

# Mitigating Risks of Slow Children Development Due to War on Gaza 2023

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**Abstract** The 2023 War on Gaza has inflicted significant hardships on children, posing severe risks to their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. This paper explores multifaceted approaches to mitigate these developmental risks, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support systems for children in conflict zones. The study highlights the detrimental impact of the war, including trauma, malnutrition, disrupted education, and healthcare challenges. It advocates for trauma-informed, multilevel interventions focusing on psychological counselling, healthcare, educational support, and creating safe environments. The research identifies key areas of concern, such as the high prevalence of mental health issues like PTSD and depression, and the decline in social services and economic stability. It calls for collaboration among local governments, international organizations, NGOs, and communities to establish supportive frameworks for children's development. The paper proposes immediate and long-term approaches, including establishing safe spaces, providing psychosocial support, ensuring continuity of education through informal means, and addressing health and nutrition challenges. These approaches are aimed at fostering resilience, providing stability, and enhancing the capacity of children to cope with the adversities of war. The paper underscores the critical role of the community ever during the highest time of the war on Gaza, or similar situations in creating a protective development environment where children can receive education, healthcare, and emotional support. The research also highlights the need for sustainable and trauma-informed support systems, stressing the significance of collective engagement to reduce harm and support caregivers. Overall, this study offers a comprehensive framework for mitigating the risks of slow children's development due to the war on Gaza, providing valuable insights and practical recommendations for supporting children in conflict zones. The proposed approaches aim not only to address immediate needs but also to lay the groundwork for long-term recovery and resilience building among the affected Palestinian children so that they cope with Israeli atrocities.

**Keywords** Children Development, War on Gaza, Palestine, Psychosocial Support, Coping and Resilience Building, Collective Community Engagement

## 1. Introduction

Wars can have profound and detrimental effects on children and newborn children. Mentally and emotionally, they may experience trauma, anxiety, and depression. Huge number of Palestinian children are injured and facing the risk of malnutrition and education disruption. The pose risks of slow developmental progress in Gaza's children, which is also becoming substantial and multifaceted. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from local and international bodies to provide necessary support, including psychological counselling, educational resources, healthcare, and stable environments. Ensuring the wellbeing and development of children in conflict zones like Gaza is crucial,

not only for their immediate welfare but also for the future stability and health of the society. Hazer and Gredeback (2023).

Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, mentioned in May 2021 that "If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza", ESCWA (2023). Even before the War on Gaza 2023, UNICEF (2023a) reported that around 5.7 per cent of school-age children in the Gaza Strip dropped out of school during the 2021-2022 academic year due to school-related expenses, children's need to work or schools not being inclusive.

Collaboration among local governments, international organizations, NGOs, and communities is essential to create a supportive environment that allows children to grow and thrive even in the midst of conflict. The focus should be on creating a sense of normalcy and security for children, ensuring their access to education, healthcare, and emotional support, and building the resilience of communities to withstand and recover from the effects of the war. Abu Hein

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et al. (2023).

The paper emphasizes how to mitigate the severe impact and the result of the aggression from the war on Gaza 2023 on Palestinian children. It particularly highlights the physical and mental health consequences for children affected by the risks of the war. Betancourt (2011), Yule (2010).

Exposure to war creates risks for both physical and mental health, more so for children and their caregivers. This includes violence, inadequate healthcare, malnutrition, infectious diseases, and distress, Miller et al. (2000). Studies show that there is a high global burden of mental health consequences due to war, with prevalent rates of depression and PTSD, especially in war-affected countries and among refugees and displaced children. War leads to the deterioration of social services, increases communal divisions, collapses local economies, disrupts schooling, and reduces educational opportunities. Abu Hein et al. (2023), Alexander et al. (2010).

The paper advocates for multilevel, need-oriented, and trauma-informed approaches to support children affected by war, Hazer and Gredebäck (2023). This includes providing basic needs, psychological first aid, targeted interventions based on individual assessments, and long-term mental health care. Supporting children also involves helping parents and families, as parental support is crucial for the mental health of children in armed conflict. Eltanamly et al. (2021), Baker (1990).

The article stresses the need for comprehensive, sustainable, and trauma-informed support for children affected by war, underscoring the importance of community collective engagement to reduce harm and support care providers. Prince and Howard (2002).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Type of Slow Children Development Risks Due to the War on Gaza

The slow children's development due to the 2023 war on Gaza is considered another important threat to the Palestinian community among many that have been identified by the Gaza Resilience Lab, ESCWA (2023). The continuity of the war and its related devastations now clearly shows that it would bring in more adverse impact on the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development of Gaza's children. For example, malnutrition due to food shortages, lack of access to healthcare, and living in unhealthy environments can lead to stunted growth and other physical developmental delays in children. Buheji and Al-Muhannadi (2023), Buheji et al. (2020).

Historically, the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP), which was established in 1990, aimed to support children's mental health issues through clinical and counselling work. The CCMHIP did training for mental health professionals, and engaged the community involving schools, nurseries, survivor organizations, and family and community resources. The program focused on

both healing and preventing psychopathology and fostering resilience. But, now, all of this is gone with the devastating 2023 war on Gaza.

War on Gaza inflicts multifaceted challenges on children, leaving enduring scars on their mental and emotional wellbeing. Exposure to violence, the innocence of childhood is disrupted, and the emotional toll can hinder their ability to form stable relationships and cope with daily life. According to UNICEF (2023a) nearly one million children are affected in the Gaza Strip.

Disruptions in education due to school closures and destruction, along with the stress and trauma of war, can impede learning and cognitive development, Malaguti (2023). Children may fall behind in academic skills and critical thinking abilities. The constant exposure to violence and trauma can result in emotional and psychological disorders such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. This impacts a child's ability to regulate emotions, leading to long-term mental health issues. Bürgin et al. (2022), Attanayake et al. (2009).

War often disrupts family and community structures, which are crucial for social development. Children may struggle with forming healthy relationships, developing empathy, and acquiring social norms due to the breakdown of these structures and the trauma they experience, Qouta et al. (2008). The stress and trauma of war, combined with possible disruptions in education and familial communication, can impact speech and language development, which is crucial for effective communication and learning. Hazer and Gredebäck (2023), Santa Barbara (2006).

### 2.2. Factors that are Increasing the Probability of Gaza's Slow Children Development

The probability of slow development in children due to the war on Gaza is unfortunately high. Several factors contribute to this slowness of Gaza's children development due to the war of 2023 and inhuman atrocities of the Israeli forces (IDF). The most known factors are the prolonged exposure to conflict, the severity of the conflict, the basic life sources resources depletion, the psychosocial stressors, the interrupted support systems, and the environmental factors. ESCWA (2023).

One of the main factors that are contributing to the increasing risks on children's development is the prolonged exposure to the war, Halevi et al, (2016). This exposure is creating a cumulative effect of stress, trauma, malnutrition, and educational disruptions which take a more significant toll over time, Goldson (1996). Therefore, even the intensity and the severity of the war directly affect the extent of the developmental challenges. High-intensity conflict zones with frequent bombings, violence, and destruction pose a greater risk to children's development. Attanayake et al. (2009).

The other factor of risks on children development in Gaza is the quality-of-life resource depletion which might stay out of service for long time. As the war continues, resources for healthcare, nutrition, and education become increasingly

scarce, exacerbating more developmental delays, Malaguti (2023). The continuous exposure to violence, displacement, and loss of loved ones creates an environment of chronic stress and fear, severely impacting mental health and development of the children of Gaza. Attanayake et al. (2009).

Living in a war-torn environment with inadequate access to clean water, sanitation, and safe living conditions also hinders the physical development of the children in Gaza, Buheji and Al-Muhannadi (2023). Given these factors, children in Gaza are at a high risk of experiencing developmental delays and disruptions. The extent of these delays can vary based on individual circumstances, such as the level of family support, access to any remaining services, and personal resilience. However, without significant intervention and support, the likelihood of widespread developmental challenges among children in Gaza remains a critical concern. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023b), Wessells (2017).

### 2.3. Mitigating the Risks of Gaza's Children Slow Development

Mitigating the risks of slow development in children during the war in Gaza is a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. Efforts must be directed toward ensuring the safety, health, and emotional wellbeing of children, even in the midst of conflict, Buheji and Khunji (2023). Mitigating the developmental risks for children during the war in Gaza requires a comprehensive approach that combines immediate protective measures with long-term developmental approaches. Brown et al. (2017).

The mitigation approaches should preferably be feasible in a way that they can be done Gazans even if the war start or the siege on Gaza continues. Therefore, this paper investigates the type of risk mitigation approaches that would reduce on risk on Gaza's children physical development, cognitive development, emotional and psychological development, social development, speech and language development. Halevi et al, (2016).

#### 2.3.1. Mitigation through Establishing Safe Spaces

Despite its difficulty Gazan should collaborate with health officials to create safe zones or child-friendly spaces where children can play, learn, and receive psychological support away from the dangers of the conflict. Then, the health officials along with the education official should bring their efforts to set up temporary educational facilities in safer areas to ensure continuity of learning. Malaguti (2023).

The trauma associated with experiencing war can have long-lasting psychological effects on children, Goldson (1996). Safe spaces offer a semblance of normalcy and security, helping to mitigate the development of mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, Betancourt (2011). In the midst of armed conflict, the primary concern is ensuring the physical safety of children. Safe spaces provide a haven where children are shielded from the direct dangers of warfare, such as bombings, shootings, and physical violence. Brown et al.

(2017), Thabet et al, (2009).

Wars disrupt educational structures, but children's education is critical for their future prospects and cognitive development, Kadir et al. (2019). Safe spaces often facilitate educational activities and informal learning, helping children to maintain a routine and continue their intellectual growth despite disruptions. Such environments allow children to interact with their peers in a safe setting. This social interaction is vital for their emotional and social development and provides a sense of community and belonging, which can be particularly comforting in times of upheaval. Alexander et al. (2010).

Safe spaces can serve as access points for vital health services and nutritional support, ensuring the physical wellbeing of children during critical developmental years, Buheji, and Khunji (2023). Knowing that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment can significantly alleviate the stress and burden on parents and caregivers, allowing them to better manage other aspects of life in a conflict zone. Ott (2011).

In the chaos of war, children are at increased risk of exploitation, including trafficking, forced labor, or recruitment into gangs or illegal groups. Safe spaces provide a protective barrier against such exploitation and abuse. Safe spaces help children to develop coping mechanisms and resilience in the face of adversity. This resilience is crucial for their emotional stability and future ability to handle challenges. Buheji et al. (2020).

#### 2.3.2. Mitigation through Immediate Psychosocial Support Approaches

Again, based on the safe space established, the Gaza health team should select professionals and even medical students to help provide access to trauma counselling and psychological support to help children cope with the stress and anxiety caused by the war.

The program should also offer support to children's families, helping the Gazan parents provide a stable and supportive environment for their children. Eltanamly et al. (2021) Buheji et al. (2020), Qouta et al. (2008).

Providing psychosocial support for children in Gaza, especially those experiencing the trauma of being under fire, is a complex and sensitive task, Barenbaum et al. (2004). These children are exposed to extreme stressors, including the threat to life, destruction of their homes, and the loss of loved ones. The support they need must be multifaceted and multidisciplinary, addressing both immediate and long-term psychological and social needs. Baker (1990).

Usually in similar cases children psychosocial support would need immediate support, then psychological interventions would be decided and prioritized. Long-term support would be defined more precisely based on the field situation, Wessells (2017). Similar to that the community-based interventions that would take into consideration the cultural and contextual needs of Gaza's children, Prince and Howard (2002). The psychosocial team would design an advocacy

and awareness program that would be followed by training and capacity building, Barenbaum et al. (2004). Such long rehabilitation program would need proper monitoring and evaluation, besides an organized collaboration and coordination.

The primary immediate need is to ensure physical safety for the Gaza children and try to create more secure environment where they feel protected from immediate danger. They need to access to food, water, shelter, and medical care as meeting their basic needs can provide a sense of normalcy and stability. The other primary need is the provision of emotional support that provide a comforting presence, allowing children to express their feelings and fears, and reassuring them they are not alone in their experiences is essential. Prince and Howard (2002).

Crisis counselling should help Gaza children process their experiences, reduce anxiety, and stabilize their emotions. Play therapy could be utilized as a medium for Gaza's children to express their emotions and process traumatic events in a non-threatening way, besides facilitating sessions with peers who have experienced similar traumas can be effective in reducing feelings of isolation and building support networks. Hazer and Gredebäck (2023).

Parents and caregivers also need support to manage their stress and grief to effectively care for and support their children, Eltanamly et al. (2021). Also, strengthening community support would help to build a network of children care and mutual assistance spirit. This should be done through activities that empower children and give them a sense of control, such as art, music, or sports.

One of the best practices found during the wars is establishing peer support groups where children can share experiences and coping approaches, Buheji et al. (2020). In the meanwhile, the experts or the specialists in these groups should work on building local capacity that bring in multidisciplinary team from educators, health workers, and community leaders in trauma-informed care and psychological first aid. Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023a), Ruzek et al. (2007), Baker (1990).

The concerned Gaza leaders should help in educating the community about the psychological impact of trauma on children and how to support them. This should be done through regularly assessing the mental health needs of children and the effectiveness of interventions. Baker (1990).

### 2.3.3. Continuity of Minimum Education Means

Gazans in support with main community leaders, dedicated local or international NGOs can utilize radio, television, or online platforms for educational purposes to compromise for schools' closures. Besides the informal education option, Gazan need to adapt curricula to be more flexible and context-appropriate, acknowledging the challenges faced by children in conflict zones. Alexander et al. (2010).

Informal education plays a critical role in supporting the development of children in Gaza, especially during times of war. This form of education, which occurs outside of the traditional classroom setting, can be instrumental in maintaining

continuity in learning and promoting psychological wellbeing in children living in conflict zones. Buheji and Khunji (2023), Malaguti (2023).

Since the formal schools education are closed due to the war on Gaza, informal education helps fill the gap. It can be delivered through community centers, local organizations, or even at home. Educational activities, storytelling, art, and play can continue the learning process and provide a sense of normalcy. Informal education often includes psychosocial support, Barenbaum et al. (2004). Activities like art therapy, music, and drama can provide emotional outlets for children to express their feelings and cope with trauma. Such activities help in managing stress and anxiety, crucial for maintaining mental health during conflict. Fakhro and Buheji, (2018).

Part of the mitigation for Gaza's slow children development is to continue promoting resilience and coping skills amongst them which the Gazans are doing very well in that compared to the atrocities or the conditions they are going through, Brown et al. (2017). Panter-Brick and Leckman (2013). This coping can be achieved more through the informal education that can help the children to focus on life skills and resilience-building activities, Buheji and Mushimiyimana (2023b). Therefore, the Gaza education team even in the displaced areas should continue to help the children explore the problem-solving, adaptability, and coping mechanisms. This can help them to handle the challenges posed by living in a war zone. Buheji et al. (2020), Bürgin et al. (2022).

Gaza's informal education should focus on preserving cultural identity which the Israeli occupier is trying to wipe out. Therefore, informal education should include lessons on history, culture, and language, helping children stay connected to their heritage and community, fostering a sense of belonging and identity. This means we need to encourage community involvement. This social interaction is vital for children's social development, especially when regular social activities are deeply disrupted.

Informal education can be more flexible in terms of timing, location, and content, making it more accessible to children in a war zone and it can be tailored to the immediate needs and circumstances of the children. Where possible, online resources, educational apps, and social media can be used to deliver lessons and educational content, provided there is access to the necessary technology and internet. Parents can be involved in this informal education, which can strengthen family bonds. Parents learning alongside children can provide additional emotional support and reinforce the learning process. Eltanamly et al. (2021).

Critical information on maintaining health, hygiene, and nutrition, should be part of the informal education programs even in the displacement areas as currently happening in Rafah, South of Gaza Strip, Bürgin et al. (2022). This is especially important during times of war when these aspects can be neglected. Informal education can also focus on teaching practical skills like gardening, basic first aid, cooking, and other skills that might be particularly useful in a conflict or post-conflict setting.

#### 2.3.4. Mitigation of Risks on Health and Nutrition

The war in Gaza in 2023 likely had developed significant impacts on children's health and nutrition, which in turn can profoundly affect their development, Santa Barbara (2006). Now the Gazan public health team cannot even target to implement programs that provide essential nutrition to children, particularly those suffering from malnutrition. Even the idea of deploying mobile clinics to provide basic health services, vaccinations, and medical care to children and families is totally out of scope as many areas in Gaza are inaccessible. Kadir et al. (2019).

Such deterioration of conflict often would lead to food shortages, impacting the availability and access to nutritious food, essential for children's growth and development. War can damage healthcare infrastructure, limit access to medical facilities, and deplete medical supplies, hindering children's access to essential health services.

Overcrowding in shelters, poor sanitation, and lack of clean water increase the risk of communicable diseases, which can be particularly harmful to children development. Besides, the constant fear and trauma can lead to psychological stress, which adversely affects children's physical health, including weakened immune systems. Limited access to a balanced diet can lead to Gaza's children deep malnutrition, stunting, and other developmental issues.

Part of the mitigation approaches is to provide immediate high-energy foods and micronutrient supplements, especially for infants and young children. Besides, the rebuilding and re-equipping of healthcare facilities so that support the vaccination drives and disease control to prevent outbreaks of communicable diseases. This should be supported by ensuring access to clean water and improve sanitation facilities to prevent waterborne diseases amongst these children.

Even if the war on Gaza continues regular monitoring of children's growth and development to identify and address health and nutrition issues early. Also, the support to local planting even in the displacement areas could improve food availability and encourage the consumption of locally produced, nutritious foods. Bürgin et al. (2022).

#### 2.4. Other Multifaceted Risks on Gaza's Children Development during War 2023

The impact of military trauma on 2023 brought multifaceted risks on Gaza's children, affecting their various developmental domains including cognitive, emotional, social, symbolic, psychophysiological, and mental health. These multifaceted risks that are profoundly influenced by the extent of the war violence used by the Israeli forces, shows the priority for focusing on differentiated creative development approaches that rehabilitate to optimize the cognitive capacities, and develop the emotional feelings exploitation. Symbolic processes, such as dreaming and play, parent-child interactions, sibling and peer relations can help to absorb many traumatic experiences besides it can

significantly mitigate any children's developmental obstacles, especially those that would have potential long-term consequences. Brown et al. (2017).

Additionally, the study looks at the effect of movement restrictions and sonic booms as forms of collective punishment, causing substantial everyday stress and severe psychological responses, particularly among children. These conditions exacerbate issues like anxiety, panic attacks, poor concentration, and fear in children.

In conclusion, the research emphasizes that the experiences of war and military violence are in stark contrast to children's developmental needs. The traumatic impact of such experiences requires attention to various aspects of child development, and interventions should consider the unique and severe nature of these traumatic events. Wessells (2017).

### 3. Observation of Cases on Children Development Risks Collected from the War on Gaza 2023

The researchers used selected cases from the social media to represent samples of accumulated risks on Gaza's children development that have rapidly increased during war 2023. The video clips links presented here about the children in Gaza mostly focus on capturing the impact of the war on children, emphasizing the human cost and highlighting the challenges they face. These videos aim to shed light on the human side of the conflict, generating empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by children in Gaza.

#### Observation Case (1) Children Trauma and Emotional Impact

Footages illustrating the emotional toll of conflict on children, capturing their fear, grief, and the psychological trauma they may experience.

##### Evidences

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/CzTMIBLor8H/?igsh=N3ljenVxeXA0Yjhp>

<https://youtu.be/W3oyhn7ijrw>

<https://youtu.be/6sktGTgpUII>

#### Observation Case (2) Displacement and Shelter Conditions

Scenes showing children living in temporary shelters, highlighting the challenges of displacement, lack of basic necessities, and the impact on their living conditions.

##### Evidences

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-XwPX0Uwnc&t=9s&pp=ygULd2FyIGluIGdhemE%3D>

<https://youtu.be/sc2hsHJeejQ>

<https://youtu.be/VZEaY0Q8fTM>

#### Observation Case (3) Education Disruption

Coverage of the impact on children's education, including damaged schools, disrupted learning environments, and the struggle to access quality education.

*Evidences*

<https://youtu.be/49qJ1GJYApQ>

<https://youtu.be/FveRpSsCfOU>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/3WPjZP6sZw?feature=share>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/C2kHqawTrdY?t=10&feature=share>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/1NKMaWGI-Pg?feature=share>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/CU3m74cygAo?feature=share>

<https://youtu.be/VcdZ8XqguG4>

**Observation Case (4) Children Healthcare Challenges**

Footage depicting children in hospitals, emphasizing the strain on healthcare facilities and the difficulties in accessing adequate medical care.

*Evidences*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SdIZmZr29L0&t=83s&pp=ygULd2FyIGluIGdhemE%3D>

<https://youtu.be/4hiE6d4QpfQ>

<https://youtu.be/8J-FMopg0q8>

**Observation Case (5) Children Loss and Grief**

Personal stories and interviews with children who have lost family members, homes, or have been directly affected by the conflict.

<https://youtu.be/wKK2fBF5EkI>

<https://youtu.be/f0kXEISxBtY>

**Observation Case (6) Children Resilience and Creativity**

Positive stories showcasing children's resilience, creativity, and their ability to find moments of joy despite challenging circumstances.

<https://youtu.be/F3ReQ-NCNoA>

<https://youtu.be/kzPA5M0urhU>

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/3lFF7917bPM?feature=share>

**Observation Case (7) Children Becoming a Source of Support for their Families**

In this clip we observe the daily life of Lina, a Palestinian little girl, talking about her daily life during the war in Gaza 2023. Her house was turned into a refugee tent, and her mornings begin with combing her hair as she sees herself through a small side non-starting car mirror. Lina's grandmother is a source of psychological and emotional support and offers her a lot of hope to return to their home and live a normal life. The grandmother is suffering, but she always tries to hide the pain she is experiencing from the young children, including Lina, but when the grandmother's eyes bring tears to her, Lina is a source of support for her, as if the generations are exchanging roles of psychological support.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqQRujmK\\_1o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqQRujmK_1o)

**Observation Case (8) Children without Shelter or Safe Zone**

This case shows that faith and spirituality can play a

supportive role in helping children cope with the challenges of war. Religious beliefs may provide comfort, a sense of purpose, and a community for emotional support. An Israeli air strike hits the house next door to nine-year-old Elaf child and her family. They had already escaped their home in the Bureij refugee camp after days of Israeli bombardment. When their dreams of a truce turn into reality, Elaf returns home to discover childhood treasures and the fate of her friends amidst the rubble. But as the truce ends and the bombardment restarts, Elaf and her family are forced to relocate once again.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-XwPX0Uwnc>

**Observation Case (9) Coping Mechanism**

Children using silence as a coping mechanism in response to the trauma of war is not uncommon. It's a form of emotional self-protection. Silence can be a way for children to cope with overwhelming emotions and traumatic experiences. It serves as a protective measure, allowing them to retreat inward. When a child is so scared that they become speechless, it's a common reaction to intense fear or anxiety.

This temporary inability to speak may be indicative of overwhelming emotions. Extreme fear triggers the body's fight or flight response. In some cases, this can lead to a freeze response, making it challenging for the child to vocalize their feelings. If the child has experienced a traumatic event, being speechless can be a way of processing or distancing from the distressing reality. Youtube (2023a), New York Times (2023).

**Observation Case (10) Serious Calls for Safe Zone for Gaza's Children During Winter**

"The latest IPC report acknowledged that famine thresholds for almost 1.2 million people have already been exceeded, pushing countless families to the brink of starvation. The arrival of winter—marked by heavy rain and gusting winds—adds to their miseries. Huddled in makeshift tents, countless families endure sleepless, cold nights without blankets or warm clothes. Children in Gaza desperately need uninterrupted access to food, water, shelter, medicines, and protection." UNICEF (2023b).

**Observation Case (11) Worries about the Future Psychological Impact Due War**

The Gaza children suffering due to the 2023 war is now started to have a psychological impact that cannot be ignored, and will have future dimensions on the psychological, social and emotional development of the children participating in such campaigns. UNICEF (2023c).

**Observation Case (12) Risk of dying from starvation**

Save the children foundation: "Children in Gaza are at risk of dying from starvation, dehydration, and disease. We need a definitive ceasefire now. We cannot let a whole generation of children bear the brunt of this conflict." Physically, children become vulnerable targets of conflict, facing injuries, malnutrition, and inadequate healthcare. The destruction of infrastructure compounds these issues, limiting access to essential resources. The long-lasting impact on their physical

health can impede their overall development. Save the Children (2023).

## 4. Methodology

This paper targets to explore the type of children development risks that might come from risks of mental health using the growing body of evidence from the observations collected from the posts in the social media. The work goes to analyze and synthesis what disrupts the Gazan children effective cognitive-emotional processing of traumatic experiences, leading to symptoms such as intrusive memories, avoidance, and hyperarousal.

The literature review uses the previous war high prevalence rates of psychopathology evidences that have been observed among Palestinian children in Gaza during periods of intense military conflict even before 2023 to bring the attention to level of high scale risks that need to be mitigated as a result of the war on Gaza that started since October 2023.

The research methodology goes beyond the specific traumatic events that the children suffered and still suffering during this last war which led to losing loved ones, home and neighbourhoods' destructions and deep physical injuries. We analyze all this knowing that all of this collective leading to losing symbol of security and family/community life, which being children with developmental issues that are beyond what we know of anxiety, depression, and symptoms of re-experiencing and withdrawal.

Thus, the researchers bring a practical framework that would help to deal with the current risks coming from level of violence and cascading impacts experienced by the children of Gaza for more than 3 months now and even at the time of the publication of this paper.

## 5. Proposed Slow Children Development Mitigation Framework During War 2023 on Gaza

### 5.1. Background of the Framework

The framework discusses the severe impact of the Israeli atrocities on the Palestinian children mental health and child development during the War 2023 on Gaza strip. Despite the conflict has been on ongoing since 1967 due to persistence of the Palestinians for getting self-determination while the occupation of Israel increasing their military violence, and animosity; the amount of revenge that started since October 7<sup>th</sup> in 2023 have started to affect the lives of the still surviving Palestinian children much deeper and this effect might deteriorate their functionality and quality of life from birth to death, Yule (2003), Buheji, and Mushimiyimana (2023a). This long-term military occupation has resulted in material losses, economic disaster, lack of independence, and notably, significant mental health burdens. The framework

takes into consideration all these facts.

### 5.2. Gaza's Children Development Protection Framework

Even if the war on Gaza continue to escalate, Gazan need to start implementing child protection practices to safeguard children from abuse, exploitation, and recruitment into violence groups. Establish mechanisms for monitoring and reporting child rights violations. The program should also aim at sustainable development and poverty reduction, which are crucial for the long-term wellbeing of children. The work of Alexander et al. (2010) can be used as a reference in this area.

The implementation of Gazan children protection means during the war on Gaza is of paramount importance, serving as a critical lifeline for the wellbeing and future of vulnerable children caught in the midst of conflict. In an environment where the daily realities include violence, loss, and disruption, such a program becomes a beacon of hope and safety. It aims to safeguard children from the physical dangers of warfare, such as injury and exploitation, while also addressing the psychological trauma that can have long-lasting effects on their mental health and development.

The proposed framework provides a structured approach to monitor, prevent, and respond to abuse, neglect, and any form of violence against children, ensuring their safety and security. Moreover, it plays a significant role in offering psychosocial support and counselling services, helping children to process their experiences and cope with stress and grief. We use the work of Barenbaum et al. (2004) to build this part of the framework. This framework targets to mitigate the risks that would prevent the development of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues that can arise from prolonged exposure to conflict. Additionally, child protection initiatives often incorporate educational and recreational activities, which are vital for maintaining a sense of normalcy and continuity in children's lives. These activities not only assist in the children's emotional and cognitive development but also provide them with essential life skills and coping mechanisms. The framework proposed in Figure (1) not only addresses the immediate physical and psychological needs of children, but also lays the foundation for their recovery, resilience, and future wellbeing in the aftermath of the conflict.

The proposed framework is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the immediate actions to mitigate risks on 'Gaza's children's development' while the second part focuses on the areas for 'Gaza's children's continuous development'. The immediate actions should focus on creating safe spaces, immediate psychosocial, supporting the continuity of the Gazans' education means, and maintaining Gaza children health and nutrition. The last action should focus on developing the emotional Gazan children feelings of exploitations. To maintain 'Gaza's children development', the framework sees the necessity for reporting children rights violations. This part also focuses on monitoring, preventing, and responding to violence, abuse and neglect. Then, the

framework focuses on processing the child's experience to cope with stress and grief so it could help in mitigating the risks of the development of PTSD through incorporating educational with recreational activities.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

### 6.1. Community Engagement

Community engagement plays a crucial role in supporting the development of children in Gaza, even amidst the ongoing war. When local communities come together, they create a network of support that can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of conflict on children's growth and wellbeing. Engaging community members in creating safe spaces for children, whether through makeshift schools, play areas, or counselling centers, can provide a semblance of normalcy and stability in their turbulent lives. Such spaces not only cater to the educational needs of children but also offer psychological support to help them cope with the trauma and stress of war.

Furthermore, community-led initiatives can focus on organizing nutritional and health programs, ensuring that children have access to essential food and medical services, which are often disrupted during conflict. These programs can also offer guidance to parents and caregivers on maintaining

children's health and wellbeing under challenging conditions. Moreover, community engagement fosters a sense of belonging and security among children. By involving them in community activities, such as arts and cultural events, sports, and group discussions, children can express themselves, share their experiences, and build resilience. These activities not only aid in their emotional and social development but also inculcate a sense of hope and positivity.

Additionally, communities can advocate for children's rights and needs, drawing attention to their plight and garnering support from NGOs and international organizations. This collective voice can be instrumental in securing aid and resources necessary for sustaining children's health, education, and overall development during ongoing conflict. In essence, community engagement in Gaza is vital for nurturing the physical, emotional, and intellectual development of children amid the uncertainties of war. It creates a supportive environment that compensates, to some extent, for the disruptions caused by conflict, ensuring that the rights and needs of children are not neglected. Public health services professionals need to conduct field workshops on child development, stress management, and parenting in times of conflict. They need to engage older children and adolescents in youth-led initiatives to foster a sense of purpose and community involvement.

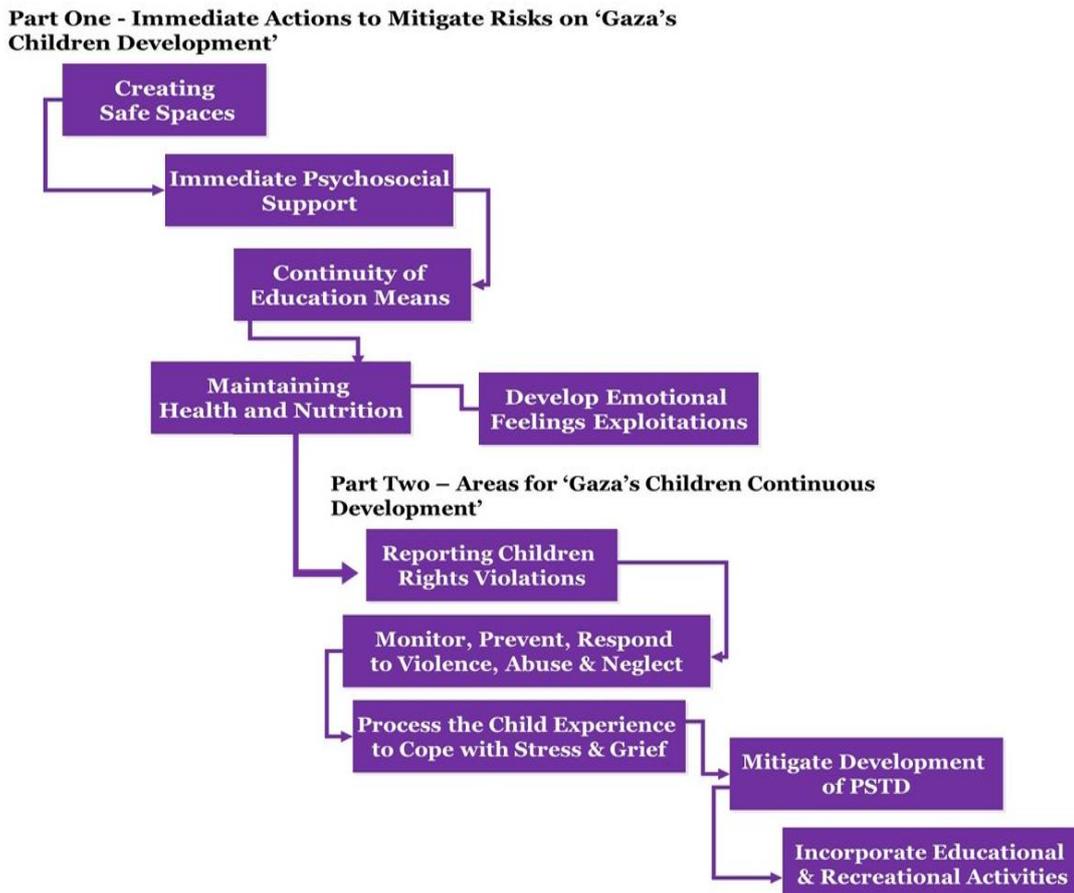


Figure (1). Proposed Gaza's Children Development Protection Framework

## 6.2. Establishing Safe Spaces that Offer Psychosocial, Informational Education and Nutritional Health Development

Establishing safe spaces for children during the war on Gaza is not only crucial for addressing their immediate physical and psychological needs but also plays a significant role in the long-term resilience and recovery of the affected communities. These spaces serve as essential refuges, offering hope and stability in the midst of turmoil.

The psychosocial support needed for children in Gaza under fire involves a combination of immediate crisis response, ongoing psychological care, community-based interventions, cultural sensitivity, advocacy, training, and collaborative efforts. It's crucial to address both the short-term and long-term impacts of trauma to promote healing and resilience in these children. Besides this, the safety space should help address health and nutrition issues for the holistic development of children in Gaza. Collaborative efforts between local authorities, international organizations, and communities are essential to effectively implement these approaches and mitigate the risks posed by the conflict.

The informal education in conflict zones like Gaza can be a lifeline for children, providing not just continuity in learning but also crucial psychosocial support. It helps in mitigating the impact of war on children's development and wellbeing, ensuring that despite the challenges, children continue to grow, learn, and develop resilience.

## 6.3. Sustain with the Challenges and Hardship Faced by the Children both Hardiness and Resilience Building

The health professional, in collaboration with the social development and education team, should provide education on life skills, focusing on resilience, hardiness, problem-solving, and conflict resolution, besides linking faith during challenges, Buheji (2023). Community resilience programs should be fostered through local initiatives and programs that support families and children.

## 6.4. Role of Journalist in Illustrating Children Development Challenges

Journalists and media professionals working in war zones can indirectly contribute to supporting children affected by war. By bringing attention to the plight of these children through their reporting, they raise awareness and foster international understanding. This, in turn, can lead to increased humanitarian aid, advocacy for peace, and efforts to address the root causes of conflict. While journalists may not provide direct support like aid organizations, their work can play a crucial role in mobilizing resources and generating empathy for the affected children and communities.

## 6.5. Final Words

Finally, one has to emphasize that Palestinian children's development is integral to the long-term recovery and rebuilding of Gaza during and after the war. Investing in

Gaza's children's wellbeing and development during the war lays a foundation for a stronger, more resilient post-war society. Beyond the practical benefits, there is a moral imperative to protect and support children, who are among the most vulnerable populations in any conflict. Providing safe spaces is a direct way to uphold their rights and dignity in situations where these are most threatened.

Children of Gaza need programs which focus on the promotion and generation of hopeful scenarios that promote mental health, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and active participation to help overcome the horrors of confrontation. Giving a voice to children as a symbol of change and allowing younger generations exposed to armed conflict to move from the role of victim to actors who transform their realities in search of building peaceful societies, will help children of Gaza to overcome most of the negative effects of this war.

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