

Master of Public Health

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**Effect of Al-Aqsa Intifada Psychic Trauma on School
Performance among Preparatory School Children in
Gaza Strip**

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Abstract

The over all aim of this study was to assess the relationship between psychic trauma and school performance among preparatory school children in Gaza Strip.

A cross sectional study was carried out at eight governmental and United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) preparatory schools in Gaza Strip.

Data was collected through indirect method using a structural interviewed questionnaire and reviewing school records. trauma was classified to three levels mild, moderate and severe according to Gaza Traumatic Chick list , if child have 0-4 traumatic events consider as mild trauma , 5-10 items consider as moderate trauma , more than 10 items consider as severe trauma , the most traumatic events was watching martyrs and injured people on TV, which rated 96.9% of study sample . After that the researcher study the prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder which was 71.2% among the study sample developed PTSD.

School performance was assessed by getting scores in Math, Arabic language, and total average in the first half of scholastic year. Concentration, attention and participation in class activities. Results showed that 19.7% of study sample exposed to mild trauma, 72.4% of them exposed to moderate trauma and 7.9% of the study sample exposed to severe trauma. 71.2 % of the study sample developed post traumatic stress disorder. And there is a positive relation and association between trauma, PTSD and school performance.

Conclusion: there is a positive association between trauma, PTSD and school performance, this association was demonstrated through lower means of scores in Math, Arabic language and total average of children after the Intifada events than before it.

ملخص الدراسة

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى اختبار العلاقة بين الصدمة النفسية الناتجة عن أحداث انتفاضة الأقصى والتحصيل الدراسي عند طلاب المرحلة الإعدادية في قطاع غزة.

الأهداف الخاصة

- 1- معرفة مدى انتشار الصدمة النفسية بين طلاب المرحلة الإعدادية.
- 2- فحص العلاقة بين الصدمة النفسية والخبرة الصادمة.
- 3- معاينة العلاقة بين حدة الصدمة النفسية والتحصيل الدراسي.
- 4- فحص العلاقة بين الخبرة الصادمة والتحصيل الدراسي.

منهجية الدراسة

هذه الدراسة هي دراسة وصفية تحليلية درست تلاميذ المدارس بصورة مقطعية.

عينة الدراسة

تكونت الدراسة من خمسمائة طفل تم اختيارهم بصورة عشوائية متعددة المراحل من ثمانية مدارس إعدادية موزعة على محافظات غزة وشمال غزة والوسطى وهي مدارس حكومية وتابعة لوكالة الغوث.

جمع المعلومات

جمعت المعلومات بطريقة غير مباشرة عن طريق استبانة خاصة من إعداد الباحث لجمع المعلومات الجغرافية والديمغرافية واستبانة الصدمة النفسية والخبرة الصادمة والتحصيل الدراسي وتم الرجوع إلى ملفات الطلبة للحصول على معدلاتهم في المواد الدراسية. وقد تم فحص صدق وثبات الاستبانة من الناحية العلمية والعملية من قبل محكمين بالإضافة إلى تطبيقها على عينة أولية.

النتائج

أظهرت النتائج أن الصدمة النفسية هي حالة شائعة بين الأطفال وقد تعرض لها جميع أفراد العينة بنسب متفاوتة فكان 19.7% من أفراد العينة قد تعرضوا لصدمة خفيفة في حين أن 72.4% قد تعرضوا لصدمة متوسطة وكان 7.9% قد تعرضوا لصدمة شديدة. كما أظهرت النتائج أن 71.2% من أفراد العينة طوروا خبرات صادمة وأظهرت النتائج أيضا وجود علاقة وارتباط إيجابي بين الصدمة النفسية والخبرة الصادمة من جهة مع التحصيل الدراسي.

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INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian people live in a very difficult and hard condition in all sides of life, political, economic, social and psychological.

Since 1948 when Israeli forces occupied Palestine and established Israel as independent country, most of Palestinian people were uprooted and live in refugees' camps in Gaza Strip, West Bank, and neighbor countries. The problem was more complex when military Israeli occupation captured Gaza Strip and West Bank in 1967.

In 1987, the Intifada started against the military Israeli occupation in Gaza Strip and West Bank. Children were the part active in the core events of the Intifada and came to known as “the children of the stones” (Quota, 2000).

When the current Intifada “AL-Aqsa Intifada” uprising in September 2000, it opened a dramatic new chapter in the Palestinian –Israeli conflict with for reaching psychological, political, and socio-economic consequences.

The Israeli aggression was so obvious in this Intifada, because they used all harsh methods of treating of Palestinian; they have including military plans against civilian building which is surrounding a lot of popular building that lead to high number of killed and injured people.

Big number of children living in Gaza Strip has been directly experienced physical or psychological violence or they may have witnessed it directed toward their families and neighbors.

On the other hand, learning disabilities are abroad term that covers a pool of possible causes and it considered one of the indicative clues, which reflects the cognitive abilities of a child.

In this study the researcher intends to test a hypothetical prediction about the relationship between trauma and school performance among middle school children in Gaza Strip.

BACKGROUND

The geographic location:

Gaza Strip is an essential part of historical Palestine, which is located at the meeting point of the old world

area between Palestine and the rest of Asham' s territory from one side and Egypt and rest of Africa from another side.

area is about 365km; this part goes along the east-southern shore and the Mediterranean Sea for about 45km with slight inclination to the west from north south with a width of 6 12km.

the Israeli side control about 40% of the total area of Gaza Strip in the form of settlements. Gaza Strip is rounded from east and north by the 1948 occupied area, Mediterranean Sea from west and Sinai from south.

Gaza Strip geographic surface is nearly straight with no in the world about more geographic complexities with slight variation from one site to another, where the average height from the sea level is about 40-50m. Abu-Auda and Alquba hills at Rafah are considered the highest areas in Gaza Strip and about 104m above the sea level.

Demography:

Gaza Strip is considered one of the heavily populated areas 2000\ km and this basically is due to the following reasons: -

1. The narrow and constricted area of this part due to the extensive Israeli security measures and control of about 40%of its area by Israeli Settlements.
2. The influx of thousands of refugees to this area after the war of 1948.
3. The natural increment of population, which is comparatively high.
4. The return of thousands of Palestinian after the establishment of Palestinian National Authority in 1994.

year of 2001. (Palestinian central bureau of statistics 2003).

Justification of the study

No one can deny that Palestinian community is full of traumatic events, especially in the last three years, so Palestinian people are on high risk for many psycho-social problems.

The most common people affected by these situations are the children, which will affect on all life sides including school performance.

Many of the children had low school performance level, we started to observe them to put my hand on the causes of the deterioration in their school performance, we noted many signs and symptoms of trauma on them, for example grief, irritability, fear, nightmares, difficulty concentrating and startle response. So we decided to do this study and my hypothesis is that there is a relationship between psychological trauma and school performance.

The researcher hopes that this study high lighten the way for more researches to find possible relation between other psychological problems with the school performance and to be useful for the next generation.

Objectives: -

General objectives

To assess the effect of trauma on school performance as one of the indicators for cognitive abilities among middle school children in Gaza Strip.

Specific objectives

1. To measure the prevalence of psychic trauma among middle school children in Gaza Strip.
2. To assess relationship between psychic trauma and PTSD.

3. To assess the relationship between the severity of psychological trauma and school performance.
4. To assess relationship between PTSD and school performance.
5. To provide recommendations and conclusions regarding the problem of psychological trauma among middle school children.

Research Questions:

The study addresses the following questions: -

1. What are the type and the severity of psychic trauma among middle school children in Gaza Strip?
2. What is the proportion of low school performance among middle school children in Gaza Strip?
3. Is there an association between psychological trauma and low school performance?
4. Is there a relationship between PTSD and school performance?
5. Is there a relationship between trauma and PTSD?
6. Is there a relation ship between socio-economic status of the family and PTSD

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess a possible relationship between traumatic events of the AL-Aqsa Intifada on school performance among preparatory school children in Gaza Strip.

Across- sectional design was used to accomplish this mission.

It is worth noting that, this study considers as pioneer in this field in Palestine, which investigates the current Intifada events and its consequences in the psychological trend, and its effects on school performance.

Trauma, and post traumatic stress disorder reactions were not only a psychological problems, but it is political, economical, and social in its origins.

general conditions in the area.

The total sample that participate in the study was 500 preparatory school children from three governorates of Gaza Strip , with respond rate of 94% , this highly response rate was expected related to many factors , such as the strong self motivation, high encouragement of school head masters and teachers , and the current political situations which give the children the real and internal

motivation to participate and to express their psychological feelings , and troubles , note that these feelings not only for children but for all Palestinian people due to daily stressors and terrorism from the occupation .

Comprehensive review of the local, regional, and international recent and ancient literatures was done, and demonstrated about the problem of trauma, post traumatic stress disorder and the impact of school performance, most literature appeared a positive relationship between the variables (trauma, PTSD, and school performance), as we mentioned before this study consider a pioneer in this field in Palestine, but there is some studies and articles which touch this issue in some parts.

Result of the study revealed that all sample's children traumatized in different levels and the most common traumatic events were ,watching pictures of martyrs and injured persons on TV , then hearing of invasions , and the results revealed that 71.2% of the sample children developed PTSD.

The result showed that there is a positive relation ship and between traumas, post traumatic stress disorder and school performance.

There was a relationship between demographic residency, families' monthly income, and parent's education level to trauma and post traumatic stress disorder reactions. The main findings of this issue were that the children who live in mid zone or on north Gaza more vulnerable to have trauma and develop PTSD , and children who have educated parents less vulnerable to develop PTSD .

6.2 Recommendations

It is obvious from this study and other studies that children are highly vulnerable to have post traumatic stress disorder reactions, as well as other population categories, as a result of direct and indirect exposure to traumatic events.

This problem was more complex during Al-Aqsa Intifada and they are in great need for immediate interventions.

So on the light of these results we recommend of the following:

First: internationally

As the Israeli occupation and its aggressive practices is the main direct cause of Palestinian people suffering, so, we ask the international associations and human rights organizations especially the united nations to do their best to stop and finish the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands and protect the civilians during the time of war, which has many negative effects in all fields of life even though it was social, psychological or economical.

Second: Arabian field

We ask the official and national Arab public opinion to continue supporting to the Palestinian nation, by saving the political, social and commercial support.

Third: locally

- 1- We must exert our efforts to increase the social solidarity by visiting the
to face their faith after they lost their bread winners through all social and human
rights associations all over the state.
- 2- Holding directive public courses, especially for parents to explain how to deal
with problems, which appear early and recognize the unfamiliar behaviors.
- 3- Distributing psycho directive associations and programs all over the
governorates and focus on the areas which face the oppression of the occupation.
- 4-Exerting efforts to obtain a free directive phone line works day and night to
give advice direction and reply the public questions.
- 5- Intensifying informational activity in different national and governmental
broad casting stations to present psycho and social rehabilitation programs.
- 6- Publishing regular leaflets through associations and centers which concern
with psych and social sides and distribute it for every person as possible.
- 7- Activating the role of the associations which concern with this field by
opening new branches as much as they can all over the governorates.
- 8- We ask the ministry of education to do the best to deal with this issue and to
activate the teachers and psychologists who work in MoE to discover any
behavioral problems in the students.