

**Deanship of Graduate Studies  
Al-Quds University**



**Anxiety and Depression among Orphaned Children  
in Gaza Strip**

**Ahmad Own Al Sawaf**

**MPH Thesis**

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**Anxiety and Depression among Orphaned Children  
in Gaza Strip**

Prepared By

**Ahmad Own Al Sawaf**

Bachelor of Nursing- Islamic University of Gaza  
Palestine

**Supervisor: Professor Fadel Abu Hain**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Community  
Mental Health**

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Al-Quds University



## Thesis Approval

### Anxiety and Depression among Orphaned Children in Gaza Strip

Prepared By: Ahmad Own Al Sawaf

Registration No.: 21213006

Supervisor: Professor Fadel Abu Hain

Master thesis submitted and accepted. Date: 4/4/2016

The names of signatures of the examining committee members are as follows:

1. Dr. Prof. Fadel Abu Hain
2. Dr. Prof. Abdelaziz Thabet
3. Dr. Samir Qouta

Head of committee

Internal examiner

External examiner

*[Handwritten signatures]*  
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.....  
.....

Jerusalem – Palestine

1437 / 2016

## Declaration

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

## Signature:



Ahmad al Sawaf



## **Dedication**

To my father and my mother who gave me the energy to continue my study ...

To my dear wife. Thank you for giving me the support, I needed .

To my brothers and my sisters ...

I appreciate all the encouragement and support you gave me during my study.

Special thanks to my colleagues who supported me to have this work being accomplished.

To all friends and to everyone who contributed to get this study done.

To the orphaned children in Palestine.

Thank you

Ahmad Al Sawaf

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>AICS</b>	Al-Salah Islamic Charitable Society
<b>AIO</b>	Al-Amal Institute for Orphans
<b>APA</b>	American Psychiatric Association
<b>ASCC</b>	Australian Safety and Compensation Council
<b>CBR</b>	Crude Birth Rate
<b>CDR</b>	Crude Death Rate
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GS</b>	Gaza Strip
<b>MDs</b>	Mental Disorders
<b>MH</b>	Mental Health
<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>OC</b>	Orphaned Children
<b>NGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>PASSIA</b>	Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs
<b>PCBS</b>	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
<b>PHC</b>	Primary Health Care
<b>PTSD</b>	Post Traumatic Stress Disorders
<b>UNAIDS</b>	United Nations Program on HIV and AIDS
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN-OCHA</b>	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the Palestinian Refugees
<b>WB</b>	West Bank
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



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## Chapter One

### 1.1 Introduction

The Gaza Strip (GS) with its complicated situation as a result of three wars between 2009 – 2014, which caused mass destruction of infrastructure facilities, homes, and thousands of deaths, injuries and disabilities. These wars had a catastrophic effect on the health and wellbeing of the people and long-term physical and psychological harm to the people in GS. Furthermore, the internal political conflict between the main two political parties (Fateh and Hamas) which was accompanied by armed violence, adding to that the siege imposed against GS resulted in very hard life conditions on all the classes of the GS society, adding to that many families left without parents as a result of the three wars.

The loss of a parent is an overwhelming event that will provoke negative impact on family members, especially children. When a child experiences the death of a parent, the emotional trauma can be devastating, as the life span progresses and the individual reaches adulthood, the psychological and interpersonal consequences of the loss may manifest in long-term mental health problems, and that the aspects of the family environment, such as quality of parental care and relationship with the surviving parent, are important in affecting long-term psychological reactions following parental loss (Nickerson et al., 2013).

The family is the first socializing institutions of the society. Within the family, the child learns the social norms and values, and becomes capable of having relations with the other members of the society. Psychologists agree that children with secure attachments to their parents have better chances to develop into happy, successful, and well-adjusted adults. Parents encourage their children to investigate the world, manipulate objects, and explore

psychological consequences of orphanhood, such as anxiety, sense of failure, pessimism, and suicidal tendency (Makame et al., 2002). Furthermore, a study conducted in Uganda found much higher levels of anxiety, depression and anger among orphans than among non-orphans (Atwine et al., 2005).

In this study, the researcher is going to examine the mental health problems (anxiety, and depression) among orphans who are placed in Al-Amal Institute for Orphans (AIO) in Gaza city and orphans who are attending the school of Al-Salah Islamic Charitable Society in Der Al Balah (AICS) in relation to some variables (gender, age, level of education, type of orphan, school achievement, cause of parents' death), and the results that will be obtained will highlight the psychological status of orphans and will be a guide for interventions to improve the psychological status of orphans.

## **1.2 Research problem**

Orphaned children (OC) continue to be an international problem with millions of children worldwide being orphaned or made vulnerable by wars and conflicts. Large and growing numbers of OC are a worldwide concern because they may face many hardships during childhood including a decline in health, nutrition, and psychological well-being. Baaroy and Webb, (2008) reported that orphans suffer higher level of psychosocial problems than their non-orphan peers, in particular, maternal and double orphans are more likely to experience behavioral and emotional difficulties, suffer abuse and low rate of trusting relationships.

AIO is the main institution that provide shelter, education, and other social services to OC in Gaza Strip, while AICS provides education and social support for orphans who are living with one of their parents, brothers, or relatives. Thabet et al., (2007) conducted a study in Gaza among OC found that 49% of them had depression and 28.5%



had anxiety. The focus of the present study is to further investigate the mental status of OC.

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

The death of one or both parents has a profound and lifelong impact on the psychological wellbeing of children that may increase the risk of unresolved or complicated bereavement because of their developmental vulnerability and emotional dependency. Recently, there has a growing international interest in research on orphans (Pivnick and Villegas, 2000; Cluver et al, 2007; Atwine et al., 2005; Andrews et al., 2006; Doku, 2009). In GS, with the complicated surrounding life as a consequence of the long siege and frequent wars that resulted in increase the number of OC, in addition to the poor economic status and increase the rate of inflation and poverty, which added extra difficulties and challenges to people living in GS. These difficulties would increase the risk for developing psychological disturbances for the whole population included OC. Thus, this study tries to explore the mental health status of the OC who are residing in orphanage and those who are living with their family and to use the findings to put strategies that may help in decreasing the level of mental disorders among those children.

### **1.4 General objective**

The general objective of the study is to examine the level of anxiety and depression among orphaned children in Gaza Strip.

### **1.5 Specific objectives**

- To find the prevalence of anxiety among orphaned children in Gaza Strip.
- To identify the prevalence of depression among orphaned children in Gaza Strip.

- To examine the relationship between anxiety and selected sociodemographic variables (gender, age, level of education, governorate, type of orphan, cause of parents' death).
- To examine the relationship between depression and selected sociodemographic variables (gender, age, level of education, governorate, type of orphan, cause of parents' death).

### **1.6 Questions of the study**

- What is the level of anxiety among orphaned children in Gaza Strip?
- What is the level of depression among orphaned children in Gaza Strip?
- Is there a relationship between anxiety and selected sociodemographic variables (gender, age, level of education, governorate, type of orphan, cause of parents' death)?
- Is there a relationship between depression and selected sociodemographic variables (gender, age, level of education, governorate, type of orphan, cause of parents' death)?



## **1.7 Context of the study**

### **1.7.1 Demographic context**

Historical Palestine is a small country, its area about 26,323 sq. km. Gaza Strip (GS) is a narrow band of land located on the south of Palestine, constituting the coastal zone of the Palestinian territory along the Mediterranean Sea between Egypt and Israel. It is 45 Kilometres long and 6-12 Kilometres wide with an area of 365 sq. km (PASSIA, 2008).

At the end of December 2013 total population of Palestinians globally was 11,806,735 divided as follows: 4,485,459 in Palestine (2,754,722 in WB and 1,730,737 in GS), 1,430,212 inside the green line, 5,225,776 in Arab countries, and 665,288 in foreign countries. The population density (capita/km<sup>2</sup>) is 745 in Palestine (847 in WB and 4,742 in GS) (PCBS, 2014). The Crude Birth Rate (CBR) in the Palestinian territory estimated to be about 32.6/1000 population in 2013 (29.7/1000 in WB and 37.1/1000 in GS), and the Crude Death Rate (CDR) in Palestine was estimated about 3.8 /1000 live birth (4.0 /1000 in WB and 3.7 /1000 in GS) (PCBS, 2013).

### **1.7.2 Socioeconomic context**

The Palestinian economy is under increased pressure to create decent and productive jobs, reduce poverty and provide economic security on an equal basis for all social groups in a rapidly growing and urbanizing population. The three wars against GS in the past six years with demolition of houses and mass destruction of infrastructure and economic facilities added extra pressure on the weak economy of GS. These circumstances increased the poverty rate to higher levels in GS than in WB (18% in WB and 39% in GS) (PCBS, 2012). Furthermore, the strict siege led to loss of jobs and increase inflation, and unemployment rate among Gaza's population estimated at 31% of population, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is estimated to be 6,797.3 million US Dollar (USD) (5,030.5 in WB and 1,766.8 in GS) and GDP per capita estimated to be 1,679.3 USD (2,093.3 in WB

and 1,074.5 in GS) (PCBS, 2013). The people in GS has experienced a decline in living conditions due to the closures and blockade, with deteriorating infrastructure and poor quality of vital services such as health, shelter, education, and water and sanitation. About 54% of Gazans are food insecure and a further 12% are vulnerable to food insecurity (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – UN-OCHA, 2012).

### **1.7.3 Al Amal Institute for Orphans (AIO)**

AIO was established on 1949 after the Nakba on 1948 as the vast majority of Palestinians were enforced to leave their original cities and villages by the Israeli military forces. At the beginning the institution offered shelter to male orphaned children and on 1956 started to accept female OC.

The institution offers shelter, comprehensive family-like care in different aspects including social, psychological, educational, health, and food, and the OC reside in the institution consider the institution their home. The total number of OC residing in the institution is 100 children aged between 5 – 18 years old. The total number of employees is 40 ones with different specialties and trained on working with orphans. Recently, the institution established kindergarten for small OC before going to school. The institution get help from many charity institutions and donors locally and internationally, and the estimated monthly expenses around 100,000 \$ monthly (<http://www.al-amal.ps>).

### **1.7.4 Al-Salah Islamic Charitable Society (AICS)**

AICS is a charitable institution was established on 1978. The AICS aims to support and enable the Palestinian community in different aspects, spiritually, emotionally, socially, and educational support for the poor and orphaned families in GS. Between 1999 – 2000, AICS established two schools in Der Al-Balah on a land around 5000 m<sup>2</sup>, one school for boys and one for girls that offer free education and health support to OC. The schools are