, UNICEF reports provided a comprehensive overview of how ongoing violence in Gaza impacts children's access to education.

Additionally, comparative studies from other conflict-affected regions, such as Syria and Iraq, were examined to create a broader contextual framework. These studies helped identify strategies that have been effective in addressing similar challenges elsewhere. A notable example is Karmakar (2022), which reviewed psychological support mechanisms for students in war-torn areas and their potential application in Palestinian contexts.

The study's data sources were diverse and included academic databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, and ERIC, ensuring access to the most relevant and recent research. Keywords such as "Education in Palestine," "Psychological impact of conflicts on education," and "Trauma and education in Gaza" were used to locate pertinent studies. Furthermore, reports from international organizations like UNICEF and WHO were instrumental in providing critical insights into the intersection of mental health and education in conflict zones. Gray literature, such as field reports and unpublished case studies, enriched the analysis by offering a ground-level perspective on the challenges faced by Palestinian schools and students.

The methodology for the literature review followed a systematic approach. Relevant studies were identified using well-defined search criteria, prioritizing research published in the past decade to ensure the findings were up to date while also including foundational references where necessary. Studies were included if they were published between 2013 and 2024, focused on Palestine or similar conflict-affected settings, and provided empirical or theoretical insights into the intersection of education and mental health. Articles that lacked peer review or focused solely on political dimensions without psychological or educational analysis were excluded.

The literature was analyzed using thematic analysis, categorizing studies based on key themes, including the psychological impact of conflict on students (such as trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and depression), the effects on academic performance (such as concentration difficulties, dropout rates, and learning disruptions), social and community influences (such as the role of family support and school environments), and interventions and coping mechanisms (including policies, school-based mental health programs, and psychosocial support strategies). Thematic coding was applied to ensure a structured comparison of key findings across multiple sources.

A comparative analysis was conducted to identify patterns, gaps, and inconsistencies across studies. The study also examined case studies and intervention strategies to propose best practices for improving education in Palestine.

Despite its comprehensive approach, this study has some limitations. The lack of primary data means that the findings rely entirely on secondary data sources, which may not fully capture the lived experiences of students and educators in Palestine. Additionally, findings from other conflict zones may not always be directly applicable due to unique socio-political factors specific to Palestine. Furthermore, some studies may be biased due to limited access to field-based research in conflict areas.

However, despite these limitations, this review provides a comprehensive synthesis of existing knowledge and contributes to understanding the intersection between education, mental health, and conflict in Palestine. By synthesizing diverse perspectives and empirical findings, the study offers critical insights into the challenges faced by students and educators and presents evidence-based recommendations for improving educational and psychological support systems in conflict-affected environments.

### 3. Result and Discussion

The education system in Palestine operates under extraordinary strain due to prolonged conflict, creating a multifaceted crisis affecting both students and teachers. Recurring violence, infrastructure destruction, and socio-political instability have led to severe disruptions in the educational process. Schools, traditionally perceived as safe spaces for learning, are now burdened with challenges that undermine their fundamental purpose. The psychological impact of war on Palestinian children is profound and pervasive. El-Khodary and Samara (2020) highlight that exposure to trauma caused by violent conflicts results in significant mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders. These challenges compromise students' ability to focus, retain information, and engage with their studies. The psychological toll is further compounded by a lack of access to adequate mental health resources, leaving many children unsupported in their struggle to cope with the effects of war.

The ongoing conflict has also led to frequent interruptions in the educational calendar. Students face extended periods of school closures due to security risks, with many educational institutions suffering from physical damage caused by airstrikes or ground attacks. According to Forsberg et al. (2023), the absence of consistent schooling environments not only disrupts the continuity of education but also contributes to a sense of instability and insecurity among students, further hampering their academic performance. Another significant challenge is the erosion of social structures that support education. Khamis (2015) underscores that family and community dynamics are often destabilized in conflict zones, limiting the support that students receive at home. This breakdown in social cohesion exacerbates feelings of isolation among

children and weakens their capacity for resilience, a critical factor in navigating the challenges of conflict-affected education.

Higher education in Palestine faces similar obstacles, as noted by Kayyali (2024). University students are particularly vulnerable to the economic and psychological effects of conflict, which can disrupt their academic pursuits. Many face additional responsibilities at home due to the economic strain on their families, forcing them to prioritize survival over education. Furthermore, universities often lack the infrastructure and resources necessary to meet the needs of students coping with trauma and displacement. Despite these challenges, some students exhibit remarkable resilience. Thabet et al. (2015) identify cases where individuals demonstrate a capacity to adapt and grow despite experiencing traumatic events. However, this resilience is not universal, and the long-term psychological burden carried by many students poses a substantial threat to the future of education in Palestine.

The overall quality of education is also affected by the constant uncertainty created by the conflict. Veronese et al. (2018) observe that students in Gaza often struggle with maintaining their focus and motivation, as the ever-present threat of violence creates a pervasive sense of fear and instability. This psychological stress negatively impacts not only academic outcomes but also broader aspects of child development, such as social interaction and emotional well-being. In summary, the current situation of education in Palestine is shaped by the interplay of psychological, infrastructural, and social challenges brought about by conflict. These factors create an environment where students and educators alike must navigate extraordinary difficulties, often with limited resources and support. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges the systemic nature of the crisis and prioritizes the integration of psychological, educational, and social interventions.

The education system in Palestine faces immense challenges due to the prolonged and multifaceted conflict, which directly impacts the mental health and well-being of students and educators. Economic, political, and social deprivations exacerbate the psychological strain on students, limiting their ability to focus on learning and compromising their educational outcomes. As highlighted by Hammoudeh et al. (2022), economic, political, and food deprivation act as critical determinants of mental health in the occupied Palestinian territory, indirectly influencing the educational environment by intensifying stress levels among students and reducing their capacity to engage effectively with their studies.

The ongoing mental health crisis in Gaza, as described by Taha et al. (2024), is a direct consequence of displacement, violence, and social instability. This crisis has created an urgent need for mental health resources that are integrated into educational systems to support the emotional and academic well-being of children. Such resources are vital in mitigating the long-term psychological effects of conflict, which often manifest in reduced academic motivation, higher dropout rates, and lower cognitive engagement. Integrated mental health services within schools have been proposed as a solution to address barriers to learning in conflict zones. Ogenchuk (2016) emphasizes the role of school-based mental health services in providing tailored interventions for students, which could help mitigate the adverse effects of trauma and enhance their ability to thrive academically. These interventions, however, are not yet systematically implemented in Palestinian schools, leaving a significant gap in addressing the mental health challenges faced by students.

Dabbagh and Al-Uzri (2023) further stress the importance of developing a national strategy for child and adolescent mental health in Palestine, highlighting the need for coordinated efforts to meet the psychological and educational needs of children affected by protracted conflict. The resilience of Palestinian refugee children is deeply affected by poverty, violence, and marginalization, which amplify their mental health challenges and constrain their educational opportunities. Wilson et al. (2021) note that these stressors hinder the children's ability to build coping mechanisms, leaving them vulnerable to both psychological and academic difficulties. Furthermore, exposure to violence and political insecurity diminishes human security, eroding access to educational resources and creating an environment of uncertainty and fear that disrupts the learning process (Rabaia et al., 2010).

The impact of conflict extends beyond students to their families, particularly women who often bear the brunt of displacement and loss. According to Thabet and Mousa (2009), Palestinian women face significant mental health challenges due to trauma, which not only affects their own well-being but also limits their ability to provide educational support to their children. Addressing these systemic issues requires acknowledging the broader socio-political context that perpetuates mental health challenges. As Giacaman et al. (2011) argue, political oppression is a root cause of mental distress among Palestinians, and addressing this distress is essential for creating sustainable public mental health systems that can support education and resilience.

The stigma associated with seeking mental health services also poses a barrier to effectively addressing the educational challenges faced by students. Abo-Rass et al. (2023) highlight that stigma, along with attitudinal and instrumental barriers, limits the utilization of mental health services among Palestinian-Arabs. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for improving mental health outcomes, which in turn could enhance educational performance. Additionally, as Jürges and Schwarz (2015) explain, the cognitive development of Palestinian children is impaired by the cumulative effects of violence and conflict, further demonstrating the need for psychiatric counseling integrated within educational systems to support both psychological recovery and academic success.

These interconnected issues create a complex landscape in which mental health challenges and educational barriers reinforce each other. Without addressing the systemic causes of psychological distress and integrating comprehensive mental health services into educational frameworks, the prospects for improving educational outcomes in Palestine remain severely constrained.

#### 4. Conclusion

The ongoing conflict in Palestine has significantly disrupted the education system, deeply affecting students' psychological well-being and academic outcomes. The history and political implications of the Israeli siege on Gaza have created systemic barriers to education, as highlighted by Hussein et al. (2024). The structural and political challenges faced by the Palestinian education system exacerbate the mental and emotional toll on students and educators, necessitating integrated solutions that address both the psychological and educational needs of learners.

The integration of mental health services into the educational framework is an essential component of these solutions. Studies such as Tashcheva et al. (2023) and Kondirolli and Sunder (2022) emphasize that fostering psychological resilience and emotional intelligence among students can significantly improve academic performance and overall well-being. Initiatives like group counseling, teacher training in trauma-informed care, and accessible psychological services are critical to achieving this goal.

Additionally, fostering resilience through community and school-based frameworks is crucial. As noted by Massad et al. (2018), community-driven approaches to education that incorporate psychosocial support are vital for creating a sustainable educational environment. Similarly, leveraging innovative platforms like online learning and distance education ensures continuity of education during periods of crisis, as demonstrated in the findings of Zinchenko et al. (2022).

Peace education and experiential learning also provide transformative pathways for addressing the root causes of conflict while equipping students with tools for conflict resolution and societal rebuilding. Williamson (2024) and Bekerman (2020) highlight how peace education fosters a culture of understanding and reconciliation, laying the groundwork for sustainable societal harmony.

By adopting these multifaceted strategies, stakeholders can address the critical challenges facing education in conflict zones like Palestine. Through the integration of mental health services, community-based resilience frameworks, and innovative educational approaches, the Palestinian education system can provide a supportive environment that

enables students to thrive academically and emotionally despite the challenges of conflict. This comprehensive approach ensures that education remains a transformative tool for empowerment, resilience, and long-term societal stability.

## 5. Recommendations

To address the challenges of education and mental health in conflict zones, particularly in Palestine, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhancing Mental Health Support in Schools**  
Integrating mental health services into educational systems is essential for mitigating trauma and fostering resilience. Programs such as trauma-focused psychosocial interventions and psychoeducation have shown significant benefits in improving mental well-being and academic outcomes (El-Khodary & Samara, 2020; Schultz et al., 2016). Schools should: Provide continuous training for teachers to adopt trauma-informed practices. Establish counseling and support centers within schools to offer immediate assistance to students (Altawil et al., 2018). Incorporate culturally tailored mental health interventions to ensure acceptance and effectiveness (Rockowitz et al., 2024).
2. **Promoting Community-Based Education Initiatives**  
Involving communities in educational planning and implementation can enhance resilience and ensure sustainability. Community participation fosters a sense of ownership and addresses localized needs (Constandinides et al., 2011; Jen et al., 2016). Recommendations include: Establishing local education committees to monitor and support school operations during crises. Implementing community-driven activities, such as group learning and parent-teacher engagement programs, to strengthen social cohesion.
3. **Implementing Peace Education Programs**  
Peace education is a vital tool for promoting conflict resolution and fostering a culture of understanding. Curricula focusing on empathy, nonviolence, and critical thinking should be integrated into educational systems. Studies by Robertson (2023) and Karmakar (2022) highlight the transformative potential of peace education in conflict zones. Specific actions include: Training educators to deliver peace education effectively. Incorporating experiential learning approaches to help students analyze and address the root causes of conflict (Vostanis, 2009).
4. **Leveraging Technology and Alternative Learning Platforms**  
To ensure continuity of education during disruptions, digital tools and alternative delivery methods should be expanded. Distance learning programs can bridge gaps caused by access barriers and physical risks in conflict zones (Zinchenko et al., 2022). Recommendations include: Providing students with access to technology and internet connectivity. Developing digital curricula that include psychosocial support and conflict resolution modules.
5. **Policy-Level Support and Resource Allocation**  
Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should collaborate to create supportive policies and allocate adequate resources for education and mental health in conflict zones (Abu-Ras et al., 2024; Ilyas, 2022). Recommendations include: Establishing partnerships between local and international stakeholders to pool resources. Monitoring and evaluating interventions to refine strategies and improve outcomes.
6. **Fostering Resilience through Cultural and Psychosocial Adaptations**  
Programs tailored to the cultural and social contexts of affected communities are essential for ensuring effectiveness and sustainability (Mahamid & Veronese, 2021; García Calderón & Rosero Prado, 2024). Schools should: Develop interventions that respect local traditions and values. Promote resilience-building activities, such as art therapy and storytelling, to help students process trauma and rebuild their sense of self. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create a holistic and inclusive educational framework that not only addresses immediate challenges but also lays the foundation for long-term resilience and societal stability in conflict-affected regions.

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