

Letter to the Editor

War and the Rights of the Child: A Case for Global Accountability

Morteza Heidari¹, Sadeh Yoosefee^{2,3*}

1. School of Health and Religion, Qom University of Medical Sciences, Qom, Iran.

2. Spiritual Health Research Center, Qom University of Medical Sciences, Qom, Iran.

3. Neuroscience Research Center, Qom University of Medical Sciences, Qom, Iran.

*Corresponding Author:

Address: Spiritual Health Research Center, Qom University of Medical Sciences, Qom, Iran., Postal Code: 3716993456

Tel: 98-912 2564854, Fax: 98-2532858464, Email: syoosefee@muq.ac.ir

Article Information:

Received Date: 2025/07/14, Revised Date: 2025/08/19, Accepted Date: 2025/09/17

Dear Editor,

War casualties extend far beyond battlefield fatalities. They include long-term physical and psychological injuries that affect diverse populations, with children being among the most vulnerable. Armed conflict exposes children to direct violence, displacement, deprivation, and trauma, often with lasting consequences that shape their developmental, emotional, and cognitive trajectories. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly the Gaza Strip, provides a stark example of this ongoing crisis. Since 2017, Gaza has been under a severe land, sea, and air blockade, raising serious concerns regarding violations of international humanitarian and criminal law (1). The escalation of conflict since 2023 has resulted in widespread attacks on civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools, residential buildings, places of worship, refugee camps, ambulances, and cultural heritage sites. Reports indicate that Palestinian children have been subjected to starvation, dehydration, displacement, and violence, with hundreds of thousands left homeless (2). These actions have been characterized by many observers as constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity (3). Children exposed to war and violence demonstrate a broad spectrum of mental disorders ranging from PTSD to depression, distress, and aggressive behaviors (4) that could affect their mood and life and may have permanent effects on them and even their next generation.

Children are not just collateral damage. They are deliberate victims of warfare in many instances. The suffering of children in Gaza has been described by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as akin to "hell on Earth" (3). Unfortunately, this humanitarian tragedy

is not isolated. The indifference of international organizations and their decline in fulfilling their duties, led to other destructive actions. In June 2025, Israel launched an aerial attack on Iran, killing over a thousand civilians, including at least 65 children (5). The strikes led to widespread fear, injury, and psychological harm, particularly among the children who were exposed to drones, rockets, and bombs.

The impact of war on children extends far beyond immediate physical harm. Millions of children living in war zones face chronic insecurity and psychological trauma, some of which may not fully emerge until years later (6). Research consistently shows that exposure to war and terrorism is strongly associated with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (7). During early childhood, a period marked by rapid physiological and emotional development, traumatic experiences can fundamentally alter mental health outcomes and emotional resilience. Both developmental and ecological contexts must be considered when assessing the risk and protective factors influencing a child's response to trauma (8).

International humanitarian law offers explicit protections for children during armed conflict, recognizing their unique vulnerability. Despite this, evidence from multiple sources suggests that these protections have been systematically violated in recent conflicts (9). While international organizations such as Human Rights Watch and the United Nations have issued condemnations, concrete accountability mechanisms remain limited. The repeated targeting of civilians—including children, during military operations and the disproportionate use of force raise grave concerns about the failure of the international community to uphold its



Copyright © 2026 Tehran University of Medical Sciences. Published by Tehran University of Medical Sciences.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). Noncommercial uses of the work are permitted, provided the original work is properly cited

legal and ethical responsibilities (10). This is intensified by the double standards of U.S., European countries and some international bodies who make a propaganda for some minor issues, but are indifferent to Israel's war crimes.

In conclusion, the international community must confront the urgent need for accountability in protecting children affected by war. This includes holding violators of international law responsible, reinforcing mechanisms for civilian protection, and prioritizing the psychological rehabilitation of children living in conflict zones. If we are to claim any measure of moral authority in the modern world, the safety and dignity of children must be treated as non-negotiable.

References

1. Ben-Natan S. Above and Beyond Denial: Incarcerated Children in Israel/Palestine: Incarcerated childhood and the politics of unchilding, by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2019, 174 pp., US \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN: 978-1108429870. Taylor & Francis; 2021.
2. Arı Y, Turan M. A Crime against Humanity and the Tragedy of Genocide: An Evaluation That Israel Should Be Sued for State Terrorism against Palestinians. *Uluslararası Dorlion Akademik Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi (DASAD)*. 2023;1(2):445-65.
3. Spitka T. Children as victims and activists in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. National and international civilian protection strategies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Springer; 2023. p. 107-36.
4. Vahidniya N, Hasani Z, Kamali SM. Effect of Warfare and Forced Displacement on Mental Health of Children. *International Journal of Travel Medicine & Global Health*. 2024;12(1).
5. (HRANA) HRANA. Twelve Days Under Fire: A Comprehensive Report on the Iran Israel War 2025 [Available from: <https://www.en-hrana.org/twelve-days-under-fire-a-comprehensive-report-on-the-iran-israel-war/>].
6. Chemtob CM, Conroy DL, Hochauser CJ, Laraque D, Banks J, Schmeidler J, et al. Children who lost a parent as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001: registry construction and population description. *Death Stud*. 2007;31(1):87-100.
7. Pine DS, Costello J, Masten A. Trauma, proximity, and developmental psychopathology: the effects of war and terrorism on children. *Neuropsychopharmacology*. 2005;30(10):1781-92.
8. Betancourt TS, Khan KT. The mental health of children affected by armed conflict: protective processes and pathways to resilience. *Int Rev Psychiatry*. 2008;20(3):317-28.
9. Mohammed Asqool A, Ismail SM, Nordin R. The protection of children during armed conflicts: Israeli violations of international humanitarian law in three wars in Gaza. *UUM Journal of Legal Studies (UUMJLS)*. 2023;14(2):535-56.
10. Ilyas MD. Implications and Analysis of the Crime of Aggression against Gaza: Breach of International Criminal Law amid the Israel-Hamas Conflict. *International Journal of Business and Social Analytics*. 2024;1(1).