Quality of life, primary traumatisation, and positive and negative affects in primary school students in the Gaza Strip

Guido Veronese, Alessandro Pepe, Feda Almurnak, Alaa Jaradah, Husam Hamdouna

Published Online February 21, 2018

Department of Human Sciences, University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy (G Veronese PhD, A Pepe PhD); and Remedial Education Center, Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territory (F Almurnak BA, A Jaradah MA, H Hamdouna MA)

Correspondence to:
Dr Guido Veronese, Department
of Human Sciences, University of
Milano-Bicocca, Milan 20126,
Italy
guido veronese@unimib.it

Abstract

Background Many researchers have reported that exposure to war and ongoing political violence increases mental health problems in children. Results of studies have also shown a high prevalence (58–80%) of post-traumatic stress disorder in war-affected children living in the occupied Palestinian territory. The aim of this study was to estimate the direct and indirect effects of perceived life satisfaction on the consequences of children's exposure to trauma and the balance of positive and negative affect.

Methods Palestinian children were recruited from primary schools in four refugee camps in the Gaza Strip (Bureij, Gaza Beach Camp, Jabalia, Rafah). All children had been involved in or witnessed one or more episodes of violence involving other people in the 2 months prior to the study (the 2012 Gaza War). We used the Multidimensional Students Life Satisfaction Scale (peers, self, living environment, school, family), the Positive and Negative Affect Scale for Children, and the revised Children Impact of Events scale (intrusion and avoidance symptoms) to test (through structural equation modelling) the moderation effect of life satisfaction on war trauma via positive emotions.

Findings 1276 Palestinian children were enrolled in this study. The model tested with structural equation modelling was robust. Children's life satisfaction influenced both the intrusion (β =-0.48; p=0.003) and avoidance (β =-11; p=0.021) effects of primary traumatisation. The consequences of primary traumatisation by intrusion (β =0.34; p=0.008) and avoidance (β =0.27; p=0.011) contributed to increasing negative affect. Finally, perceived life satisfaction had direct effects on affective experience, specifically increasing positive affect and diminishing negative affect.

Interpretation Perceived quality of life in children has a role in controlling war-related traumas. Life satisfaction contributes both directly and indirectly to change affectivity. When children perceive themselves to be highly satisfied with their home and school environment, living conditions, and relationships with peers and parents, the effects of trauma are less severe.

Funding None.

Contributors

GV planned the research and wrote the Abstract. AP did the statistical analysis and wrote the Abstract. FA, AJ and HH collected data and wrote the abstract. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the Abstract for publication.

Declaration of interests

GV has worked in the Gaza Strip as a trainer with Mercy Corps, USA, and as a teacher in the MA program in community mental health at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program. Since 2009, GV has contributed to the Remedial Education Centre in Gaza as a consultant, teacher, and project coordinator. FA, AJ, and HH are members of REC Gaza. AP declares no competing interests.

14 www.thelancet.com