

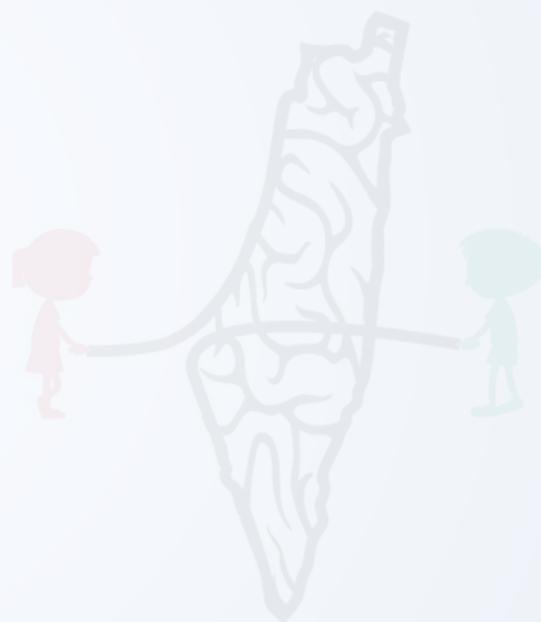
UNIVERSITY CENTERS FOR
NEURODEVELOPMENT

REPORT

2025

NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

WHY THEY MATTER IN
THE **PALESTINIAN** CONTEXT?



Prepared By
NeuroDev Project

Palestinian Network for
Child Neurodevelopment
(PNCN)

Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Starting Early, Lasting a Lifetime

Neurodevelopmental disorders (NDDs) are characterized by early-onset deficits of variable severity in personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning¹. These disorders include intellectual developmental disorders, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), specific learning disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), communication disorders, motor disorders and other neurodevelopmental disorders. They typically emerge early in development, usually before school age, and vary in severity, often resulting in lifelong challenges for affected individuals².

BIRTH → EARLY CHILDHOOD → PRESCHOOL AGE

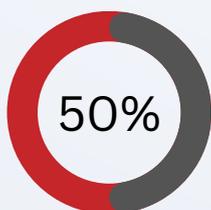


ONSET OF NDDs

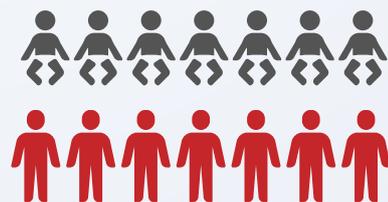


A High-Risk Developmental Environment for Palestinian Children

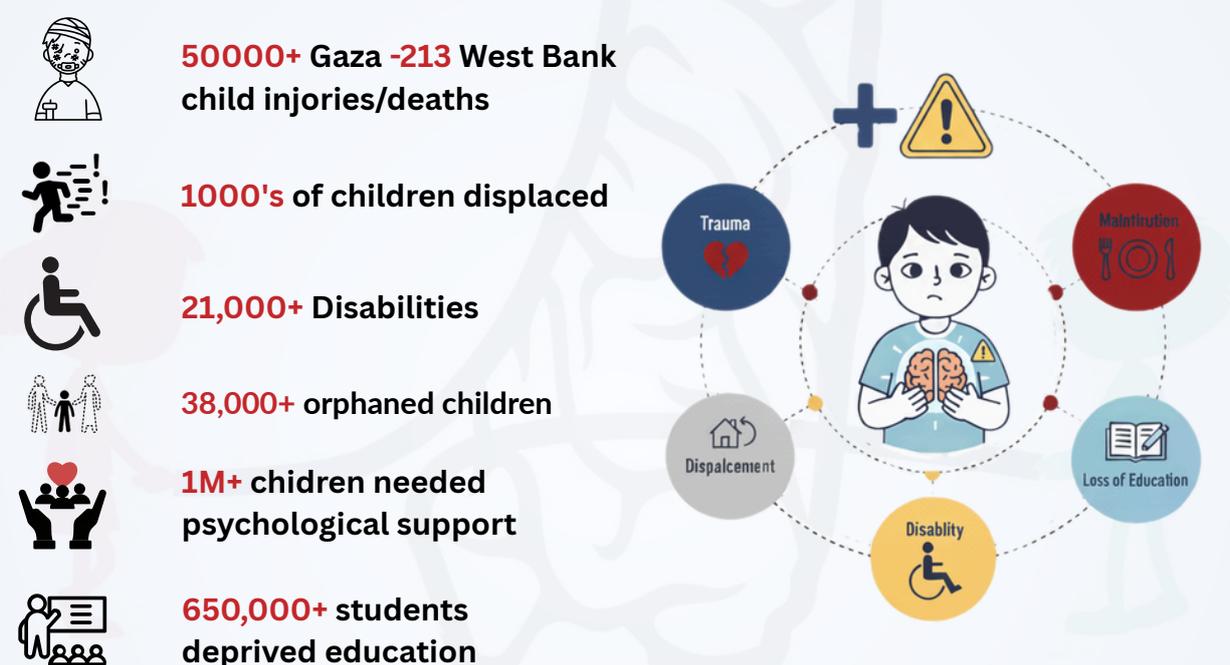
In Palestine, nearly half of the Palestinian population is children, with over 2.43 million under 18³.



2.43M+
under 18



Since October 7, 2023, the Israeli aggression has led to over 50,000 child injury or deaths in Gaza⁴, and 213 in the West Bank⁵, and thousands of children were displaced^{6,7} and more than 21,000 acquired a permanent disability. The crisis has orphaned more than 38,000 children⁸, leaving more than a million children in need of psychological support, and depriving over 650,000 students in Gaza of education⁹.

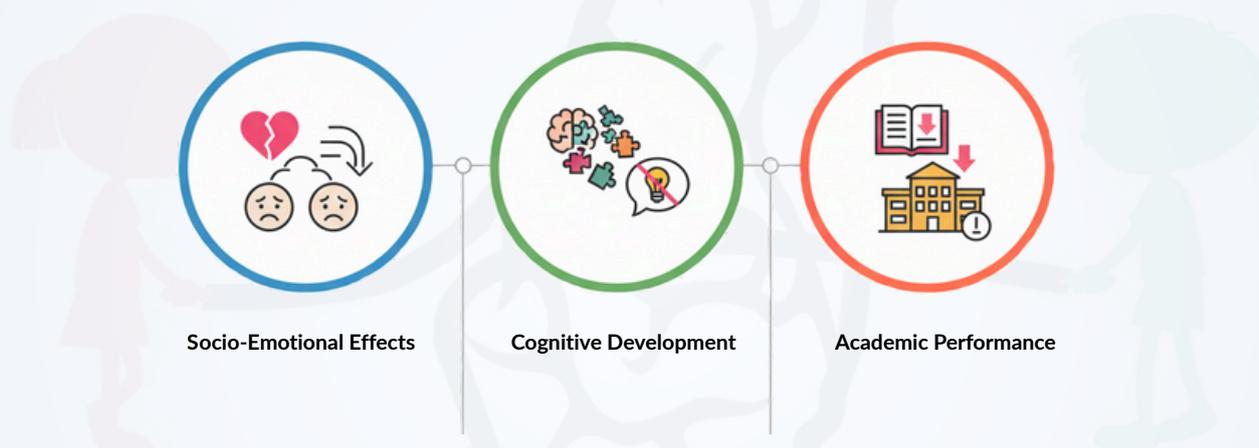


Food insecurity affects 95% of Gaza's population, with severe malnutrition and wasting among children. Health services are overwhelmed, with newborns and children suffering due to malnutrition, dehydration, and a lack of vaccinations. The ongoing aggression continues to exacerbate the physical, psychological, and educational well-being of Palestinian children¹⁰.

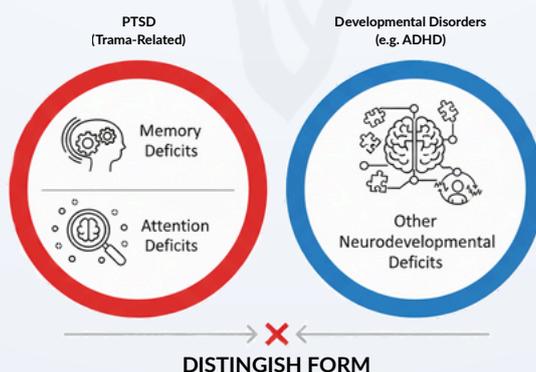


Research since World War II has extensively highlighted the effects of war on children's mental health and development¹¹. These effects also extend to include impairments in socio-emotional and cognitive development¹². Exposure to conflict can negatively impact executive functions¹³, potentially affecting academic performance.

Impacts of War on Children's Development



Research in neuropsychological assessment reveals that children and adolescents with PTSD have significant deficits in memory¹⁴, and attention¹⁵. However, these results should be distinguished from other deficits usually observed in developmental disorders, such as ADHD¹⁶.



Moreover, neuropsychological problems of children and young people, including Palestinian children, have not been adequately addressed in scientific literature. Few studies have examined Palestinian children exposed to conflict, and found related concentration, attention, and memory problems. Thus, the neuropsychological issues faced by Palestinian children remain underresearched¹⁷.

The Palestine Ministry of Health (MoH) has published a national strategy named **“Child & Adolescent Mental Health National Strategy 2023 to 2028.”**

The strategy highlights the social, political, and economic challenges resulting in pressing developmental needs for children and adolescents in Palestine.

The strategy addressed heightened risks for mental health issues, including neurodevelopmental disorders, due to prolonged exposure to conflict, poverty, and violence among Palestinian children and adolescents. These conditions increase vulnerability to developmental disorders such as ASD, ADHD, intellectual disability, and developmental delays. It also addressed Palestine’s underdeveloped mental health care infrastructure, which lacks specialised services for neurodevelopmental care.



Existing mental health services are fragmented, underfunded, and often limited to general rather than specialised support, making it difficult for children with NDDs to receive appropriate care. The strategy also pointed to the educational barriers, where schools in Palestine are often not equipped to support children with NDDs, leading to high dropout rates and inadequate academic support.

Additionally, there is significant social stigma surrounding mental health and developmental disorders, which discourages families from seeking help and increases isolation for affected individuals.



Another issue highlighted was the scarcity of professionals trained to address neurodevelopmental needs, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and specialised educators¹⁸.

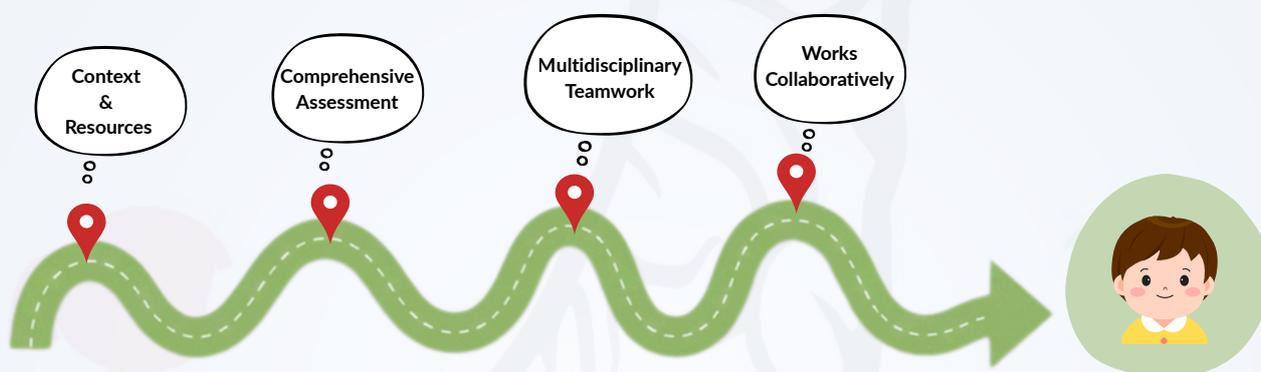


According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) 2023, there are about 115,000 persons with disabilities in Palestine, making up 2.1% of the total population. This includes around 59,000 people in the West Bank (1.8% of its population) and approximately 58,000 in the Gaza Strip (2.6%), with learning disability being the most common¹⁹. In September 2025, it was estimated that 163,096 Palestinians have been injured due to the Gaza 2023 war. 25% of those are expected to live with life-long impairments²⁰. People with disability face challenges in accessing healthcare, educational support, and social services²¹.

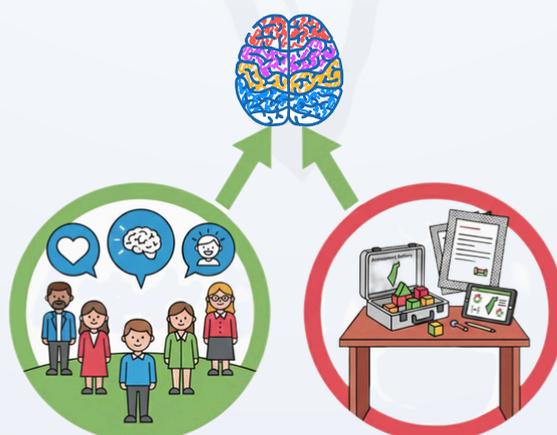


In Palestine, there is a lack of data on the burden of NDDs, although studies showed that in low and middle-income countries, the burden is considerable and more screening for some NDDs such as ASD is needed for reliable estimates²². NDDs place a significant constraint on healthcare, welfare, child protection, social support, and education²³, making it more essential to have reliable data on which to base interventions.

In light of these challenges, research and service provision for people with neurodevelopmental disorders in Palestine are both limited and fragmented. Research to evaluate institutional ability, knowledge, and resources available in Palestine. Diagnosis and assessment should be comprehensive and inclusive, involving a multidisciplinary team that works collaboratively.



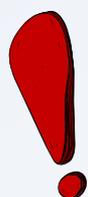
To effectively address neurodevelopmental disorders, promoting community awareness of children's mental health and developmental disability should also be addressed. Moreover, the development of culturally appropriate and standardized neuropsychological tests and batteries that could be used to assess children with neurodevelopmental disorders in Palestine is essential.



With the current geopolitical escalations in Gaza and the West Bank, it is expected that the number of children with neurodevelopmental disorders will rise and will have lifelong implications on their psychological and mental health and emotional well-being²⁴. Addressing neurodevelopmental disorders in the Palestinian context is therefore not only a matter of healthcare but a matter of social justice, resilience, and national recovery.



Projected increase in neurodevelopmental risks among Palestinian children under ongoing geopolitical escalation.



Thank you for reading through this report and for showing that you care.



Thank you!

Palestinian Network for Child NeuroDevelopment (PNCN)

The Palestinian Network for child Neurodevelopment aims to strengthen collaboration and unify efforts to enhance services for children with Neurodevelopmental disorders and their families. It also works to raise community awareness and implement community-based activities and services that support, in particular, families of children with Neurodevelopmental disorders. Ultimately, the Network strives for a future in which all children achieve comprehensive development across all domains of growth.

For **References**
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