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ABSTRACT

Mental Health of Palestinian Undergraduates during the War on Gaza: A Cross-Sectional Study on CPTSD, Resilience, and General Mental Health.

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Background: Direct and indirect war-related stressors have a significant impact on mental health, leading to an increased prevalence of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). There is limited literature on complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) in active war zones, particularly in Palestine. Moreover, little is known about the mental health distress among students who have experienced severe social crises like war.

Objectives: This study aimed to investigate the mental health of undergraduate students in Palestine during the 2023/2024 Gaza war, with a focus on CPTSD, psychological distress, resilience, and stress-coping strategies.

Methods: A cross-sectional framework was conducted from February 10 to March 6, 2024. Data was collected through an online self-administered survey using validated



measurement scales: the International Trauma Questionnaire, General Health Questionnaire-12, and the 10-item Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale.

Results: A total of 807 respondents from various regions of Palestine participated in the survey, with an average age of 20 years. Among the participants, 75% were females. The most common stress-coping mechanism reported was "praying to God for help." Additionally, the findings revealed that 76% of students experienced severe distress levels, while only 31% exhibited high resilience levels. In terms of ITQ results, approximately half of the students met the criteria for PTSD symptoms diagnosis and 26% have CPTSD. Females showed significantly higher distress scores ($P=0.004$), PTSD score ($P=0.007$) and lower resilience score ($P=0.04$) than males. Moreover, students residing in the Green Line territories, then Jenin, and Tulkarem, demonstrated a higher level of distress and CPTSD score, compared to those in other regions.

In conclusion, the study sheds light on the significant prevalence of distress among Undergraduate students in Palestine. The majority of respondents have severe distress levels and relatively low resilience. According to the findings, 51% of the participants have PTSD, and 26% have CPTSD.

Keywords: War, CPTSD, PTSD, resilience, well-being, mental health, Palestine, Undergraduate students, coping strategies.