



Policy Paper

COVID-19 and Adolescent Mental health

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people all over the globe, irrespective of social demographics and has to date (May 4th 2021) claimed 3,277,795 lives worldwide.¹ COVID-19 is stressful throughout the pandemic. It may result in longer term consequences beyond the immediate infection, recovery or fatality. It may also have adverse consequences on the finances and longer term effects on the individual, the family and the society at large. Adolescents are touched especially as related to its impact on lifestyles and social behavior. This warrants understanding and responding to adolescent's unique needs and to insure protective mental health measures.

In the State of Palestine, as of May 4th 2021, the number of infected Adolescents (10-19 years of age) is 29,220 in both Gaza and the West Bank. According to the Ministry of Health (MoH), the total number of citizens infected to date is 327,044 of which 9.8% are Adolescents. Infections amongst adolescents in Palestine rank third after those between 20-29 (13.81% infected) and those between 30-39 (11.66% infected).²

Palestinians children, adolescents and the youth³ below 29 years make over 2/3 of the Palestinian population. Children 0-14 years made up 39.4% of the total population mid 2015 while those between 15-29 years made up 30% of the population (36% between 15-19 and 64% between 20-29)⁴. Adolescents as other groups face numerous and unique challenges under the pandemic including safe, accessible, affordable and quality care. There is a pressing need for families and government and nongovernmental agencies to prioritize the needs of adolescents and identify their challenges so that they can be adequately protected and supported throughout the pandemic and its aftermath.



Generally, adolescents in the developing countries are relatively marginalized with less attention given to their welfare and health related policies. Competing wellbeing needs in Palestine under a belligerent occupation and a deteriorating economic situation exacerbated by shifts towards needs for tackling the pandemic have and will continue to jeopardize already sparse adolescent care services and interventions. This will invariably result in a significant fallout with regard to social, physical and mental wellbeing of adolescents and may further burden the health care and social system in the aftermath of the pandemic

Worldwide, at risk groups for long-term mental health issues under a prolonged pandemic are: healthcare workers, young people under 30 and children, the elderly and those with disability and in poverty. Insights on

1 Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic, Worldometer, 2020

2 CORONAVIRUS-COVID-19 Surveillance System, Palestinian Ministry of Health, 2020

3 The United Nations defines the youth as individuals 15-24 years old with the possibility of adjusting this category according to the specificity of each country. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in its press release on the occasion of the International Youth Day 2019, considered the youth as individuals (18-29 years).

4 PCBS youth survey 2015

the long-term damage of crises and widespread disasters have been accepted in the field of trauma psychology for decades. This current COVID-19 large scale pandemic and the lockdown measures require dealing with intense stressors which require mitigation of its toxic effects.⁵ There is currently very little known about the broader impact of COVID-19 in general and its impact on the adolescents in particular. A myriad of factors contribute to the adolescent population's vulnerability including physical and mental vulnerabilities as a result of the extended lockdown and its socioeconomic impact, social isolation, limited access to health facilities and the bombardment with COVID-19. The Pandemic makes adolescents susceptible to various health and wellbeing challenges especially related to Mental Health. Additionally, existing mental health problems or developing ones could worsen under Pandemic conditions of lockdown and quarantine. Similarly the lives of adolescents with disabilities are profoundly affected.

Studies from around the world have shown that most individuals have reported increased psychological distress, and worsened mental health including depression and anxiety as a result of the long-term nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular. Although worsened mental health has been documented across the lifespan, several studies have found that young adults are experiencing the greatest deterioration in mental health, poor sleep, and increased fear and stress levels, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ Although the number of adolescents infected by COVID-19 is relatively smaller compared to some other age groups, the pandemic is expected to have a tremendous effect on their lives as well their families particularly with the extended conditions of the lockdowns.

It is against this background and in light of the results of several related rapid survey assessments in Palestine and the lack of information available on this population group, that this policy brief is presented. It responds to the need for effective, responsive, and equitable policies, as part of the state of Palestine's preparedness and responsiveness to protect its citizens with focus on Adolescents mental health needs expected to be on the rise during and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The Socio-political context and COVID-19

The barriers by the Israeli occupation are the largest determinant of life of Palestinians and magnify all other barriers. Conditions under occupation, the compromised economy with high unemployment and now the challenges of dealing with COVID-19 exacerbate the difficult living situation and expose Palestinians to further vulnerabilities and stress reflected in various forms. The Gazans suffer most as a result of the ongoing imposed blockade on people's lives and the three wars Israel has waged on the Gaza Strip (GS) since 2007. The siege undermines the rights of around two million Palestinians who have been experiencing increased food insecurity and psychological trauma and live in general insecurity and fear for life. The pandemic has had enormous impact on the Palestinian population with an already high unemployment pre the outbreak of the pandemic. It increased the number of poor families by 53% (from 275,819 to 422,915)⁷ with total number of children and adolescents in

5 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/this-is-the-psychological-side-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-that-were-ignoring/>. Lockdown is the world's biggest psychological experiment - and we will pay the price

6 See for example

Duan L, Shao X, Wang Y, Huang Y, Miao J, Yang X, Zhu G: An investigation of mental health status of children and adolescents in china during the outbreak of COVID-19. *Journal of affective disorders* 2020, 275:112-118.

Zhou S-J, Zhang L-G, Wang L-L, Guo Z-C, Wang J-Q, Chen J-C, Liu M, Chen X, Chen J-X: Prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of psychological health problems in Chinese adolescents during the outbreak of COVID-19. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 2020, 29:749-758.

Yeasmin S, Banik R, Hossain S, Hossain MN, Mahmud R, Salma N, Hossain MM: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of children in Bangladesh: A cross-sectional study. *Children and Youth Services Review* 2020, 117:105277.

Loades ME, Chatburn E, Higson-Sweeney N, Reynolds S, Shafran R, Brigden A, Linney C, McManus MN, Borwick C, Crawley E: Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 2020, 59:1218-1239.e1213.

7 State of Palestine, Ministry of Social Development. Study of the Social Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Palestine and its Implications on Policies and Future Governmental and Non-Governmental Interventions –July 2020

need estimated as 554,000 boys (25%), 525,000 girls (23%)⁸. With the spread of COVID-19 since March 2020, these numbers have grown as the pandemic has continued to exacerbate the already overburdened health system⁹.

The mental health status of Palestinians was already compromised before the pandemic as a result of prolonged occupation and daily violations of basic human rights in an environment of violence, insecurity, inequality and injustice. Many Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza live in a permanent state of stress and discomfort owing in large part to the Israeli settlements as well as poverty and lack of services and rights¹⁰. The severity of the measures to curb the spread of the virus in oPt have had serious effects on many families' financial situation, and exacerbated mental health problems due to the ongoing political crisis. In addition, reports indicate a worsening of the job market because of lockdown, and a rise in unemployment rates¹¹.

Child labor (between ages 10-17) in the WB is 4% compared to 2% in Gaza¹². The number becomes of further concern with the deteriorating socio-economic conditions under COVID-19. Organizations reported receiving reports neglected children and "children forced to beg" due to difficult economic conditions¹³. 89% of children are subjected to psychological aggression and 74% to physical punishment in the household¹⁴. Psychological violence, including verbal abuse and physical violence are common at schools. Over 20% of students aged 12-17 in Gaza have been exposed to psychological violence and over a fifth also exposed to physical violence (boys 28%, girls 16%). Additionally, More than half of the Palestinian youth population live in Area (C) close to the separation wall and the settlements¹⁵. This poses various challenges on their mobility and accessibility with impediments in accessing schools, health care and other vital services, moving safely, being cut off from families on the other side of the wall and their general feeling of entrapment in engulfed pockets with fear on security from settler attacks. Children, girls and women may experience most challenges due to safety and security fears and traditional norms influencing their mobility.

Despite the significant potential impact of pandemic-related restrictions on adolescents, there is lack of studies on the impact of the pandemic's disruption on the daily lives and the emotional, psychosocial and mental well-being of adolescents, in particular. Among the studies, which assessed adolescent mental health amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, authors found a significant prevalence of depression and anxiety rates. Other studies have also reported increased feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition, young people's behavior and lifestyles have also been impacted by COVID-19. For example, one study conducted in oPt in the middle of the lockdown found that adolescents reported increased weight gain, screen time, and decreased physical activity and worse sleep behaviors compared to before the lockdown¹⁶.

COVID - 19 and adolescents

As a consequence of extended lockdowns and quarantines ,the population in general and adolescents in particular develop a wide range of symptoms of psychological stress and disorder, including low mood, insomnia, difficulty focusing, lack of motivation, anger, irritability, emotional exhaustion, depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms and feeling helpless and hopeless. Stress and anxiety are not only a result of the nature of

8 UN OCHA. 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, OPT

9 Care and OCHA .Rapid gender analysis to inform the 2021 humanitarian programme cycle in the occupied Palestinian territory .September 2020

10 OCHA: Humanitarian needs: overview in the Occupied Palestinian Territories 2019.

11 Reliefweb. In the West Bank, the COVID-19 Lock-down is Exacerbating Mental Health Crisis 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/west-bank-covid-19-lockdown-exacerbating-mental-health-crisis.2020>.

12 PCBS, 2019: <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3595#>

13 OCHA, April-May 2020, COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report 7 <https://bit.ly/2DzJkgd>.

14 UNICEF. State of Palestine, Situation Report, June 2018.

15 On the occasion of the International Youth Day, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) .Press release demonstrating the situation of the youth in the Palestinian society 12/08/2018

16 Allabadi H, Daibes J, Aghabekian V, Khader A, Khammash U: Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on dietary and lifestyle behaviors among adolescents in Palestine. Dynamics of Human Health 2020, 7.

the virus and its spread, but also from various stressors (worrying about parents losing jobs and their ability to provide for the family, losing study days and keeping up with online classes, missing interaction with peers), loneliness, loss of pleasure and recreation and others. In cases where parents were quarantined with children, the mental health toll became even steeper. All these, and many more, are present in this current pandemic¹⁷.

Although access to health services was available to households in need of them as surveyed by PCBS¹⁸, yet the pandemic influences the quantity, quality, accessibility, and affordability of health services in general including adolescent's health. Multidisciplinary coordination is invariably impeded through environmental constraints. Adequacy of preventive screening, counseling, and health education for adolescents for example accessible in various geographic locations recognizing and reflecting the particular needs and interests of adolescents is questionable. There are various additional challenges to adolescent health care under the pandemic including: infected people challenged throughout the world with social stigma associated with being infected with the disease. Palestine is no different. While anxiety and fear surrounding the disease may be understandable, yet the confusion around it has been fueling stereotyping negatively affecting infected people, their families and communities and interfering with the course of prevention and further detection of cases. In going back to normal living with preventive measures, the stigma and stereotyping around COVID-19 is an issue to be tackled for children and adolescents going back to school.



During lockdown, adolescents generally and -similar to the population at large- avoid seeking non-emergency health services to minimize risk of getting infected. This may impact their ability to access accurate, safe and reliable services and advice from qualified professionals on issues relating to adolescent health. Statistics on “hotlines” however indicate a 24% increase in the number of calls to “hotlines”, by children under the age of 18, compared to the first three weeks of April 2020¹⁹. Furthermore, stigma and shame in seeking care related to SRHR with the lack of confidentiality and the attitude of service providers towards (particularly unmarried) adolescents has been a challenge and remains a concern under the pandemic.

The pandemic accelerated mental health issues, anxiety and stress at home, posed educational and learning challenges, and caused a shortage of basic resources at home from food to medical care. With families increasingly unable to meet basic needs, mental health becomes increasingly an issue and will continue to be a main priority, both in Palestine and around the world.

Under this pandemic, services offered to adolescents were invariably challenged²⁰. In terms of SRH services under the pandemic have been impacted at most major providers (MOH, UNRWA, and NGOs)²¹ with some services scaled down or halted. Other mental health and GBV services were also compromised. Some adolescent health care including mental health services have been challenged by financial barriers and mobility restrictions, limited availability of providers, associated stigma and concerns about confidentiality and privacy and lack of smooth

17 <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/this-is-the-psychological-side-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-that-were-ignoring/>

18 PCBS Announces Results of Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic (Coronavirus) on the Socio-economic Conditions of Palestinian Households Survey (March-May), 2020. 4% of households in need of health services were unable to access health services..

19 OCHA, April-May 2020, COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report 7 <https://bit.ly/2DzJkqd>.

20 The Palestinian Coalition on Adolescents' Health. Advocacy Brief on Adolescents' Health and COVID-19 (2020)

21 The impact of COVID-19 on sexual and reproductive, including maternal health in Palestine. April 17, 2020. Situation overview

transitions and referral across health service settings.

Adolescents are particularly susceptible to errors in judgment that lead to risk-taking, are hypersensitive to immediate rewards and less equipped to regulate their impulses. Their risk-taking could also be linked to ways in which younger individuals evaluate new information and adjust beliefs while being particularly inclined to demonstrating irrational optimism. In a pandemic, adolescents may more likely discount news about the severity of the novel coronavirus. Instead, focus on the fact that they are unlikely to die from COVID-19. Communicating the threat of disease may have limited impact on adolescents but they are more apt to respond to social pressure and communication of information about social norms (i.e., informal standards of behavior). If their peers are engaged in social distancing, they are likely to follow suit.²²

Adolescents in lockdown

Home confinement with fear, anxiety, and stress is recognized to have a direct impact on one's lifestyle, including dietary habits, eating, and physical activity and sleep patterns. In general, confinement leads to an increase in sedentary behaviors that lead to low levels of energy with excessive amount of inactivity associated with increased risk of obesity. Densely populated areas including refugee camps and cities are most at risk as village and small town dwellers may have more space to move in.

Under the current restrictive measures, Palestinians, including children and adolescents have been forced to stay at home and are at risk of weight gain due to overeating, consuming unhealthy foods, and physical inactivity because of movement restrictions as well as minimal stimulation. There are also worries that families in general are risk of malnutrition due to the lack of access to proper and nutritional food because of continued unemployment, loss of jobs or salary cuts amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown.

Weight gain has been reported in a recent survey on Palestinian youth and adults²³. Another survey during the lockdown on adolescents noted similar results on weight gain among adolescents, decreased physical inactivity, and increased time spent on screen noting numerous stressors challenging adolescents during lockdown²⁴. Weight gain is alarming as Palestine is already increasingly affected by the double burden of malnutrition: the persistence of under-nutrition, combined with a rapid rise in overweight and obesity.

A study on youth and obesity concluded that it's important to recognize adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown as critical in avoiding depreciation of weight control efforts among youths afflicted with excess adiposity. Depending on duration, these untoward lockdown effects may have a lasting impact on a child's or adolescent's adult adiposity level. There were no changes in reported vegetable intake; fruit intake increased during the lockdown. By contrast, potato chip, red meat, and sugary drink intakes increased significantly. Time spent in sports activities decreased and sleep time increased and so did screen time²⁵.

In the GS the situation may be worse. About 80 percent of the population of the GS is dependent on humanitarian assistance provided by various international organizations²⁶. The siege and food insecurity and the pandemic with lockdown increase the incidence of food insecurity and are detrimental to dietary diversity. This is exacerbated in vulnerable area households with significantly lower dietary diversity. Households may be reducing dietary diversity in order to maximize caloric intake when experiencing food insecurity in conflict settings. Deprived households often have multiple vulnerabilities that interact with each other and increase the negative impacts on

22 <https://www.vcstar.com/story/opinion/columnists/2020/04/09/teenagers-may-downfall-preventing-spread-covid-19/5124412002/Commentary>: Teenagers may be downfall of preventing COVID-19 spread. Jessica Londeree Saleska, April 9, 2020

23 AWRAD. Coping with COVID-19 Pandemic: Impacts and Coping Strategies among Palestinians-18 May 2020 reported that 54% of its survey respondents reported gaining significant or some weight: 57% of women and 51% of men.

24 Juzoor. May 2020. Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on nutrition and lifestyle behaviors among adolescents in a Palestinian population. Included a random sample of 600 adolescents -300 boys and 300 girl's -aged 10-19 years in the WB including East Jerusalem between April 24 and April 27, 2020.

25 Effects of COVID-19 Lockdown on Lifestyle Behaviors in Children with Obesity Living in Verona, Italy: A Longitudinal Study. Angelo Pietrobelli et al. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22861>. Study aimed to test the hypothesis that youths with obesity, when removed from structured school activities and confined to their homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, will display unfavorable trends in lifestyle behaviors. Sample included 41 children and adolescents with obesity participating in a longitudinal observational study in Verona, Italy. Lifestyle information including diet, activity, and sleep behaviors were collected at baseline and three weeks into the lockdown with mandatory home confinement where changes in outcomes over the two study time points were evaluated.

26 aawsat.com. 80% of Gaza Strip Population Depends on Aid .Wednesday, 13 June, 2018

foodsecurity.²⁷

COVID -19 and adolescents with Mental Health issues :Lockdown, social distancing, disruption of routine, fear and anxiety, family's loss of income, the unknown and uncertainties may result in mental health and psychological challenges to young people while adolescents with pre-existing mental health conditions may be at higher risk with tremendous health burden for this population

COVID-19 and Adolescents with disability and special needs. Around 2.1% (93,000 persons) of the total population have some form of disability (45% in the WB and 52% in Gaza). A fifth of people with disabilities are under 18 years of age (18.1% females and 20.8% males).These adolescents' are already at risk and the pandemic increases their vulnerability with drastic impact particularly for those of vulnerable backgrounds. It is estimated that 3-7% of Palestinian children have a disability with 42% with more than one type of disability .1/4 have a speech disability, 1/4 learning and 19% mobility²⁸.This group is already at a disadvantage and generally requires additional support to enable them to maximize participation in society due to their special needs. They are among the most marginalized under the current pandemic and face multiple barriers to services and lives with dignity²⁹ . 38% of children with disabilities are out of school .Girls with a disability between the age of 6-15 are less likely to be enrolled in school (30% compared to 22.5% of boys)³⁰.



have increased among Palestinians under the pandemic with limitations on movement, confinement and forced coexistence, economic challenges, food insecurity, fear of exposure to virus increased security concerns facing women and girls related to GBV, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence. GBV has been perceived as an increased risk for women and girls in the crisis, as well as increase in violence reported by young males³⁵.An increase in security concerns facing women and girls related to GBV, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence have been noticed as well as an increased risk for women and girls in the crisis³⁶.

Adolescents, lockdown and dietary intake and habits: With the ongoing pandemic, a profound effect on all aspects of society including, mental and physical health along with major change to people's daily living routines, including diet has been evident. Extended lockdown with unemployment and loss of jobs has had repercussions on food access and utilization,Food Insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Reflections

27 Food Insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Reflections in Light of the COVID-19 Lockdown. By Sharesby Tracy, Kuo Lin, Rawan Kafri, Weeam Hammoudeh and Tiziana Leone.

28 UNICEF .Children in the State of Palestine.www.unicef.org .November 2018.The WHO suggests the rate is even higher

29 Care and OCHA .RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS TO INFORM THE 2021 HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME CYCLE IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY September 2020

30 UNICEF, 2018 a: <https://www.unicef.org/mena/reports/state-palestine-out-school-children>

31 National Strategy for Early Childhood Development and Intervention in the State of Palestine for the period 2017-2022.

32 United Nations. Policy Brief .The Impact of COVID-19 on Children .15 April 2020

33 World Vision -COVID-19 places millions of children at risk in fragile & displacement contexts FRIDAY, APRIL 24,2020 Nathan McGibney

34 CARE E International Rapid Gender Analysis MENA Region. 5 April 2020.

35 CARE Palestine West Bank Gaza .The COVID-19 Outbreak and Gender – Advocacy Brief-Quoting Sawa. organisation

36 CARE Palestine West Bank/Gaza COVID Rapid Gender Assessment. April 2020.

in Light of the COVID-19 Lockdown has increased the incidence of food insecurity and is detrimental to dietary diversity. Extended lockdown, school closures and limited activity affect childhood obesity and increase obesity risk³⁷Analysis focusing on food deprivation in the context of impact of conflict and occupation on food security with exposure to a range of political, economic, and agricultural hardship and food insecurity experiences reflect that economic stress and unstable economic conditions have a negative effect on food consumption, increasing food insecurity at the household level.³⁸

Under this pandemic emergency situation, it is likely that nutrition and obesity are not priority policy issues. However, the urgency to tackle children and adolescents dietary and eating habits becomes paramount with added challenges of COVID-19 and its likely negative effects on the dietary and lifestyle habits of Palestinian children, adolescents and adults. Obesity as a main risk factor for NCDs impairs the health and quality of life of people and will add considerably to Palestinian national health-care budget. It can be mitigated

Adolescents and other stressors during the Pandemic: Teenagers are generally used to connecting with peers on social media and that would be relatively the same under lockdown. The real difference however for them under lockdown is being forced to stay at home with their families for long periods of time, feeling “trapped” in the same space with heightened anxieties and emotions.³⁹

During a pandemic with lockdown, adolescents may face increased loneliness, stress, and anxiety. Behavior may change including: changes in sleep, appetite, mood (feeling overwhelmed, upset, frustrated or angry), difficulty focusing, lack of motivation, feeling hopeless, or loss of pleasure.

School and university students have been affected by the largest disruption to schooling and education, interacting with extended family and friends, playing outdoors, and participating in leisurely sports all the while maintaining social distancing measures [8]. It has been recognized that the psychological impact of COVID-19 on adolescents seems to be far greater than the impact on adults because they are more vulnerable to the negative effects of traumatic and stressful events. This is greatly alarming as the period of adolescence represents a time of social transformation where adolescents are in need of social interaction with their peers and social stimuli [9]. Reduced social interaction, stay-at home restrictions, difficulties in schoolwork, substantial changes to daily routine, fear of becoming sick, and boredom can create dramatic psychological effects on teenagers and adolescents. Similarly, these restrictions ultimately can lead to adolescents feeling socially isolated, lonely and can disrupt their socio-emotional benefits from these experiences [8], also potentially increasing the risk of mental illness in this young generation [7].

Social and physical distancing and self-quarantining come with challenges to all but especially to children, adolescents and teens. Suddenly, their routines have completely changed .No going to school, no seeing of friends, forced to spend long hours with the family at home when they want more control over their lives. They are missing a lot 40 .Furthermore not all respond to lockdown stress in the same way and some may be more affected right now than others. Main behavior changes include unhealthy eating or sleeping habits 41

Apart from worries about the virus itself, COVID-19 has intensified fears, anxiety and tensions in families in general who have found themselves obliged to be in lockdown in densely populated homes with children who are out of school, fathers and or mothers or both who have lost their jobs and bombarded with local and global media on the toll of the virus.

37 COVID-19–Related School Closings and Risk of Weight Gain among Children. Andrew G. Rundle 1, 2, Yoosun Park3, Julie B. Herbstman4, Eliza W. Kinsey1, and Y. Claire Wang- 2020. The Obesity Society. Received: 25 March 2020; accepted: 26 March 2020; Published online 18 April 2020.doi:10.1002/oby.22813

38 Food Insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Reflections in Light of the COVID-19 Lockdown Food Insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Reflections in Light of the COVID-19 Lockdown

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by Tracy Kuo Lin, Rawan Kafri, Weeam Hammoudeh and Tiziana Leone

39 <https://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au/quaranteen-adolescence-in-lockdown/>

40 <https://parentzone.org.uk/article/quaranteened-helping-teenagers-cope-lockdown>

41 <https://www.relationshipsnsw.org.au/quaranteen-adolescence-in-lockdown/Adolescence in lockdown>

Related studies in Palestine on Adolescent under COVID-19

Juzoor for Health and Social Development, in collaboration with the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre conducted a study⁴² to track lifestyle habits and behaviors of Palestinian adolescents (ages 10-19 years old) in the WB during lockdown to help address important issues about the overall impact of social distancing measures on their health. The survey included a range of lifestyle behaviors including physical activity, diet and nutrition, sleep and screen time. It addressed two aims¹) Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on changes in nutrition and dietary habits among Palestinian adolescents and (2) Assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on changes in physical activity, sleep patterns.

Results indicated unfavorable changes in risk factors for weight gain including eating, nutritional, physical activity, sleep and screen time behaviors among adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdown, raising concerns for the health and well-being of Palestinian adolescents amidst the current lockdown and other potential closures and crises in the future. The study concluded with the critical need to implement preventative measures for obesity and overweight during lockdown periods and national-closures and for policy makers to consider the lifestyle effects of the lockdown on youths at risk and with obesity when making decisions regarding the current lockdown and related future crises.⁴³

Juzoor in collaboration with the JMCC also examined the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown on family relationships, and whether the lockdown is causing increased violence against children, wives, husbands, and other family members⁴⁴. Related findings include :19.5% indicated domestic violence increased during the lockdown and 70.8% believe it will further increase with the extension of the lockdown. Most believe parents are the main source of help for victims of violence. Fathers and mothers agreed regarding changes in physical violence against their children. Mothers especially the younger ones however, reported more verbal violence against children compared to fathers. There was a cluster of violence within families: A strong relationship between coming from an abusive family, violence against a spouse, and violence against children.

A summary of early gender impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic by Care-Palestine also revealed ⁴⁵:GBV appears to have increased among Palestinians since the onset of the crisis and limitations on movement, Twenty-four percent of CARE respondents noted increase in GBV security concerns facing women and girls , intimate partner violence, and domestic violence, Female participation in community and political organizations supporting the COVID-19 response is marginal, with implications for its reach and impact, and significantly fewer female respondents than males reported having safe access to health facilities inside and out of their community.

Palestinian adolescent's experiences during COVID 19 were elicited by adolescents in an online session with adolescents conducted facilitated by Juzoor in May 2020 which focused on: the participants experience in quarantine, needs during this period, experience with distance-online learning and lessons learned. Discussion revealed

- General experience and feelings under lockdown and quarantine include stress, and a sense of going through an unprecedented time. Stress attributed to staying home for long and not knowing about the nature of the virus and its potential impact and loneliness.
- Needs during lockdown and quarantine include: Mental and psychosocial support, awareness raising to understand the nature of the virus and its protective measures, need to go back to pre COVID -19-normal life

42 Juzoor- Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on nutrition and lifestyle behaviors among adolescents in a Palestinian population. Included a random sample of 600 adolescents -300 boys and 300 girl's -aged 10-19 years in the WB including East Jerusalem between April 24 and April 27, 2020.

43 See Allabadi H, Daibes J, Aghabekian V, Khader A, Khammash U: Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on dietary and lifestyle behaviours among adolescents in Palestine. *Dynamics of Human Health* 2020, 7.

44 Conducted a household phone survey on a random sample of adults residing in the West Bank, including Jerusalem (J2). Multistage random sampling was used to select 800 Palestinians aged 18 years and older for the survey. Data was collected in April 2020, and the response rate was 79%. Half of the sample was below 40 years of age, 19% had non-communicable diseases, and 18% had at least one elderly person (aged 65 and above) living at home while 94% of survey participants lived with members of their nuclear family and half of the study participants had more than two children).

45 A Summary of Early Gender Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. CARE Palestine WBG COVID-19 Rapid Gender Assessment-March 2020.

- Thoughts on life after COVID-19 include: on the positive side, awareness and more attention to the environment, less pollution, more love, empathy and cooperation, better hygiene and awareness, better time management, better awareness on taking care of health. On the negative side: less physical activity, poor economic conditions, no more gatherings and boredom with more stress not being able to see friends as often. Generally, participants were more positive regarding the future than negative especially in regards to taking care of their hygiene and health.
- Online education has fostered time management and sharpened adolescent's use of technology. However, it is a big challenge and stressful as it places greater responsibility for self-learning.

Juzoor also conducted a survey between January 19 and March 1, 2021.⁴⁶ The online survey assessed sociodemographic factors, lifestyle behaviors during COVID-19, COVID-19 related factors, sources of stress, and psychosocial and mental health factors which occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown. Questions were structured to be answered directly in comparison to “before” or “during” confinement conditions. Results indicated that the majority have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with over 60% exhibiting poor-very poor mental well-being. It revealed significantly elevated rates of psychological distress, among respondents compared to before the pandemic and lockdown, and negative impacts on family's financial situations, family relationships, social connectedness, motivation and learning.

Poor mental well-being, COVID-19 related stressors, and high stress levels were more common among university students and older adolescents while there were no differences in mental well-being rates among gender. Participants which contracted the COVID-19 infection or had a family/household member which was infected were more likely to have poor-very poor mental well-being.

Most respondents reported the pandemic had affected a parent's employment status, with 43.5% losing their jobs. This has led to increased psychological distress for many adolescents as well as poor mental well-being. A significant proportion also reported poor dietary habits, exercising less and sleeping difficulties as well as high levels of uncertainty about the future, all of which were associated with increased levels of stress as well as poor mental well-being.

Among the factors causing a lot of stress for adolescents (more so for females) were staying at home all day, not going to school, unable to attend recreational activities and distance learning. Participants also reported feelings of loneliness, which were associated with increased psychological distress and a reduced sense of well-being. Differences in region were reported for almost all stressors. Participants residing in the West Bank reported stressing a lot from all the reported causes of stress than those residing in Gaza.

These findings shed light on adolescents ,worry, stress and change in lifestyle associated with COVID-19 and its potential impact on their long term mental well-being .The need remains for longitudinal research to assess the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on adolescents and the need for interventions to support young people through this disruptive time. However, the findings have important implications for prevention, psychosocial intervention and future research. Importantly, mental health services for adolescents should be made available with easy access to support their psychosocial and mental health needs.

Needed Action

Globally, an estimated 10-20% of all adolescents experience mental health conditions, yet these remain underdiagnosed and untreated. Attention to adolescent's mental health during times of crises, such as COVID-19 is of utmost importance. Implementation of recommended actions below by policy makers and service providers will help minimize and address the consequences this pandemic has imposed on this vulnerable population. Supporting healthy adolescence needs must be framed within the human rights approach as an overarching principle .Challenges and difficulties as a result of the pandemic must not be considered excuses for jeopardizing rights. Despite the significant negative impact of the pandemic and especially on the deteriorating economy advocacy must be directed towards allocating resources in the best interest of population strata's including adolescents. In this context

⁴⁶ The impact of COVID-19 on the psychosocial and mental well-being of Palestinian Adolescents. Included a sample of female and male adolescents (13-19 years of age) residing in the State of Palestine, using non-probability convenience and purposive sampling surveyed through a self-administered structured online questionnaire via a range of methods: emails, official network pages, and sponsored social media platforms such as Facebook™, Twitter™ and WhatsApp. A total of 1829 adolescents between the ages 13-19 years old were virtually surveyed between January 19-March 1, 2021(58.9% were females and 41.1% males). 72.4% were living in the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and 27.6% in Gaza. 42.8% were city dwellers; 34.3% from villages and 22.9% from camps. The majority 94% were never married; 90% were unemployed; and 37.1% were high school students, 33.0% middle school students and 18.3% were enrolled in university.

- Advocate for rights based services for adolescents. With extended school closures and increased poverty, there is a risk of the most marginalized may not return to schools. Additionally increased risk of instability and violence
- Advocate for access to water especially with increased utility due to protective hygiene measures and electricity in light of increased internet utility for online learning and general communication in light of social distancing
- Campaign for the release of all Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails particularly children and adolescents

The COVID-19 pandemic has already had profound mental health and consequences on the Palestinian population at large including adolescents. The longer term impact is yet to be assessed. The physical and mental impact due to lifestyle changes under a pandemic and Lockdown may have far reaching effects burdening services in the future. Promoting psychological and mental well-being and protecting adolescents from adverse experiences and risk factors which may impact their potential to thrive are not only critical for their well-being during adolescence but also for their physical and mental health in adulthood. This need is further exacerbated under the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and warrants responsiveness under various realms including:

On the planning and policy level

- Develop strategies to enhance adolescent's access to mental health services during and post pandemic through a multisectoral approach and collaborative network including various stakeholders.
- Include psychosocial and mental health consideration in the COVID-19 response plan in the State of Palestine including related to specifically adolescents.
- Develop strategies that allow everyone to have equal opportunities and equal access for health and psychological services
- Integrate routine mental health services into primary healthcare and specifically train general practitioners on child and adolescent mental health screening, treatment and referral if needed to specialized mental health services.
- Bring to the table stakeholders: government, civil society, municipalities, universities, NGOs, adolescent organizations and others to further adolescents related needs under the Pandemic and its aftermath while sharing knowledge, strengthening partnerships and cross-sector collaborations, and to address adolescent's needs.

On the operation/service level

- Support and strengthen community mental health services to respond to the needs of the community, in particular the needs of adolescents.
- Provide emergency support for those in need of psychosocial and mental health assistance during the pandemic including community services which strengthen social cohesion, help with coping mechanisms, reduce loneliness and promote healthy mental well-being.
- Scale up support to organizations which provide mental health services remotely
- Strengthening mental health services to respond to the needs of people and particularly adolescents in the recovery period/post COVID-19 pandemic.
- Conduct research on the long term effects of the pandemic on psychosocial and mental health of adolescents and use results to inform policy makers and service providers..
- Make available mental health resources online to guide adolescents and their families through the stress and tension they are experiencing during the Pandemic and its aftermath.
- Promote coordinated work of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and others for a more effective complementary mental health services .Work on incorporating trained individuals organized into networks of providers.
- Strengthen provision of counselling and hot line services
- Engage with adolescents and youth to plan and design age and gender tailored and friendly interventions

which encourages peer to peer programs and support psychosocial related interventions

- On capacity building and awareness raising
- Increase awareness among adolescents on the importance of their mental well-being and to seek support if needed. Develop psychoeducation campaign, raising awareness of adolescents on the importance of their mental health and to seek help, either in school or university settings as well as in health facilities.
- Strengthen psychosocial and mental health programs at schools with a special focus on the adolescent's risky behaviors. Build teachers and school counselor's capacity to play a role in promoting mental health among students (diet, nutrition, physical activity, avoiding risky behaviors, no tobacco and mental health).
- Promote online exercise activities and recreational activities, to try and avoid sedentary lifestyles in order to promote good mental well-being.
- Encourage adolescents to reach out to friends and family via phone, video chats, social media, or even via video games.
- Raise parents and adolescents awareness on harmful effects of excessive internet use among adolescents and its connection to anxiety. Similarly, excessive and irresponsible use of social media or internet gaming should be cautioned against.
- Train related governmental and NGOs with expertise in training, on various related mental and psychological issues under crisis specifically pertaining to adolescents
- Develop manuals and guidebooks to help parents, caregivers and teachers to manage tensions, fears and emotions due to the Pandemic and the gradual move to normal life.
- Educate people about the expected psychological impact and reactions to the pandemic s and raise awareness on needs of the adolescent population obesity and nutritional diversity targeting the population of all age groups
- Invest in wider outreach to adolescents through online and virtual interventions including online capacity building.
- Reach out and influence adolescents through tips on how to better use time, invest it, and achieve goals by taking advantage of the home quarantine period.

On engaging adolescents

- Engage adolescents in action during and post lockdown⁴⁷:partnering, safely and effectively, with young people , recognizing young people's actions and potential to mitigate against the pandemic and to raise awareness of its impacts especially with peers
- Develop Tailored and catchy programs targeting adolescents to increase their interaction and engagement with organizations and service providers giving adolescents a platform to express their opinions and aspirations whilst reaching out for adolescents through a preferred tool of communications (social media) with a higher reach with less operational cost.
- Present positive examples of adolescents who contributed to this pandemic and were able to create hope and achieve under difficult conditions.
- Develop and use social media messages (e.g. videos, pamphlets, success stories) to promote physical activity in children's, adolescents and youth's daily routines during lockdowns and closures.

On fund raising and support

- Make funding available for protective measures on COVID-19 now and in the future for post crisis measures
- Aside from coordinating efforts amongst international funders for current situation under the Pandemic

, coordinate for post Pandemic efforts to ensure maximum coverage of required interventions including dealing with impact on adolescents

- Recommendations for the long term
- Despite the overwhelming needs and budget limitations, continue to seek inclusion of related psychological support in ministry budgets
- Build on the proactive engagement of young people in combating the spread of the virus and its impact ,in raising awareness by disseminating information about the virus, reaching out to their peers and using various platforms to spread fact-based information and supporting others
- Recognize the multiple impacts the COVID-19 on young people and their human rights including: right to health, safety, employment , healthy environment, education, food security and good nutrition, participation and inclusion and ,right to peace and security⁴⁸
- Learn from current experience to inform a process of review of policies and services as needed under crisis in the future
- Continue fundraising for adolescent services highlighting importance with implications of the current crisis on the need of support to services now and in the future in the course of returning to normalcy

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