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Mental Health in Schools

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Background: There have been several mental health quantitative researches over the years. Most came to the conclusion that the primary cause of mental distress and depression among Palestinians is due to the high exposure to violence due to occupation practices in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, the stigma around mental health illness in the Palestinian community, and the lack of highly educated and experienced mental health nurses and practitioners cause many Palestinians to refrain from seeking professional help in most cases. Many studies also indicated the lack of qualitative research regarding the topic and the necessity of this type of research, along with the many available quantitative researches on the topic, to establish a sustainable support system.

Objectives: This study aims to investigate the mental health awareness, integration, and situation specifically in Palestinian middle and high school.

Methods: Several interviews were booked up with multiple schools from different regions in Palestine., with school principals, social advisors, and students. Questions were asked concerning, first, the background of each participant (age, gender, level of education, governorate, residence, and work), and second, concerning mental health.

Results: There are a number of interviews left that are scheduled for a soon time, and would further add to the richness of these results.

Most participants defined mental health as a form or shape of depression or negative mental state. Most students and teachers indicated that mental health is extremely important, and affects a



person's efficiency and feelings and perception of themselves. Most also said that schools do not have a clear assessment of the students' mental health. Most of the factors listed included a variety of influences from the home, to the school environment, and peers, but many singled out school load work, and assignments. Many of the participants believed that there is no defined or accessible system that students can approach to seek professional help when they need it, and that teachers specifically need to be aware of the students' mental health, and that their teaching methods should also accommodate the students' conditions. Most participants believed mental health should be introduced to parents and teachers to help them better understand and support their students and children. However, several indicated that having this as a scholarly curriculum will restrict the flexible process of learning about mental health and coping with it, and recommended introducing it in a creative way. Some thought it should be introduced at a young age, and some recommended middle/ high school.

Conclusion: This study supports many of the previous quantitative researches concerned with this topic, however it provides important insights beyond the statistics and evaluations of the mental health situation in schools. It highlights the opinions of those most concerned with the topic, school faculty and students.

It is evident that a well-structured support system needs to be established in schools, taking into consideration the political, economic, and cultural situation in Palestinian schools, and taking a creative approach that would accommodate different ages, interests, and environments.

Keywords: Mental Health, Middle/High School, Palestine.