

4 War, displacement, family disintegration and the loss of safe mobility: A psychosocial framework with reference to the Gaza Strip

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Introduction

A peaceful, stable, and secure environment is widely recognised as fundamental to children's healthy development. Where safety, responsive caregiving, continuity and social support are present, children are more likely to develop secure attachments, emotional regulation, social competence, and cognitive resilience (Attanayake et al., 2009; Bürgin et al., 2022; McCormick et al., 2020; UNICEF, 1989; Zain & Iswinarti, 2024).

Armed conflict radically disrupts these developmental foundations. War does not only affect children through direct exposure to bombardment, injury, bereavement and displacement. It also reshapes the family system, alters caregiving, weakens institutions, fragments social support and narrows the developmental world in which children can grow (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Blackmore et al., 2020; El-Khodary & Samara, 2019; Hoppen et al., 2021). Exposure to armed conflict, whether through direct violence, forced displacement or the loss of caregivers, has been associated with heightened rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and behavioural disorders (Blackmore et al., 2020; Bürgin et al., 2022; El-Khodary & Samara, 2020; Hoppen et al., 2021).

This chapter examines how war-induced stress infiltrates family life and why this matters for children's mental health, family violence and the loss of safe mobility, leisure, and tourism-related opportunities. It draws together developmental theory, trauma theory, family-process research, displacement literature, and tourism scholarship to explain how war disrupts family func-