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**Examining Trauma Exposure, Post-Traumatic Stress
Disorder Symptoms, Anxiety, Depression and Coping
Strategies among Early Adolescents Affected by War in
Jenin Refugee Camp, Palestine**

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Examining Trauma Exposure, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms, Anxiety, Depression and Coping Strategies among Early Adolescent Affected by War in Jenin Refugee Camp, Palestine

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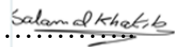
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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, whose unwavering support, patience, and encouragement have been the cornerstone of my academic and personal journey. Their presence in my life has been a constant source of strength and motivation, enabling me to persevere through challenges and remain committed to my goals.

I extend my deepest gratitude to my beloved mother, whose prayers, compassion, and unconditional love have continually surrounded me and sustained me throughout this journey. Her faith in me has been a source of comfort and resilience in the most demanding moments.

My profound appreciation is also devoted to my father, whose guidance, wisdom, and sacrifices have illuminated my path, much like a candle that dispels darkness. His steadfast support and belief in my abilities have shaped both my character and my aspirations, and I would not be who I am today without him.

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Abeer Gh. Nazzal

Declaration

I certify that this thesis submitted for the Degree of Master, is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this study (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for a higher to any other university or institution.

Signed:..........

Abeer Ghassan Mohammad Nazzal

Date: 10/ 1 /2026

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Abstract

Background: Early adolescents living in war zones are exposed to chronic and cumulative traumatic stressors that place them at high risk for psychological distress. Palestinian children residing in Jenin Refugee Camp have experienced repeated military incursions, forced displacement, and ongoing instability.

Objectives: This study aimed to examine trauma exposure, post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD symptoms, anxiety, depression and coping strategies among early adolescent aged 10-14-year-old affected by war in Jenin Refugee Camp, Palestine.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive-correlation design was employed using a purposive homogeneous sample of displaced children aged 10–14 years residing in Arab American University-Palestine AAUP temporary shelters. Data were collected between June 10 and September 10, 2025, using a war-related traumatic events checklist, the BIRLS Depression Self-Rating Scale, the Spence Self-Rating Anxiety Scale, a (DSM-5-TR) based PTSD assessment, and the Brief-COPE Scale. Descriptive statistics, inferential analyses, and post-hoc Tukey tests were conducted.

Results: Early adolescent reported extremely high exposure to war-related traumatic events, particularly jet-fighter sonic sounds (99.1%), forced displacement (99.1%), and viewing images of injured or killed individuals through media (95.2%). High levels of depression ($M = 67.43$), anxiety ($M = 65.79$), and PTSD ($M = 60.02$) were observed. Intrusion was the most severe PTSD symptom cluster, followed by arousal and reactivity, negative cognitions and mood, and avoidance. Coping levels were high, with predominant emotion-focused and avoidance-based strategies, including self-distraction, venting, religious coping, active coping, and planning. Significant associations were found between intrusion and self-distraction, and between avoidance and positive reframing and humor. Sociodemographic differences emerged across several coping strategies, higher denial among children with fathers of lower educational levels, higher behavioral disengagement among children of employed mothers, higher positive reframing among older children (12–14 years) and higher self-blame among children from larger families and those with more highly educated mothers

Conclusion: Palestinian early adolescents demonstrate remarkable coping efforts. However, persistent war-related trauma exposure within an oppressive ecological system limits the protective capacity of these strategies, resulting in high levels of psychological distress.

Keywords: Early adolescents, war-related trauma, PTSD, anxiety, depression, coping strategies, Jenin Refugee Camp

Table of content

Declaration.....	I
Acknowledgment.....	II
Abstract.....	III
Table of content.....	IV
List of tables	VI
List of figures	VI
Chapter one.....	1
Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	2
1.3 Significance of the Study.....	3
1.4 Aim of the study	4
1.5 Objectives of the study	4
1.6 Research Questions	5
1.7 Statistical Hypothesis	6
Chapter Two	7
Literature Review and Conceptual Framework.....	7
2.1 Definition of Terms	7
2.1 Introduction	9
2.2 The Protracted Crisis in the West Bank: Jenin as an Epicenter of Escalation.....	9
2.3 The Mental Health Impacts: Documenting the Psychological Toll	10
2.4 Conceptual Framework: The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping in Context...	11
2.5 The Global Context of Child Mental Health in War	13
2.6 The Palestinian Reality: Chronic Trauma and Conceptual Challenges.....	13
2.7 Review of Key Studies	14
2.8 Synthesis, Gap Analysis, and Justification for the Current Study.....	17
Chapter Three	18
Methodology:	18
3.1 Introduction:	18
3.2 Study Design	18
3.3 The Study Population	18
3.4 Study Sample.....	18
3.5 Data Collection Procedure.....	20
3.6 Period of the Study	20
3.7 Instruments of the study	20
3.8 Data Recoding	23
3.9 Statistical Methods	24
3.10 Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire.....	25
3.11 Normality test of the Study Variables	25
3.12 Eligibility criteria.....	32
3.13 Ethical Consideration	32
3.14 Limitation of the study	33

Chapter Four	34
Result:	34
4.1 Traumatic Events	34
4.2 Mental health disorders among children who have been exposed to trauma in Jenin...36	36
4.3 Coping strategies used by Palestinian children to deal with traumatic experiences.41	41
4.4 Relationships between Exposure to Traumatic Events and Mental Health Symptoms.45	45
4.5 Relationships between Coping Strategies and Mental Health Symptoms.....46	46
4.6 Differences in Trauma Exposure According to Socio-demographic Variables51	51
4.7 Differences in Anxiety According to Socio-demographic Variables.....51	51
4.8 Differences in Depression According to Socio-demographic Variables.....52	52
4.9 Differences in PTSD According to Socio-demographic Variables.....53	53
4.10 Differences in Coping According to Socio-demographic Variables.....54	54
4.11 Additional analysis:	55
Chapter five	64
Discussion.....	64
5.1 introduction.....	64
5.2 Methodological Considerations.....	64
5.3 Trauma Exposure.....	65
5.4 Anxiety Outcomes	65
5.5 Depression Outcomes	65
5.6 PTSD Outcomes	66
5.7 Coping Strategies.....	67
5.8 Family-Centered Fear and Responsibility in Palestinian Children’s Trauma	67
5.9 Conclusion.....	72
5.10 Recommendation:	73
5.11 Suggested research studies	74
References	75

List of Tables.

Table 3.1. Severity Levels for the Study Scales.....	24
Table 3.2: Cronbach's alpha coefficients.....	25
Table 3.3: Normality tests, and Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients.....	26
Table 3.4: Socio Demographic Variables (N=105).....	27
Table 4.1: War Gaza Traumatic Events (N=105).....	35
Table 4.2: Feeling of safety toward traumatic events (N=105).....	36
Table 4.3: Anxiety Scale among children who have been exposed to trauma in Jenin Refugee Camp (N=105).	37
Table 4.4: Depression among children who have been exposed to trauma in Jenin Refugee Camp (N=105).....	41
Table 4.5-A: PTSD among children who have been exposed to trauma in Jenin (N=105). ..	40
Table 4.5-B: PTSD among children who have been exposed to trauma in Jenin (N=105)....	41
Table 4.6-A: Coping strategies used by Palestinian children to deal with traumatic experiences (N=105).	43
Table 4.6-B: Coping strategies used by Palestinian children to deal with traumatic experiences (N=105).	44
Table 4.7: Pearson Correlations between Exposure to Traumatic Events and the Mental Health Symptoms.	46
Table 4.8: Pearson Correlations between Coping Strategies and the Mental Health Symptoms.	50
Table 4.9-A: Differences in Trauma Exposure According to Socio-demographic variables.	51
Table 4.9-B: Differences in Trauma Exposure According to Socio-demographic variables.	50
Table 4.10: Tukey Pairwise Comparisons for differences in Trauma Exposure based on the number of siblings.	50
Table 4.11: Differences in Anxiety According to Socio-demographic variables.....	51
Table 4.12: Differences in Depression According to Socio-demographic variables.	52
Table 4.13: Differences in PTSD According to Socio-demographic variables.....	53
Table 4.14: Differences in Coping According to Socio-demographic Variables.....	54
Table 4.15: Differences in Denial Subscale According to Fathers' Education.....	55
Table 4.16: Tukey Pairwise Comparisons for Differences in Denial Subscale According to Fathers' Education.	55
Table 4.17: Differences in Behavioral Disengagement Subscale According to Mothers' Employment	56
Table 4.18: Differences in Positive Reframing Subscale According to Age	56
Table 4.19: LSD Pairwise Comparisons for differences in Positive Reframing subscale according to Age.....	56
Table 4.21: Tukey Pairwise Comparisons for differences in Self-Blame Subscale According to Number of Siblings and Mothers' Education.....	60

List of figures

Figure 3.1 The Distribution of the Age	28
Figure 3.2 The Distribution of the Gender	28
Figure 3.3 The Distribution of Number of Siblings	30
Figure 3.4 The Distribution of Mothers' Education	30
Figure 3.5 The Distribution of Fathers' Education.....	30
Figure 3.6 The Distribution of Mothers' Employment.....	30
Figure 3.7 The Distribution of Fathers' Employment	31
Figure 3.8 The Distribution of Family Monthly Income.....	31
Figure 4.1 Percentage Means of Coping Strategies.....	45

List of Annexes

Consent Form-Parents	83
Consent Form-Child	85
Sociodemographic Status Questionnaire	86
War Gaza Traumatic Event Checklist Abd-Alaziz Thabit	87
Spence Children's Anxiety Scale - Short Version (SCAS-S)	89
Depression Self-Rating Scale for Children	90
The UCLA PTSD Reaction Index for DSM-5.....	91
Brief-Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief-COPE)	93
Data regarding the number of population size	95
Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at Al-Quds University prior to the commencement of data collection.....	96

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Background

Armed conflict constitutes a severe global public health crisis, with children and adolescents consistently identified as its most vulnerable victims. For Palestinian youth living in the West Bank, exposure to violence is not a historical event but a continuous and lived reality. While the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has understandably dominated international attention, this focus has contributed to a relative geographical imbalance in the literature. As a result, the escalating crisis in the West Bank—particularly in areas of intense military confrontation such as Jenin—remains under-examined despite its profound and ongoing impact on children’s mental health.

Carpiniello (2023) reports that children are the most vulnerable to war and have a two to three times higher prevalence rate of developing depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, children are at risk of developing behavioral and emotional symptoms, psychosomatic symptoms, and play and sleep disturbance (Slone & Mann, 2016). Moreover, Aqtam et al. (2025) conducted a study among 1148 Palestinian children aged 8-15 years, result shows that 70% of children developed severe mental health problems post the October 7, 2023 war

Following October 7, 2023, a marked “spillover effect” of violence into the West Bank was documented, characterized by intensified military operations, home demolitions, and mass displacement (War Child et al., 2025). The Jenin governorate emerged as a central epicenter of this escalation. In 2023 alone, 506 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, with 2023 and 2024 representing record years for child fatalities (Save the Children, 2023; UNICEF, 2024). Repeated military incursions into Jenin Refugee Camp have displaced thousands of residents and severely damaged approximately 150–180 homes, producing an environment marked by instability, loss, and persistent fear (UN OCHA, 2025).

Pakman (2006) defines the spillover effect as the psychological spillover that takes place when, after a temporary process of tension accumulation, it reaches such an intensity that the equilibrium is broken and the homeostatic mechanisms are saturated, experiencing an emotional overflow because of this cumulative process.

Beyond direct exposure to armed violence, Palestinian children in Jenin endure chronic, war-related stressors, including restrictive checkpoints, frequent home invasions, economic deprivation, and disrupted access to education and healthcare. Together, these conditions constitute a sustained high-pressure environment in which military incursions, forced displacement, mobility restrictions, and economic insecurity interact to erode psychological well-being. The Palestinian Ministry of Health (2023) estimates that nearly one million individuals in the occupied Palestinian territory require mental health support, the majority of whom are children and adolescents.

This psychological burden is particularly concerning for early adolescents aged 10–14 years, a critical developmental stage characterized by rapid emotional, cognitive, and identity formation. Exposure to chronic trauma during this sensitive period can disrupt emotional regulation, self-concept development, and coping capacities, increasing vulnerability to long-term mental health disorders (Kassa et al., 2024). Existing empirical evidence consistently reports elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression among Palestinian children exposed to political violence (e.g., det al., 2024).

However, despite robust documentation of psychological symptoms, much of the existing literature remains predominantly pathology-focused, emphasizing distress outcomes while offering limited exploration of how children actively cope with and adapt to chronic adversity. Although previous work has highlighted the potential protective role of family cohesion, faith, and community solidarity (Thabet, 2017), integrated empirical data examining coping strategies alongside mental health symptoms—particularly among early adolescents living in high-risk environments such as the West Bank—remain scarce. This limitation constrains the development of culturally responsive mental health and psychosocial interventions, especially within pediatric and community nursing practice.

To address this gap, the present study employs a descriptive-correlation design to examine early adolescents aged 10–14 years residing in the Jenin Refugee Camp. The study quantifies exposure to recent war-related traumatic events, measures symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression, and identifies the coping strategies employed by this population. By integrating mental health symptoms with coping processes, the study seeks to generate evidence that can inform nursing-led, culturally sensitive mental health and psychosocial support programs tailored to war-affected children especially within Palestinian context.

1.2 Problem Statement

Current research on Palestinian child mental health remains geographically unbalanced and conceptually limited. While extensive studies conducted in Gaza document severe psychological distress among children exposed to war (e.g., Albelbeisi et al., 2024), the escalating and sustained crisis in the West Bank—particularly in recurrent sites of military

violence such as Jenin Refugee Camp—has received comparatively limited empirical attention. As a result, the specific mental health experiences of early adolescents living in this context, who are exposed to cumulative trauma amid repeated military incursions, displacement, and economic collapse, are insufficiently understood.

Moreover, the dominant research paradigm in Palestinian child mental health is largely deficit-oriented, prioritizing the assessment of mental health symptoms—namely PTSD, anxiety, and depression—while giving limited attention to how children actively cope with chronic adversity. Although the present study also assessed these psychological symptoms, it did so in order to contextualize them within a broader framework that foregrounds children’s coping strategies and adaptive responses to prolonged trauma.

The absence of integrated empirical evidence on both psychological symptoms and coping mechanisms has direct consequences for nursing practice and intervention design. Pediatric and community nurses, school health programs, and psychosocial service providers are often required to design and implement mental health interventions in the absence of context-specific data on early adolescent’s coping capacities. Consequently, interventions risk being symptom-focused, culturally disconnected, and insufficiently tailored to the lived realities of early adolescents in refugee camp settings, thereby limiting their effectiveness and sustainability.

Therefore, the core research problem addressed in this study is the lack of an integrated, empirical understanding of both war-related trauma exposure and active coping mechanisms among early adolescents aged 10–14 years in Jenin Refugee Camp. Addressing this gap is essential to inform nursing-led, mental health and psychosocial interventions that move beyond symptom reduction to strengthen coping capacities and support long-term psychological well-being in war-affected early adolescent.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical empirical and applied gap in the literature on early adolescents’ mental health in war-affected settings. Its significance is articulated through two complementary dimensions: scientific significance and practical significance, with particular emphasis on implications for pediatric and community nursing practice.

Scientific Significance

Scientifically, this study advances current knowledge by moving beyond a purely deficit-based approach that focuses exclusively on psychological symptoms. By integrating the assessment of war-related psychopathology (PTSD, anxiety, and depression) with an empirical examination of active coping strategies, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of psychological adaptation under conditions of continuous traumatic stress. This integrated approach responds to recent calls in the literature for more context-specific and developmentally sensitive research, particularly in under-researched areas of the West Bank such as Jenin Refugee Camp (Albelbeisi et al., 2024; Schöler et al., 2024).