


Mental Health in Conflict

How citizens are affected by living in conflict, and how mental health can be protected



This resource will take you around four hours to complete

solutions
not sides 



TRIGGER WARNING

02

Mental Health and Conflict

This resource talks about issues that might impact or affect you personally. The issues might have impacted your friends or family, and it might also be that reading that resource and engaging in the issues bring up some memories or feelings for you that you had not expected.

Here is some advice to make sure that you are checking in with yourself throughout this resource

- If you feel uncomfortable or upset by the content, you do not need to continue reading or continue the project
- Please reach out to someone; whether a friend or family member, or the mental health support system at your school
- Reflecting on how you feel reading the resource is a good exercise to do, whether by writing it down or speaking with others about

We will be looking at how conflict impacts young people. This includes looking at violence, trauma, stress, and war. It might be useful to consider now how these words and these topics might affect you.

If you feel affected by any of the issues discussed in this resource, there is help out there.

YOUNGmINDS
fighting for young people's mental health

[Young Minds](#)



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

[Anna Freud Centre](#)





MENTAL HEALTH AND CONFLICT

03

What will you learn?

In this activity you will learn how living in conflict can affect the mental health of those living within the conflict, and what steps are being taken to address it, with a particular focus on Israel - Palestine. Please note that this topic is vast, and we are aware that there is so much more to cover than what we could fit here.

- How does conflict impact mental health?
- How does it manifest?
- What do we know about it?
- What does the research say?
- What ways are there to address it?
- What's going on in Israel - Palestine?

This activity can be completed on your own through reading and reflection, or working together with someone you know from home or school.

Let's get started!

Here are the kinds of skills which are Important for this activity:



EMPATHY



**ACTIVE
LISTENING**

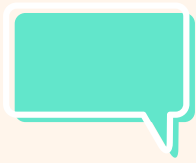


RESEARCH



**CRITICAL
THINKING**





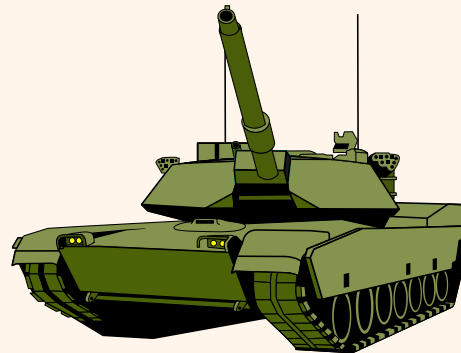
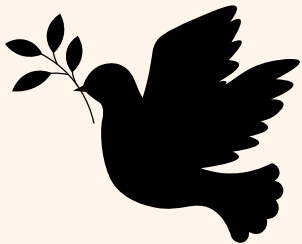
THINKING ABOUT YOU

04



Take a pen and paper or get together with your group or study partner to discuss the following questions

- Why did you choose this research topic?
- What do you think of when you hear the term, mental health and conflict?
- What do you feel when you think about how conflict might impact mental health?
- What do you already know about it?
- If you have already done an SNS session, did either of the speakers talk about their mental health?
- If not, can you think of a way to ask them?





KEYWORDS

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Mental Health can be defined as our internal wellbeing; how we feel, how we are able to function, and how we are able to respond to the day to day and long term pressures and challenges of life. Mental health issues can have physical as well as psychological and mental symptoms and include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic-stress-disorder, and bipolar disorder, amongst others.

Conflict, in Israel-Palestine can be defined as a violent and political struggle with unbalanced power dynamics internally between the Israelis and Palestinians, and complex international power dynamics for and against both sides



Whilst there are differing perspectives on when the **Israel - Palestine conflict** started, multiple generations of Israelis and Palestinians have lived within conflict since at least 1917 and before, and for Palestinians, under occupation since 1967. The entire region of Israel - Palestine is around the size of Wales, and there are around 15 million people living there. Both countries have younger than average populations, with the average age in Israel being 30, and the average age in Palestine being 21 (18 in Gaza and 24 in the West Bank).





DEHUMANISATION, STRESS AND TRAUMA

06

Defining Stress

The World Health Organization says that "Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain.

Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, make a big difference to your overall well-being."

Defining Trauma

The mental health charity, Mind says that "Going through very stressful, frightening or distressing events is sometimes called trauma. When we talk about emotional or psychological trauma, we might mean:

- situations or events we find traumatic
- how we're affected by our experiences.

Traumatic events can happen at any age and can cause long-lasting harm. Everyone has a different reaction to trauma, so you might notice any effects quickly, or a long time afterwards."

Defining Dehumanisation

Brene Brown says "Dehumanization is a process. I think Michelle Maiese, the chair of the philosophy department at Emmanuel College, lays it out in a way that makes sense, so I'll use some of her work here to walk us through it. Maiese defines dehumanization as "the psychological process of demonizing the enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment." Dehumanizing often starts with creating an enemy image. As we take sides, lose trust, and get angrier and angrier, we not only solidify an idea of our enemy, but also start to lose our ability to listen, communicate, and practice even a modicum of empathy."





STRESS AND TRAUMA

07

Conflict, occupation, and violence, harm the mental health of people in Israel and Palestine, and especially young people.

Trauma can be caused by exposure to or participation in violence, loss of a loved one, loss of one's home

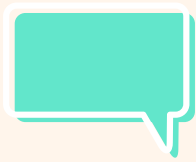
Stress: Poverty, economic insecurity, isolation and unable to move around town, city, country, etc, political instability, food insecurity, community divisions, family violence

There are diverging views of trauma in conflict. Some argue that trauma is the most important mental health challenge, and others that actually the day to day stress of living in conflict creates more issues.



YOUR REFLECTIONS

1. Can you think about some of the day to day stress factors for Israelis and Palestinians?
2. Can you think about anything that might cause trauma to Israelis and Palestinians?
3. Does understanding this help you to have more empathy for the people in this conflict?



WHAT WE KNOW

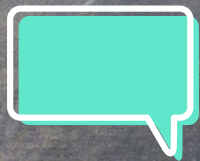
What does the research tell us about mental health in conflict? We have come to know more and more in recent years, thanks to research. However, there are criticisms of the research

Reflections and Thoughts

- Mental health is negatively impacted by living in conflict zones
- Children are the worst affected
- Women are more affected than men
- More than one in five people in conflict zones have some form of mental health issue, three times the number of those not living in conflict
- Access to support is often hard to find in conflict zones

- *Why do you think children are the worst affected?*
- *Why do you think mental health is negatively affected by conflict?*
- *Access to support is often hard to find in conflict zones*
- *Why do you think that it is hard to find support for mental health in conflict zones? Can you think about why this might be different to support for physical health?*





WHAT WE KNOW

09

- Mental health issues can continue for a lifetime, even after a conflict has finished or someone has left the conflict zone
- Conflict causes stress and trauma, and violence is particularly damaging.
- Every conflict context is different and the needs of the citizens differ
- There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution to mental health issues

Some critics say that the way we understand mental health is a Western perspective and not applicable to some conflict zones.

See [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)

- Why do you think that violence and/or the threat of violence is damaging to mental health?
- Why do you think that there is a western perspective of mental health? What other perspectives may there be?

Knowing what you know about Israel - Palestine, can you make a list of the different challenges that Israelis & Palestinians face, which might impact their mental health?





MOVIE BREAK

CLICK [HERE](#) TO
WATCH
SPEECHES BY
WASIM FROM
PALESTINE
AND ERAN
FROM ISRAEL

09

ERAN AND
WASIM ARE
SNS SPEAKERS
AND WERE
INVITED TO
ADDRESS THE
UN IN
SEPTEMBER
2022

THEY SPOKE
ABOUT THEIR
EXPERIENCES
GROWING UP
IN CONFLICT
AND THEIR
HOPES FOR
THE FUTURE





ISRAEL & PALESTINE

10

In Gaza, A study conducted by the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme among children aged 10-19 years (41) revealed that 32.7% suffered from PTSD symptoms requiring psychological intervention, 49.2% from moderate PTSD symptoms, 15.6% from mild PTSD symptoms, and only 2.5% had no symptoms. Boys had higher rates (58%) than girls (42%)

(Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7137754/>)

In Israel, a study found that 76.7% of subjects exposed to war-related trauma (such as witnessing a violent attack or a friend/family member being involved) had at least one traumatic stress-related symptom, while 9.4% met the criteria for acute stress disorder.

(Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1472271/#B35>)



A student of 15-24 year olds in the West Bank, found that the proportion of elevated symptoms of global distress (46%), depression (55%), and (37%) anxiety was high; 47% had been a personal victim, 71% had witnessed violence, and 69% had heard about violence experienced by someone close to them.

(Source: <https://www.emro.who.int/emhj-volume-26-2020/volume-26-issue-2/exposure-to-violence-and-its-relationship-to-mental-health-among-young-people-in-palestine.html>)

VIOLENCE

11

- Fear of violence is stressful and traumatic
- Feelings of helplessness and worthlessness (why me) lead to a loss of self-confidence
- Increases distrust of the other
- And increases support of harm towards the other
- Increases dehumanisation

Most Israelis and Palestinians have been exposed to violence and for many Palestinians, it is a daily occurrence



Can you think of how it might be possible to counter dehumanisation? Can you research some of the programmes below?

**STOP
WAR**

**SEEDS
OF PEACE**



YOUNG PEOPLE

12

We learnt earlier that young people in particular have their mental health affected by conflict

We know that good mental health thrives when young people feel safe and secure. Can you think about some challenges that young people in Israel and Palestine are facing, which might make them feel unsafe and insecure?



Israeli children & their families
Source: [Uriel Sinai, Getty Images](#)



Palestinian children & their mother
Source: [AFP](#)

What do you think the children in these photos are experiencing and feeling?



WAYS TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN CONFLICT

We now know something about how conflict affects the mental health of those living there, although there is much more to learn.



Remember that with all mental health problems, there is no one-size-fits-all solution that works for everyone



FURTHER EXPLORATION

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Study



Global Health and conflict

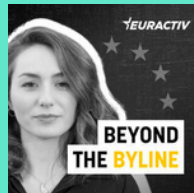


War and Psychiatry

podcasts



War, Trauma, and Mental Health



The war in Ukraine



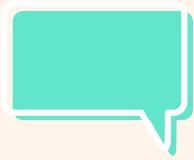
Anxiety of War



Rage, Revenge & Repair

Documentary

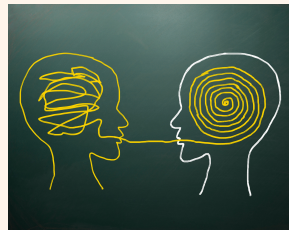




YOUR TASK

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We now know a little bit about how mental health impacts conflict



If you feel affected by any of the issues discussed in this resource, there is help out there.

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Task Ideas:

- Can you research some of the ways in which Palestinians & Israelis are talking about and dealing with mental health issues and prepare a short essay?
- Can you research what the WHO says about mental health in conflict and prepare a briefing document?
- Can you look up why some say that the way we look at mental health is a western perspective and prepare a presentation for and against this argument?

