

BRIEF #1

YOUTH AND ADOLESCENTS' PLIGHT AMIDST GENOCIDE IN GAZA: UNVEILING THE MENTAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL STRUGGLES

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Juzoor for Health and Social Development is Launching a Series of Brief Reports on the Impact of Genocide on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing in Gaza: Findings from a Comprehensive Study of 1,011 Youth Aged 10–24, Conducted in August-September 2024

The war on Gaza has inflicted profound and far-reaching consequences on the mental and psychosocial health of its adolescents and youth. For these young individuals, war is an ever-present reality that permeates every aspect of their lives. Daily exposure to violence, loss, physical injuries, destruction, repeated displacement, unlivable conditions, and psychological warfare has left them grappling with trauma, anxiety, and despair. With most schools damaged or destroyed, many adolescents face disrupted education or overcrowded, under-resourced environments. With no safe haven, the psychological toll has been devastating.

The Mental Toll of War

The constant sound of airstrikes and the sight of shattered neighborhoods have erased any sense of safety, leaving adolescents in Gaza to endure an emotional fallout that is staggering. They are not only surviving the physical dangers of war but also grappling with a deep psychological toll that could persist for years, if not a lifetime.

Rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Gaza's adolescents have surged. Sleep disturbances, emotional withdrawal, and behavioral changes have become alarmingly common, as they navigate adolescence under unimaginably harrowing conditions. With limited mental health services and strained community support networks, the mental well-being of these young individuals is deteriorating at an alarming rate.

This report marks the launch of a series based on a recent comprehensive study conducted in Gaza. Using validated tools, the study explored the mental health, resilience, coping strategies, and support systems of adolescents and youth, providing evidence-based recommendations to address their urgent and long-term needs amid the ongoing crisis.

A Generation in Crisis: Mental Health Struggles of Gaza's Youth

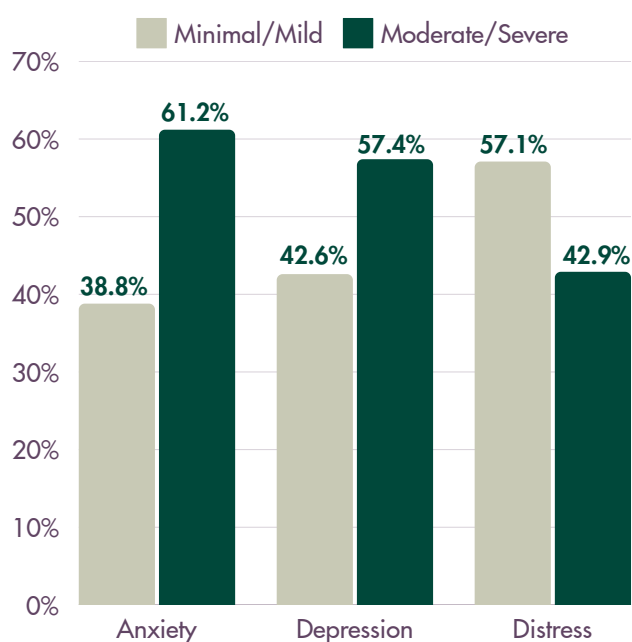
The study uncovers alarming mental health challenges among Gaza's adolescents, with 61.2% reporting moderate to severe anxiety and 57.4% exhibiting moderate to severe depressive symptoms. Nearly half (42.9%) experienced moderate to severe distress, while 45.8% reported low resilience levels. Additionally, 60.9% showed signs of PTSD, with over 55% meeting the diagnostic criteria for the disorder. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions to address the devastating psychological toll of the genocide.

The study also highlights significant disparities in mental health outcomes across different demographic groups. Anxiety was more prevalent among participants aged 20-25 and married youth, while depressive symptoms were common in older adolescents, married individuals, those displaced multiple times, those with poor economic status, and particularly adolescents in the North of Gaza.

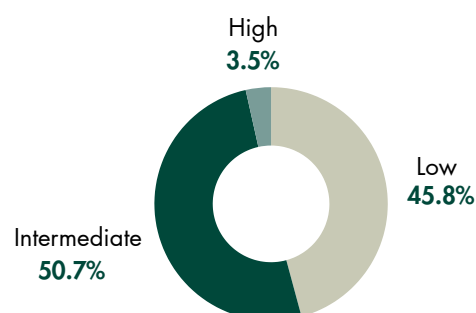
Distress was notably higher among females, older adolescents, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. PTSD was most prevalent in adolescents from the North of Gaza, females, older youth, and those displaced more than eight times.

Further analysis revealed that among the 43% of participants who reported high distress, females and lower-income groups were most affected. Additionally, 32% demonstrated low coping abilities, particularly those with lower education levels and greater exposure to conflict. Females and adolescents from the North of Gaza were more likely to rely on maladaptive coping strategies, such as avoidance and substance use. Social support also emerged as a critical issue, with 28% of adolescents reporting insufficient support, especially among those from low-income families, those displaced multiple times, and residents of severely affected war zones. These groups reported feelings of isolation and a lack of supportive networks, further exacerbating their mental health struggles.

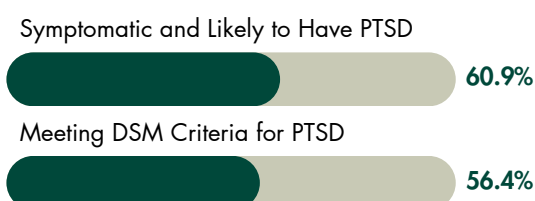
Proportion of Youth Experiencing Symptoms of Anxiety, Depression, and Distress



Distribution of Resilience Levels According to BRCS-9 Scale



Prevalence of PTSD Among Adolescents



A Call for Urgent Action

The mental health crisis facing Gaza's adolescents is both dire and urgent. The overwhelming levels of anxiety, depression, distress, and PTSD underscore the profound psychological toll of the genocide. Vulnerable groups—particularly females, low-income adolescents, and those repeatedly displaced—are bearing the brunt of the crisis, often without adequate support systems. If left unaddressed, the long-term impact on this generation's mental well-being and future prospects could be catastrophic. It is imperative that international and local stakeholders prioritize comprehensive mental health services, psychosocial support, and resilience-building programs to mitigate the lasting effects of this trauma. The time to act is now, before the psychological wounds of war define the future of Gaza's youth.