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ABSTRACT

The Impact of Online Learning on the Physical, Mental, and Academic Well-Being of University Students during the 2023 – 2024 War in Palestine

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Background: The 2023–2024 war in Palestine forced university students to shift to online learning, imposing unprecedented challenges that affected their physical health, mental well-being, and academic performance. This study explores these impacts and examines how adaptability and institutional support influenced outcomes.

Methods: This cross-sectional study surveyed 721 university students across 11 Palestinian institutions using a structured, 23-item questionnaire. The instrument assessed demographics, academic concerns, and health impacts, with sections on adaptability, institutional response, and physical and mental health effects. Data were collected via online platforms and analyzed for descriptive trends and relational insights.

Results: The study revealed that 65.1% of participants experienced negative mental health effects, including increased stress, anxiety, and loneliness. Female students expressed greater concerns about family safety (66.7%), mental health (60.6%), and physical health (52.7%) compared to male students (p -value < 0.001). Physical health issues, such as sleep disturbances (reported sometimes by 24.1% and often by 35.7%) and exhaustion (reported sometimes by 21.1% and often by 37.9%),

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were prevalent. Institutional support varied significantly; Polytechnic University received the highest rating for adaptability (70.6% effective), while Hebron University was rated the least effective (22.6% effective). Adaptability also differed across disciplines (p -value = 0.01), with advanced studies students demonstrating higher adaptability (72.7%) than medical students (25%). Academic performance was adversely affected, with 45.5% of students reporting concentration difficulties and 43.8% expressing concerns about graduation delays.

Conclusion: Online learning provided necessary educational continuity but posed severe challenges for students' well-being and academic success. These findings highlight the critical need for tailored institutional support, enhanced adaptability strategies, and systemic measures to mitigate the impacts of crises on education.