

# 2021 Best Research Poster Award



## Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anger and mental health of school students in Syria after nine years of conflict: a large-scale school-based study

**Project Team Leader:** Ameer Kakaje<sup>1,2</sup>

**Project Team Members:** Ragheed Al Zohbi<sup>3</sup>, Ayham Alyousbashi<sup>1</sup>, Rawan N.K. Abdelwahed<sup>1</sup>, Osama Hosam Aldeen<sup>1</sup>, Mohammad Marwan Alhalabi<sup>1</sup>, Ayham Ghareeb<sup>1</sup>, and Youssef Latifeh<sup>4,5</sup>.

1. Faculty of Medicine, Damascus University, Damascus, Syria
2. University Hospital Geelong, Barwon Health, Victoria, Australia
3. Faculty of Medicine, Aleppo University, Aleppo, Syria
4. Psychiatry Department, Al-Mowasat University Hospital, Damascus, Syria
5. Department of Internal Medicine, Syrian Private University, Damascus, Syria

### INTRODUCTION

The Syrian crisis has entered its ninth year leaving millions of Syrians suffering from major tragedies. Around 11.1 million people need humanitarian assistance and 2.7 million are dependent on humanitarian assistance [1]. Moreover, over 5.5 million people have fled the country, 6 million have been internally displaced, and more than 80% of the remaining people in Syria live below the poverty line [1].

### OBJECTIVES

This is the largest-scale study that aims to evaluate the psychological profile of secondary school students in Syria.

### Methods

This is a cross-sectional study in schools in Damascus, Syria. The surveys assessed working habits, smoking war exposure, grades, socioeconomic status (SES), social support, health-related quality of life (HRQL), post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), problematic anger, and other parameters. Only participants who lived in Syria and attended its schools for the past nine years were enrolled.

### REFERENCES

1. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) (2020) Syria crisis overview. Available at <https://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/about-ocha-syria>.

### RESULTS

This study included 1369 students of which 53% suffered from PTSD and 62% from problematic anger. Around 46% declared a fair or worse general health and 61% had moderate or severe mental health. Only 9.3% did not report exposure to any war-related variable. War exposure had an impact on PTSD, anger, and HRQL, but not on students' grades. Smoking, having consanguineous parents and working did not have a clear association with grades or anger. Social support weakly reduced PTSD and anger scores. Interestingly, working was associated with lower PTSD scores but was associated with a worse physical component of HRQL.

### DISCUSSION

This study found that the prevalence of PTSD (intrusion + avoidance) was 53.0% and problematic anger was 62% with high mean scores of arousal symptoms (9.46). Moreover, one-third of the students were either previous smokers or current smokers. More than 90% of the students reported at least one positive variable of war exposure.

### CONCLUSION

This is the largest study on school students in Syria that reports the psychological ramifications of war. Although the direct effects of war could not precisely be described, the high burden of PTSD and anger distress was a strong reflection of the chronic mental distress.

### Acknowledgement

The authors thank Sami Jomaa for designing this poster and acknowledge his contribution.