

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



**The Relationship Between War Trauma and Mental  
Health Problems Among Secondary School Students in  
Gaza Strip**

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**MPH Thesis**

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**The Relationship Between War Trauma and Mental  
Health Problems Among Secondary School Students in  
Gaza Strip**

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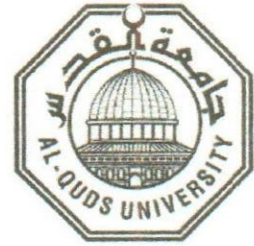
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### Thesis Approval

## The Relationship Between War Trauma and Mental Health Problems Among Secondary School Students in Gaza Strip

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Jerusalem- Palestine

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قَالَ رَبُّ الشَّمْسِ لِيَوْمِ مَعْرَجِهِ \* وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي \* وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ ذُو انْتِقَامٍ \* وَيَقُولُ

قَوْلِي

مَعْرَجِ اللَّهِ الْعَمَلِيِّ ص 25-28

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work for

My Mother and Father for their support

My Husband Sameh for his Patience and precious support

My children Huda, Noor, Raghad, Amal, and Mahmood.

My friends , relatives, and everybody who encourage me to finish this hard work.

All Palestinian martyrs who sacrificed their lives for freedom.

Declaration

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

Signed... *Hana' Qeshta*

Hana' Qeshta

Date: *9/11* / 2015

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Without my husband dedication I would never dare to think of standing where I am. My Husband thanks for dedicating your time to me. Thanks for your encouragement, support, and extraordinary patience.

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## **Abstract**

The study aimed to investigate the relationship between war trauma and mental health problems (traumatic events, PTSD, anxiety and depression) among secondary school students in Gaza Strip. The study sample consisted of 408 secondary school students (204 boys and 204 girls). The researcher used descriptive –analytical design to demonstrate the relationship between the study variables, for this purpose the researcher used socio-demographic questionnaire; traumatic events scale due to war by Thabet, 2009; PTSD scale Arabic version by Thabet, 2008; Depression Self-Rating Scale For Children by Birlson et al 1987; and The Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale RCMAS by Thabet, 2014.

The results showed that the most common traumatic experiences reported by children were: watching mutilated bodies in TV (93.1%), hearing shelling of the area by artillery (92.4%), hearing the loud voice of drones (90.4%), , forced to leave you home with family members due to shelling (67.6%), and Inhalation of bad smells due to bombardment (67.6%).

The results showed that the most common anxiety symptoms reported by adolescents were : I get nervous when things do not go the right way for me (82.1%), I worry about what is going to happen (64.5%), It is hard to keep my mind on my school work (46.6%), I worry about what other people think about me (46.8%), and I wiggle in my seat a lot (45.6%).45.6.

The results demonstrated that the most common depression symptoms reported by adolescents were: I like talking with my family (68.4%), I can stick up for myself (63%), and I feel so sad I can hardly stand it (54.9%). The results showed that the most common post traumatic reactions in adolescence were: recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event, including images, thoughts, or perceptions (49%), Acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (44.8%), Intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event (34.8%).



**Table of content:**

	<b>Dedication</b>	IV
	Declaration	V
	Acknowledgement	VI
	Abstract	VII
	Table of content	XI
	List of tables	XIV
	List of figures	XV
	List of annexes	XV
	List of abbreviation	XV
	<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	<b>1-9</b>
1.	Introduction	3
1.1	Problem statement	4
1.2	Study Justification	4
1.3	Study objectives	5
1.4	Research questions	5
1.5	Operational Definitions	6
1.6	Context of the study	7
	<b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	<b>10-66</b>
	<b>Part One</b>	11
2.1	War trauma	11
2.1.1	Children Loses in War	13
2.1.2	Losing Possessions	13
2.1.3	Losing Cultural Continuity	13
2.1.4	Losing place and language	14
2.1.5	Losing loved ones	14
2.1.6	The Effects of Loss on Children:	15
2.1.7	Stages of Grief and Mourning	16
2.1.8	Children's Response to Death :	17
2.1.9	Separated and Unaccompanied Children	18
2.1.10	Exposure to Extreme Violence	19
2.2	<b>Mental Health</b>	19
2.2.1	Mental Illness	21
2.3	<b>Post –Traumatic Stress Disorder</b>	22
2.3.1	Definition of PTSD	22
2.3.2	DSM-IV Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	24
2.3.3	PTSD in DSM-5	25
2.3.4	Types of PTSD	27
2.3.5	PTSD symptoms among children and adolescents	29
2.3.6	PTSD theories	31
2.4	<b>Depression</b>	36
2.4.1	Definitions of depression	36
2.4.2	Risk factors for depression	36
2.4.3	The manifestation of depression	37
2.4.4	Types of depression	38
2.4.5	Theories of Depression	40

2.5	<b>Anxiety</b>	45
2.5.1	Anxiety disorders	45
2.5.2	Anxiety As A Response To Stress	45
2.5.3	Levels of Anxiety	48
2.5.4	Anxiety theories	49
	<b>PART TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>52</b>
	Previous studies related to war trauma exposure	52
	<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>67-75</b>
3.	Introduction	67
3.1	Study design	67
3.2	Population and sample	67
3.3	Study Setting	68
3.4	Study Period	68
3.5	Sampling Procedure:	68
3.5.1	Sampling process	69
3.6	Eligibility Criteria	69
3.7	Research tools and instruments:	70
3.7.1	Socio-demographic questionnaire:	70
3.7.2	PTSD Scale for DSM-IV:	70
3.7.3	Depression Self-Rating Scale For Children	71
3.7.4	Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS)	71
3.7.5	Traumatic events scale due to war Thabet 2014	73
3.8	Data collection	73
3.9	Data entry and analysis	74
3.10	Ethical consideration	74
3.11	Study boundaries:	74
3.12	Anticipated Study limitations	75
4	<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS</b>	<b>76-97</b>
4.1	Socio demographic characteristics of the children and adolescents	76
4.2	Results of traumatic events	78
4.3	Results of PTSD	83
4.4	Results of Anxiety	89
4.5	Results of Depression	93
5.	<b>CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion</b>	<b>98-115</b>
5.1.	Study main results	98
5.1.1	Traumatic events main results:	98
5.1.2	PTSD Main Results:	99
5.1.3	Anxiety Main Results:	99
5.1.4	Depression Main Results:	100
5.2.	<b>Discussion</b>	101
5.2.1	Discussion of Traumatic events Results:	101
5.2.2	Discussion of the PTSD Results	104
5.2.3	Discussion of Anxiety results:	108
5.2.4	Discussion of Depression results:	109
5.3	Conclusion	112
5.4	<b>Recommendation</b>	113

5.5	Suggested Research studies	115
	References	116
	Annexes	122

## List of tables

No.	Table title	Page
3.1	The distribution of the study sample	68
4.1	Socio-demographic information of the children	77
4.2	Types of traumatic events due to 51 days war on Gaza in children	78
4.3	Level of traumatic events due to 51 days war on Gaza according to sex	80
4.4	Traumatic events and sex	81
4.5	Differences in severity of traumatic events and age of adolescents	81
4.6	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and children's place of residence	82
4.7	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and families income	82
4.8	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and number of siblings	83
4.9	Post-traumatic distress symptoms in children (N = 408)	83
4.10	Means and Standard deviations of PTSD	84
4.11	Prevalence of PTSD (N = 408)	84
4.12	Means and Standard deviations of the PTSD and sub scales and sex	85
4.13	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and age	86
4.14	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and Place of residence	87
4.15	One-way ANOVA of traumatic events and family monthly income	88
4.16	Means and SD of monthly income of families	88
4.17	Anxiety symptoms in children (N = 408)	89
4.18	Anxiety and sex differences	91
4.19	One Way ANOVA of anxiety and age	91
4.20	One Way ANOVA of anxiety and number of siblings	92
4.21	One way ANOVA of anxiety and place of residence	92
4.22	One Way ANOVA of anxiety and Monthly income	93
4.23	Means and SD of anxiety and monthly income	93
4.24	Depression symptoms in children (N = 408)	93
4.25	Table Mean of depression and sex differences	94
4.26	One way ANOVA of depression and age	95
4.27	: One Way ANOVA of depression and number of siblings	95
4.28	One Way ANOVA of depression and place of residence	96
4.29	One Way ANOVA of depression and Monthly income	96
4.30	Means and SD of depression and monthly income	96
4.31	Pearson correlation test between trauma, PTSD, anxiety, and depression	97

## List of Figures

NO.	Figures	PAGE
1	Conceptual framework diagram	10

## List of Annexes

NO.	ANNEX TITLE	PAGE
1	Questionnaire cover letter	122
2	Socio-demographic questionnaire:	123
3	Traumatic events scale due to war	124
4	PTSD Scale for DSM-IV	125
5	Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS)	126
6	Depression Self-Rating Scale For Children	127
7	Abstract in Arabic	128
8	Helsinki committee approval	
9	Letter from Al Quds University for mission facilitation	
10	Ministry of Education memo for mission facilitation	
11	Ministry of education and higher education memos for education directorates	

## Table of Abbreviations

Acronym	Description
APA	American Psychiatric Association
ASMPIHE	Annual Statistical Manual of Palestinian institutions of higher education.
DSM -5	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th ed.
DSM IV	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th edition
DSM-IV-TR	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fourth Edition
GAS	General Anxiety Stress
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation IBM Statistics SPSS
NIMH	National Institute of Mental Health,
NODE	New Oxford Dictionary of English
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SPSS	Statistical Package of Social Sciences
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations For Relief and Work Agency .
WHO	World Health Organization.

## **1. Introduction**

Palestinians experienced various types of political, social and psychological problems during their life and they are laudable for their patience and their ability to be reviving in this land. The Palestinian people struggled different types of fierce events that counter them and soured their lives that affected their mental health.

The extended effects of wars and conflicts depend on a complex interaction of different factors that include demographic considerations and the specific nature of the individual's war and traumatic experiences (Jagodić, 2000). However, research on war conflicts and other survivors of traumatic experiences found that more time spent in potential danger can lead to increased levels of trauma and subsequently affecting their mental health (Eth, 2001; Kaysen, Resick, & Wise, 2003; Norris, Murphy, Baker, & Perilla, 2003).

The Palestinians generally, and Gazans' people specially experienced a new wide range of war trauma that affected everything in their life which reflected negatively on their mental health. During the war many of the Gazans' people lost their families, children, and many close relatives in addition to some families completely lost. Furthermore, they lost their work, possessions, cultural continuity, and places they love which considered one of the most significant factors in mental health instability.

War atrociously loses give the chance for psychological problems such as trauma, depression, anxiety, and aggression to rampant among Palestinians. The Palestinians wrench from different types of psychological problems that now ubiquitous in Gaza Strip. However, Palestinian people plagued from war egregious that stalemated everything in the Palestinian life. It is well documented that children living in war zones are at a high risk of developing types of psychopathology, predominantly Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (Husain et al, 1998; Mohlen et al, 2005; Thabet et al, 2007). . Gaza Strip dwellers were exceptional who seized

psychological trauma with privilege due to exceptional events that exposed to during the time. They exposed to dislodging under gunpoint, liquidate, penury and conspiracies in addition to troops sweep, blasts, coup, quash, tarnish, and several unlimited events that occurred during war time. The life in conflict areas and wars is a reality that many people face throughout the world(Qouta & El-Sarraj, 2004); Hundreds of thousands are affected every year, including the victims of the conflicts, their relatives and friends, disaster workers and eye witnesses.

The impact of armed conflict and wars on mental health is increasingly being recognised as a major cause of different mental health problems including persistent stress, anxiety, depression and several other problems such as emotional and behavioural problems. Palestine and specially Gaza Strip subjected to long –standing conflicts and wars. These wars and conflicts put the Palestinian people on direct effects of the war consequences, the young children were suffered more due to developing long –term mental health problems including PTSD, anxiety, stress, and emotional problems as a result of prolonged conflict. Many studies were concluded that prolonged conflicts and wars contribute to variety of mental health problems as well as cultural, economic and social disorders(Altawil et al, 2008; Eth, 2001; Kaysen et al, 2003; Khamis, 2005; Thabet et al, 2014). .

In the fact, I ruminate in the severity of war trauma that these people carry and its relationship with mental health. So this study try to investigate the relationship between war trauma and mental health among secondary school students at the ministry of education schools in Gaza strip

## **1.1 Problem statement**

Gaza strip considered one of the most hot areas in the world that exposed regularly for extensive conflicts and wars. These wars and struggles generates instability of mental health of Gaza residents and cause several mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, severe trauma and fears among adult as well as children. Several studies indicated that more time spent in potential danger can lead to increased levels of PTSD, depression and anxiety due to traumatic events and subsequently affecting mental health(Eth, 2001; Kaysen et al., 2003; Norris et al., 2003).

The intention of this research is to investigate the relationship between war trauma and mental among group of students from different secondary schools in Gaza strip, with particular reference to their experiences during wars and conflicts and how they perceive such war trauma for themselves, friends, family members or close relative. From this point of view the researcher build up the problem statement for this study to highlight mental health problems and the effects of war trauma among the target group.

The study will investigate the relationship between war trauma and mental health problems among secondary school students limited to PTSD, depression and anxiety as major mental health problems.