

How Gaza conflict will traumatise a generation of adolescents

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A new study has examined adolescent victims of conflict in the Gaza strip - and has found that exposure to war-torn environments has a lasting and damaging effect on the psychology of young people.

The paper, entitled 'Trauma, PTSD, Anxiety and Coping Strategies among Palestinians Adolescents Exposed to War in Gaza' has been published in the Arab Journal of Psychiatry and was co-authored by Professor Panos Vostanis from the University of Leicester's Greenwood Institute of Child Health, Professor Abdelaziz Thabet from Al-Quds University and Omar EL-Buhaisi from the University of Leicester.

The study investigated types of traumatic events experienced by Palestinian [adolescents](#) exposed to war in Gaza in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and [coping strategies](#) and has found that a substantial number of adolescents in these situations develop a range of long-lasting emotional and behaviour problems.

Professor Vostanis said: "The University of Leicester has been collaborating with colleagues from Gaza for the last 15 years. All studies have consistently shown the impact of war trauma and how this is mediated further by poverty and deprivation. Each cycle of violence has a cumulative effect on children and [young people](#)."

The sample comprised 358 adolescents aged 15 to 18 years; 158 boys (44.1%) and 200 girls (55.9%). Of the adolescents studied, the majority witnessed mutilated bodies on TV, were exposed to heavy artillery

shelling, saw evidence of shelling and heard sonic sounds from jetfighters. As a result, many adolescents developed anxiety disorders, with females reporting a greater number of PTSD symptoms than males.

Professor Vostanis added: "The toll on the mental health of these young people tends to be exacerbated by poverty, which is endemic in Gaza. It's a double whammy for many of them. As well as the conflict itself, they are also affected by how their parents respond, by the provision of basic needs and if there's a sense of helplessness."

More information: Arab Journal of Psychiatry Vol. 25, No. 1 May 2014 edition, page 76: [www.arabjpsychiat.com/media/PDF ... rab_journal_2014.pdf](http://www.arabjpsychiat.com/media/PDF/Arab_Journal_of_Psychiatry_Vol_25_No_1_May_2014_Edition_Page_76.pdf)

Provided by University of Leicester

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