



Making the Invisible Visible: Slow Violence, Mental Health and Resilience in Gaza

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Introduction

This research focuses on an urgent humanitarian case: Gaza, and builds on a preliminary study supported by the [Wellcome Trust](#) demonstrating how power, slow violence and mental health are entangled. Specifically, our aim here is to make the invisible and long-term effects of violence visible, i.e., to examine how violence affects Gaza's young generation in terms of their increasing vulnerability to mental health challenges, and how existing resilience networks could serve as a vehicle for better strategic interventions in mental health. Our main objective is to give public and academic visibility to the mental health conditions of Gazan young people by: (1) collecting up-to-date data on the extent of mental health deterioration among Gazan youth; (2) giving visibility to personal, youth narratives; (3) analysing existing and varied mental health interventions; (4) developing a set of recommendations for future policies and interventions.

Methodology

Methodologically, the interdisciplinary experience and networks of the research team (Conflict Studies, Urban Health, Psychiatry) were used as the core frames for data gathering. The following tools were employed: (1) Desk review: revisiting the existing data related to Gazan youth mental health; (2) surveys: amongst 215 young people aged between 18-29 years, both men and women, across the five Gazan governorates. Surveys captured demographic data, socio economic conditions and mental health status through a questionnaire; (3) semi-structured interviews: of five youth interviewees and three mental health specialists.

Overall research questions

Our contribution to the extant literature on this topic is that slow violence is both overlooked and too frequently invisible, often with consequences that are hidden, yet ones that severely shape the mental wellbeing of young people in Gaza. We are inspired by the acknowledgement that mental health is a global health priority (Marquez & Saxena, 2016). Consequently, our main research question was: How has Israel's slow violence in the Gaza Strip to date affected the mental health of Gazan young people? Three sub-questions guided our study: (1) What is the status of the mental health of young people in the Gaza Strip today? (2) What are the coping strategies that Gazan youth employ to overcome their dire living conditions? And: (3) What are the required interventions from Gazan youth's and mental health professionals' perspective?

It is important to acknowledge, at this stage, the research challenges that were faced on the ground. To start with, conducting research in a conflict zone is never an easy task. Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa did his best to achieve the task via an established, trustful network. Nevertheless, difficulties and challenges emerged. Security challenges were central to the fieldwork, as some professional interviewees refused to be interviewed or asked for strict anonymisation, which has been respected. Another significant issue was the social stigma attached to mental health issues in Gaza. This affected the interviewees' and survey participants' motivation to take part in our research. There was also an impact on the researcher. Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa (himself originally from Gaza) who was challenged during the interviews due to his exposure to the deep frustration of the participants (as explained further below).

The following sections of this report attempt to answer these questions. The report concludes by summing up the key findings of this research project and with some further recommendations for future policy interventions.

Violence and mental health from Gaza's youth's perspective

Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa conducted interviews with young people in Gaza and observed an increasing frustration and lack of hope in relation to their present conditions and their thoughts on the future. Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa himself encountered genuine discomfort and torment during these interviews due to the narratives shared by well-educated and intellectual youths, who are going through ongoing disturbance, anguish and deep pain. In other words, although youth suffering in Gaza is often invisible, some of them addressed their agony in verbal and physical ways, for example, in the manner in which they looked directly into the eyes of Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa while they spoke during their interview; the way in which they breathed deeply, or their faces turned red (a flushed face in such a context is often the result of anxiety and stress). As we will illustrate below, discussing the topics of this research is very sensitive and anxiety ridden.

Two student interviewees, Dunia and Ahlam (pseudonyms) were in the same room and agreed to give a joint interview. Nonetheless, within a minute of the interview, Dunia said "Let me go outside in order to make Ahlam speak comfortably". The sensitivity of the theme under investigation was also visible when 18-year-old Khaled (pseudonym), another student from Rafah, asked his father (who had accompanied him to the interview venue) to leave the interview lounge in order to be able to talk more freely. Culturally speaking, particularly in Rafah City (in the southern Gaza Strip) which is rather conservative, parents have a special position in all family aspects and are held in high esteem by their primary relatives. Khaled's behaviour is considered an unprecedented phenomenon in such a context. It is worth mentioning that the eye contact between this father and his son summarises the enduring agony amongst Gazans, when the son - before the interview was recorded - told his father: "You took a bank loan to cope with our life's difficulties, but since taking this on, we are severely distressed" (referring to the dire economic situation this family finds itself in). The answer by his astute father, who, looking at Ziad, smiled with a flushed face hiding the invisible suffering, was a positive and dignified response to his son's appeal: "the apartment is yours and feel free to conduct the interview with my lovely son".

Following the above short prelude, we will now shed light on several (longer) direct quotations from our respondents to uncover their mental health challenges. Significantly, and at first glance, it wouldn't come to the researcher's mind that the respondents have mental issues, because of the way interviewees dressed, spoke (during the initial phase at least) and their nuanced knowledge. Conversely, during the interviews, numerous hidden "wounds" among our respondents could be observed. For instance, as Diana (pseudonym) from Gaza City (who invested a lot of time searching for productive employment and who has studied new subjects as a way of having a dignified life) relayed:

"The idea of continuing to search for opportunities and not finding them, then seeking and working hard to strengthen yourself to find an opportunity and then things do not work out, or to reach the (job) interview stage in a very great institution and then not succeed? All of this takes you way back. The idea of seeking is related to finding something, so when you seek and do not find something, it causes you many problems. I cried often and experienced depression, poor appetite and anxiety. Even my face and skin have psychological problems and my hair is falling out because I keep trying in vain" (Interview with Diana, 24 years old, Gaza City, 22/03/23)

Moving to Khan Yunes, south of Gaza city, Jalal (pseudonym) didn't complete his bachelor's degree because of a tuition fees predicament. This was the shortest interview, not owing to frustration from the researcher or the interviewee, but due to the angry facial expressions on the interviewee's face, who put it directly as follows:

"I first studied for a Diploma in Automation and Office Management and then progressed to a bachelor's degree in accounting. To receive the bachelor's degree, I need to study two years and a semester only. But because of the circumstances and

conditions in Gaza and the high costs of studying, I was only able to study for one year, then I stopped. I still have one year, and a semester left. This happened because of costs and transportation, as I needed 12 shekels daily, in addition to university fees, which ranged from 250 to 300 Jordanian dinars each semester. This made me stop studying”.

When Jalal was asked about his future, he reacted angrily and said:

“There is no future in this country and the situation is very difficult. If we are unable to complete our education, will we find a future in this country?”

He further added:

“... I am depressed, at the age of 26 I have no life or future, not even hope for the future in four- or five-years’ time ...”. (Interview with Jalal, 26 years old, Khan Yunes, 28/03/23)

As shown above, despair dominates our interviewees. Challenges with university fees and with finding suitable work are issues that were reconfirmed in our survey.

Violence, youth and mental health through experts’ perspectives

As part of this research, three mental health specialists and experts were interviewed, namely: Dr Yasser Abu Jamei, Director General of Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (also a research team member); Rawia Hamam, Director of Training and Scientific Research Department at Gaza Community Mental Health Programme; and a third psychology professional who prefers to remain anonymous. According to Dr Yasser Abu Jamei:

“Mental health is the feeling of psychological wellness and your ability to overcome circumstances, challenges and difficulties, to be productive for yourself and for society, and to feel your ability to change in your society.” (Interview with Dr Yasser Abu Jamei, Gaza City, 26/03/23)

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, one-fifth of the Gaza population are youth aged between 18 and 29 years old ([International Red Cross, 2022](#)). Dr Abu Jamei demonstrated that youth is an important segment of Palestinian society, and that it is a young society. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in cooperation with the World Bank, released statistics in March 2023 which stated that 71% of the Gaza Strip population have depressive symptoms. A screening tool was used to arrive at this drastic statistic, and there is a need for a clinical assessment to know if these people meet the criteria for clinical depression.

Our interviewees demonstrated a challenged state in terms of mental health mainly due to the dire economic and living conditions that Gazan families find themselves in:

“The opposite question might be, how many young people are happy to be in the Gaza Strip? Are young men and women happy with the crises and challenges they suffer from? And the answer is definitely no. The situation in the Gaza Strip does not make anyone happy. If a fully abled young person does not have a meaningful job that reflects his or her qualifications and experience, how can one meet the requirements for a human being to enjoy psychological wellness? Therefore, there is certainly a negative effect on the mental health of individuals living in Gaza” (Interview with Dr Yasser Abu Jamei, Gaza City, 26/03/23)

In a similar vein, expert interviewee number 3 linked the lack of work and economic crisis that Gaza's youth are going through directly to stress and mental health issues. For example, he referred to the level of stress that the students are suffering at university and put it directly:

*"We find that the biggest issues are the economic pressures and basic needs that the student cannot fulfil. Of course, these issues cast a great shadow on their psyche."
(Interview with an expert number 3, Gaza City, 26/03/23)*

Rawia Hamam, Director of the Training and Scientific Research Department at the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme, agreed that poverty, unemployment and Israeli aggression affected Gazan youth's mental health:

"We may have said before that Palestinian youth are trapped between unemployment, poverty, lack of a horizon, frustration and loss of hope. This applies to most young people here in Gaza. If we ask a young man how he imagines the future or what he dreams of? A young man can sometimes answer this question that he does not expect what may happen today or tomorrow, let alone the future. The continuous expectation of Israeli aggressions and continuous wars makes many young people unable to plan or form a specific picture of the future". (Interview with Mrs Rawia Hamam, Gaza City, 26/03/23)

In hindsight, it could also be argued that, to a large extent, the similarities between the above experts' interviews are obvious. Furthermore, all three narratives confirm one given fact, that Gazan youth are suffering from different mental health issues. Nevertheless, both the interviewed youth and experts indicated that resilience is still ripe and strong amongst Gazan youth, in spite of the hardships they face and the dark horizon ahead of them.

Youth, mental health and resilience

In spite of the "no-horizon" vision and unpredictable future in Gaza, resilience and the will to challenge the problematical situation are evident. Alternative notions of this exist at different levels among the interviewed youth. Based on our survey (to be discussed further below in this report), participants' responses displayed their resilient attitudes when it comes to job opportunities after graduation. For instance, if students do not expect to get a job after graduation, what are their alternatives? The survey results show that respondents' alternatives can be quite creative and innovative, as follows: doing a private project, continuing looking for work, working with parents or neighbours, self-employment, looking for online work, working on self-development by taking training courses and completing postgraduate studies, obtaining a profession, travelling, and emigration.

A direct example of resilience found during our research is the case of Ahlam (pseudonym), an English literature student based in the North Gaza governance. With Ahlam, Dr Ziad Abu Mustafa found himself interviewing a potential Palestinian leader, who is working constantly and preparing herself for leading a nation, not just developing her abilities for her own sake:

"I was affected, but one of our advantages as Palestinians is that we make miracles out of our inhibitions, as we struggle and make something... In terms of individual salvation, I can say that I am now working on an online platform. To put it in other words, I am doing online trade business, and receiving income" (Ahlam, North Gaza, 24 years old, 22/03/23)

There is a consensus among the mental health experts that working remotely is one of the solutions and means for youth to overcome the current status quo in Gaza. As with the example (already mentioned above) of Ahlam, Gazan youth show strong resilience in the face of adversity. Ahlam, who started to work online in the business/trade field as well as marketing the Palestinian narrative told us:

"To be clearer and franker, when I started my university studies, my family's situation was bad. My father was sick and unemployed, and my mother was sick. I was able to join the university through a scholarship. Generally speaking, many non-governmental organisations are offering the scholarship as well as ministry of higher education and some political factions. But the covering of transportation costs was difficult for me. The difference in ages of all of us, brothers and sisters, was a year between each one and the other, and that is why we joined the university directly one after the other, so the burden became greater on the shoulders of the family. Honestly, only during the year 2022, when a work permit was issued to my father inside the occupied territories, things started to improve. Before that, it was very tragic. And had it not been for the scholarship, I would not have been able to study, as I was two years late in studies due to the circumstances, as I used to study one semester and skip one. I was born in 1998, so I should have finished my studies two years ago so that one of my brothers would study instead of me. It happened to allow everyone to learn. I received social affairs grant because my mother was ill. They exempt us from 50%, defer 25%, and pay 25%. As for transportation, I was constantly absent from the lectures due to the lack of money for transportation. I used to borrow lecture notes from female colleagues so that I could follow the lectures. Most of us in the Gaza Strip face difficult circumstances, but this prompted me to work towards financial independence and to become a source of income for me and supporting my family. For this reason, I set out towards the world of institutions and civil society and achieved even a small part of self-support. And I succeeded in providing something with which I could help. It was a Western media campaign to market the Palestinian narrative and refute Israeli one" (Ahlam, North Gaza, interviewed 22/03/2023)

Participants' responses displayed their resilient attitudes when it comes to job opportunities after graduation.

It is worth now shedding some light on the story of Enas (pseudonym). Enas's father passed away in his apartment in front of his five children and wife in 2012 due to a gas cylinder explosion. He was filling the cylinder in his flat in Khan Yonis refugee camp, as one means to overcome the blockade and a source of income for the family. Some families resold gas for higher prices after filling it into smaller cylinders. His death left the family with an open wound. Despite the pain and sadness, Enas got a high grade at the Secondary School - 97,77% in 2019 and joined the Medical College at Al-Azhar University in Gaza:

"I am a 4th year medicine student at al Azhar University. The day I finished high school, and my GPA was high for I was one of the top students back then. However, when I wanted to choose, the things that were affordable were different than what I was dreaming of. I was dreaming of faculty of medicine and to study in Gaza not abroad. However, the cost was very high to afford. Also studying math was available, but I faced difficulty securing tuition fees. Medicine remained as my first wish. We made big efforts to find someone to help me with the fees for medicine. After contacting many contacts, we reached to the point where someone from outside would help me with those fees which proved to be more challenging than finding someone locally. The amount is massive per semester, JD 1800 every 3-4 months (1 JD = 1.4 USD). It's difficult to transfer. It would be fearful that my studies would be disrupted and to waste all the past years of study or to shift to another discipline of study which can be wrecking psychologically and financially as well. The situation is difficult for everyone be them students or otherwise, all are subjected to those stressors... Our message is that we as community we have great potential, but we don't have the right mentors to dig it out. We call for someone to invest in us and realize that potential". (Enas, Gaza City, interviewed 19/03/2023)

Youth vulnerability

This report concerns the vulnerability of the Gazan youth's mental health. Before focussing on the required strategy for overcoming the current situation in Gaza, it is worth mentioning the causes of youth vulnerability, and the factors that have led Gaza to this situation from Gaza's youth standpoint. The surveys and interviewees indicated the following major causes.

The Israeli occupation, imposed blockade, closure of crossings and borders, and repeated attacks namely in 2008, 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021, and increasingly since. Economic resources are all under the control of the occupation, including reservoirs of oil and natural gas wealth in Area C of the West Bank and the Mediterranean coast off the Gaza Strip ([Al-monitor, 2023](#)). Destroyed infrastructure due to Israel's recurrent aggressions and living under constant emergency for decades. Demolitions of homes and rebuilding policies. Importantly, the youth indicated that Palestinian political divisions within the mainstream parties, Hamas and Fatah, as well as between and within the municipalities and governances, create further challenges as they fail to uphold their responsibilities. Favouritism, nepotism in employment, corruption and lack of support for graduates were also mentioned as significant barriers for the future of young people in Gaza. Finally, although the economic concerns fall on the shoulders of both men and women, it is more burdensome for men given societal expectations on men to be the main breadwinners. Economic challenges in the midst of an overpopulated Gaza Strip amplify these challenges. According to a [UNCTAD \(2019\)](#) report, the exploitation of Palestinian natural resources imposes on the Palestinians massive costs that escalate as the occupation continues.

As reported above, the occupation and its consequences are considered the principal causes of youth vulnerability in Gaza, alongside domestic factors. The youth and experts interviewed shared their views and pointed, firstly, to ending the occupation and lifting the siege on Gaza as crucial macro-level conditions for potentially ensuring freedom, peace and a sense of security. Secondly, internal Palestinian unification, ending the political division and establishing a unity government, as well as projects and factories to provide job opportunities are also important conditions for our interviewees. Thirdly, interviewees mentioned conducting elections, involving youth in decision-making, raising students' awareness of the requirements of the labour market, supporting institutions that employ young people, and ensuring a decent life for young people. Fourthly, the field of remote work is available in some professions and is recommended as a way out, as well as urgent growth in development programmes for the Palestinian people's economic ecology, benefitting young graduates with untapped potential to work. Finally, it was mentioned that the youth should try as hard as possible to obtain information and accurate knowledge in their field of specialization. In the past, the youth had to travel to seek knowledge. Therefore, one of the experts interviewed recommended that the youth should increase their search via online websites, which will assist them in building their futures by finding jobs or completing their postgraduate studies.

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The survey

The interviews mentioned above complemented a survey conducted among young people in Gaza. The 215 survey respondents included 116 students (54%). Among the remaining 99 respondents, 61 (61.6%) identified themselves as unemployed or job seekers. This unemployment figure is not far from the one reported by the [Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics](#) (PCBS) which stands at 46% during the first quarter of 2023. The rate is even higher (68%) when it comes to youth under 30. Only 31% of the responding students expect to find a full-time job upon finishing their studies. This is further complicated with 93.1% of student respondents answering that the experience of covering university tuition fees and the costs of their studies was too exhausting.



The main financing source for the students was their parents or family (63.8%), then taking a loan (14.7%). This clearly shows the linkage between being a student and the added burden on the family. Perhaps that is why Khaled, who is mentioned earlier in this report, was “blaming” his father for taking a bank loan which made family life more complicated, and then asked his father to leave the room allowing him to speak openly in the interview. Jalal, as also earlier indicated, could not finish his education since he could not afford the costs. Ahlam had to skip some semesters and lessons, and count on her friends to deal with the transportation costs. Enas continued to study at the faculty of medicine fearing that each semester her sponsors would not be able to send her the university fees.

The five characters showed how they were psychologically impacted through describing their feelings. They spoke about depression, anger, poor appetite, and fear. Dunia even mentioned how her skin and hair were affected by her mental conditions, and Jalal explicitly said that there is no hope in the future. The survey results confirmed these narratives. Almost 50% of respondents reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless more than half the time, or almost every day over the two weeks prior to the survey.



45% have little interest or pleasure in doing things;



47.9% are not able to stop or control worrying;



and 42.8% feel anxious, nervous, or on the edge.



Mental distress, the feeling of hopelessness and lack of social support were found to be risk factors for suicidality (which, according to The American Psychological Association is defined as “the risk of suicide, usually indicated by suicidal ideation or intent, especially as evident in the presence of a well-elaborated suicidal plan.” It can also be defined to include suicidal thoughts, plans, gestures, or attempts) among university students in the Gaza Strip (Guido et al., 2021). However, this research demonstrates a different response and coping mechanism that the respondents use to meet the challenging conditions. Four out of the five interviewees are determined to succeed in completing their studies or finding a job despite the difficulties. Dunia keeps trying to identify various job opportunities despite failing several times. Jalal progressed his studies from a diploma in automation to a bachelor’s degree in accounting. He did this despite feeling that there is no hope in the future. Ahlam skipped some semesters and is already two years delayed in her studies, but she is determined to obtain her degree. And Enas continues to be successful in her studies despite the ongoing concern that her sponsor might be blocked from supporting her at any moment.

The above can be interpreted as expressions of resilience. Moreover, when the 215 survey respondents were asked to give advice to a high school graduate regarding next steps in their education and life, all the answers were positive ones: choosing appropriate specializations, focusing on technology and vocational training, finding self-employment and private businesses, attending skills’ building courses, planning well, not falling into despair and keeping hope. None of the respondents advised quitting education or gave negative advice.

The survey respondents were asked about factors that help them get through their lives. Their answers were various and included: hope for the future; patience; satisfaction with God’s judgement; hope in God that the situation will improve and depending on this; religious dimensions and faith; will and determination; patriotism; support from family, relatives and friends; self-confidence, self-worth and self-support; passion and ambition; work; looking to the future; dreams and ambitions, future goals and self-development; Palestinian just cause; and Gazan young people’s desire to be able to build families and have children. However, young people in the Gaza Strip are entitled to live a normal life with fewer challenges and more hope. The notion that Palestinians are resilient should not put the international community at ease or delay interventions that could end the suffering.

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Existing and varied mental health interventions in Gaza

It is an expectation in most modern societies that specialized mental health care should be available and accessible through community mental health centres and inpatient facilities if needed. In the Gaza Strip, there is one psychiatric hospital run by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and nine community mental health centres: Six of these centres are run by the MoH and the other three are run by the [Gaza Community Mental Health Programme \(GCMHP\)](#). The community centres are expected to have well-trained, multi-disciplinary teams that can intervene and provide therapy to patients as needed. This intervention is prioritized as it could be lifesaving. There are more service providers when it comes to non-specialized care. Many primary healthcare providers at the MoH and UNRWA are trained on MHGAP: The WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (MHGAP) aims at scaling up services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders for countries especially with low- and middle-income. However, this practice needs to be re-enforced as service providers are overwhelmed with patients and cases in need for mental health interventions could be easily missed. Some local and international organizations also provide counselling and basic emotional support services to the community.

However, many of these are underfunded or not enough to meet the massive needs of the population. Services are scarcer when it comes to women, youth, and children as more professional skills and resources are needed. For example, there is only one school counsellor per school. Most of the schools in Gaza have more than 700 children per school. GCMHP operates a toll-free line that tries to respond to the needs of marginalized women and youth. The organization also has an ambitious project that help adolescents overcome their psychological problems through sport activities.

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude this report, Gaza and its youth are facing enormous and extraordinary challenges daily. The report summarized the main findings concerning the impact of the current situation in Gaza on Gazan youth's mental health. On the other hand, resilience is present among the youth for various reasons, including hope, faith, social support, and determination. All in all, the report found that the current disastrous situation in Gaza is not purely humanitarian; it is politically and economically driven. The Israeli occupation and the siege of Gaza, combined with very regular Israeli aggressions, alongside Palestinian internal political divisions are the main reasons for Gazan youth suffering. This conclusion was also voiced throughout Dr Abu Jamei's interview:

"...work is life, and where there is no work, there is no life. This is one of the ideas that young people come up with because if you are unemployed, you cannot get a job or have a home or a family or be productive. Therefore, most of the elements of (good) mental health for this young man or woman who do not have a job are almost non-existent" (Dr Yasser Abu Jamei, 26 March, 2023)

Below are some concrete recommendations that we identified regarding mental health interventions. These recommendations are not in the macro-level political sphere, but rather aim to improve the psychological and wellbeing of youth in the Gaza Strip:

- A. Provide specialized mental health care: Young people meet various challenges and often, the existing, supportive mechanisms are not strong enough to address these challenges. The feelings of anxiety, worry, loss of hope, or depression can reach clinical thresholds impairing the "normal" functioning of the youth and making them vulnerable to suicide ideation (see: [Middle East Eye](#), 2022). There is a need to support and further expand the services that offer psychotherapy and medications to people in need. The intervention could be at secondary and tertiary prevention levels.
- B. Inhouse counselling units: Few universities offer counselling to students through in-house counselling units. Such units are run mainly by university lecturers from the faculty of psychology. The availability of these units needs to be mainstreamed across universities, and capacity-building programmes need to be provided to academic lecturers. The counselling units have a major advantage of being within the universities, thus easily accessible (for university students who manage to get to university) and, more importantly, are less stigmatising. In few instances, the units were run in cooperation with more expert institutions like GCMHP. GCMHP also provides such services to the wide community through cooperation with local community-based organizations. This makes accessibility available also to women and children, and reduces the stigma associated with visiting a mental health facility. Such services are important for international governments and NGOs to support.
- C. Stress management interventions: There are several evidence-based interventions that could help young people overcome stress. Some of them are WHO recommended interventions like [Self Help Plus](#), (a group-based stress management course for adults), [Problem Management Plus](#), a program which involves individual psychological help for adults impaired by distress in communities exposed to adversity, and [Doing What Matters](#), a stress management program for coping with adversity. Mind and Body Interventions, or mind-body training (MBT), that is, health and fitness interventions that are intended to work on a physical and mental level such as yoga, tai chi, and Pilates, are also helpful. There are several organizations including national and international ones in the Gaza Strip that offer training on these self-help techniques. It would be worth adapting and applying these to university students and other youth. A good example of this is the work that began in 2023 by GCMHP on piloting Self Help Plus for the Gazan population. Self-help Plus (SH+) is a WHO developed multimedia, guided, self-help stress management course delivered over a period of five weeks to groups of up to 30 people at a time. The course is suitable for anyone who experiences stress, wherever they live and whatever their circumstances. The intervention was applied to more than 150 people,

most of them young. The intervention is being assessed for effectiveness and feasibility. Once this is proven, efforts will be made to build the capacities of more people to use this intervention.

- D. Psychosocial Interventions: These are very important at the prevention level. They are activities based on the use of the arts, storytelling, sports, games, drawing, singing, etc. They can be applied at early ages, for children, as well as for adolescents. They have the advantage of being low-cost and are mostly group-based interventions. Plenty of national and international organizations provide such activities. However, they need to be more focused or structured when applied to young people. An example of such an intervention is the Eyes of Gaza artistic project, an intervention method using Arab Art Therapy. Youths and adults in Gaza painted walls with stories, ideas and questions, including those of children, who also participated in the project (Akut12016).
- E. Psychoeducation: Psychoeducation is an important element and, in this case, aims at strengthening family support and social networks around young people. In many families, being a university student is the biggest (economic/financial) burden. Families might not be aware how students or unemployed graduates feel or think about that burden. Many local organizations conduct campaigns promoting certain important messages and addressing issues like gender-based violence and child mental health care. Sensitizing such activities toward youth mental health is also important. They also reduce stigma towards mental illness and inform the population on means of finding support.
- F. Finally, it is important to encourage young people to overcome social stigma, and to speak up and talk about their challenges and feelings, to give them the sense that they are in charge and can make a difference.

The current disastrous situation in Gaza is not purely humanitarian; it is politically and economically driven. The Israeli occupation and the siege of Gaza, combined with very regular Israeli aggressions, alongside Palestinian internal political divisions are the main reasons for Gazan youth suffering.

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