

Impact of siege on Palestinian Families in the Gaza Strip

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Introduction

With a population of 1,416, 546 million people, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics estimations indicate that the population density in the Palestinian Territory was 625 persons/km² in the end of 2007. In the West Bank, the density was 415 persons/km² while in Gaza Strip, the density raised to 3,881 persons/km². In Israel the population density in 2007 was approximately 317 person/km² of Arabs and Jews. Eighty percent of the population in Gaza falls below the poverty line of US\$2 per day (up from 30 percent in 2000) and the unemployment level stands at approximately 50 percent. In addition, people in Gaza have been subject to military occupation, causing significant psychological trauma, particularly for children (PCBS, 2006).

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- Since the beginning of 2006 the situation has become more uncertain and only can be viewed with concern by the international organizations working in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Specifically, this uncertainty is based on the results of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections at the end of January 2006 – in which the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) won 74 of the 132 seats. Following this election, the international community, through public statements issued by the Quartet for the Gaza Disengagement, the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) have asked the future Hamas-led government to commit to non-violence, to the recognition of Israel and to the acceptance of previous obligations (the Roadmap) in order to allow international donors to continue providing funds to the PA. Israel has announced that it will withhold monthly tax payments to the PA, amounting to between US\$ 50 million and US\$ 65 million per month and constituting about two-thirds of the income derived from Palestinian economic activity (WHO, 2006).

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- The last six months of 2006 were characterized by the escalation of the crisis after the capture of an Israeli soldier by a Palestinian militant group in Gaza. Consequently, Israel started the Summer Rains campaign and imposed strict closure by sealing off the entire Gaza Strip. This included closing the Rafah and Karni crossings for prolonged period of times, and resulted in huge humanitarian suffering for the whole Palestinian population. Israel has also committed major military offences including a massacre in Beit Hanoun village in north of Gaza Strip, with over 20 victims. More than 400 people were killed and thousands were injured. The current crisis can be highlighted by several miseries. Though the impact varied between Gaza and the West Bank, both Gaza and the West Bank suffered from the intensification of Israeli military operations, and the suspension of the transfer of the PNA dues which lead to the suspension of civil servants' salaries. Gaza also suffered from resumption of sonic booms, the shortage of food, fuel and Medical supplies, and the destruction of Electricity Station.

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Siege of Gaza

- On September 19, 2007 Israel's Security Cabinet voted to declare the militant Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip an "enemy entity" and enacted a number of sanctions. Among the sanctions approved by the Cabinet was reducing the fuel supply to a bare minimum. Only essential food and medical supplies would be permitted to enter the Strip and electricity would also be reduced. From that time till today the siege of Gaza was tightened and this was escalated in the last 2 months in which fuel shortage problem and closure of borders became the main issue of discussion in the Gaza Strip.

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Aims:

The aims of the study were:

- To investigate impact of siege on Palestinians quality of life in the Gaza Strip.
- To investigate the impact of siege of the Gaza Strip on Palestinians feelings of anger and anger state in relation psychological symptoms in relation to other socioeconomic variables.
- To investigate the impact of siege including other traumatic events on mental health and resilience of children.

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Methodology

➤ *Subjects*

- The study sample consisted of 386 adults' age range (18-64 years) who were selected randomly from a community base sample process representing the five geographical area of the Gaza Strip with similar socioeconomic and cultural characteristics. Also, 386 children from the same families were interviewed.

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Instruments

Sociodemographic variables: include sex, age, education, etc.....

1- Adults tools

- 1.1 Gaza Siege Checklist (GCMHP, 2008)
- 1.2 World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF)
- 1.3 Symptom Checklist (BSI-53) (BSI; Derogatis, 1993).
- 1.4 State–Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI; Spielberger, 1996).Arabic version (Elqourashi, 1997) .

2- Children tools

- 2.1 Gaza Traumatic Events Checklist for Israelis Violence (Thabet et al, 2006).
- 2.2 Gaza Traumatic Events Checklist for Factional Fighting (Thabet et al, 2006)
- 2.3 UCLA PTSD Index for DSM IV - Adolescent Version (Rodriguez et al , 1999).
- 2.4 Child General Mental Health Scale.
- 2.5 Children Resilience Scale (Mekhemir, 2000, Thabet et al, 2007).

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Sociodemographic Characteristics of study population adults (N = 386)

	No	%
<i>1. Sex</i>		
Male	201	52.07
Female	185	47.93
<i>2. Age</i>		
<i>Mean = 41.53 (SD = 7.48)</i>		
<i>3. Place of residence</i>		
North Gaza	64	16.58
Gaza	142	36.79
Middle area	54	13.99
Khan Younis	80	20.73
Rafah area	46	11.92
<i>4. Type of residence</i>		
City	221	57.25
Village	39	10.10
Camp	126	32.64
<i>5. Citizenship</i>		
Refugee	284	73.58
Citizen	102	26.42

Economic and health status due to siege

Our results showed that 72 of the sample were unemployed due to siege (18.8%), 164 were unemployed before the siege (42.7%), 83 had chronic illness and can not treated (21.5%), and 97 one of the family members had chronic illness and can not treated (25.1%).

Frequency of impact of siege of Gaza

- The results showed that the most common impact of siege of Gaza items were: prices are sharply increased (97.67%), I feel I am in a big prison (92.23%), I can not find things I need in the market (91.70%), I quitted some purchased daily needs (88.30%), and social visits are less than before (85.23%). While least common reported items were: I started doing the papers for immigration (16.10%) and one of the family member died due to prevention of traveling for treatment (13.80%). The siege items ranged from 0- 21 with mean siege was 12.

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World Health Organization Quality of Life results- 24 items

The results showed that only 11.8% of Palestinians were satisfied with their general health and only 8% said that they enjoy their life.

In this study the highest percentage of quality of life items were measure by summing 4+5 (good QOL): 38.9% were satisfied with their personal relationships, 30.91% had negative feelings, such as blue mood, despair, anxiety, depression, 30.5% satisfied with their spirituality, religion and personal beliefs, 29.09% satisfied with their bodily appearance, and 26.5% had pain and discomfort. While the least frequent items of quality of life were: 3.38% have the opportunity for leisure activities, 5.76% were satisfied with the conditions of living place, 8.83% have access to health and social care, 8.83% have enough money to meet their needs, 9.09% were satisfied with transport.

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Means and Standard deviations of QOL and subscales

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Quality of life-Total	359	31.00	100.00	64.19	9.67
Physical domain	375	7.00	28.00	18.37	2.95
Psychological domain	379	7.00	27.00	17.67	3.01
Social domain	378	3.00	15.00	8.71	2.26
Environmental domain	379	9.00	34.00	19.47	4.28

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Association between siege scores and quality of life

- When each siege items was entered as independent variables in a multiple regression model, with total WHOQOL as the dependent variable. The results showed that the total QOL scores were negatively associated with I had suffering of being not able to receive proper medical care : $B = -.12$, 95% CI = $-4.57 - -.39$, $p = 0.02$, I can not find some of the necessary things for my children (Milk, napkin, and other things for my children): $B = -.14$, 95% CI = $-5.86 - -.81$, $p = 0.01$, I feel I am in a big prison : $B = -.13$, 95% CI = $-8.70 - -1.26$, $p = 0.009$, I went to Zakat (charity organizations and other organizations to get the food : $B = -.11$, 95% CI = $-4.55 - -0.24$, $p = 0.03$, I started doing the papers for immigration $B = -.10$, 95% CI = $-5.40 - -0.14$, $p = 0.03$.

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General psychopathology using Symptoms Checklist

- Mental distress was evaluated by the short form of self-report fifty three item Symptom Checklist (BSI-53), which is a general standardized measure of psychopathology showed that 75.91 % feel worthlessness, 56.5% blaming themselves for things, 55.7% feel that every thing in life is difficult, 54.4% had nervousness, 41.8% feel tense or keyed up, and 41.1% feel easily annoyed or irritated. While the least common psychological symptoms were thoughts of ending your life (10.4%), feeling inferior to others (14.8%), beliefs that someone is controlling your thoughts (23.3%).

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Means and Standard deviations of psychological symptoms (BSI and subscales)

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Symptom Checklist (BSI-53)	353	4	186	81.19	31.91
Somatization	374	0	26	10.88	5.47
Obsessive compulsive disorder	382	2	23	11.30	3.85
Interpersonal sensitivity	386	0	15	4.89	2.95
Depression	382	0	24	8.62	4.39
Anxiety	378	0	23	10.00	4.69
Hostility	379	0	19	7.31	3.73
Phobic anxiety	384	0	19	7.53	3.89
Paranoid	381	0	19	7.16	3.80
Psychosis	381	0	19	6.90	3.82

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Determinants of siege scores and psychological symptoms

In order to find out the predictive effect of siege on psychological symptoms, total psychological symptoms was entered as dependent variable in a multiple regression model, with siege items as the independent variables. The results showed that the total BSI scores were positively associated with the following siege items: I had suffering of not able to receive proper medical care ($B = .14, p < 0.001$), I feel I am in a big prison ($B = .19, p < 0.01$), I sold some of my furniture and gold ($B = .15, p < 0.003$), I was not able to get specific medicine for me or for one of the family member ($B = .13, p < 0.01$), I quitted some purchased daily needs ($B = .11, p < 0.02$).

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Anger

➤ Anger state

➤ In this study the most common state of anger items were: I feel upset (18.4%) and I barely burned from the inside (10.4%). While the least common states were: I had the desire to break things (2.6%), and I feel the desire to direct insults someone (4.1%).

➤ Anger trait

In this study the most common trait of anger items were: I feel upset when my work is not appreciated (21.1%), I became angry when I did a good job and get the estimate is weak (19.9%), and I am angry when mistakes of others delayed my work (16.1%). While the least common traits were: I loss control of my self (4.4%), I feel a desire to strike a person when touch of frustration (4.2%), I said bad words when I am provoked outrage (2.9%).

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Determinants of anger state and siege

In order to find out the predictive effect of siege on anger state, total anger state was entered as dependent variable in a multiple regression model, with siege items as the independent variables. The results showed that the total anger state scores were positively associated with the following siege items: I was not able to get specific medicine for me or for one of the family member: (B= .17, $p < 0.001$), I thought of immigration (B=.13, $p < 0.007$), one of the family member died due to prevention of traveling for treatment (B=.12, $p < 0.01$), my work affected so much due to shortage of fuel, papers, medicine, raw materials (B= .10, $p < 0.03$), I feel I am in a big prison (B= .10, $p < 0.03$).

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Children and Siege

Sociodemographic Characteristics of study population Children (N = 386)

	No	%
1. Sex		
Boys	201	52.07
Girls	185	47.93
2. Age	Mean = 13.41 years (SD = 2.96)	

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Types of traumatic events due to Israeli aggression

- Palestinian children reported a variety of traumatic events as a result of the repeated incursions of the Gaza Strip. The total number of traumatic events ranged from no traumatic event to 28 traumatic events with a mean of 10.18 events (SD = 6.40). The most common traumatic events reported by children were: hearing shelling of the area by artillery (85.4%), hearing the sonic sounds of jetfighters (81.5%), watching mutilated bodies on TV (78.2%), and hearing shootings and bombardment (76.7%) .

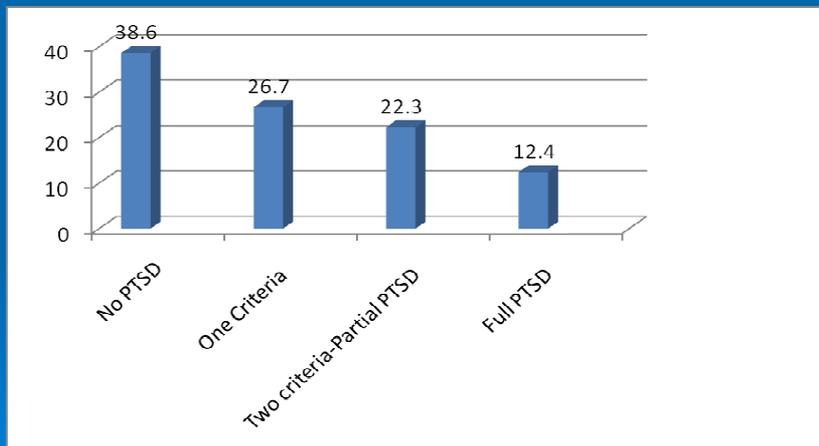
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Types of traumatic event due to factional fighting

- Palestinian children reported a variety of traumatic events as a result of the factional fighting in Gaza area. The number of traumatic events ranged from no traumatic event to 20 traumatic events with a mean of 7.42 events (SD = 4.86). The most common traumatic events reported by children were: hearing shootings and gunfire due to fighting in the streets (89%), watching mutilated bodies on TV (87.3%), being detained at house during fighting (55.1%). While, the least common traumatic events reported by children were threaten of being killed (13.8%), and being arrested or kidnapped (13.2%).

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Frequencies and Percentages of PTSD Symptom (No =386)



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Child general mental health

Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip reported a variety of psychological symptoms. The most common psychological symptoms were: worried about things (73.8%), depressed (54.8%), afraid when being alone (53.7%), headache (53.2%), and sadness in the morning (52.9%). While the least common symptoms were nervous breakdown (12.1%) and joint pains (8.8%).

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Resilience in Palestinian children

Children reported a different resilience, the most common items were : I had my values and principles and I keep it (70.5%), I initiate doing things to help my family (66.7%), change is the usual thing in life and the importance is to face adversities successfully (64.5%), I think I had goal in my life and I live to achieve this goal (62.8%). While the least common ones were: I think being away from people is a good thing (14.3%), I belief on the common sentence said "piece of luck better than mountain of cleverness (14.3%), I think luck and accidents play an important role in life (2.4%).