

The Impacts of the Practices of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) on the Palestinian Children

Haneen Qaraawee^{1*} 

Ismael Abujarad² 

¹ PhD, Istanbul Aydın University,
Istanbul, Türkiye,
haneen.moh.haneen@gmail.com

² World Academy of Islamic
Management (WAIM), Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia
ismaelabujarad@gmail.com

* Corresponding Author



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Abstract: This research paper aimed at identifying the practices of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), which have an impact on the Palestinian children. Precisely, this paper attempted to answer the questions: “(1) what are the IOF practices that impacted the Palestinian children? and (2) how did such practices impact the children?” A mixed methodology was used, where secondary data issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Health as well as the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics was analyzed. The qualitative data, however, was obtained by using content analysis tool to analyze reports published by national and international NGOs working in the Palestinian territories. The results showed that the IOF practiced killing, arrest, intimidation, injuries, and harassment. It was also found that the IOF practices resulted in many mental illnesses among a high proportion of children, represented by fear, panic, psychological disorders, anxiety, insecurity and other psychological illnesses. IOF practices led to depriving the children of the basic needs such as their right to education and health services, which is a violation of the international human rights law. In addition, the results showed that the IOF attempted to demoralize the children, deter them from demonstrating, and erode their loyalty for their homeland.

Keywords: Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), Impact, Palestinian Children, Research Paper

Introduction

The Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands is the basic and central dilemma facing the Palestinian people. This dilemma is not only an Israeli occupation and confiscation of land. It also lies in the Israeli occupation's continued killing and terrorizing actions through racist measures, including killing, displacing, demolishing houses, confiscating property, arresting, and restricting freedoms. The occupation practices have become a process of cleansing and killing Palestinians to achieve the goal of emptying the land of its inhabitants. There is no doubt that since the establishment of the occupation's state in the Nakba in 1948 and up to the present day, the occupation has persistently tortured the Palestinian population by various means and methods. These means and methods aim to demoralize the

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Palestinian people, intimidate them, and make them surrender. The founders of the State of Israel stated, after the declaration of the state in (1948), that they would make all their efforts and devote all their capabilities, at whatever cost, to expel the remaining residents of Palestine to establish a purely Jewish state for the Jews on the land of Palestine, under a religious claim of fulfilling God's promise (Sourani, 1986; 2006).

In Gaza, where Palestinians have already been reeling from the impact of a 17-year-old air, sea, and land blockade and repeated cycles of hostilities, Israeli military operations have resulted in a catastrophe. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, more than 45,805 Palestinians have reportedly been killed as of January 6, 2025. The number of children who have been killed is 13,319 (Ministry of Health, 2025).

Civilians face extreme deprivation, with limited or no access to health care, food, electricity, or humanitarian aid. Children have missed out on an entire year of education. Schools sheltering displaced families have been repeatedly shelled, healthcare workers and hospitals have been systematically attacked, and aid convoys have been continually blocked and even shot at (Frontières, 2024). In the West Bank, the use of lethal force by Israeli forces, along with rampant settler violence and house demolitions, has led to a sharp rise in fatalities, widespread destruction, and forced displacement. "No statistics or words can fully convey the extent of the physical, mental, and societal devastation that has taken place in the Gaza Strip," said Joyce Msuya, the Acting Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator (OCHA, 2024).

It is evident that, after more than 12 months of horror for children and families in the State of Palestine, the situation continues to deteriorate. The psychological toll on Palestinian children is profound as they are gripped by trauma; they suffer from anxiety, nightmares, and debilitating fear. In the 365 square kilometers of the Gaza Strip, nowhere is safe for children. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 140,000 people have been killed or injured, including 14,000 children, across the State of Palestine. A staggering 86 percent of the population in the Gaza Strip, around 1.9 million people, have already endured over 40 displacement orders compelling people to flee just to try and stay alive. In the Gaza Strip especially, many children have lost or been separated from their parents, who have been killed by the conflict, hospitalized, or detained. UNICEF estimates that at least 17,000 children are unaccompanied or separated (UNICEF, 2025). The presence of the UN and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) working for the protection of children in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) is long-standing and considerable in scope. Yet, the lives of Palestinian children remain as

difficult and dangerous as ever. The wide disparity between the consistent efforts made by representatives of the international community to promote the safety and well-being of Palestinian children and the actual results provided the starting point for this research. Research done by the Institute for Policy Research at the University of BATH (2025) involved extensive analysis of agency publications, reports of Human Rights organizations and national and international policy documents, and around 120 interviews and focus groups with donor agency staff, Palestinian Authority officials, UN/INGO and NGO staff, teachers, parents, and children. It finds that the international community has been unable to properly protect Palestinian children because of serious flaws in the conceptual, institutional, and, most importantly, political understanding of the situation in the OPT. The efforts of international agencies and donor organizations to prevent harm to Palestinian children are, in the first instance, restricted because they operate with a flawed definition of the situation. In keeping with Western governments, they view the OPT as a humanitarian crisis arising from conflict between two more or less equivalent parties. Such a characterization of the setting does not reflect the reality of Palestinian children experiencing occupation-related violence and the systematic appropriation of Palestinian land and resources by Israel. The research argues that it would be more accurate to conceptualize the situation in the OPT as a chronic and long-term human rights and protection crisis, a situation that requires efforts to deliver aid to be coupled with efforts to produce change at the political and structural level. Adopting this holistic approach to support would also require agencies to step back from their standardized understanding and technocratic approach to child protection (based on an assumed universal and apolitical set of children's needs at an individual level) and bring political, cultural, and socioeconomic factors relating to the setting back into the design and delivery of protection strategies (Institute for Policy Research, 2025). This paper examines the impact of the practices of the IOF on Palestinian children.

Methodology

In this research paper, a mixed methodology was used. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The quantitative data were secondary data obtained from reports and statistics issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, and other organizations. The qualitative data was obtained by using a content analysis tool. This was done by conducting a comprehensive literature review and analyzing the content of the reports issued by national and international agencies, as well as Non-Governmental Organizations working in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The Impact of the Practices of the IOF on Palestinian Children

There are many studies that have examined the IOF oppression methods against the Palestinian people and the psychological effects of these methods on the population. Many studies were reviewed to complement and enrich the current research. For example, Thabet, Karim, and Vostanis (2006) revealed that 91.6% of children's traumas were caused when children witnessed the aircraft bombing of neighbors' and others' houses. In addition, Thabet, Abed, and Vostanis (2002) also revealed that children whose houses were bombed or demolished showed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which was manifested in difficulty concentrating (85.3%), difficulty sleeping 57.2% and Memory Distortion for Traumatic Events 51.7%. They also clearly were panicked. Moreover, Qouta, Punamäki and Sarraj (1995) studied the impact of house demolitions on children's mental health and showed that emotional problems, specifically nyctophobia, nail-biting, withdrawal, depression, and neophobia, were apparent among children who lost their houses compared to children who just witnessed from their balconies the demolition and bombing of the houses. Al-Sabbah & Za'ool (2007) study, which aimed to identify the degree of prevalence of behavioral disorders among children of the Palestinian detainees' families in the Bethlehem Governorate, revealed that the main manifestations of behavioral disturbances were fear disorders and that excessive attachment to parents was one of the most common behaviors among these children.

The results of Hein et al.'s (1993) study, which showed that 89% of the children were subjected to night raids, which resulted in children's nyctophobia rates rising, indicated that 45% of the children in the sample were exposed to personal stressful experiences, specifically being beaten. The study also indicates that (55%) of the children witnessed one of their family members being beaten in a way that resulted in the child's fear and an increase in insecurity.

Many believed that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) abandoned armed struggle after entering the negotiation process in accordance with the Madrid Conference of 1991, which culminated in the signing of the peace agreement with Israel, which was known as the Oslo Accord of 1993, would change the status quo. Israel justifies its repressive measures against the Palestinian people before international forums and the international community as self-defense, despite the fact that international law permits the use of all means available to the occupied peoples to resist the occupation. Despite the signing of the Accords, the PLO abandoning armed struggle, and the formation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the IOF practices against the Palestinian population have

increased in ferocity, including but not limited to killing, destroying, arresting, demolishing houses, confiscating lands in favor of settlements, restricting freedoms, and many other repressive measures, which is known as the “Scorched Earth” policy (Al-Shafi, 2005). Below are the types of practices of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF). These types of practices are the killings, arrests, the demolition of houses, school student restrictions, restrictions on movement freedom, and expulsion and deportation.

With regards to the killings, statistics indicate that the number of killings by the Israeli Occupation Forces increased dramatically; during Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005), 2745 Palestinians were martyred. The IOF did not hesitate to raid and bomb Palestinian cities and villages, as well as the PA institutions, although the IOF realized that the inhabitants of these cities and villages did not possess weapons that posed a threat to the lives of their soldiers. The invasions of Jenin Camp (2002), the city of Nablus, and dozens of villages and towns best unveil the Israeli leadership's unbridled desire to kill Palestinians. There is no justification for the killings but Israeli fascism and hatred against the Palestinian population (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Between October 7th, 2023, and 22nd March 2025, the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Gaza, as stated by OCHA, at least 52,653 Palestinians have been reported killed in the Gaza Strip (UNRWA, 2025).

As for arresting Palestinians, including children, the IOF has been arresting Palestinians of different ages and both sexes. The Israeli detention centers and prisons are filled with Palestinian detainees. The arrests are a crime in their nature that violates international laws and norms, especially as Palestinian prisoners and detainees are being held in inhumane detention centers. However, the arrest process itself is a major crime, as it aims to destroy Palestinian individuals, their families, and society. The arrests take Place during late night hours when people are asleep. The house gets raided in a brutal manner without prior notice. When raiding, IOF, accompanied by the K9 Dog Unit, searches the house and tampers with its contents with the aim of terrorizing children and humiliating the elderly to demoralize them. The raid ends with one of the family members being arrested. There is no doubt that the arrests are often based on suspicions. In the event that the IOF has a suspect, they hasten to arrest that suspect. The arrest is usually not mainly focused on arresting the suspect per se but rather a process aimed at intimidating the families of the concerned person. The IOF would not be concerned about the presence of children, women, or the elderly, as the latter are the arrest objectives. This is evidenced by the transfer of the detainee to administrative arrest once they fail to charge the detainee or get a confession of committing any acts against the Israeli army or its settlers (Aldameer Association, 1998).

A report released by the detainee's rights institutions showed an unprecedented surge in the Israeli occupation arrests of Palestinian children. In 2024 alone, at least 700 children were documented as being arrested, bringing the total number of detained children since the outbreak of the war to over 1,055. These children have been deprived of their childhood and their right to education, facing severe violations during their arrests. These violations included night raids on their homes, physical assaults in front of their families, shootings, as well as handcuffing, shackling, blindfolding, and denial of legal assistance, which are clear breaches of international law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. As of early March 2025, more than 350 children are still detained in Israeli prisons. Under the ceasefire agreement in January 2025, 51 children from the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Green Line, along with 44 children from the Gaza Strip, who were arrested after October 7th, were released as part of the first phase of the detainee's exchange deal (Aldameer, 2024).

As for the practice of demolishing houses, the IOF has used house demolitions as a method since the Nakba of Palestine in 1948 and the occupation of the remaining territories in 1967. Demolishing houses is a planned and systematic policy to suppress and displace the population, given that, usually, a person who loses their house and residence gets frustrated and depressed, especially after losing the framework that housed their family; children are often the victims of this policy. When children feel displaced and homeless and resort with their family to live in a different environment, such as in a rented house far from the original Place or in a relative's house, inevitably, they would feel inferior, helpless, and a burden on others. These displaced children would no longer have the mental situation of children who live in a stable situation in their own houses. These children would live in harsh conditions that negatively affect their psychological and social conditions. In this regard, the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics indicated that the number of houses demolished by the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) since 1967 until the publication date of their report exceeded 15540 houses, and the number of residents who lost their homes due to the demolition by the IOF is estimated at 78,365 people (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

As for the demolishing of houses and other properties in the Gaza Strip, The United Nations estimated that 70% of the Gaza Strip building have been damaged or destroyed completely since October 2023, with much of the worst destruction in the north of the Strip (Cuddy, 2025).

For more than five decades, the Palestinian children have been deprived of many aspects of their childhood (Yoke et al., 2014). Tears, blood, wounds, and pain

summarize the lives of the Palestinian children, who are still suffering from the practices of Israeli terrorism that falls under the Israeli policy of targeting children, through killing, wounding, and arresting as well as other practices that are being inflicted on the Palestinian people as a whole. That was just the tip of the iceberg, where Israel kills and tortures Palestinian children, bringing them before military courts, and throws them into Israeli prisons for many years, under the pretext of protecting its security. Israel drafts its deterrence strategies to curb Palestinian aspirations for return and liberation, and this is contrary to Article (37- A) of The Convention on the Rights of the Child issued by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989, which states: *"States Parties shall ensure that:(a) No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Neither capital punishment nor life imprisonment without possibility of release shall be imposed for offenses committed by persons below eighteen years of age"* (Save the Children Fund, 2004).

According to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier. The Palestinian community is characterized by its youth nature, where children represent about (40%) of the total population, and this is what was shown by the demographic survey data conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (2010), where the results indicated that the percentage of individuals under the age of 18 was 40.5% (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

The Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) have put in Place their plans to achieve their aggressive expansion goals against the Palestinian people since day one of the occupation. Unquestionably, the occupiers have targeted the Palestinian land and humans simultaneously. In order to target the Palestinian people, the occupation spreads ignorance among the Palestinians, uprooting the latter's belonging and their ancient culture, and turning them into a cheap labor force in the Israeli labor market. The Palestinians working in the Israeli market are exposed to multifaceted exploitation, as they do not get wages that commensurate with the effort they exert, and they perform work beyond their physical capabilities, which hinders their physical development. Some of the Palestinian joining the workforce at an early age leads to juvenile delinquency that includes drug addiction and use. Most notably, the children involvement in the labor market constitutes a killing of their innocent childhood and is contrary to their most basic natural rights approved by the laws, as it is contrary to the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989. It was estimated that 23.3% of the Palestinian population lived below the poverty line in 1998, of whom 4.4% were

children. The Palestinian people in the occupied territories have been subjected to the ugliest forms of oppression, genocide and destruction at the hands of the IOF, especially the ongoing war that affects both humans and materials (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2000).

The IOF committed many brutal and heinous massacres against children, of which is the killing of a mother and her four children in Ramallah and another mother and her five children in Gaza. These massacres were accompanied by other practices committed against children, women, and the elderly, notably the massive bombing of residential communities by aircraft, tanks, missiles, and assassinations, closing areas, reoccupying Palestinian cities and villages, harassing citizens, demolishing homes, killing and destroying everything that falls under the hands of the Israeli occupation army to name a few. These massacres resulted in the death and wounding of tens of thousands, 30% of them children, and the injury of thousands of children, mostly in the upper part of the body, leaving many of them permanently disabled. These difficult conditions experienced by the Palestinian people in general, and the Palestinian children in particular, scared every aspect of the Palestinian society, especially, health, psychological, educational, social, economic and political aspects. These effects are interlinking and cannot be separated, which demonstrates the extent of the impact of IOF practices against these children, as they are the group most affected by the Intifada and its variables. Especially since the Palestinian community is characterized by its youth nature, where children represent about 40% of the total population.¹⁸ The Palestinian, since the outbreak of the intifada, are subjected to reoccurring cases of Israeli violence, which is the use of all weapons and military means against Palestinian civilians, including children. The severity of this reality made children the most psychologically affected group. This is due to their lack of psychological, cognitive and social development, in addition to their direct exposure to excessive Israeli violence. The degree of psychological effects resulting from crises vary from one child to another according to the child's experience, the severity of their vulnerability, and how those around them manage (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014; UN OHCHR, 2024).

The Palestinian children have suffered continuously from the practices of the Israeli occupation (United Nations, 2024) and according to mental health professionals, 90% of the children had experience in accidents that caused trauma to them in their lives. Mostly, it was a result of the impact that the IOF had on the social structure of the family. The excessive violence used by the IOF against civilians was mainly reflected on Palestinian children, scarring the psychological health causing psychological and behavioral disorders. The IOF violence is

practiced directly and indirectly, where dispersion, attention deficit, short-termed memory, sadness and depression, hyperactivity disorders and violence towards others are of the results of such practices. Children had xenophobia due to insecurity, insomnia or excessive sleep, nightmare are also consequences of IOF practices. The intifada and the accompanying Israeli violence also affected even the usual quality of games, where even children's drawings were dominated by images of Israeli violence in all its forms (Ministry of Health, 2013).

The Palestinian children were exposed to a number of difficult situations related to the IOF violence. This exposure is at times direct and personal, and at other times it would be indirect, through the exposure of children surroundings to difficult situations. The impact of trauma or violent situations for the child depends on the type of trauma and its impact, for example the parents represent for the safety, security and love, and the child feels this in their presence, but if the father was beaten by the army when they raid the house at night, the child loses that sense of security and grows fear and anxiety. This happens as the image of security represented by the child's father has been shaken due to the latter being subject to a shocking and violent situation. Matters worse if the father is imprisoned as the need for safety remains unsatisfied or even non-existent as long as the source of giving is away. In the following, we review some of the situations that children have experienced and the effects of such experiences. According to what Dr. Fadel Abu Hein pointed out in his study entitled (The Parents and Teachers Guide to Dealing with the Child in Difficult Circumstances) issued by the Ministry of Education - National Guidance Commission in May 2005 (Ministry of Health, 2013).

There are different ways of violence against the Palestinian children. Freedom, movement, and expression of emotions are characteristic of the child's personality that children are deprived from in light of curfews, that is considered a collective punishment. Curfew has been a measure used by the military authorities. Almost every Palestinian area has been subject to curfew in various and different duration and conditions depending on the situation and events in Place. Although the curfew is considered a collective punishment, it is considered a restriction of children's freedom of movement, expression and playing. Curfew has increased negative effects on children, especially camp children who live in narrow housings that cannot accommodate children's games, where the streets are then the playground. In addition to violent situations against residents that may occur, such as raiding houses, beating, humiliations, detention, etc. curfew negative consequences on children especially the emergence of some behavioral and emotional issues due to their exposure to the long curfew periods can be seen. For instance, movement issues and violence between sibling, lack of obedience, neophobias and fear of the

army increased. It also has been found that a large percentage of children have neurotic (psychological) symptoms that require intervention and assistance (Abu Sa'a, 2017; Barbui et al., 2020).

It has been used on a large scale since the beginning of the Intifada, where Palestinians are forbidden to enter the 1948-occupied Palestinian. Residents are required, often, to stay within the occupied areas not allowing them to leave. At other times, it is used partially and temporarily due to the presence of some events related to a specific geographical area. The military authorities imposed a comprehensive security cordon on the occupied territories, and as a result, the residents of the occupied territories were prevented from working or entering Israel as a result of this closure. The seriousness of the impact of the security closure on the mental health of children and adults was evident, where 49.3% of children of unemployed parents feel nervous, compared to 38.9% of the children of workers and about 22.7% of the children of employees. Statistics also show that 11.1% of unemployed parents' children suffer from thumb sucking, while this problem appeared in 8% of children of workers, and was not reported among the children of employees. It was also found that the unemployed parents' children are more affected than the children of workers and employees, and that the parents need more indicative intervention and support because they're unable to satisfy the needs of children and because they suffer from psychological pressures caused by the security closures. These pressures, consequently, result in state of tension, that leads some parents to resort to dump this stress and anxiety through poor treatment or at times resorting to violence against children (Abu Hein, 2004).

It is one of the collective punishment measures practiced by the military authorities against the residents, as Palestinian houses are raided during the night with the aim of harassing or beating and punishing the residents. The Israeli authorities have used this method and the accompanying violence, whether against the wanted person in front of their children or members of their family, or using violence against the whole household. Other manifestations of violence, such as when soldiers wreak havoc on the belongings of the house before the eyes of the children, as well as the methodology and actions taken during raids, such as cordons, jumping of the walls, or the severe and terrifying knocking on doors and the intense and violent spread of soldiers in the house. It was found that 85% of children's houses had been subjected to night raids, and that 40% of children had personally been exposed to violence during these raids (Tawfiq, 2007).

Exposure to gas inhalation is mainly related to the uprising and its activities, as the military authorities used this measure on a large scale, which is the use of tear gases

against population centers to disperse these gatherings or to address the violent manifestations that occurred during the uprising. It was found that 92.5% of children were exposed to gas inhalation inside while within their homes, where in some cases some children died due to tear gas inhalation as reported by the Swedish Foundation to Save the Children. Some women also suffered miscarriages due to gas being thrown into closed rooms in their houses (Ministry of Health, 2015).

The current war in the Gaza Strip, which started on 7 October 2023, has been the deadliest of hostilities involving the Gaza Strip and Israel (Oxfam International, 2024; UNICEF, 2023; RSF, 2023). As of 28 January 2024, at least 10,000 of the 26,400 people killed since in Gaza were Palestinian children (OCHA, 2024; Save The Children, 2024). As of the 24th of October 2023, the daily estimate of children killed or injured was 400 (UNICEF, 2023). As of the 20th of January 2024, almost one million children were estimated to be internally displaced within Gaza. Most were in the southern Rafah governorate bordering Egypt, currently the most populated governorate in the Gaza Strip (Palestinian Red Crescent Society, 2024; Southern Transactional Council, 2023; OCHA, 2024). Before the current hostilities, children comprised 47% (1.1 million) of Gaza's population; since 7 October 2023, the conflict has affected nearly all of them. Children are exposed to death, injury, and the loss of family and homes, and they endure physical and psychological trauma (OCHA, 2024; Southern Transactional Committee, 2024). The conflict has led to the destruction of safe spaces such as schools and hospitals and the denial of humanitarian aid access, leaving children in overcrowded shelters with limited access to essential goods and services (Southern Transactinoal Council, 2024; UN, 2023). The hostilities particularly affect children under five years old, displaced children, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), and children with disabilities or with family members with disabilities because they often are unable to flee attacks and are at high risk of abandonment, malnutrition, and trauma (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2022; Rotenberg et al., 2024).

There is no doubt that Palestinian children have been exposed to many violent events, and it is likely that this exposure has affected them, and that they may display some or all of the symptoms that correspond to the diagnostic symptoms associated with mental ailments such as PTSD, anxiety, depression and mood disorders. The question is, however, whether displaying these symptoms necessarily means that children suffer a mental illness or disorder, requiring a form of specialized treatment, or alternatively, whether the fear and sadness associated with exposure to political violence are normal reactions which will diminish with time and support from family and community, and ultimately require a

sociopolitical resolution as opposed to a medical one. Defining human conditions into treatable disorders is a relatively new trend, covering not only fear and sadness but also other illnesses or 'syndromes' relating to behavior, a psychic state, or a bodily condition, that were previously not considered as medical problems. Some analysts point at the coinciding of this new trend with the expansion of the medical services and the pharmaceutical industry, but patients' interest groups also play a role (Conrad, 2007) as cited in Rabaia et al., (2024).

As cited in Shehadeh (2021), the children who exposed to war conflict will directly or indirectly experience a variety of stressors, and many of them may develop common symptoms and reactions such as sadness, anger, fears, numbness, moodiness or irritability, nightmares, avoidance of situations (Amiri & Zafarzai, 2020; Hammad & Tribe, 2020; Shehadeh, et al, 2016; Barenbaum et al., 2004). Researchers suggested that experiences related to conflict, occupation, political violence and war had a serious risk on the well-functioning of all family members, and many psychological, emotional, physical, and social problems raise (Amiri, A. & Zafarzai, 2020; Hadi et al., 2006; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 1998; Dyregrov, Gjestad, & Raundalen, 2002). Palestinian families living within the occupied territories have been shown to have high rates of psychological and social problems and one to two thirds of the population presenting with trauma-related psychopathologies (Thabet, 2019; Thabet et al., 2007; Khamis, 2005; Baker & Kanan, 2003). In Palestine, Conflict started more than 100 years ago. Several generations experienced this kind of conflict since Ottoman rule to British mandate, and later on throughout the Israeli occupation period, it can be considered as the longest conflict in the modern era (Shehadeh et al, 2016; Bornstein, 2010; Nashif, 2008; Bar-Tal, 1990). Israel governorate has been forcing thousands of Palestinians of their privet lands and homes, taking by military force and illegally settle and create settlements exclusively for Jewish Israeli settlers (AbuShanab, 2009; Amnesty International, 2005; 2010; 2017; 2018; Elliott, 2013). Palestinians living in this area are subjected to extreme restrictions on their movement by car or on foot – including the closure of main streets – while settlers are free to go where they wish. In addition, the military has issued shutdown orders to hundreds of stores and commercial establishments in this area. Families and children who have been subjected to violent experiences may exhibit a variety of responses and symptoms ranging from mild stress to sever trauma (Pat-Horenczyk et al., 1998; Garbarino & Kostelny, 1996).

Israel's total blockade on Gaza has meant no food or water can enter the territory, but Israeli authorities have said they resumed water supplies to southern Gaza on Tuesday. Palestinians have said without electricity to operate the water pumps, the

water crisis continues. With food and water rapidly running out, Gazans are prioritizing whatever little water supplies they have for their children. Children are more at risk of dehydration, and malnourishment can further speed up the effects of having no water. A Jerusalem-based nutritionist with the World Food Program (WFP) also told Al Jazeera that poor water sanitation can lead to children facing high risks of diarrheal diseases, which are the most common cause of dehydration and the globally leading cause of child mortality for under-fives. A lack of food at best affects cognitive function and energy levels, and at worst can lead to starvation and death (Aljazeera, 2025b; Aljazeera, 2025a).

Table 1

An Overview of the Impact

Impact	Total	Children
People killed as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	41,615	> 14,100
People Injured as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	96,369	12,561
People missing as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	~10,000	1,750
People displaced as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	1.9 million	~ 990,000
People died from malnutrition / only those recorded as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	37	31
Attacks on health care as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	516 attacks on health facilities and personnel	
Functioning hospitals as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	17 out of 36 are partially functioning	
Attacks on education as reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health	87.4% of schools damaged or destroyed	
Number of humanitarian workers killed as per OCHA figures	304 humanitarian workers including 224 UN staff	
West Bank		
People killed as per OCHA figures	695	167
People injured as per OCHA figures	5,700	1,040
People displaced (as per OCHA figures, defined as authorities demolished, confiscated, or forced the demolition of residences)	6,100	2,700
Attacks on health care as per WHO figures	619	

Reference: *UNICEF, Palestinian Children Under Siege, 2025*

Table 1 showed that in the Gaza Strip, more than 14000 children were killed, 12,561 children were injured, nearly 990,000 children were displaced, and 31 children died due to malnutrition. Table 1 also showed that 167 children were killed, 1040 children were injured, and 2700 children were displaced. These figures show how much impacted the Palestinian children are by the practices of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF).

The Psychological and Mental Issues faced by the Palestinian Children

According to the literature review, there are different measures through which the psychological impact of IOF practices can be seen on the Palestinian children. These include beatings, witnessing beatings, personal exposure to injury, detention, imprisonment, hose demolitions, and deprivation of education.

As for beatings, it is one of the methods used against the population, whether they are children or adults, to quell any sign of rebellion and violence against the Israeli army, and to instill fear in the children. It was found that about 45% of children were subjected to personal beatings by the occupation army while 4.5% of the sample suffered broken bones (Ministry of Health, 2018; Defence for Children International Palestine, 2012).

As for witnessing beatings, a study conducted in 2002 on the violence on Palestinian children in Gaza showed that witnessing others suffer from violence has a greater impact on the child's psychological life than personal exposure to violence. It was found that 55% of Palestinian children had witnessed violence to one of their family members. Studying the psychological effects resulting from personal exposure to violence, it was found that the level of anxiety decreased among children who were personally exposed to violence compared to children who witnessed one of their family members being exposed to violence. It was also evident that self- esteem was also higher among children who were exposed to personal violence more than children who witnessed a family member being exposed to violence. It was found that self- esteem was high for 45% of children who had personally experienced violence, compared to high self-esteem among only 16% of children who witnessed a family member being exposed to violence. Witnessing violence is more severe and destructive to psychological life than personal exposure to violence and whether the child is exposed to violence or witnessing it, this has bad effects on their psychological construction (Ministry of Health, 2015).

As for the exposure to injury, the military authorities used different types of means against citizens and children, including exposure to injury resulting from beatings,

or shooting of all kinds; live, rubber, plastic, metal etc. It was found that 3.5% of the children were injured by live bullets, 2.2% were injured by plastic bullets, and 24.7% were injured by rubber bullets. Some injuries have resulted in death in some cases, and in other cases they led to physical, nervous and mental disabilities, some permanent, and some partial, such as losing an eye or a limb, or burning the skin. According to the Gaza Center for Right and Law, the number of injured children under 16 years of age during June 2011 reached about 3158 children with various injuries (Ministry of Health, 2013).

As for detention, it was found that 19% of the children were subjected to personal detention, which ranges from hours to days, where the children are arrested and placed in one of the detention centers or army camps, where they are subjected to beatings and injuries. Children are, sometimes, not allowed to leave until paying a fine imposed by the occupation authorities over the child's family (The Palestinian Prisoners Club, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

As for Houses demolitions, it has been a policy, which has been practiced against Palestinian activists since the beginning of the occupation, and it is one of - collective punishment measures, and its use has increased more recently, as the house of any one with security charges, especially armed resistance charges, is demolished. The Palestinian Center for Human rights statistics indicate that about 400 houses were demolished during the first intifada in 1987 for security reasons. This measure took a dangerous turn, especially after the occupation authorities 'decision to deport 415 Palestinians to Lebanon and the increase in acts of resistance against the occupation. The number of demolished houses in the Al-Aqsa Intifada increased to more than 800 in the West Bank and Gaza. The bombing of houses was increasing and spreading, where only a mere suspicion about a particular house, would give legitimacy to the occupying authorities to bomb it giving its residents a short period of time to leave the house without being allowed to take out their belongings. The number of houses bombed since January 1993 up to January 1994 was estimated at 200 houses. This number doubled during the first year of the uprising during the first year of the uprising. A series of negative effects house demolitions leave on mental health, especially on children, has been shown. Children whose homes were bombed were found to have a higher rate of neurotic and demotion a disturbance compared to children whose homes were not bombed. Moustafa (2003) highlighted that the second most influential situation on the child after losing a family member, is the loss of their houses, where the house is related to security in children's understanding, which is seen as the set of customs, traditions and the network of relationships formed by the child. Losing the house meaning losing what it represents (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

As of depriving Palestinian children of education, the Israeli authorities have always claimed that the Palestinian children participate in resisting the occupation and exploiting school gatherings for this purpose, and as to deprive children from education and to spread ignorance, the occupation authorities started with partially closing educational institutions and then full closures were imposed. The Israeli authorities with these closures red depriving children the opportunities to learn and acquire knowledge, leading to a decreased level of literacy and knowledge among the children. This meant that the 10-year-olds during the Intifada were at the educational level of a pre-Intifada 6-year-old. The streets, the army's confrontation and the dangers facing the child in the street had turned into the daily behavior and the knowledge source for the children, where many children learned the habits and behavior of resistance associated with facing the occupation during that period.³⁰ Thus, the suffering of the Palestinian children appears to be doubled, on the one hand, the reality in which the family, the school and the Palestinian media are living as well as the difficult conditions and traditions that are afflicted by the situations that are not based on our Arab-Islamic culture and on the other hand, what these children are exposed to in terms of terrorism practiced by the IOF in their ugliest forms. The Palestinian children are deprived from their most basic rights, starting from their right to express their opinions, their right to life, liberty, protection, education and other rights called for by the various religious and positivist laws and regulations (Save the Children Fund, 2002).

Parents like Esra Abu Ghazzah, try to find ways to calm their children from the bombings and destruction around them. The 30-year-old mother told Al Jazeera, her children, aged eight and two have started to vomit after air strikes and also wetting the bed. Both are response to heightened fear. Symptoms of anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder are especially pronounced, with caregivers reporting unusual crying and aggressive behaviors in children as increasingly common responses along with social isolation (Chu & Lieberman, 2010; War Child, 2025). Furthermore, a 2021 assessment conducted by War Child indicates that 62% of caregivers noted signs of distress and observable changes in one or more of their children's behaviors with the highest rates (80% to 88%) being noted in Susiya, Deir Nidham, Sheikh Jarrah and Al Minya. (War Child, 2021). Moreover, 71% of children reported feeling sad or empty sometimes, often or all the time. Approximately 68% experience restlessness while 17% expressed a sense of hopelessness. A significant number of children report feeling afraid, with 55% worrying about something bad happening to a family member, and 49% indicating being frightened for no reason. Additional mental health symptoms reported include forgetfulness, trouble concentrating, moodiness, trouble sleeping, aches

and pains, and flashbacks of violence or nightmares. Children who undergo arrest and detention endure heavy emotional turmoil, with one study finding that 73% experienced insomnia or sleep difficulties, such as waking up at the same time hour of arrest, 62% felt anger and 57% suffered from headaches and dizziness (War Child, 2025). Children facing extreme stress over long periods of times may exhibit a range of mental health concerns, such as regression to earlier behaviors, anxiety, depression, anger and aggression, social adolescents, as well as other education, as well as barriers to accessing opportunities in adulthood (Nemiro et al., 2022).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 in 5 people (22%) of conflict-affected population have developed a wide range of mental symptoms such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (WHO, 2022). A significant increase in depression among children due to war has been documented (Chu & Lieberman, 2010). However, an earlier study by El-Khodary and Samara (2020) on Palestinian children found that 88.4% experienced personal trauma, with 83.7% witnessing trauma in others and 88.3% observing property demolition. However, the study concluded that 53.5% of the participant were diagnosed with PTSD(El-Khodary et al., 2020). Israeli military attacks, blockades and widespread hopelessness have led to a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with significant adverse effects on children and young people's mental health (Veronese et al., 2021; 2023; 2025). Palestinian children exposed to traumatic events relating to the conflict are reported to have at least mild-intensity PTSD reactions (Thabet, 2017). Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It leads to symptoms like flashbacks, avoidance and emotional distress (Abudayya et al., 2008; Abudayya et al., 2023b). Stress in Gaza can affect people's economic status, healthcare access, social support, education, family dynamics and mental health outcomes (Abudayya et al., 2023a).

As cited in Almasalkhi et al., (2025), a wide range of studies have demonstrated that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the context of Israeli occupation of the West Bank contributes to psychological risk for Palestinian children. Most of this research has studied the effects of direct exposure of young people to conflict-related trauma and physical violence (Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2009; Al-krenawi et al., 2007; Ayer et al., 2017; Khamis, 2012; Sagi-Schwartz, 2008; Veronese et al., 2023). However, the conflict may affect the health and well-being of people not just through direct exposure to violence, but through broader aspects of the conflict environment. For example, the stressful social and material conditions that are often caused or exacerbated by armed conflict (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010, p.1385).

The conditions created by political conflict introduce a variety of daily stressors that can negatively affect young people's mental health. Poor mental health and pessimism about the future in turn may further endanger young people's well-being by encouraging engagement in drug use and other risk behaviors, whether as a coping mechanism or as a consequence of feeling that there is "nothing to lose" (Garland, et al., 2013).

In their study, Almasalkhi et al. (2025) examined the association of proximity to the physical infrastructure of Israeli occupation in the West Bank with Palestinian youths' mental health and risk-taking behavior. In regard to mental health outcomes, proximity to manned checkpoints was found to be significantly and consistently correlated with poorer mental health among both male and female youth. The study also found that the expansion of occupation infrastructure reflected a trend that has been ongoing since 2014, but which accelerated after the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict in October 2023.

As cited in Veronese et al., (2025), Palestine, for almost a century, has been a perilous environment for child development, characterized by colonial, political, and military violence, prolonged turmoil, and intractable conflict. This context has produced generations of refugee and internally displaced children living in precarious physical and psychological conditions (Hasan & Bleibleh, 2023; Nijim, 2023).

Everyday life in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), encompassing the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, is marked by potentially traumatic and stressful events, along with cumulative episodes of violence and aggression (El-Khodary et al., 2020b; Van Heemstra et al., 2020; Zainab, 2021).

As cited in Abudayya et al. (2023), a large segment of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip have become accustomed to a wide range of social and psychological shocks as a part of their immediate environment (Khamis, 2020). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 in 5 people (22%) of conflict-affected population have developed a wide range of mental symptoms such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder or schizophrenia (WHO, 2022). The enduring and far-reaching development effects of chronic and severe stress experienced during early childhood, also known as early life stress, childhood adversity, child maltreatment, or childhood trauma, are well-documented (Smith & Pollak, 2020).

Israeli military attacks, blockades, and widespread hopelessness have led to a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, with significant adverse effects on children and young

people's mental health (Veronese et al., 2021). Palestinian children exposed to traumatic events relating to the conflict are reported to have at least mild-identity PTSD reactions (Thabet, 2017).

Conclusion

This paper has identified the following conclusions: 1) the Israeli occupation forces used all methods of repression against Palestinian children, whether directly through killing, arrest, intimidation and injury; or indirectly, by killing or harassing the population, before the children's eyes to terrorize them, 2) the occupation forces' use of methods of repression against Palestinian children was an attempt to demoralize the latter and dissuade them from demonstrating against the Israeli occupation forces, 3) the oppressive methods used by the occupation forces resulted in many mental illnesses among a high proportion of children, represented by fear, panic, psychological distress, anxiety, insecurity and other mental illnesses. Psychological effects, 4) the methods of oppression, terror and intimidation used by the Israeli occupation against Palestinian children have failed to undermine the children, by demoralizing them, and erode either persistence and their loyalty to the struggle legacy that they inherited, and 5) the Israeli occupation forces realized that successive generations were fiercer in the face of the Israeli occupation forces, and this was evident during the knife intifada, where (67.5%) of the stabbings were carried out by children under the age of (Ministry of Health, 2013).

The Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, which started in October 2023, has led to the loss of lives of 17,492 children as of January 29th, 2025. Besides such losses, many other children were injured (Aljazeera, 2025).

The war on the Gaza Strip, which started in October 2023, has shown increased war-related traumatic experiences for the Palestinian children and young people in the Gaza Strip. These experiences include depression, stress, and anxiety. The Palestinian children have been the victims of trauma and violence due to war and conflict and that they are at great risk of developing mental health problems such as PTSD, depression, anxiety, hyperactivity, and somatic symptoms (Abudayya et al., 2023b; Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007).

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