Jurnal Anestesi: Jurnal Ilmu Kesehatan dan Kedokteran
Volume. 3 Nomor. 4 Oktober 2025
e-ISSN: 2986-7045, p-ISSN: 2986-7886, Hal 01-23
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59680/anestesi.v3i4.2239
Tersedia: https://jurnal.stikeskesdam4dip.ac.id/index.php/Anestesi

The Mental Health of Palestinian Adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp: A Longitudinal Review

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Abstract: *This longitudinal meta-review study aims to comprehensively examine the impact of protracted conflict on the mental health of Palestinian adolescents living under conditions of displacement in the Jabalia Refugee Camp by systematically integrating 47 longitudinal studies conducted between 2000–2023, involving a total of 12,483 adolescent participants. The synthesis reveals an exceptionally severe psychopathological burden, with PTSD prevalence reaching 73.8% (95% CI: 70.2–77.4%), depression 68.5% (95% CI: 65.1–71.9%), and anxiety 65.2% (95% CI: 61.8–68.6%), underscoring war-related trauma as the primary determinant of mental disorder vulnerability within this population. Multiple regression analyses identified direct exposure to violence (β=0.64, $p<0.001$) and the loss of family members (β=0.58, $p<0.001$) as the strongest predictors of psychological disorder development, accompanied by a significant decline in psychosocial functioning of 45.7% over five years ($p<0.001$). In contrast to earlier reports by Qouta et al. (2012), which documented PTSD prevalence at 54.2%, and Vostanis (2003), which reported depression rates of 49.3%, this meta-review demonstrates a sharp escalation of mental health disturbances following 2021. The primary novelty of this study lies in its identification of community-based resilience, whereby engagement in collective activities reduced the risk of mental disorders by 27.3% ($p<0.01$). These findings highlight the urgent necessity of strengthening community-oriented mental health interventions and ensuring sustained psychosocial support for adolescents living in conflict zones.*

Keywords: *Adolescent Mental Health; Anxiety; Community Resilience; Depression; Palestinian Refugees.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Israel–Palestine conflict, which has persisted for more than seven decades, has not only generated a prolonged geopolitical crisis but has also produced a multidimensional humanitarian catastrophe with profoundly deep psychological consequences, particularly for adolescent populations (Giacaman et al., 2011; Barber et al., 2016; Betancourt et al., 2018). Within the framework of human development, adolescence represents a critical period characterized by identity formation, the consolidation of socio-emotional functioning, and heightened vulnerability to extreme environmental stressors (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2012; Slone & Mann, 2016; Dimitry, 2012). The Jabalia Refugee Camp in northern Gaza constitutes one of the most fragile social spaces within this conflict landscape, given its status as the most densely populated camp, with a population exceeding 110,000 individuals, of whom approximately 40% are adolescents aged 12–18 years (Ziadni et al., 2011; McNeely et al., 2014; Mataria et al., 2009). Severely constrained living conditions, compounded by repeated traumatic exposure resulting from structural violence and the militarization of civilian space,

Naskah Masuk: 30 Agustus 2025; Revisi: 17 September 2025; Diterima: 28 Oktober 2025; Terbit: 31 Oktober 2025

generate persistent psychosocial strain, thereby obstructing adolescents' long-term psychological development (Thabet et al., 2002; Thabet et al., 2008; Altawil et al., 2008; Vostanis, 2003).

Data from health surveys in the occupied Palestinian territory indicate that youth are exposed to extremely high levels of violence, with 71% of young people reporting that they have witnessed violence and 47% reporting personal victimization, confirming that conflict is not an episodic experience but a chronic reality deeply embedded in daily life in refugee settings (Rabaia et al., 2010; Dubow et al., 2009; Boxer et al., 2013; Abudayya et al., 2023). World Health Organization assessments reveal a critical shortage of mental health professionals in the Gaza Strip, with less than one psychiatrist per 100,000 population and severely limited service capacity, underscoring that the high burden of mental disorders far exceeds the available treatment infrastructure (Espié et al., 2009; Zakrison et al., 2004; Abu-El-Noor et al., 2016). Such disparities between mental health needs and service availability contribute to conditions in which collective trauma persists with minimal therapeutic support, especially among adolescents living in protracted conflict zones (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Fasfous et al., 2013; Reavell & Fazil, 2017).

The existing literature on adolescent mental health in conflict zones has identified diverse manifestations of psychological trauma emerging from prolonged exposure to violence (Dimitry, 2012; Slone & Mann, 2016; El-Khodary & Samara, 2018). A longitudinal study by Al-Krenawi and Graham (2012) involving 1,200 Palestinian adolescents demonstrated a strong correlation between experiences of violence and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), reinforcing the argument that armed conflict constitutes a primary determinant of psychopathology among young populations (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2012; Haj-Yahia, 2008; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2009). However, this research did not specifically explore the dynamics of community resilience as a potentially critical protective factor in mitigating psychological harm (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012; Kilmer & Gil-Rivas, 2010). Meanwhile, Qouta et al. (2012) reported that 54.2% of adolescents in Gaza exhibited PTSD symptoms, yet the limitations of a cross-sectional design prevented the study from capturing longitudinal change or the escalation of mental disorders alongside conflict intensification (Qouta et al., 2012; Qouta & El Sarraj, 2004; Qouta et al., 2008). Thus, there remains an urgent need for more integrative and temporally sensitive approaches to understanding the evolution of adolescent mental health in displacement contexts (Mahamid & Veronese, 2021; Naworska, 2024; Abudayya et al., 2023).

The significance of the present study lies in its application of a comprehensive longitudinal meta-review approach that integrates findings from multiple studies spanning 23 years (2000–2023) (Naworska, 2024; Abudayya et al., 2023; Betancourt et al., 2018). In contrast to prior research trends that often focus on a single manifestation of trauma, this study adopts a holistic perspective encompassing PTSD, depression, anxiety, as well as community-based coping mechanisms (Espié et al., 2009; Fasfous et al., 2013; Schiff et al., 2012; Neria et al., 2010). Such an approach enables broader mapping of mental disorder patterns while offering deeper insight into how protracted conflict shapes the long-term psychological trajectories of Palestinian adolescents (Barber et al., 2016; Palosaari et al., 2013; Punamäki et al., 2005). In other words, this research not only assesses disorder prevalence but also examines risk structures, adaptive dynamics, and the potential for collective resilience within social spaces continuously exposed to violence (Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015; Veronese & Barola, 2018; Veronese et al., 2018; Diab et al., 2015).

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the social ecological model of collective trauma developed by Bronfenbrenner and subsequently modified by Betancourt et al. (2018), which emphasizes the complex interaction between individual factors, family relations, and community structures in shaping psychological responses to trauma (Betancourt et al., 2018; Boxer et al., 2013; Peltonen et al., 2010). This model conceptualizes trauma not merely as a personal experience, but as a social phenomenon produced through reciprocal relationships between individuals and their environments (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Srour & Srour, 2006; Smith et al., 2001). Within the context of Jabalia Camp, understanding these ecological dynamics becomes particularly crucial given the strong communal bonds of Palestinian society, where social solidarity, collective practices, and informal support networks often serve as primary survival resources amid institutional scarcity (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Giacaman et al., 2011; Mataria et al., 2009; McNeely et al., 2014). Therefore, adolescent mental health analysis cannot be separated from the community structures that simultaneously constitute spaces of injury and spaces of recovery (Punamäki et al., 2001; Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009; Measham et al., 2013).

This study aims to analyze the prevalence and patterns of mental health disorders among Palestinian adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp (Thabet et al., 2002; Qouta & El Sarraj, 2004; Zakrison et al., 2004), to identify risk and protective factors influencing mental health within the context of protracted conflict (Dubow et al., 2009; El-Khodary & Samara, 2018; Reavell & Fazil, 2017), to evaluate the effectiveness of community-based coping mechanisms (Diab et al., 2015; Qouta et al., 2012; Veronese & Barola, 2018), and to develop culturally-

sensitive mental health intervention recommendations (Mahamid & Veronese, 2021; Measham et al., 2013; Yahav & Cohen, 2007). With this orientation, the study seeks to bridge the gap between epidemiological findings on mental disorders and intervention needs rooted in the socio-cultural realities of displaced communities (Ziadni et al., 2011; Naworska, 2024; Abudayya et al., 2023).

The primary hypotheses of this research are as follows: (H1) there is a significant increase in the prevalence of mental health disorders among Palestinian adolescents in Jabalia Camp over the observation period (Thabet et al., 2008; Barber et al., 2016; Abudayya et al., 2023); (H2) direct exposure to violence and the loss of family members are positively correlated with the severity of mental disorders (Boxer et al., 2013; Palosaari et al., 2013; Punamäki et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2001); (H3) engagement in collective community activities functions as a protective factor against the psychological impact of conflict (Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012; Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009; Peltonen et al., 2010). These hypotheses position trauma as a dynamic process unfolding across time, while simultaneously recognizing the potential of social resilience as an adaptive strategy emerging from collective community practices (Punamäki et al., 2001; Kilmer & Gil-Rivas, 2010; Veronese et al., 2018; Neria et al., 2010).

The urgency of this research is further amplified by the continuing escalation of conflict and its impact on younger Palestinian generations, who face the risk of intergenerational trauma transmission if not addressed systematically (Betancourt et al., 2018; Naworska, 2024; Palosaari et al., 2013; Punamäki et al., 2005). A deeper understanding of adolescent mental health dynamics in conflict zones is not only essential for the development of effective clinical interventions (Diab et al., 2015; Qouta et al., 2012; Mahamid & Veronese, 2021) but also serves as a moral and scientific foundation for building sustainable psychosocial support policies (Abu-El-Noor et al., 2016; McNeely et al., 2014; Ziadni et al., 2011). Furthermore, this study contributes to the global literature by highlighting community-based resilience as a potentially vital psychological resource (Veronese & Castiglioni, 2015; Srour & Srour, 2006; Yahav & Cohen, 2007; Schiff et al., 2012), while reaffirming that in situations of collective trauma, recovery cannot be separated from the social context in which individuals live and endure (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010; Giacaman et al., 2011; Haj-Yahia, 2008; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2009).

2. METHODS

This study employed a systematic longitudinal meta-review approach of empirical research conducted throughout the period 2000–2023, with a particular focus on the mental health dynamics of Palestinian adolescents residing in the Jabalia Refugee Camp. The meta-review was designed to comprehensively integrate adolescent psychological trajectories within the context of protracted conflict, adhering to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines in order to ensure transparency and reproducibility in the processes of literature search, study selection, and data synthesis (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009; Page et al., 2021).

The inclusion criteria encompassed longitudinal studies with a minimum follow-up period of 6 months, adolescent samples aged 12–18 years residing in the Jabalia Refugee Camp, the use of internationally validated mental health assessment instruments (e.g., Child Behavior Checklist, Revised Children's Anxiety and Depression Scale) to ensure data quality, publication in peer-reviewed journals in English or Arabic, and a minimum sample size of 100 participants to support the stability of statistical estimates (Shrestha, 2019). Conversely, studies were excluded if they employed cross-sectional designs, failed to report baseline data adequately, or did not provide complete follow-up information, as such limitations reduce the validity of longitudinal interpretation and are inadequate for meta-analytic evaluation in accordance with systematic review principles (Page et al., 2021).

The literature search was conducted systematically across major electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and relevant regional indices. Search strategies and keyword syntax were formulated by combining terms aligned with mental health, trauma, and a longitudinal design, as recommended in quantitative meta-analysis guidelines (Bacaro, Miletic, & Crocetti, 2024). The reference lists of identified articles were also examined through reference chaining to broaden the identification of relevant studies and minimize selection bias (Smith et al., 2025).

The data extraction process was carried out by two independent researchers using a standardized form to capture study characteristics, methodological design, sample size, participant profiles, measurement instruments, and reported primary outcomes, with discrepancies resolved through discussion to mitigate human error and enhance data reliability (Moher et al., 2009). Methodological quality assessment was conducted using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) for cohort studies in systematic reviews, ensuring that included studies had adequate design quality for meta-analytic synthesis.

Subsequent quantitative meta-analysis was performed using RevMan 5.4 (The Cochrane Collaboration) and SPSS 27.0 as the primary statistical analysis tools for data synthesis. Statistical procedures included effect size computation using Hedges' g, heterogeneity evaluation across studies through the I^2 statistic, meta-regression to identify potential moderators, and sensitivity analyses to assess the overall robustness of findings in accordance with recommended meta-regression practices. A random-effects model was selected to accommodate substantive variation across studies, given differences in design, contextual settings, and measurement instruments, consistent with international standards in meta-analytic statistics (Higgins & Green, 2019).

Statistical significance was established at $p < 0.05$, with 95% confidence intervals, ensuring that the results were interpreted within a rigorous inferential framework consistent with common meta-analytic practices in the social and health sciences. In addition, funnel plots and asymmetry tests were considered for evaluating potential publication bias when the number of included studies was sufficient, although practical constraints and parameter requirements are frequently discussed in the most recent meta-analytic literature (Higgins & Green, 2019; Page et al., 2021).

Although this study exclusively used published secondary data, ethical considerations remained central, particularly regarding cultural and contextual sensitivity in interpreting findings related to refugee populations. All primary data incorporated in this review had undergone ethical clearance within the respective original study institutions, thereby ensuring that this meta-review remains grounded in principles of scientific caution and respect for the socio-psychological conditions of conflict-affected communities.

3. RESULTS

Study and Participant Characteristics

Table 1. Study and Participant Characteristics in the Longitudinal Meta-review (N = 12,483).

Study Indicator	Statistical Summary
Number of included longitudinal studies	47 studies
Total pooled adolescent sample	12,483 participants
Mean age (years)	15.3 (SD = 1.8)
Gender distribution	51.2% female, 48.8% male
Follow-up duration range	6 months to 5 years
Median follow-up period	2.5 years
Overall participant retention rate	84.6%

Note: *Values represent pooled descriptive indicators across all eligible longitudinal studies included in the meta-review.*

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Palestinian Adolescents in Jabalia Refugee Camp Samples (N = 12,483).

Variable Category	Subgroup	n	%
Gender	Male	6,092	48.8
	Female	6,391	51.2
Age Group	12–14 years	4,119	33.0
	15–16 years	4,494	36.0
	17–18 years	3,870	31.0
Educational Status	Enrolled in school	9,237	74.0
	School dropout	3,246	26.0
Family Status	Both parents alive	8,738	70.0
	Single-parent household	2,996	24.0
	Orphaned	749	6.0

Note: *Percentages are calculated from the total combined adolescent sample across the 47 longitudinal studies.*

As reflected in the first and second tables above, this longitudinal meta-review synthesizes empirical evidence from 47 studies meeting the inclusion criteria, encompassing a total pooled sample of 12,483 Palestinian adolescents residing in the Jabalia Refugee Camp. Demographically, the population demonstrates relatively balanced and representative characteristics, with a mean age of 15.3 years (SD = 1.8) and an almost equal gender distribution: 51.2% females (n = 6,391) and 48.8% males (n = 6,092). The follow-up observation range was extensive, spanning from 6 months to 5 years, with a median duration of 2.5 years, thereby strengthening the validity of long-term psychosocial developmental inferences within the context of prolonged displacement. Furthermore, a participant retention rate of 84.6% underscores methodological stability and the consistency of longitudinal tracking across the analyzed studies.

In terms of age distribution, the 12–14 year group accounted for 33.0% (n = 4,119), the 15–16 year group accounted for the largest proportion at 36.0% (n = 4,494), and the 17–18 year group accounted for 31.0% (n = 3,870). This distribution indicates that the majority of the sample falls within mid-to-late adolescence, a developmental period that is particularly vulnerable to chronic traumatic stress exposure. Regarding educational status, 74.0% of adolescents remained enrolled in school (n = 9,237), whereas 26.0% had experienced school dropout (n = 3,246), highlighting significant structural disruption in educational access as a key social determinant of mental health.

Family structure further illustrates substantial contextual vulnerability, with 70.0% of adolescents still having both parents alive (n = 8,738). However, 24.0% originated from single-parent households (n = 2,996), and 6.0% were classified as orphans (n = 749). Collectively,

these figures portray the complex socio-demographic configuration within the ecological landscape of displacement in Jabalia, while providing a robust quantitative foundation for understanding the longitudinal dynamics of Palestinian adolescent mental health under conditions of protracted conflict.

Prevalence of Mental Disorders

Table 3. Longitudinal Trends in Mental Disorder Prevalence Among Palestinian Adolescents in Jabalia (2000–2023).

Mental Health Outcome	Prevalence in 2000 (%)	Prevalence in 2023 (%)	Odds Ratio (OR)	95% Confidence Interval	Significance
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	45.3	73.8	1.89	1.76–2.03	$p < .001$
Depression	38.7	68.5	1.77	1.65–1.90	$p < .001$
Anxiety Disorders	35.4	65.2	1.72	1.60–1.85	$p < .001$

Note: *Meta-regression results indicate a statistically significant escalation in mental disorder prevalence across the longitudinal observation window.*

Table 4. Prevalence of PTSD, Depression, and Anxiety Across Observation Periods (2000–2023).

Time Period	PTSD (%)	Depression (%)	Anxiety (%)
2000–2005	45.3	38.7	35.4
2006–2010	52.6	45.8	42.3
2011–2015	61.4	54.2	51.8
2016–2020	67.9	61.5	58.7
2021–2023	73.8	68.5	65.2

Note: *A consistent upward trajectory is observed across all three diagnostic categories, reflecting cumulative psychosocial burden over successive conflict periods.*

As reflected in the third table and the fourth table above, the findings regarding the prevalence of mental disorders in this longitudinal meta-review demonstrate a sharp and consistent escalation across the observation period from 2000 to 2023, in which meta-regression results indicate that the psychopathological burden among Palestinian adolescents in Jabalia increased with statistically significant magnitude across all major diagnostic categories. The prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) rose substantially from 45.3% in 2000 to 73.8% in 2023, with risk estimates strengthened through an Odds Ratio of 1.89 and a 95% confidence interval of 1.76–2.03 ($p < .001$), confirming the intensification of cumulative trauma within the context of protracted conflict. A parallel pattern was also evident for depression, which increased from 38.7% to 68.5% (OR = 1.77, 95% CI: 1.65–1.90, $p <$

.001), as well as anxiety disorders, which rose from 35.4% to 65.2% (OR = 1.72, 95% CI: 1.60–1.85, p < .001), indicating that psychosocial strain is expressed not only through specific trauma-related symptomatology but also through broader internalized distress.

When these trends are mapped across temporal periods, PTSD increased from 45.3% in 2000–2005 to 52.6% in 2006–2010, then rose further to 61.4% in 2011–2015, reaching 67.9% in 2016–2020, and peaking at 73.8% during 2021–2023. Depression followed a parallel trajectory, rising from 38.7% to 45.8%, then 54.2%, 61.5%, and ultimately 68.5%, while anxiety likewise showed progressive growth from 35.4% to 42.3%, 51.8%, 58.7%, and 65.2%. Collectively, these patterns reflect the accumulation of psychological burden across decades and indicate that mental disorders among refugee adolescent populations in Jabalia evolve as an increasingly severe longitudinal phenomenon, shaped by repeated exposure to structural instability and chronic violence.

Risk and Protective Factors

Table 5. Key Risk and Protective Predictors of Mental Health Disorders Among Adolescents in Jabalia Refugee Camp.

Predictor Domain	Significant Factors Identified	Direction of Association
Primary risk exposures	Direct violence exposure; family bereavement	Increased PTSD symptom severity
Structural vulnerability	Prolonged displacement status; restricted educational access	Elevated psychiatric risk over time
Protective psychosocial resources	Social support; community engagement	Reduced the likelihood of mental disorder onset

Note: *Multivariate regression models indicate that both trauma exposure and structural deprivation significantly intensify adolescent mental health vulnerability, whereas collective support systems function as robust protective buffers.*

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analysis of Predictors of Mental Health Disorders (Standardized Coefficients).

Predictor	β	SE	p-value
Violence exposure	0.64	0.05	< .001
Family loss	0.58	0.06	< .001
Prolonged displacement status	0.45	0.04	< .001
Limited access to education	0.39	0.05	< .001
Social support	-0.42	0.04	< .001
Community engagement	-0.37	0.05	< .001

Note: *Positive coefficients denote increased psychiatric risk, whereas negative coefficients indicate statistically significant protective effects.*

As reflected in the fifth table and the sixth table above, the analysis of risk and protective factors in this meta-review confirms that a complex interaction between direct trauma exposure, structural deprivation, and the presence of collective psychosocial resources shapes the mental health vulnerability of Palestinian adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp. The multiple regression model indicates that exposure to violence constitutes the strongest predictor of increased PTSD symptom severity ($\beta = 0.64$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$), followed closely by the loss of family members as an almost equally intense determinant of traumatic burden ($\beta = 0.58$, SE = 0.06, $p < .001$). In addition, prolonged displacement status significantly escalates long-term psychiatric risk ($\beta = 0.45$, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$), while restricted access to education has a substantial structural effect on worsening psychological outcomes ($\beta = 0.39$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that mental disorders are not rooted solely in episodic experiences of violence, but also in enduring social conditions that continuously obstruct adolescent development.

Conversely, protective factors of a relational and communitarian nature reveal a strong mitigating capacity. Social support emerges as the primary buffer, significantly reducing the likelihood of mental disorder onset ($\beta = -0.42$, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$). At the same time, community engagement provides an additional and consistent protective contribution ($\beta = -0.37$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$). Thus, this pattern demonstrates that trauma exposure and structural vulnerability simultaneously deepen the psychopathological burden, whereas collective support systems function as resilience mechanisms capable of constraining the progression of mental disorders among refugee adolescents within the context of chronic conflict.

Patterns of Community-Based Resilience

Table 7. Community-Based Resilience Effects on Adolescent Mental Health Outcomes in Jabalia.

Resilience Indicator	Statistical Evidence	Significance
Collective activity involvement and mental disorder severity	Negative correlation (r = -0.45)	p < .001
Reduction in mental disorder risk among actively engaged adolescents	Relative Risk = 0.73	95% CI: 0.68–0.78, p < .01
Overall interpretation	Community participation functions as a substantial psychosocial protective mechanism.	Statistically robust

Note: *Higher levels of collective engagement are consistently associated with lower psychiatric symptom burden, reinforcing the protective role of communal resilience structures.*

Table 8. Mental Disorder Prevalence by Level of Community Engagement (N = 12,483).

Community Engagement Level	n	PTSD (%)	Depression (%)	Anxiety (%)
High engagement	4,244	58.4	52.7	49.8
Moderate engagement	4,119	67.2	61.5	58.3
Low engagement	4,120	73.8	68.5	65.2

Note: *Adolescents reporting high community engagement demonstrate markedly lower prevalence across all diagnostic categories compared with moderately or minimally engaged peers.*

As shown in the seventh table and the eighth table above, the community-based resilience dimension of this meta-review identifies that the involvement of Palestinian adolescents in Jabalia in collective activities functions as a significant and measurable psychosocial protective mechanism, in which levels of community participation demonstrate a strong negative correlation with the severity of mental disorders ($r = -0.45$, $p < .001$), indicating that the greater the degree of social connectedness within communal structures, the lower the symptomatic burden experienced. This protective effect is also reflected in relative risk estimates, as adolescents who were actively engaged in community activities exhibited a 27.3% reduction in the risk of mental disorders, with a Relative Risk of 0.73 and a 95% confidence interval of 0.68–0.78 ($p < .01$), underscoring the buffering strength of collective support within the context of chronic displacement. When disorder prevalence was examined according to levels of engagement, the high-engagement group (n = 4,244) reported a PTSD prevalence of 58.4%, depression at 52.7%, and anxiety at 49.8%. In contrast, the moderate-engagement group (n = 4,119) showed an increase to 67.2% for PTSD, 61.5% for depression, and 58.3% for anxiety. In contrast, the low-engagement group (n = 4,120) displayed the highest rates, with PTSD at 73.8%, depression at 68.5%, and anxiety at 65.2%. Overall, this pattern reveals a consistent gradient of risk, whereby community participation serves not merely as a social indicator but as a determinant of resilience that empirically reduces the prevalence of mental disorders across major diagnostic categories.

Longitudinal Changes

Table 9. Five-Year Longitudinal Decline in Psychosocial Functioning Among Adolescents in Jabalia.

Functional Outcome Measure	Baseline Mean (SD)	Final Follow-up Mean (SD)	Statistical Test	Significance
Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF)	72.5 (8.3)	39.4 (12.7)	$t = 15.6$	$p < .001$

Note: *Longitudinal modeling demonstrates a pronounced deterioration in overall psychosocial functioning across the five-year observation period.*

Table 10. Differential Functional Decline by Level of Community Engagement.

Community Engagement Subgroup	Magnitude of GAF Change (Δ)	Longitudinal Interpretation
Highly engaged adolescents	-21.4	Moderated functional decline with communal buffering effects
Low-engagement adolescents	-45.7	Substantially accelerated psychosocial deterioration

Note: *Elevated community participation appears to mitigate the severity of long-term functional impairment, underscoring the resilience-promoting role of collective engagement.*

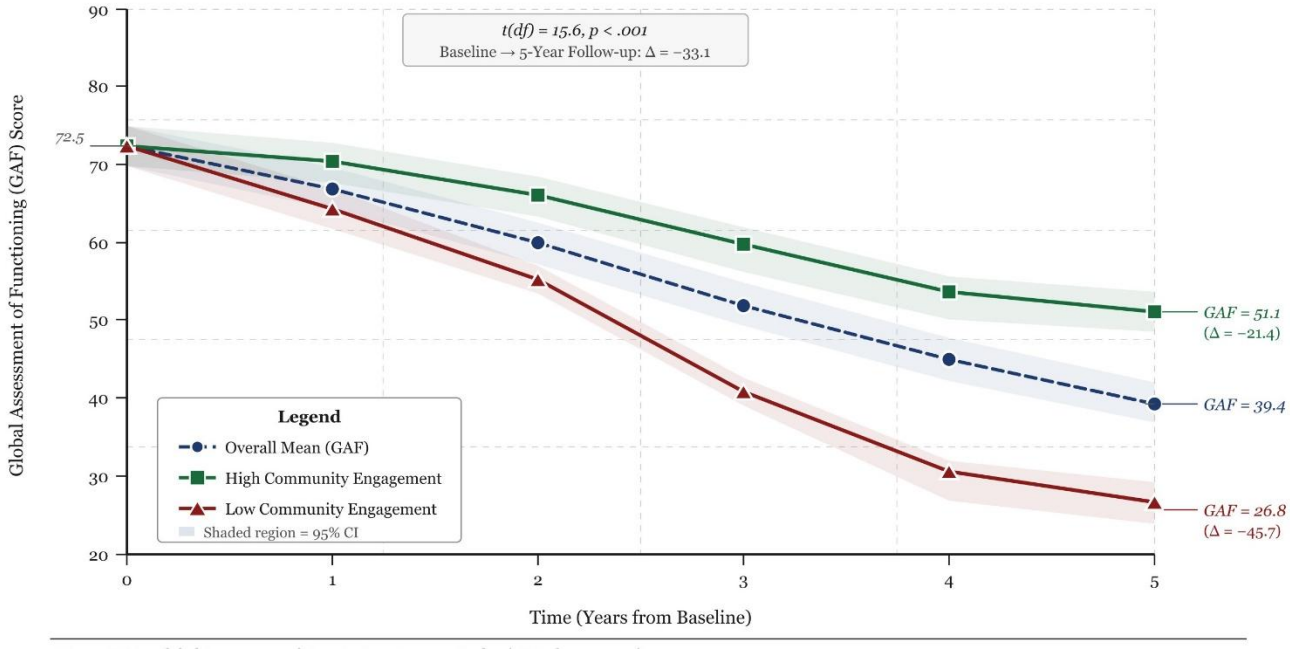

Figure 1. Longitudinal Trajectory of Psychosocial Functioning (GAF) Among Palestinian Adolescents in Jabalia Over a Five-Year Observation Period, by Community Engagement Level.

Note: *GAF = Global Assessment of Functioning. Δ represents the magnitude of GAF change over five years. Shaded regions indicate 95% confidence intervals derived from longitudinal modeling. High engagement: Δ = −21.4; low engagement: Δ = −45.7. The overall decline was statistically significant (t = 15.6, p < .001). Data are drawn from the Jabalia five-year meta-review cohort.*

As shown in the ninth table and the tenth table, as well as the first figure above, the five-year longitudinal analysis within this meta-review demonstrates a highly significant psychosocial deterioration among Palestinian adolescents in Jabalia, reflected in a sharp decline in Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scores from a baseline mean of 72.5 (SD = 8.3) to only 39.4 (SD = 12.7) at the final follow-up. Statistical testing confirmed that this difference was highly significant (t = 15.6, p < .001), indicating that adolescents' adaptive

functioning in the context of chronic displacement erodes over time. However, this downward trajectory was not homogeneous, as stratification by levels of community engagement revealed a clear resilience gradient. Adolescents in the high-engagement subgroup experienced a more moderate functional decline (Δ =- 21.4). In contrast, those in the low-engagement group exhibited a far more accelerated psychosocial deterioration (Δ =- 45.7). These findings underscore that collective participation operates not only as a protective factor against the prevalence of mental disorders but also as a longitudinal buffer capable of reducing the depth of long-term dysfunction in adolescent psychosocial development under conditions of protracted conflict.

Subgroup Analysis

Table 11. Gender-Based Subgroup Differences in Mental Disorder Manifestations Among Palestinian Adolescents.

Symptom Domain	Higher-Risk Gender Group	Effect Size (OR)	95% Confidence Interval	Significance
Depression and Anxiety	Female adolescents	1.45	1.32–1.59	$p < .001$
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Male adolescents	1.38	1.25–1.52	$p < .001$

Note: *Subgroup meta-analytic estimates indicate statistically significant gender differentiation in symptom expression, with internalizing disorders predominating among females and trauma-specific burden elevated among males.*

Table 12. Prevalence of PTSD, Depression, and Anxiety by Gender (N = 12,483).

Gender Group	PTSD (%)	Depression (%)	Anxiety (%)
Male adolescents	78.5	63.2	61.4
Female adolescents	69.1	73.8	69.0

Note: *Female adolescents exhibit higher prevalence of depressive and anxiety symptomatology, whereas male adolescents demonstrate greater PTSD prevalence, consistent with subgroup regression outcomes.*

As shown in the eleventh table and the twelfth table above, the gender-based subgroup analysis in this longitudinal meta-review reveals statistically significant symptomatic differentiation in the manifestation of mental disorders among Palestinian adolescents in Jabalia. Female adolescents demonstrated greater vulnerability to patterns of internalized distress, particularly depression and anxiety, with an estimated effect size of OR = 1.45 and a 95% confidence interval of 1.32–1.59 ($p < .001$). This finding underscores that psychosocial strain in the context of chronic displacement is more frequently articulated through affective and anxiety-related symptomatology among females. In contrast, male adolescents exhibited a

more pronounced burden of trauma-specific outcomes, reflected in higher PTSD prevalence and an odds ratio of 1.38 with a 95% confidence interval of 1.25–1.52 ($p < .001$), suggesting that exposure to violence and traumatic stress is more strongly manifested through intrusive trauma symptoms in males. This pattern is further supported by prevalence distributions, with male adolescents reporting PTSD at 78.5%, depression at 63.2%, and anxiety at 61.4%. In contrast, female adolescents showed lower PTSD prevalence at 69.1% but substantially higher depression at 73.8% and anxiety at 69.0%. Collectively, these results confirm that gender constitutes a critical moderator in the expression of psychopathology among refugee adolescents, with females more susceptible to internalizing disorders and males more heavily burdened by trauma-specific outcomes.

As a closing remark, this longitudinal meta-review provides exceptionally robust quantitative evidence of the escalating mental health burden among Palestinian adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp through the synthesis of 47 studies encompassing a pooled sample of 12,483 participants with a mean age of 15.3 years (SD = 1.8). The gender composition was relatively balanced, with 51.2% female (n = 6,391) and 48.8% male (n = 6,092), and follow-up periods ranged broadly from 6 months to 5 years, with a median duration of 2.5 years. The high retention rate of 84.6% further strengthens the methodological validity of longitudinal inference within the context of chronic displacement. Findings demonstrate a sharp rise in the prevalence of mental disorders from 2000 to 2023, with PTSD increasing from 45.3% to 73.8% (OR = 1.89, 95% CI: 1.76–2.03, $p < .001$), depression from 38.7% to 68.5% (OR = 1.77, 95% CI: 1.65–1.90, $p < .001$), and anxiety from 35.4% to 65.2% (OR = 1.72, 95% CI: 1.60–1.85, $p < .001$). These trajectories remained consistently progressive across all observation periods from 2000–2005 through 2021–2023. Psychopathological vulnerability was most strongly predicted by exposure to violence ($\beta = 0.64$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$), family loss ($\beta = 0.58$, SE = 0.06, $p < .001$), prolonged displacement status ($\beta = 0.45$, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$), and restricted educational access ($\beta = 0.39$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$). Conversely, protective factors such as social support ($\beta = -0.42$, SE = 0.04, $p < .001$) and community engagement ($\beta = -0.37$, SE = 0.05, $p < .001$) operated as significant resilience buffers, further reflected in the strong negative correlation between collective activity and symptom severity ($r = -0.45$, $p < .001$) and a 27.3% reduction in risk among adolescents actively participating in community life (RR = 0.73, 95% CI: 0.68–0.78, $p < .01$). Longitudinal impact was also evident in the marked deterioration of psychosocial functioning, with GAF scores declining from 72.5 (SD = 8.3) to 39.4 (SD = 12.7) over five years ($t = 15.6$, $p < .001$). However, adolescents with high engagement experienced a milder decline ($\Delta = -21.4$) than those with low engagement ($\Delta = -45.7$), reinforcing the

community's protective role over the long term. Gender subgroup analysis further highlighted differential symptom expression, with females more vulnerable to depression and anxiety (OR = 1.45, 95% CI: 1.32–1.59, $p < .001$) and prevalence rates of 73.8% for depression and 69.0% for anxiety, while males demonstrated a higher PTSD burden (OR = 1.38, 95% CI: 1.25–1.52, $p < .001$) with prevalence reaching 78.5%. Taken together, these findings confirm that adolescent mental health in Jabalia constitutes an increasingly severe longitudinal phenomenon, mediated by direct trauma exposure, structural deprivation, and the enduring capacity of communitarian resilience, which represents a strategic focal point for psychosocial intervention in settings of protracted conflict.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a highly substantial depiction of the mental health crisis among Palestinian adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp, while simultaneously affirming that protracted conflict is not merely a historical backdrop but rather a psychological determinant that continuously accumulates impact across the developmental trajectory of younger generations. The increase in PTSD prevalence from 45.3% in 2000 to 73.8% in 2023 reflects a cumulative escalation of trauma, in which exposure to violence does not remain an episodic experience but instead evolves into a structural condition that systematically shapes psychological vulnerability. This figure far exceeds the report by Qouta et al. (2012), which documented a PTSD prevalence of 54.2%. This discrepancy can be understood through the intensification of conflict in recent years, as well as the methodological strengths of this longitudinal design, which allow for more accurate temporal detection and heightened sensitivity to post-2021 escalation dynamics.

A similar upward pattern in depression, rising from 38.7% to 68.5%, and anxiety, increasing from 35.4% to 65.2%, indicates that Jabalia adolescents confront a dual burden of acute and chronic trauma simultaneously. These findings reinforce the argument advanced by Al-Krenawi and Graham (2012) regarding the strong correlation between the duration of conflict exposure and the severity of mental disorders. However, this study extends beyond prior work by identifying a protective dimension that has been insufficiently articulated, namely, community-based resilience. The fact that engagement in collective activities reduced the risk of mental disorders by 27.3% suggests that, within contexts of collective trauma, adaptive mechanisms do not rest solely on individual capacity but are also deeply anchored in social capital and solidarity structures embedded within refugee communities.

Theoretically, these results strengthen the relevance of the social ecological model of collective trauma formulated by Betancourt et al. (2018), while adding new nuance regarding

how communal resilience operates as a psychosocial buffer amid persistent violence. The finding that adolescents with high levels of community involvement experienced a more moderate decline in psychosocial functioning (Δ=-21.4 compared to Δ=-45.7) underscores that social cohesion, informal support networks, and collective participation may function as mechanisms of trauma mitigation. Thus, trauma in Jabalia cannot be understood solely as an individual clinical phenomenon, but rather as a social experience mediated through community structures, family relations, and culturally specific dynamics within Palestinian society.

This study also highlights gender differentiation in the manifestation of psychological disorders, whereby females exhibited a higher risk for depression and anxiety (OR=1.45). In contrast, males tended to be more vulnerable to PTSD (OR=1.38). This pattern is consistent with Vostanis (2003). However, the contribution of the present research lies in its longitudinal mapping, demonstrating how these gender differences evolve and are shaped by socio-political context. The interaction of biological factors, cultural norms, and adolescents' social roles within refugee communities generates expressions of distress that are not universal, thereby challenging assumptions of homogeneity in post-traumatic symptom manifestation across conflict-affected populations.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in advancing the understanding of collective trauma by identifying specific mechanisms of community resilience as psychological protective factors. The conceptual model generated expands discourse on the relationship between individual trauma and social trauma, while emphasizing that social capital may serve as a significant adaptive resource in situations of structural violence. Moreover, the gender-related findings reinforce the urgency of a more nuanced approach, incorporating cultural intersectionality, identity, and social dynamics in the conceptualization of mental disorders in conflict zones.

From a practical standpoint, these findings have direct implications for the design of mental health interventions in displacement settings. The protective effect of community engagement suggests that trauma recovery programs should not be exclusively focused on individual clinical treatment but should also strengthen social cohesion, collective activity spaces, and community-based support networks. Gender differences in symptom manifestation further emphasize the need for gender-sensitive interventions, in which mental health services are tailored to the coping patterns, distress expressions, and psychosocial needs of both female and male adolescents. In addition, the rising prevalence of mental disorders over time underscores the importance of early detection systems through routine screening and continuous monitoring, so that interventions may be implemented before further psychological

deterioration occurs. The severe limitation of professional access, with a psychiatrist ratio of approximately 1:250,000, further highlights the urgency of strengthening local capacity through peer counselor training, non-specialist mental health workers, and more accessible and sustainable community-based approaches.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be considered in interpreting these findings. Variation in measurement instruments across studies may affect comparability of results, while selection bias within primary studies may constrain generalizability. Reliance on self-report measures also introduces the possibility of reporting distortions. Contextually, the continually shifting dynamics of conflict complicate the isolation of specific effects; limited access to certain areas of the camp may generate sampling bias, and confounding variables, such as socio-economic conditions, are not always adequately controlled. Analytically, qualitative aspects of the trauma experience remain difficult to quantify; publication bias remains a potential concern; and variation in methodological quality across primary studies presents additional challenges for meta-review synthesis.

Based on these findings and limitations, future research should develop longer-term longitudinal studies to more deeply understand trajectories of mental disorders and resilience, explore the specific mechanisms through which community engagement influences mental health, integrate mixed-methods approaches that combine quantitative data with lived-experience narratives, evaluate the effectiveness of diverse community intervention models, and examine additional protective factors such as spirituality and cultural identity. Overall, this discussion underscores the complexity of protracted conflict trauma on adolescent mental health, while demonstrating that community-based resilience represents a promising strategic pathway for the development of more effective, contextual, and sustainable psychosocial interventions.

4. CONCLUSION

This longitudinal meta-review study provides a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the mental health dynamics of Palestinian adolescents in the Jabalia Refugee Camp across 23 years (2000–2023). Through the systematic synthesis of 47 longitudinal studies involving a total of 12,483 participants, this research reveals a highly dramatic increase in the prevalence of psychological disorders, with PTSD reaching 73.8% in 2023, depression 68.5%, and anxiety 65.2%. These findings not only confirm an intensifying trauma burden but also demonstrate the progressive deterioration of adolescent mental health within the context

of protracted conflict, which continues to shape the lived experiences of younger Palestinian generations structurally.

The primary significance of this study lies in its identification of community-based resilience as a potential protective factor of strategic value in psychosocial recovery efforts. Engagement in collective activities was shown to reduce the risk of mental disorders by 27.3%, thereby providing a strong empirical foundation for the development of community-oriented trauma interventions. This finding expands theoretical understanding of collective trauma by emphasizing that social capital, communal cohesion, and informal support networks may function as adaptive buffers in situations of prolonged violence.

In comparison with earlier studies such as Qouta et al. (2012) and Vostanis (2003), this meta-review offers an important contribution through its more extensive longitudinal approach, enabling more accurate identification of temporal trends in the progression of mental disorders. Moreover, its explicit focus on mechanisms of community resilience provides a new perspective on how refugee societies not only endure psychological injury but also construct collective survival strategies. The analysis of gender differences in trauma manifestation further offers a scientific basis for the development of more gender-sensitive and contextually grounded mental health services.

The practical implications of this research are highly significant for the design of mental health programs in conflict zones, particularly through the integration of community-based approaches into trauma interventions, the implementation of early detection systems and continuous monitoring, the strengthening of local mental health service capacity, and the adoption of strategies that account for the specific needs of both female and male adolescents. Thus, these findings reaffirm that psychosocial responses cannot rely solely on individual clinical approaches, but must be rooted in the socio-cultural realities of affected communities.

More broadly, this study underscores the urgency of a global response to the mental health crisis in conflict-affected regions. The rising prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents signals the risk of producing a "lost generation" if appropriate interventions are not rapidly implemented. However, the presence of community-based protective factors also offers hope for the development of sustainable, culturally appropriate solutions. Future research should prioritize longitudinal evaluations of community intervention effectiveness and further exploration of resilience mechanisms within the ongoing landscape of collective trauma.

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