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Exposure to Violence and Instability among Children in Palestine

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Summary

Exposure to violence and instability can cause mental and physical challenges among children, who are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world. Palestinian children have long been exposed to violence and instability due to military conflict, forced displacement, and lack of access to essential resources like food, water, and electricity. The volatile political situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the unstable Palestinian governments exacerbates these issues. As a result of being exposed to high levels of violence and instability, Palestinian children experience PTSD, exhibit high levels of aggression, and face physical injuries and death. Legal aid and advocacy efforts can be implemented to protect children and ensure their rights and interests are represented.

Key Terms

Food Insecurity—“lack of access to the kinds and amounts of food necessary for each member of a

household to lead an active and a healthy lifestyle.”¹

Gaza Strip—Another portion of land that legally belongs to Palestine but over which Israel has historically exerted control. It is also the base of Palestinian terrorist or militant groups like Hamas.

Hamas—A Palestinian militant group and social welfare organization based out of Gaza. It is designated by many countries and organizations to be a terrorist group.²

Instability—“uncertainty caused by the possibility of a sudden change in the present situation.”³ For this brief, instability generally refers to displacement and lack of resources.

Internally displaced people—Also called internal refugees, IDPs are “people who are forced to flee their homes due to armed conflict, generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, but who remain within their own country.”⁴

Intifada—“Either of two popular uprisings of Palestinians in the West

Bank and Gaza Strip aimed at ending Israel’s occupation of those territories and creating an independent Palestinian state.”⁵

Occupied Palestinian Territory

(OPT)—Palestinian land that is under Israeli control, namely East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip.⁶

Shatterbelt—“A region of persistent political fragmentation due to devolution and centrifugal forces...Regions classified as shatterbelts are characterized by states or territories with a large degree of ethnic, linguistic, religious diversity,

and a history of antagonism and hostility between the groups living there, and can result from the balkanization of larger political entities.”⁷

West Bank—A portion of land in the region (around Jerusalem) that legally belongs to Palestine, much of which Israel controls.

Zionism—The belief that the land of Israel and Palestine belongs solely to the Jews due to a biblical promise.

Context

Q: What is exposure to violence and instability?

A: For this brief, exposure to violence is defined as “personal exposure to physical acts of intentional harm,”⁸ both as a victim or as a witness. Instability is defined as facing an

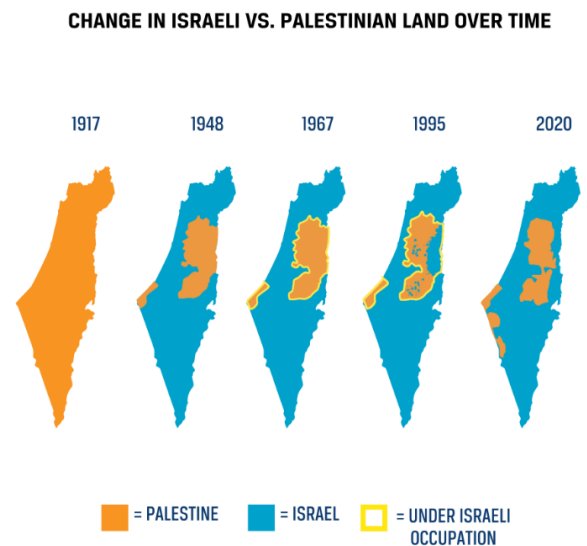
unpredictable or changeable life or future.⁹ Exposure to violence can create emotional, physical, and developmental problems, especially among children.¹⁰ Instability can further hurt development and make it difficult for children to manage their emotions and behaviors.¹¹ This problem is widespread, with around 1 billion children suffering from various types of

violence and instability every year.¹² Of those 1 billion children, more than 450 million are living in conflict zones, around 200 million are living in lethal war zones,¹³ and as of 2021, 36.5 million children are forcibly displaced people.¹⁴

Q: When did exposure to violence and instability in Palestine begin?

A: As a shatterbelt region, the land of Israel-Palestine has long experienced instability in the form of various empires and peoples, so it is difficult to pinpoint one moment when violence and instability began.¹⁵ However, modern violence and instability are influenced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In 1947, the UN divided the land previously known as the British Mandate for Palestine into Israel and Palestine, giving each state a part of the land.¹⁶ The Palestinians, upset at the land division, rebelled in the wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973 and were beaten by Israel, who then claimed more land.¹⁷ Currently, conflict exists between the Israeli government,

the Palestinian Fatah in the West Bank, and the Palestinian Hamas in the Gaza Strip.¹⁸ Fatah and Hamas are rival Palestinian political parties, and although both have issues with Israel, they have separate approaches, with Fatah taking a more anti-violence stance.¹⁹



Hamas, on the other hand, espouses a more violent approach, which, along with their restrictive government model, can contribute to instability in Gaza.²⁰ Although there was some violence between Fatah and Hamas in 2006, soon after Hamas was elected, their biggest issue was their disunity.²¹ When the militaries of both Israel and

Palestine seek to claim land, intimidate, and force compliance, political unrest bleeds over into violence. Currently, armed violence occurs on both sides, with major outbreaks in 2007, 2014, and 2021.²²

Q: What is the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?

A: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict describes the ongoing struggle between these two states to claim and maintain the land previously known as the British Mandate for Palestine. In the early 1900s, Great Britain and other European powers had control over the area that is now Israel and Palestine.²³ During WWI, Great Britain promised the Arab Palestinians that if they helped overthrow the Ottomans, they would be granted their independent land, free of colonial and Ottoman control.²⁴ Around the same time, they also promised Jews that they would be able to have a homeland in the same area.²⁵ Instead, after the war, they were left with two groups with a claim to the land—the Jews, seeking to leave Europe and find safety, and the

Palestinians, who had been living there for centuries.²⁶ In the decades since the UN partition, when the UN divided up the land between Israel and Palestine in 1947, the conflict between Israel and Palestine has continued, with each side resulting to violence and attempting to lay claim to the land.²⁷ Currently, Israel has the majority of the power and control, which has led to subjugation and discrimination against Palestinians living in the region.²⁸



Q: Who is affected by violence and instability in Israel-Palestine?

A: In the most basic terms, Israelis are citizens of Israel, while Palestinians are people from Palestine. Israelis are generally of both Jewish descent and members of Judaism, although there may be Israeli Arabs (sometimes called Palestinian Citizens of Israel).²⁹ Some Israelis started coming into the region from various parts of Europe and Africa in the early 1900s as part of the Zionist movement, and even more immigrated and formed the state of Israel soon after the Holocaust.³⁰ Palestinians today are generally Arab. According to the National Charter of Palestine, “The Palestinians are those Arab nationals who, until 1947, normally resided in Palestine regardless of whether they were evicted or stayed there. Anyone born after that date of a Palestinian father—inside or outside it—is also a Palestinian.”³¹ The Palestinians generally consider themselves as both descendants of Arab conquerors from

the 7th century AD, as well as the indigenous Hebrews and Canaanites.³²

Although both regions are affected by violence and instability, this brief will focus on Palestine. This focus is because Palestine is not globally recognized as a country and does not have full UN membership, resulting in a power imbalance between Israel and Palestine.³³ In the UN, Palestine is a non-member observer state but has not been able to receive approval for full membership from the UN Security Council.³⁴ Globally, Palestine remains a partially recognized state, with many major players, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan refusing to recognize its statehood.³⁵ Within Palestine, this brief will focus on children ages 0–18 because children are an especially vulnerable population.³⁶ According to recent surveys, “93% of Palestinian children do not feel safe and believe that they are vulnerable to attack.”³⁷ Children and youth are often exposed to more risk than other age groups in the form of exploitation, deprivation, abuse, violence, or neglect.³⁸

The Israeli claim to the land is based on ancestors who lived there centuries ago, as well as on the biblical promise made by God to the Jews regarding a promised land.³⁹ The land has experienced many upheavals and changing of hands, but throughout this, the Jews have maintained ties to the land.⁴⁰ Palestinians also maintain deep roots in the land because they consider it their homeland.⁴¹ At this point, both Israelis and Palestinians have lived in the land for long enough that being forced to leave or give up claims would be difficult for either group.

Q: Where in the Israel-Palestine region are violence and instability most prevalent?

A: The remaining Palestinian territories—the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem—are where the most violence and instability occur. These places are the bases for Palestinian militants, and they often experience fighting with Israel.⁴² According to an independent report

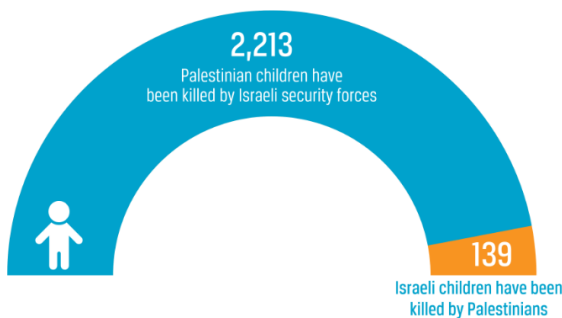
commissioned by the UN, Israel wants to maintain control over the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs),⁴³ although Israel claims to only be protecting itself from Palestinian violence.⁴⁴ Additionally, although these territories were established as Palestinian in the 1900s, they are now considered occupied territories, as Israel maintains full security control there.⁴⁵ The West Bank, in which East Jerusalem is located, is led by Fatah and the Palestinian Authority and contains more of the central government.⁴⁶ The Gaza Strip is controlled by Hamas and has historically faced a lot of violent conflicts.⁴⁷ Due to the fractured nature of the territories, violence and instability are prevalent, so these will be the areas discussed.

Contributing Factors

Military Conflict

Military conflict in Palestinian-occupied territories leads to exposure to

violence and instability because the violence that is so often occurring around Palestinian children puts them in physical danger. According to a study done in association with the Imperial College London, 54–97% of children in Palestine had witnessed fighting, shooting, or an explosion, 56–95% were tear-gassed, and 37% had seen family members arrested.⁴⁸ One common weapon of political violence in the area is missile firings, which in August 2022 led to the deaths of 6 children in Gaza.⁴⁹ Ground fighting also occurs, often between the Israeli military and Palestinian protesters. Although children usually aren't directly involved in ground fighting, they face the consequences of misfired bullets and destroyed cities.⁵⁰



The study found that Palestinian children were exposed to political violence at higher rates than Israeli children, despite the fact that Israel is also involved in the conflict. For example, although 61% of children in Palestine knew about the killing of a close relative, only 10% of children in Israel had a family member killed.⁵¹ In Israel, only 23–44% of children surveyed had heard a bomb exploding or a terrorist shooting, while 63–93% of Palestinian children had heard shelling or bombs.⁵² Since September 2000, around 2,213 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli security forces, while 139 Israeli children have been killed by Palestinians.⁵³ These acts of military conflict play a large role in exposing Palestinian children to violence.

An example of children being exposed to the conflict occurred in the May 2021 conflict, when an Israeli court ruled to evict 6 Palestinian families from East Jerusalem.⁵⁴ This ruling led to protests, which caused the deployment of Israeli police against protesters. From there, Israeli forces

and Palestinian militant groups continued fighting, with the militants launching rockets at Israel and the Israeli forces responding with airstrikes and artillery.⁵⁵ This breakout of violence between Israel and the State of Palestine resulted in the deaths of around 70 Palestinian children.⁵⁶ According to Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz, part of the reason for these deaths is that Palestinian militants hide among civilians and store weapons in civilian areas (a claim which is denied by Hamas).⁵⁷ This claim gives the Israeli military a justification for drawing civilians into the violence by targeting dense civilian centers.⁵⁸ What started as a political court decision had far-reaching consequences, spreading to include and hurt civilians.

Forced Displacement

Forced displacement creates instability in the lives of Palestinian children because it creates uncertainty in regard to their well-being, safety, and health. Although both external and internal displacement exists, this

section will focus on internally displaced people who fled or were forced to leave their homes but remain in Palestine.⁵⁹ Israel contributes to displacement by establishing illegal settlements on Palestinian land for Israeli citizens. To solidify their claim on Palestinian territories, various entities in the Israeli government, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministerial Committee on the Settlements, have encouraged Israeli citizens to settle illegally, especially in the West Bank.⁶⁰



Some methods the Israeli government uses to displace Palestinians are by claiming legal rights to evict them, restricting or revoking residency rights and status of Palestinians, or demolishing Palestinian residential buildings by reasoning that the

buildings do not conform with Israeli building permits and codes.^{61, 62} Although these illegal settlements are classified as a war crime by the UN and under the Geneva Convention, they continue because Israel is not being held accountable by international actors and authorities, although an International Criminal Court case is ongoing.⁶³

In December 2021 alone, Israeli forces “demolished, seized, or forced owners to demolish” 15 structures, including homes and businesses, owned by Palestinians.⁶⁴ Of the Palestinians displaced from their homes in 2013, 50% were children,⁶⁵ and, in East Jerusalem alone, 424 children were facing eviction court cases at the end of 2021.⁶⁶ These forcibly displaced families then become internal refugees, facing instability and uncertainty. Once displaced, families and children are forced to seek out somewhere new to live, which they cannot always afford, or seek refuge in camps, whose poor conditions can cause further issues. As of 2008, of the 10.6 million Palestinians in the world, 67% (7.1 million) were

forcibly displaced, with 1.8 million children registered as refugees.^{67, 68} Of these refugees, around 427,000 are internally displaced persons or IDPs.⁶⁹ With raids by both Palestinian security forces and Israeli military forces, many refugee camps face safety issues.⁷⁰ For children, these safety issues mean that outdoor spaces can be dangerous. Children who do play outside are exposed to risks from military raids, as mentioned above, as well as intra-communal violence and drug abuse from others living in the camps.⁷¹ Although some refugee camps have Child-Friendly Spaces (CFSs) camps in Palestine, these are not a priority in Palestinian refugee camps because they have not been designated as an emergency.⁷² These refugee camps often suffer from poor conditions, like the violence and drug abuse discussed above, further exposing children to instability. In the West Bank alone, around 215,000 refugees live in refugee camps.^{73, 74} In these refugee camps, children experience overcrowding, malnutrition, and disease.^{75, 76} The conditions can

also exacerbate existing problems; overcrowding allows illnesses to spread rapidly and can put a strain on sanitation systems.⁷⁷ Because of these ever-shifting housing conditions and displacement, many children in Palestine have been exposed to high levels of instability and stress at young ages.

Unequal Access to Important Resources

Clean Water

Lack of access to important resources, including clean water, exposes children to instability because it can cause physical health challenges among Palestinian children. In the Gaza Strip in 2014, only 11% of children had access to an improved water source⁷⁹ (a water source that has the potential to deliver safe water⁷⁸). Palestinian access to clean water is limited and affects the health of many in the area. Israel has limited Palestinian access to water sources such as the Jordan River and West Bank aquifer by restricting permits for building water installations, tapping

West Bank springs for themselves, and preventing access to large areas of the West Bank.⁸⁰ Although Israel bears some responsibility for the water issue, Palestine is also somewhat responsible. In the Gaza Strip, the overpumping of aquifers and lack of infrastructure also contribute to the water crisis.⁸¹ As a result, Palestinian water consumption is only 55% of the amount recommended under the WHO minimum standard.⁸² WHO recommends a 100 liters per capita per day standard for water usage (not just drinking), while in Palestine, the average is 55 l/c/d.⁸³ This scarcity, also called water stress, leads to community instability and threatens food access, which especially affects children.⁸⁴ Due to a lack of clean water, Palestinians will use and reuse dirty water, using the same water for different household tasks like laundry, cooking, or bathing. This use and reuse of dirty water results in diarrhea and waterborne illnesses among especially vulnerable children.⁸⁵ According to UNICEF, “all children in the Gaza strip are at risk of waterborne diseases.”⁸⁶ However, they

lack option because, as discussed above, the average Palestinian already uses well below the average recommended water usage. Lack of access to water causes a variety of problems that make life more difficult and increase instability.

Food

Along with the health issues that directly result from the consumption of contaminated water, the lack of water can also lead to issues with food availability. Food availability is a big problem for children, as almost half of the deaths among children younger than 5 can be attributed to undernutrition.⁸⁷ Farming remains a major source of both food and income for many Palestinians, so a lack of water for irrigation can result in food insecurity.⁸⁸ Around 13% of the population is employed in the agricultural sector, and it remains part of the cultural identity since farming has been part of life for millennia.⁸⁹ So, when the challenges to irrigation efficiency result in difficulties with food production, that leads to further food

insecurity among children. Along with the lack of water, limited land also results in food scarcity. Israeli blockades and borders block tens of thousands of Palestinians' access to their lands and farms, and many end up losing these means of survival.⁹⁰ Unable to farm and without a way of making money, many Palestinians are not able to afford food for their families. Prior to COVID-19, 32.7% of the Palestinian population could not afford nutritious food.⁹¹ As of 2019, only 14% of children under the age of 5 in the Gaza Strip met the standards of a minimum acceptable diet (as determined by a UN nutrition needs assessment), and UNICEF was treating hundreds of Palestinian children for acute malnutrition.⁹² This assessment, conducted by Save the Children, UNICEF, and the World Food Programme, judges a minimally acceptable diet by combining indicators that measure how nutritional needs are met.⁹³ Malnutrition and lack of access to nutritious food can lead to instability by causing weakness,

tiredness, and difficulty recovering from illnesses.⁹⁴

Electricity

Access to electricity is also restricted among Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, due to fuel and supply shortages.⁹⁵ Currently, only 45% of the demand for electricity in Gaza is being met, and 86.2% of the 347 citizens of Gaza surveyed received only 6–8 hours of electricity daily.^{96, 97} To illustrate: the average per capita energy consumption in Palestine is 1,040 kWh, while in Israel, the average per capita energy consumption is 5,874 kWh.^{98, 99} The lack of energy can affect the day-to-day lives of children, as the restricted electricity affects their use of appliances such as refrigerators and air conditioners. As a result of decreased hours during which these appliances can be used, some Palestinians in Gaza experience food spoiling, extreme heat or cold in homes, and reduced working hours in fields that require electricity.¹⁰⁰ Reduced working hours lower the wages a person receives, which can result in instability for

children because their parents may struggle to provide for them.¹⁰¹ According to a study done by the International Committee for the Red Cross in the Gaza Strip, even among residents who also have access to an alternate source of energy, 77.6% of citizens suffer due to the inability to warm homes, and 79.5% are still unable to store foods in refrigerators due to spoilage.¹⁰² Electricity shortages also limit clean water availability, as the water treatment plants cannot run without electricity.¹⁰³ Food, water, and electricity are basic necessities, and many Palestinian children experience instability because they do not have access to these.

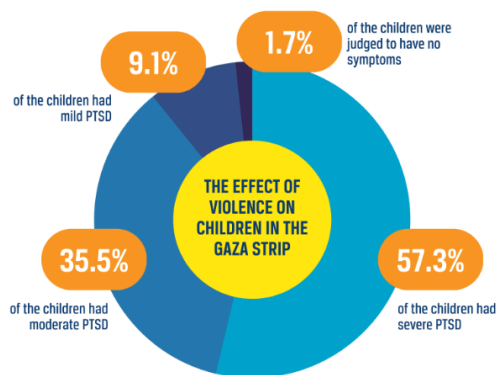
Consequences

PTSD

Political violence and instability can have long-lasting emotional effects on children, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Childhood is extremely important developmentally, and experiencing so much instability as

a child can be detrimental to their mental health.¹⁰⁴ Some of the aspects of political violence that lead to mental health struggles include losing a family member, hearing bomb explosions, witnessing death and violence, or having their homes destroyed. PTSD is especially prevalent among Palestinian children; according to a study done among children in Israel, Palestine, and Iraq, PTSD was most common in Palestine, with a prevalence of 23–70%.¹⁰⁵ In contrast, the prevalence in Israel was 5–8%, and in Iraq, it was 10–30%.¹⁰⁶

areas that had recently endured significant violence, 53.7% of the children had severe PTSD, 35.5% had moderate PTSD, 9.1% had mild PTSD, and only 1.7% of the children involved in the study were judged to have no symptoms.¹⁰⁷ This PTSD can result from ongoing military action, the unpredictability of shelling, and grief.¹⁰⁸ As discussed above, many children personally witnessed fighting, and witnessed family members being hurt or arrested. Many children have also been personally hurt or lost their homes to destruction or eviction, which can contribute to the development of PTSD.^{109, 110}



PTSD severely complicates life for children who suffer from it; some effects include flashbacks, disturbing thoughts, nightmares, and detachment issues.¹¹¹ PTSD can also cause children to have trouble in school, struggle to focus, and lose touch with reality.¹¹² It can also lead to further health issues; around half of the people with PTSD also suffer from Major Depressive Disorder,¹¹³ and it has been proven to lead to issues such as hypertension and

In a study done in the Khan Yunis and Rafah communities in the Gaza Strip,

cardiovascular disease.¹¹⁴ Palestinian children who have PTSD or have been exposed to traumatic events report avoidance of negative alterations in mood and negative alterations in cognition.¹¹⁵ These health disorders can make it more difficult to function in society and cause problems for these children as they grow up. For example, having PTSD as a child can prevent the brain from fully developing, result in chronic physical issues, or lead to participation in risky behaviors.¹¹⁶ The PTSD that children may develop as a result of exposure to violence and instability can complicate their lives for years afterward.

Aggression

Exposure to violence in particular can lead to further aggression, especially when exposed at a young age, like many of the children in Palestine. These effects occur because exposure to violence can increase emotional distress and lead to beliefs favoring aggression.¹¹⁷ According to a 2008 study done among Palestinian children, exposure to military violence is

associated with higher levels of aggression, while those who faced lower exposure to violence demonstrated less aggression.¹¹⁸ Exposure to military violence is also associated with antisocial behavior, which can be a contributor to aggression.¹¹⁹ Additionally, political violence causes heightened physical and verbal aggression, anger, and hostility among Palestinian children.¹²⁰ A study done by Quota and El Sarraj found that 38% of the children they studied during a period of violence in Gaza developed aggressive behavior.¹²¹ The high levels of violence and instability that children are exposed to can desensitize them to violence and contribute to aggressive behaviors.¹²²



Increased levels of aggression can hurt children by encouraging them to engage in violent or risky behavior.¹²³ Along with heightened aggression, children exposed to violence and instability also exhibit more revenge-seeking behavior,¹²⁴ and in this case, that revenge-seeking behavior is aimed at the Israelis. The decades of conflict and the atrocities witnessed by Palestinian children can encourage them to fight back in whatever ways they can. For example, during the first intifada, children set fires, blocked traffic, and threw stones.¹²⁵ Stone-throwing has persisted as a form of violence; it is the charge that children most often face in courts, with children as young as nine being detained for it.^{126, 127} Thus the exposure to violence that Palestinian children experience as a result of the conflict causes children to display aggressive behaviors, such as stone-throwing.

Hamas, the governing power of the Gaza Strip, also exposes children to violence and further encourages aggression. Hamas runs a high school program called Al-Futuwwa, in which

adolescent boys in Gaza receive military training.¹²⁸ As of 2013, around 37,000 Palestinian boys between the ages of 15–17 had been involved in this curriculum, receiving training in firearms and explosives.¹²⁹ The lack of involvement of girls is because, culturally, Palestinian boys are typically more encouraged to participate in political activities and fighting than girls are, and so girls generally do not join the armed conflict. This program exposes children to further violence and encourages them to participate in violence as well by promoting aggression. According to research in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, “34% of boys from 12–14 years of age said they considered that the best thing to do in life is to die as a martyr.”¹³⁰ This belief further encourages aggression by romanticizing martyrdom. Hamas has even used the slogan “death for God is victory,” further encouraging children to engage in aggressive behavior and to actively participate in the conflict.¹³¹ According to an article by Garbarino and Kostelny, “When coupled with

political ideology reflecting violent communal conflict, the experience of chronic danger appears to be a primary force serving to generate recruits for participation in terrorist violence.¹³² The exposure to violence experienced by Palestinian children can lead to aggressive behavior and participation in violent behavior.

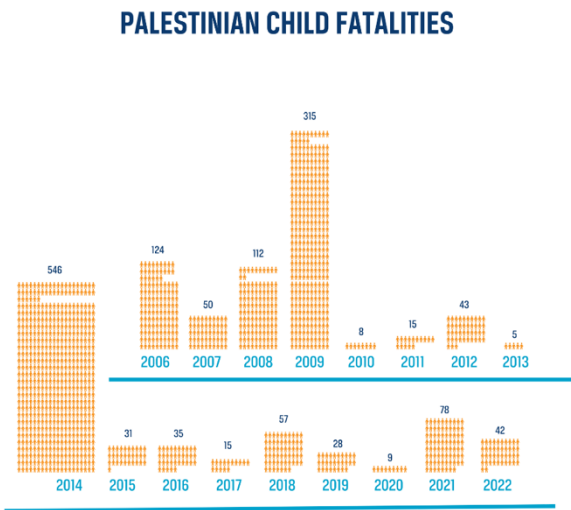
Injury and Death

As a result of exposure to violence and instability, Palestinian children face direct danger, which can result in physical injury or death. These may be a result of military incursions, military offensives, demonstrations, and settler attacks.¹³³ In 2017, 1,160 children in Palestine were injured as a result of armed conflict, while only 4 Israeli children were reported injured due to armed conflict.¹³⁴ The next year, 2018, saw a period of heightened tensions during which at least 530 children were injured, leaving many of them with amputated limbs or permanent disabilities.¹³⁵ Violence also occurs against children who are detained by Israeli forces.¹³⁶ One study found that

73% of Palestinian children detained by Israeli forces experienced physical violence after being arrested, while another found that 80% of child detainees were beaten.^{137, 138}

In Palestine, the leading causes of injury-related death among children ages 10–19 are firearms and missiles, which is vastly different from the data from Israel, where transport accidents are the leading cause of injury death for the same age group.¹³⁹ As of early December 2021, 78 Palestinian children had been killed that year; some were shot by Israeli forces, some killed by armed Israeli civilians, and some were killed by rockets and missiles (both Palestinian and Israeli missiles).¹⁴⁰ In some cases, these injuries and deaths are byproducts of the conflict and collateral damage, such as misfirings, or results of missile strikes.^{141, 142} Other times, children are purposefully hurt, such as when Israeli forces shot and killed a 14-year-old boy for throwing Molotov cocktails.¹⁴³ Although not unprovoked, this retaliation still contributes to the death and injury toll among children.

Part of the reason forces can retaliate is that Israel labels Palestinian children as combatants.¹⁴⁴ As a result, Israel is the only country that systematically prosecutes children in military courts, prosecuting 500–700 children each year.¹⁴⁵ Palestinian children in Israel and Palestine are thrown into the middle of the conflict and, as a result, suffer more injuries and deaths than Israeli children.



Practices

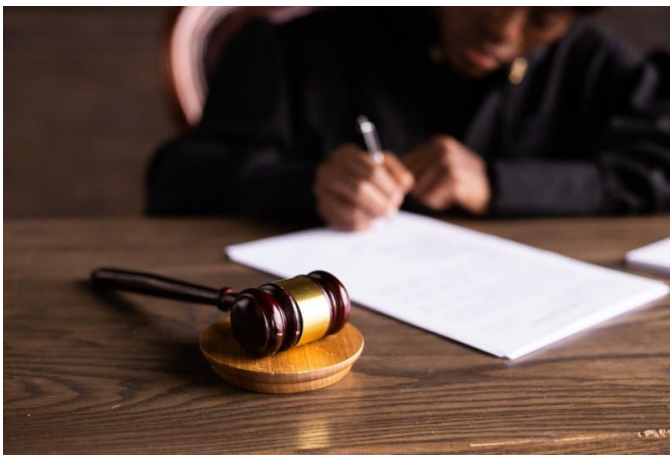
Legal Aid and Advocacy

To address the root cause of exposure to violence and instability among

Palestinian children, legal aid and advocacy are needed. Legal aid and advocacy may include legal and court defense of children accused of crimes, lobbying for laws and policies to protect children, and introducing reform. According to an article in a human rights journal, one necessary aspect of protecting children is ensuring that they have representatives who advocate on their behalf.¹⁴⁶ Advocates help children by representing their interests and pushing for policies that will help them.¹⁴⁷

Advocacy is essential not just in Israel and Palestine but in the US in regard to its policies towards Israel and Palestine, considering that the US, as a world power and supporter of Israel, has much influence in the region.¹⁴⁸ The US has been the largest provider of financial and military aid to Israel and has also provided economic and humanitarian assistance to Palestine.^{149, 150} Due to the large amounts of aid they provide, the US has the power to influence policy in the area and has been a leader in

attempting to facilitate peace.¹⁵¹ However, the US has aligned itself more closely with Israel, especially in recent years.¹⁵² Anybody in the US can advocate by lobbying their Congressional representatives to implement more egalitarian policies towards Israel and Palestine.



Legal aid can take multiple forms. It can be actual policymakers and lawyers who step forward to offer protection and campaign for reform. Many social problem-solving organizations (SPSOs) that seek to protect children utilize legal aid in the process, such as UNICEF. However, advocacy does not require professionals, as many people can get involved by contacting their politicians and representatives, getting involved in lobbying, and advocating for legal protections.

Impact

Due to the fact that legal advocacy may take years to show results, many of the more recent practices do not have full evaluations of impact done. However, UNICEF, an organization active in this area, does offer up some evaluations of their practices. One such evaluation is on humanitarian action for children in Palestine. According to this report, their advocacy led to increased funding and more program development for children in the area, especially in the sectors of education, social responsibility, and WASH.¹⁵³ Through appeals, advocacy, and some of their other interventions, access to running water increased, adolescents became more involved in community activities, children in vulnerable areas all felt safer on their commute to school and crossing checkpoint, and cases of harassment decreased.¹⁵⁴ According to their evaluation report, when children were sent to school with a protective presence (volunteers and advocates), 100% of children interviewed felt safer.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, 81% of these protective volunteers agreed that

Israeli soldiers were less likely to harass students and teachers when a protective presence was available.¹⁵⁶ They also provided some numbers: one of their interventions, “Informing humanitarian programmatic and advocacy response through doc. of grave violations against children affected by armed conflict,” reached 38,000 beneficiaries in 2014 and 50,000 beneficiaries in 2015.¹⁵⁷ Another organization that uses legal aid and advocacy is Defense for Children International-Palestine. With their accountability arm, they have represented around 150 cases for children in Israeli military courts.¹⁵⁸ Through advocacy campaigns, they were also successful in helping raise the majority age for Palestinian detainees from 16 to 18.¹⁵⁹ Therefore, all those under the age of 18 are considered minors, which can afford them some protection in regards to sentencing, although 16 and 17 year-olds generally still face the same penalties as adults.¹⁶⁰

Gaps

The time-consuming nature of legal aid and advocacy is its biggest weakness. As discussed in this brief, children in Palestine face violence and instability every day, and legal advocacy is not as able to help with short-term aid. Hundreds of children face malnourishment and displacement,^{161, 162} and over 30 Palestinian children have been killed by military violence in 2022 alone.¹⁶³ However, juvenile court cases can take more than 6 months,¹⁶⁴ and legal change can take years. For example, an International Criminal Court case investigating war crimes committed in Palestine has been in the works since 2015 and has yet to be resolved.¹⁶⁵ The efficacy of the intervention is shown, but the UNICEF evaluation also recommends continuing practices such as providing emergency supplies, expanding educational work, and obtaining funding for programs in the area. These help with more of the short-term and time-sensitive problems that legal aid may not be as effective at solving. However, legal

defense is often needed in the area, as Palestinian children are sometimes arrested or detained and lack the resources to appeal.¹⁶⁶ Legal aid and advocacy are the best long-term solutions to achieve lasting change.

Endnotes

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