

Research shows devastating effect war and violence has on children's mental health

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Violence and conflict in areas affected by war, such as Gaza, can have a devastating effect on the mental health of the children exposed to it, according to research at the University of Leicester.

After extensive research into trauma caused by war, Dr Panos Vostanis from the University of Leicester's Department of Neuroscience, Psychology and Behaviour has observed how [children](#) are affected both directly through witnessing violence and experiencing loss and indirectly due to the impaired ability of parents to protect their children and the disruption of vital support networks.

In order to challenge this and provide increased protection and well-being for children, the University of Leicester is launching a number of joint research projects on a range of child [mental health problems](#) with the State Islamic University Jakarta, after a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed in October 2014.

Professor Vostanis said: "We now have sufficient evidence on the devastating effects of war and other conflicts on children worldwide. We also have increasing access to effective approaches in helping children in the most remote parts of the planet."

The projects form part of the global World Awareness for Children in Trauma (WACIT) campaign which is led by the University of Leicester and involves centres from eight countries.

The programme focuses on promoting child well-being by integrating [cultural diversity](#) in schools, clinical and community settings such as orphanages.

The launch will start with a conference entitled 'Promoting Children's Health, Development and Wellbeing: Integrating Cultural Diversity' at the State Islamic University Jakarta on 5 – 7 November, with Professor Panos Vostanis as the keynote speaker.

During the event Professor Vostanis will present recent research findings from the Greenwood Institute child [mental health](#) group at the University of Leicester on how different traumatic events such as war and ethnic conflict affect children; how these are mediated by socioeconomic disadvantage; and how effective interventions can be delivered in countries with limited resources by involving communities, schools, families, children and young people.

A training model will be implemented on 7 November with volunteers and staff of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Jakarta on helping children who have experienced trauma and establishing sustainable networks. These networks will be facilitated through meetings with stakeholders and visits to key agencies.

Professor Vostanis added: "The vision of WACIT is to build on our knowledge and experience, and to develop programmes that can be easily used internationally by charities and statutory organisations across different settings and circumstances."

More information: More information about WACIT is available here: www.wacit.org

Provided by University of Leicester

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