

Chapter 8

What are the Possible Reasons for Different Re-actions to Trauma?

8.1 Introduction

The results of the first study in the current research found that every child in Palestine had been exposed to at least three traumatic events. Importantly, the most recent study found that 41% children suffered from PTSD in the Gaza Strip. These results encouraged the researcher to investigate this phenomenon in more depth to determine the reasons behind the rest of the Palestinian children not showing symptoms of PTSD. The first study found some of the reasons why children who were exposed to severe traumatic events suffered from PTSD. Therefore, this second study (qualitative) set out to interview a number of these children to understand clearly why they were doing well in spite of exposure to severe traumatic events. Subsequently, it is hoped that the results of first study and second study will help psychiatrists and psychologist to design suitable programs for these children who suffered from PTSD in order to reduce some or all of their suffering, and for children who did not show symptoms of PTSD to protect them from developing PTSD later on. It is clear that many children currently in the Gaza Strip are in need of urgent psychological, social, and medical services in the areas of counselling, rehabilitation, and therapeutic treatment.

In this chapter, the researcher presents some details about the theory of thematic content analysis such as definition of thematic content analysis, the advantages and disadvantages and the phases of content analysis. The researcher will also introduce the research question of the qualitative study, its aim, method, procedure, validity and reliability which includes the Inter-Rater Reliability. In addition, there is an explanation of data analysis and a list of framework-Code Categories. Finally, the researcher presents the results and discussions.

8.1.1 Thematic content analysis

Content analysis is similar in nature to the observational method. However, what is studied is not direct behaviour but a representation of that behaviour in a film, a book, a speech, and so on. Content analysis is a systematic and objective method for providing a quantitative

description of any such communication.

Content analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and describing the data set in (rich) detail. Content analysis is widely used, but there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). Most psychological applications are concerned with analysing material that can be presented to content analysts as text (Holsti, 1969). Content analysis involves coding participants' open-ended talk into closed categories, which summarize the data (Wilkinson, 2003). Content analysis has two parts to the process: a mechanical and an interpretative component. The mechanical aspect involves physically organizing and subdividing the data into categories whilst the interpretative component involves determining what categories are meaningful in terms of the questions being asked. The mechanical and interpretative are inextricably linked in a cycling back and forth between the transcripts and the more conceptual process of developing meaningful coding schemes (Searle, 1999; Krippendorff, 1980; Millward, 2006).

8.1.2 Main forms of content analysis

According to Millward (2006), there are three main forms of content analysis: quantitative, qualitative, and structural content analysis. Firstly, quantitative content analysis generates numerical values (frequencies, rankings, ratings) from text verbatim. However, the process by which these values are generated may include elements of qualitative analysis, making the qualitative-quantitative distinction far from clear-cut. Quantitative content analysis is slightly mislabelled anyway, as it is less a type of analysis than a way of producing data which can then be statistically analysed.

Secondly, qualitative content analysis tends to be more subjective and less explicit about the processes of interpretation: the emphasis is on meaning rather than on quantification. Thirdly, structural content analysis involves the development of a representation of the relationships between elements in the target material. To do this, both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the data have to be considered. Structural content analysis may go some way towards dealing with some problems of using content analysis, though techniques of structural analysis are relatively underdeveloped (Millward, 2006).

Furthermore, the classification of open-ended material is known as ‘content analysis’ (Krippendorff, 1980). It may often appear that content analysis is simply a matter of counting the number of times a certain thing occurs. However, most theorists are adamant that content analysis should be viewed as a process of theory development and hypothesis testing. Developing a framework for categorizing qualitative data is a time-consuming process, and requires a sound theoretical basis for the results to be meaningful (Wilson & Hammond, 2000).

8.1.3 What counts as a theme?

A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Ideally, there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial. As this is qualitative analysis, there is no hard-and-fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme. It is not the case that if it was present in 50% of one’s data items, it would be a theme, but if it was present only in 47%, then it would not be a theme. However, it is important to note there is no right or wrong method for determining prevalence. Part of the flexibility of thematic analysis is that it allows you to determine themes (and prevalence) in a number of ways. What is important is that you are consistent in how you do this within any particular analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

8.1.4 Advantages and disadvantage of content analysis

The main advantages of content analysis are as follows: flexibility, relatively easy and quick method to learn and do, accessibility to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research, results that are generally accessible to an educated general public, useful method for working within participatory research paradigm with participants as collaborators, can usefully summarize key features of a large body of data and/or offer a ‘thick description’ of the data set, can highlight similarities and differences across the data set. In addition, content analysis can generate unanticipated insights, allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data, can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy

development, content analysis allows for some researchers to do conversion of qualitative data into a quantitative form, the results of the contents analysis are presented quantitatively rather than qualitatively, it offers easy comparison with other studies undertaken within a similar framework (Wilkinson, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

However, content analysis also has some disadvantages: a great deal of detail are lost; it can be hard to select quotations which are both representative of the categories and compelling to the reader; one loses a sense of individual participants and, especially, the interaction between participants which is so distinctive in focus group data. It may be possible to preserve this by doing a separate 'sweep' of the data for interactional phenomena and attempting to 'map' these onto the content analysis in some way. There is also a range of coding problems associated with content analysis. It is heavily reliant on the multiple judgments of a single analyst, it includes concentrating only on what is mentioned (Wilkinson, 2003; Millward, 2006).

8.1.5 Phases of thematic analysis

There are slightly different views on how best to conduct a thematic content analysis. In this section three perspectives on content analysis will be outlined. In each case, there is a fundamental view that thematic content analysis is a systematic process involving a number of sequential stages.

According to Searle (1999), the steps of contents analysis can briefly be summarized as follows:

- Narrow down and clarify aim of the study. What exactly is the researcher studying?
- Have a research question or hypothesis based on, for example, a theory an observation or previous research.
- Decide on the materials to be studied, and decide how you will select the sample that will be analysed.
- Decide exactly which variables the researcher is going to measure.
- Devise a checklist or coding system to measure these variables. Also, the researcher should think about how he is going to analyse the information that he collected.

- Do a pilot study to see if the coding system works.
- Collect data.
- Summarise and analyse the results so that the findings are presented in a clear and concise fashion.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided another outline of the different phases of thematic analysis. According to these authors, some of the phases of thematic analysis are similar to the phases of other qualitative research, so these stages are not necessarily all unique to thematic analysis. The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data made during data collection. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) specified the main phases of content analysis as follows:

Table 36: Main phases of content analysis

No	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collation data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006, p.96) also generated a 15 –point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis as follows:

Table 37: 15 –point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis

Process	No	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for ‘accuracy’.
	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each theme have been collated.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
	7	Data have been analysis – interpreted, made sense of – rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other- the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do and what you show you have done- i.e, described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just ‘emerge’.

Finally, Burns (2000) suggested that the following steps comprise thematic content analysis: Each interview is analysed for themes/topic which should include a discussion about why certain focuses were chosen rather than others, and should reveal emerging ideas which are strengthened or weakened by successive interviews. The content analysis needs a coding system that relates to the theoretical framework or research question. The coding scheme is, in fact, the conceptual model. Coding categories should start developing as soon as the first

interview is being conducted. Coding is something one does to get data ready for analysis. The process of category generation may be the people in the setting as they perceive environment, or may be constructed by the observer/interviewer. Some of the sort of code categories that generally are useful include (e.g., event codes, definitions of the situation codes, process codes, social structure codes) (Burns, 2000).

Strategy codes can play an important role in showing how people do things. The following steps show the process: a) The first stage in coding is to develop a list of coding categories. Then a short name is assigned to each and a number to each subcategory. For example, classroom activities (CA in short) may be a category, while teaching (CA1), marking (CA2) and administration (CA3) are sub-categories. b) In the margin of the transcript file, the data can be coded by the appropriate code, e.g. CA2, as the file is read. The code may refer to a phrase, a sentence, or a paragraph. On occasions, there may be a double reference in the verbal unit and in this case it is double-coded. c) After codes have been allocated to the text in the transcript file, data coded to each category needs to be collected together. Here either index cards can be used on which cut-up sections of the text are pasted, or the cuttings are placed into manila folders. The former method is the best. The transcript file must be photocopied or held on a PC so the only copy is not lost when cut and pasted. Finally, there are the subject perspective codes: i.e. how informants think about their situation (Burns, 2000).

The current research used the method of thematic content analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006) because it is clear, organized and also generated a 15 –point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis as shown above.

8.1.6 Rationale for using thematic content analysis

A thematic content analysis was used to identify themes, concepts and meaning. This type of analysis is best for the data in the current research. It is a form of classifying content. These elements can be counted in numerical terms as well as examined for meaning (Burns, 2000). The strength of content analysis is its unobtrusive nature, allowing the researcher to investigate sensitive topics without altering the phenomena under study (Krahn & Putnam, 2005). Content analysis is a commonly used approach to analysing qualitative data

including focus group data. It involves coding participants' open-ended talk into closed categories, which summarize the data (Wilkinson, 2003). The thematic content analysis was used in the current research because of the advantages already mentioned. It allowed the research question to be explored in more depth.

8.2 Aim of study

The qualitative study aimed to explore, in more depth, the moderating factors relating to Palestinian children who have been exposed to chronic traumatic experiences, particularly the children who show low levels of PTSD. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the reasons why they are doing well.

8.3 Research Question

The main research questions for qualitative study are as follows:

In order to fulfil the above stated aims, the following research question was developed:

What are possible reasons why some Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip who have been exposed to chronic traumatic experiences show low levels of PTSD?

8.4 Method

8.4.1 Design

In the qualitative stage, the sample consisted of six children interviewed by using a semi-structured interview. They were aged between 13-18 years. The participants were selected because of the high levels of traumatic events they experienced and low levels of PTSD they suffered. Six of these children were selected who fully met the criteria from the 'hot' areas in the Gaza Strip (areas of highest exposure to traumatic experiences). The participants were selected through schools and classes in the Gaza Strip.

The main ethical issues considered for this study were: informed consent, confidentiality and consequence of participation. The participants were interviewed in Arabic using a semi-structured interview. The interview schedule was also translated into English. The schedule of semi-structured interview was developed according to the research question; this schedule was

based on four main subjects: a) Exposure to the traumatic events. b) Issues around identity. c) Issues around support. d) Issues around coping.

Six interviewers were recruited to conduct the interviews. The interviewer gave the participants, their parents, and their head teacher detailed information about the project before data was collected. The translation of transcripts into English was done by two qualified persons in the UK (Arabic and English native speakers)

Interviews were analysed using a Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) (Braun and Clarke (2006).

8.4.2 Participants

8.4.2.1 Recruitment

Potential participants were initially identified from 86 children out of the 1,137 participants that took part in the first study. Those 86 participants were selected from schools in the Gaza Strip according to the following criteria: a) They must have been exposed to severe traumatic events during the Al-Aqsa Intifada which started in 2000 and continues to the present day (i.e., at least 15 events); b) They must have shown low symptoms of PTSD or no symptoms in the first test (April-June 2006) and the second test (April-June 2007); c) Children were selected from 'clashing' areas where people settle near the border or the occupation's settlements.

This study required only six cases from the 86 who met the above conditions. Therefore, the researcher randomly selected one third (29) of the 86 children to retest them on the Symptoms of PTSD Scale. Those 29 children were informed that we would retest them in order to select some for interview. Out of 29 children, 6 were selected who met the above conditions of selection for the second stage of the study in order to interview them.

Two or three days in advance, the interviewer gave the participants, their parents, and their head teacher detailed information sheets and consents forms about the interview and purpose of interview, the reasons to be approached/involved, administration of the questionnaires, and the possible risk or benefits of taking part. These information sheets were distributed to participants, their parents, and their head teacher in order to be read, and signed with their families, if they agreed. They were also instructed to return them to his/her teacher or head

teacher. Then, the interviewer collected them through head teacher. After collection of information sheets and consents forms, the interviewer ensured that the participants understood clearly all the steps of the interview and the recording methods. They were also told that all information obtained was confidential and verbal consent was given before starting interview with them.

The six children who were retested on the Symptoms of PTSD Scale completely met the above criteria from the 'hot' areas in the Gaza Strip (areas of highest exposure to traumatic experiences). The interviewer informed them that they are doing well and it was important for the research to discover the reasons behind their positive reactions compared to children who lived in the same area, exposed to the same traumatic events, but who suffered from PTSD.

At the end of recruitment and after the completion of the interview, the participants were given careful guidance and support.

The interviewer administrated the interview by arranging a suitable appointment to meet the child with local school councillors attending. The child was informed about the period of interview and encouraged to feel free to answer the questions in his own words, using formal or informal language. The interviewer gave the interviewee 30 to 45 minutes. At the end of this recruitment, the interviewer sent the researcher the recorded interviews, his own notes about the body language of interviewees and general comments. After that, the researcher started writing down the transcriptions of interviews through listening to the recorded material. Finally, the researcher did Content Analysis.

8.4.2.2 Population

The population consisted of 1,137 Palestinian children who took part in the first study.

8.4.2.3 Sample

The sample consisted of six children interviewed by using a semi-structured interview. They were aged between 13-18 years (mean age: 15; SD 1.67). The participants were selected according to the amount of traumatic events and level of PTSD from the children who took part in first study. The sample included four boys and two girls. Overall, five of the children

were at the preparatory school (ages: 13-15 years), and one case was at secondary school (age 16-18 years).

A systematic review of recent focus groups of qualitative research ranged from six to twelve participants, and it is suggested that between six and eight participants is ideal (Albrecht *et al.*, 1993; Wilkinson, 2003) for a study such as this one. Therefore, the present study included six participants due to recruitment being difficult at this time in Gaza.

Finally, six of these children were selected who have met fully the above criteria from the 'hot' areas in the Gaza Strip (areas of highest exposure to traumatic experiences). The participants were selected through schools and classes in the Gaza Strip.

8.4.3 Measures

8.4.3.1 Developing a semi-structured interview

The participants were interviewed in Arabic using a semi-structured interview. The interview schedule was also translated into English (see Appendix 10).

The researcher used semi-structured interviewing because it is the most widely used method of data collection in qualitative research in psychology. This is partly because interview data can be analysed in a variety of ways, which means that semi-structured interviewing is a method of data collection that is compatible with several methods of data analysis (e.g., discourse analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenology). Another reason for the popularity of semi-structured interviews is that they are somewhat easier to arrange than other forms of qualitative data collection. Most qualitative methods of analysis require that the material is transcribed verbatim, or near verbatim. Taking notes during the interview is no substitute for a full recording (Willig, 2001).

The schedule of semi-structured interview was developed through pilot interview (two cases) which was leading to investigate the research question; this schedule was based on four main subjects:

a) Exposure to the traumatic events:

- What are the worst things (events), which you have seen inflicted on people (family, friends or neighbours) by the occupying forces during the Al-Aqsa Intifada until now?

- What are the worst things (traumatic events) that you directly experienced during the Al-Aqsa Intifada?
 - What did you do when exposed to traumatic events? (For example, how did you feel when your house was bulldozed by the soldiers?)
 - How did you deal with these feelings resulting from exposure to traumatic events?
 - What do you think the reasons are for your continuing to do well and not suffer from any problems or disturbances compared with other children?
 - How do you feel now, after being subjected to traumatic experiences and difficult events during the Al-Aqsa Intifada?
- b) Issues around identity:
- How would you describe yourself as a person?
 - Have experiences of traumatic events made a difference to how you see yourself?
 - Why do you think you have reacted the way you did to these traumatic events?
 - What type of things do you like to play or draw?
- c) Issues around support:
- Describe your relationship with your family members, school teachers, and friends.
 - Who do you get support from?
 - What do you think about that support?
- d) Issues around coping:
- What characteristics do you think may have helped you to cope with these situations better than other children?
 - What do you think about people that are affected badly when they are exposed to several traumatic experiences?
 - Do you see yourself as being well?
 - Do you have particular strategies for facing traumatic events or ways of coping, practically and psychologically?
 - Where do you think you will be in five years time?

8.4.3.2 Piloting the interview

The researcher initially were randomly selected four children who met the condition of the sample which was similar to the real sample in the qualitative study, aged 11,13,15,17 years, from primary, preparatory and secondary school, with an equal number of males and females and equal for represented clashing areas or hot areas (areas of highest exposure to traumatic experiences) in the Gaza Strip.

These children were recruited the same what was done with the real sample which mentioned in the previous section such as administration of interview, consent, confidentiality and other ethical issues. They were encouraged to answer as openly and fully as they could. The average period of time was 25 to 35 minutes. However, the interviewer gave them minimum 25 minutes and maximum 45 minutes.

At the end of interview and after the completion of the pilot study, the participants were given careful guidance and support. However, those participants who had been tested in the pilot study; were not used in the real study, as the participants might have felt uninterested if they were recruited twice. The researcher did subscription for these four interviews and analysed them to check whether the schedual of questions for these interview can answer the research question. Some feedback from these interviews was considered in the real study such as the need to make the language very simple and easy for children, especial for young children. In addition, there are some amendments to a few questions, so that they are more suitable for their age and culture.

Therefore, this interview became validated to use in the real study after the inter-rater reliability was done as show below.

8.4.3.3 Validity and reliability of content analysis

Internal validity is a relevant issue, as a content analysis is only as good as the coding system that is used. Also, it is possible to check the reliability of the findings, and a good content analysis will have built this into the study. For example, more than one rater will have been used and the inter-rater reliability will have been checked (Searle, 1999).

The researcher has asked a post-graduate student in psychology to make an analysis of the six cases; then to make a comparison between his analysis and the current research analysis by using the Inter-Rater Reliability. This has been done by using the schedule of factors to compare the analysis of the current researcher with that of the student (see Table 39).

To examine the reliability of the coding system a second independent researcher coded two interviews and then inter-rater reliability was examined by Pearson correlation and Kappa as shown below: the correlation of coding system for the first interview between main research and independent researcher were (Pearson's $R = 0.77$, $p < 0.001$) and (Kappa= .75) which is significant. The second interview was (Pearson's $R = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$) and (Kappa= .73). Therefore, the results of Inter-Rater Reliability for the two interviews indicated that the coding systems are acceptable and reliable for the current study.

8.5 Procedure

Six interviews were conducted to investigate the research questions. All the interviews had done by people with some expertise in psychology and experience of conducting interviews, because the main researcher was unable to get into Gaza due the border between Gaza Strip and Egypt has been closed since June 2006 to the current situation there.

The interviewer gave the participants, their parents, and their head teacher detailed information about the project before data was collected. The interviewer followed the same executive steps which had been done in the first study.

The interviewer made sure that they understood that all information obtained was confidential. Once the interviewer was certain all information was understood written consent was obtained (see appendix 47, 48). The interviews took places in the meeting room of the schools' which the participants belong to. The interviews were completely done within one month and every interview took 25 minutes to 45 minutes. Also, the participants were given careful guidance, support, relaxation exercises and debriefing at the end of interviews which was similar to what has done with first study. Consent was also obtained to record the interviews, except one participant who refused to record her interview. The interviewer took detailed notes during this interview. The recorded interviews were transcribed in Arabic and then translated into

English. The translation of transcripts into English was done by two qualified persons in the UK (Arabic and English native speakers)

8.5.1 Data analysis

Interviews were analysed using a Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) (Braun and Clarke (2006).

The research question in this current study is: "What are some of the possible reasons why some Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip who have been exposed to chronic traumatic experiences show low levels of PTSD?". Thus, the coding categories focused on areas such as family, friends, school, community, spiritual support, national pride, etc. In another words, these coding categories could determine the reasons for the reaction of Palestinian children who are still doing well, despite their exposure to severe traumatic events in the Gaza Strip. In this study, the current researcher used the method of Braun and Clarke (2006) to complete a thematic content analysis, because it was found to be very organized, clear and *suitable to answer the research question of the current study*.

The interviews of participants were analysed through the thematic content analysis as follows:

- a) The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail in Arabic and translated into English.
- b) The researcher generated the coding system (framework) based on one of these categories to be derived either from the data itself (this is known as a 'bottom-up' approach) or from the prior theoretical framework of the researcher (this is known as a 'top-down' approach, and requires prior familiarity with the literature on the topic under investigation in order to derive the categories) (Wilkinson, 2003). The current researcher derived 19 categories according to the data itself ('bottom-up' approach). These code categories led to reduce the symptoms of PTSD as show in Table 38.

Table 38: Framework- Code Categories

No Cat.	Factors
c1	The patriotic sense, culture of challenge, a strong belief in the obligatory resistance to the occupation and the patience to do so.
c2	Non frustration, hopeful about the future, ambitious and optimistic about eventual victory.
c3	Motivated by religion, faith and patience with calamities.
c4	Family support and encouragement.
c5	Friends' support
c6	Relatives, neighbours' backing, people and Community support and backing (governmental institutions or charities).
C7	Teachers' support
C8	Diligent at school despite difficult circumstances.
C9	Emotions released, as the child talks to his friends, relatives and family about his worries and problems or uses drawing, etc, as therapy.
C10	Courage and boldness.
c11	Becoming used to facing trauma and difficult circumstances.
c12	Avoiding loneliness and isolation from others.
c13	Withdrawal of the occupation from the Gaza Strip, and having a sense of freedom.
c14	Following entertainment and recreational programs.
c15	The practice of sport and hobbies, such as painting and other activities.
c16	A strong will and determination to overcome the difficult conditions.
C17	A collective sense of worry and misfortune, and a belief that the difficult conditions and trauma result from the nature of the occupation acting against all people.
C18	Not to make difficult or traumatic events dominate the person's thinking or his daily life, or try not to think permanently of the difficult and traumatic events.
C19	Others

c- The researcher looked for themes through collating codes into potential themes, and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. Also, an initial thematic map was designed showing five main themes as shown in figure 21.

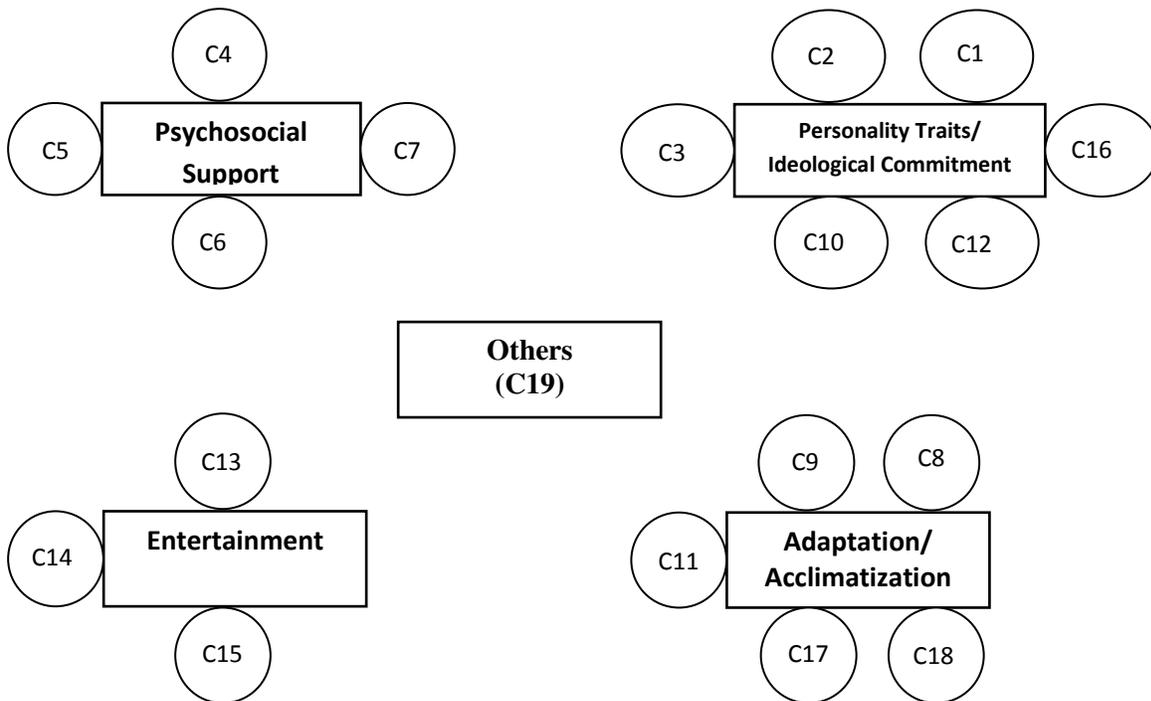


Figure 21: Initial thematic map, showing five main themes as an example (see Table 2)

d- The researcher reviewed the themes by checking if the themes work to the coded extracts (level 1). This level requires all the collated extracts for each theme to be read and considered for whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. Also, (level 2) means the entire data set, generation of a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis as shown in Figure 22,23. The researcher deleted some themes, for example, if there was not enough data to support them, or the data was too diverse. Other themes were broken down into separate themes. Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. After the thematic map work, then the researcher moved to the next phase of analytic process.

e- The researcher defined and named the themes through ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis told, generating clear definitions and names for each theme (See Figure 22 and 23).

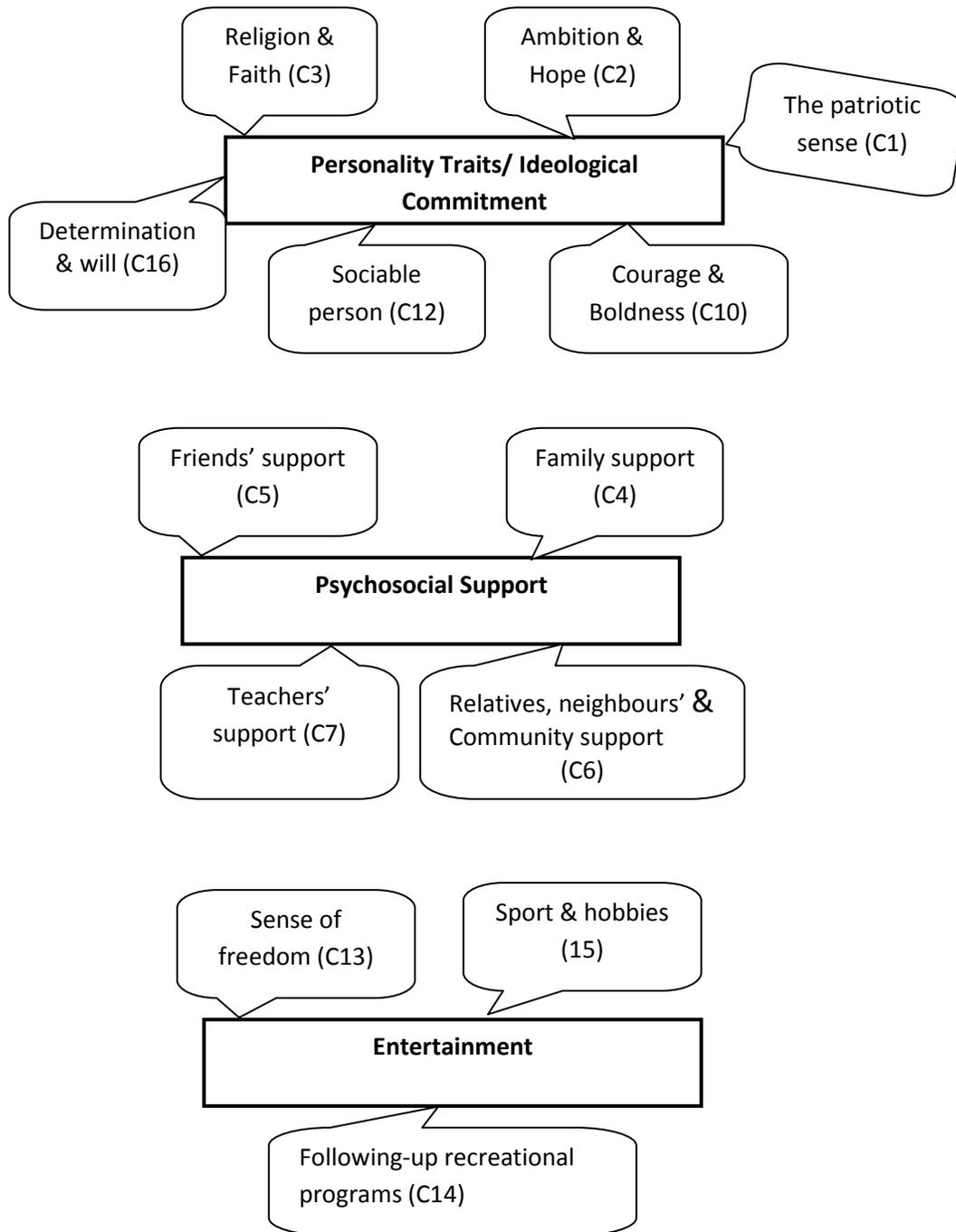


Figure 22: Initial thematic map, showing defining and naming three main themes

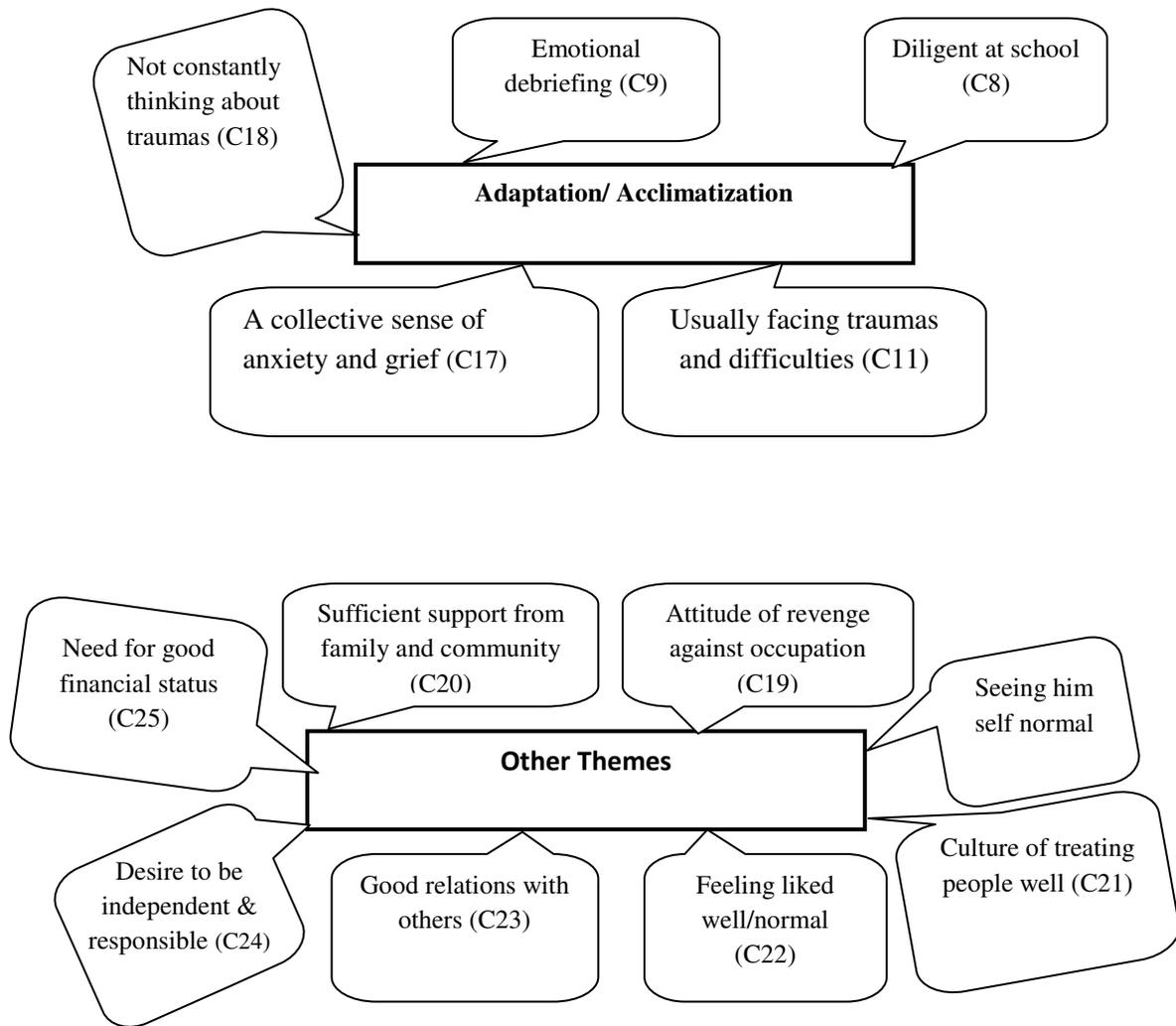


Figure 23: Initial thematic map, showing defining and naming two main themes

f- The researcher reported the final opportunity for analysis through selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating of the analysis back to the research question and literature (see Table 39).

8.5.2 Ethical issues

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethical committee at University of Hertfordshire and the ethical committee at the Palestinian educational ministry and UNRWA's Education Programme.

The main ethical issues considered for this study were: informed consent, confidentiality and consequence of participation.

Firstly, informed consent: all participants were informed of the overall purpose of the research project and the main features of the design before any data was collected. The researcher gave the participants in advance time (two or three days), their parents, and their head teacher detailed information sheets and consent forms about the interview and purpose of the study, the reasons to be approached/involved, phases of study, administration of interview, and the possible risk or benefits of taking part. These information sheets were distributed to participants, their parents, and their head teacher in order to be read, signed in with their families and if they agreed.

As well as, the researcher made sure that all participants understood the instructions and required information which must be obtained through asking them verbally before starting interviews.

Secondly, to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the names of participants and other identifying data have been changed. Finally, consequences of participation: the researcher provided some guidance and support to all participants at the end of each interview. It was ensured that each participant was fully debriefed at the end of each session. Furthermore, their positive behaviour was encouraged to allow them to keep their positive characteristics. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethical committee in the School of Psychology at University of Hertfordshire and the ethical committee at the Palestinian Educational Ministry and UNRWA's Education Programme.

8.6 Results

The first study (quantitative) was conducted from March to June 2006 and the second study (qualitative) was conducted from March to June 2007. Both of them used the same measurements on the participants.

The first study revealed that the support of family, friends, relatives, teachers, and spiritual support could be of great help. However, children whose parents had low educational levels received less support and therefore suffered more often than others from PTSD. Governmental and NGO institutions also helped to mitigate the effects of the difficult living conditions and chronic trauma suffered by the Palestinian children. In addition to this, positive traits of personality reduced the effects of post-traumatic disorders.

However, the research also found that some Palestinian children were managing well psychologically. They suffered remarkably little from mild symptoms of PTSD or did not suffer at all despite being exposed to similar traumatic experiences. Some further exploration of the lived experience of these children was undertaken to tease out some of the possible narratives involved. The selection sample for this study included children who had been exposed to at least 15 traumatic events, but despite this were still doing well or suffered from mild symptoms of PTSD.

In the second study, the research found the possible moderating factors which had led to a reduction in the symptoms of PTSD, in spite of having been exposed to severe traumatic experiences like other participants. Those main and sub-moderating factors and levels of influence are shown below:

Firstly, the main moderating factors are positive personality traits and ideological commitment which represent 75%, along with their sub main factors (e.g., the patriotic sense, ambition and hope, religion and faith, courage and boldness, social person, determination and will). For example, one of the clients described his patriotic sense, culture of challenge, a strong belief in the obligatory resistance of occupation and the patience to do so as show below:

Because the one who destroyed our house was not a national... but it is the hateful and brutal occupation on the Palestinian people ...I have looked at the actions of

the occupation troops from bombing and destruction. It is a hateful occupation happening to us... We must stand firm in his face and not surrender to him at all costs. So I must be strong and defiant to beat the enemy. I expect that the occupation troops will not return to the Gaza Strip... due to the strong Palestinian resistance against the occupation. I expect them to launch partial incursions, but I think that reoccupation may be impossible... (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

The second important moderating factor is psychosocial support, which represents 96%, along with their sub main factors (e.g., family, friend, relatives, neighbours, teachers and community support). For example, one of the clients described his family support and encouragement as shown below:

I have good relations with my family members as there are few problems that occur within the house. House members provide support, assistance, and encouragement at the time of joy and distress... In our house, the cultural atmosphere is quite positive, encouraging me to learn and get acquainted with what is going on in the world around us; also my father is a teacher and has encouraged me to study hard. Also he encourages me to achieve my ambition... (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

The third main moderating factor is entertainment, which represents 50%, along with sub main factors (e.g., sport and hobbies, sense of freedom from healthy activity, following recreational programs like drama). For example, one of the clients described his practice of sport and hobbies, such as painting:

I like to draw everything, especially birds. Also, I like to play computer games involving shooting, soldiers and battles (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

The fourth main moderating factor is adaptation or acclimatization, which represents 60%, along with their sub main factors (e.g., not thinking constantly about traumas or difficulties, usually facing up to traumas and difficulties and a collective sharing of grief and anxiety). Diligence at school and activities like painting or talking which give opportunities for emotional debriefing will also help a child adapt. For example, one of the participants

described his diligence at school despite difficult circumstances:

I practised resistance through being diligent at school, because the nature of the occupation wants to make me ignorant and uneducated. I remember the advice of others when they told me: 'The Vietnamese used to study during the war in underground shelters' (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

The fifth group covers other moderating factors and represents 41% (e.g. those who have general support from parents or the community or who use verbal or artistic acts to take revenge on the occupation). There is also a culture or attitude which sees treating people well as a positive form of resistance. Good relations with others in the community and a sense of responsibility or independence are encouraged in children. Often the children healthily express their hatred for the occupation instead of repressing their feelings. They shout and throw stones, which does little harm but gives them some relief. It overcomes a feeling of helplessness and fear. The amount of anger in the community is immense and it needs opportunities for release. For example, one of the participants described his mixed feelings:

I want to take revenge on the occupation soldiers in any possible way I can. I think that the support I get is good enough. I am happy when I do something, but I'm not always happy. (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

Personal ambition also helps to sustain morale. A child who is eager to earn money and improve his standard of living can be a source of strength for his family and for his own psychological health in the face of traumas. Some very young children maintain a family's basic needs, often at great risk to themselves, but they feel strong doing this and they grow up very quickly.

"So I must be strong and defiant to beat the enemy. Also, my boldness and courage (without recklessness), helped me to challenge and overcome hardships" (Apendix10, Ahmad: 14 yrs).

See below the general analysis for the main and sub themes in Table 39 and Figure 24.

Table 39: General analysis for the main and sub themes

Main themes	Sub themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	%	Total
Personality Traits / ideological commitment.	C1: The patriotic sense.	*	*	*		*	*	83.3	75%
	C2: Ambition and hope.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
	C3: Religion and faith.	*	*	*		*		66.7	
	C10: Courage and boldness.	*				*	*	50.0	
	C12: Sociable personality.		*	*	*		*	66.7	
	C16: Determination and will.		*	*	*	*	*	83.3	
Psychosocial Support	C4: Family support.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	96%
	C5: Friends' support.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
	C6: Relatives', neighbours' and community support.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
	C7: Teachers' support.	*		*	*	*	*	83.3	
Entertainment	C13: Sense of freedom.			*			*	33.3	50%
	C14: Following-up recreational programs.			*				17.0	
	C15: Sport and hobbies.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
Adaptation/ Acclimatization	C8: Diligence at school.	*	*		*		*	66.7	60%
	C9: Emotional debriefing.	*	*	*		*		66.7	
	C11: Usually facing traumas and difficulties.					*	*	33.3	
	C17: A collective sense of anxiety and grief.			*		*		33.3	
	C18: Not constantly thinking about traumas.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
Other themes	C19: Verbal or artistic acts of revenge on the occupation.	*						17.0	41%
	C20: Sufficient support from family or community.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
	C21: Culture of treating people well.						*	17.0	
	C22: Feeling liked/ well/normal.	*	*	*	*	*	*	100	
	C23: Good relations with others.		*					17.0	
	C24: Desire to be independent and responsible.				*			17.0	
	C25: Need for good financial status.						*	17.0	
Total		15	15	17	13	16	18	/	/

P1: means to number of client in the interview

* It means that the theme has influence on the participants.

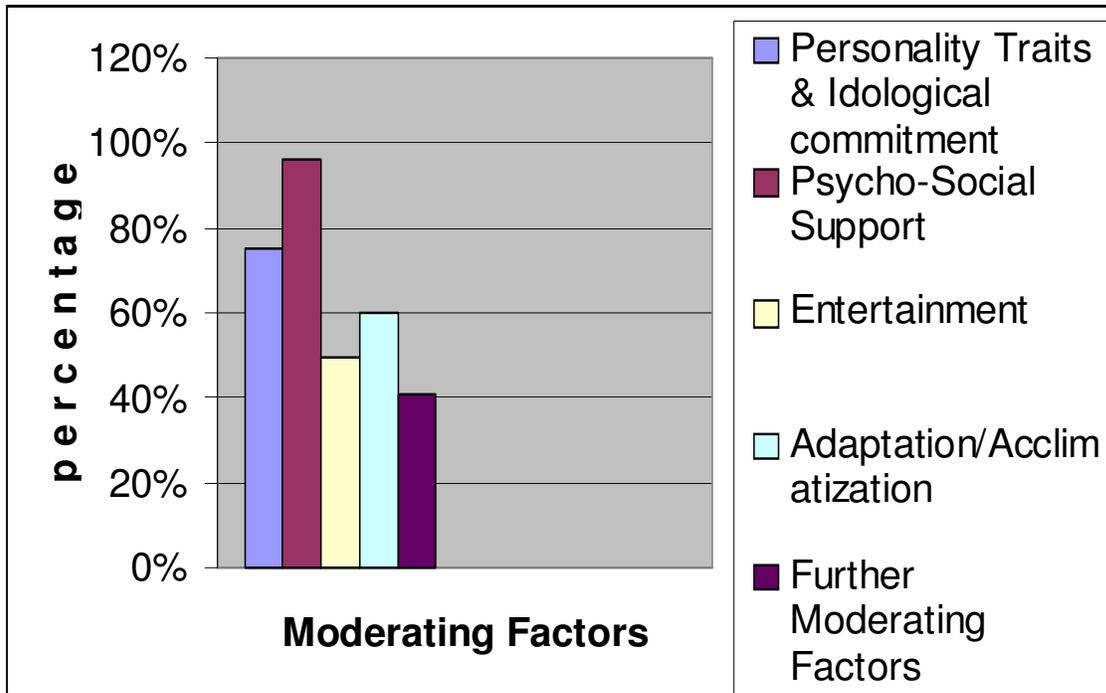


Figure 24: Percentage of main protective factors which reduce symptoms of PTSD

8.7 Discussion

The results of the second study found that some moderating factors seemed to provide protection for the Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip and prevent them from developing symptoms of PTSD, or at least reduce the level of PTSD symptoms to mild, in spite of those children being exposed to severe traumatic experiences in the Gaza Strip. These moderating factors protected the children and alleviated symptoms of PTSD in the follow ways: 96% from psychosocial support, 75% from positive personality traits, 60% from adaptation or acclimatization, 50% from entertainment, 41% from other factors.

Many of the children who were traumatized in the Gaza Strip since 2000 suffered serious health and psychological problems. However, some Palestinian children still practised their daily lives as usual and to a great extent, without apparent problems or disturbances. Furthermore, they seemed to be in good health: their morale was high, and they suffered relatively fewer PTSD symptoms, regardless of their exposure to traumatic experiences. They seemed to be performing better than others who were also physically, psychologically and

socially damaged. Other research on children and PTSD suggests that this group who seem to be coping well now might develop psycho-social problems later on. Lykes argued that any understanding of trauma 'must be read within its social' cultural and political contexts *over time*, not as a static entity located and to be addressed within affected individuals' (Lykes, 2002, pp.95-96). This indicates that it will be important to do follow-up research on this group of children in Gaza later on in their lives.

At present these children who show a relatively stable condition on the post-traumatic disorders' scale are still at risk because of the on-going traumas. They were interviewed over a period of one year and still showed few post-traumatic effects. Meanwhile, they were exposed to higher traumatic experiences which ranged from 16-26 on the scale of traumatic events. These included demolition of homes, a wounding of a family member, the killing one of their family members or relatives, exposure to shooting or bombing, invasion and an arrest of a family member. The ages of these children at the time of the second assessment were: 13, 14, 15, 15, 15 and 18 years old.

The importance of positive personality traits in the children along with a network of psycho-social support is emphasised in both studies and supported by previous studies like those of Webb, 2004; McNally, 2003; Mohlen *et al.*, 2005. The first and second studies disagreed on only one detail.

The findings in first study suggested that an increase in the network of psycho-social support (such as family, spiritual/religious and national pride) and positive personality traits both helped to reduce the symptoms of PTSD among the Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip. However, the personality traits were more significant than the network of psycho-social support. The findings in the second study, on the other hand, suggested that the network of psycho-social support (e.g. family support, friend support, relatives', neighbours' and community support, teachers' support) was more significant than personality traits.

The interaction between individual personality traits and networks of psycho-social support is important to understand before effective support for these children can begin. It is useful to view this, as the qualitative study does, as a number of interacting circles which work together

to protect the child from developing symptoms of PTSD. The first circle is family support; the second is the community of friends, relatives, neighbours and teachers; the third is the child's personality, beliefs, ambitions; hopes and ideological commitment. All these factors work to distract the child from dwelling on traumatic events and also empower him to confront them.

Entertainment, for example, alleviates suffering by being a positive distraction. Sport, hobbies, the mental and physical freedom experienced when playing-all these have proved to be a good influence on health and morale (Qouta & El-Sarraj, 2004; Grady, 2004; Webb,2004). Entertainment is an influential factor in one of the levels of support for children who experienced trauma.

The family and community help the individual child on four levels, according to the current qualitative study. First, the child must feel that support from the family is sufficient and that he or she is well liked and accepted. There must be general feelings of ambition and hope to sustain the child and to provide distraction from trauma. The second level of influential factors to reduce levels of PTSD includes a patriotic sense; determination and will; support from teachers and other status figures in the community. Personality traits overlap with psychosocial support here. Personal and national identity come together when both courage and boldness; sociable personality; diligence at school; frequent opportunities for emotional debriefings. Once again, personal and social factors interact. The last level of influential factors includes recreational programs; a sense of freedom; a collective experiencing of grief and anxiety on certain occasions; open discussion of traumatic events; simulated or low-level revenge on the enemy; the fostering of good relationships; and the realistic expectation of some financial reward or status.

Personality traits and ideological commitment (e.g. a patriotic sense; personal and national ambition; hope; religion; and faith; courage and boldness; determination and will, social-outgoing personality) work together in a significant way. Results from the current quantitative and qualitative study and many previous studies found that this combination will reduce symptoms of PTSD (Dempsey, 2002; Miller, 2003; Hyer, Rafalson, & O'hea, 2004).

Another aspect of personality is children's ability to adapt or adjust themselves to unexpected

changes in their lives resulting from the ongoing violence and disorder in their environment. The characteristics within this group or difficulties a) not thinking constantly about the trauma or difficulties b) prepared to face other traumas c) sharing in the collective grief or anxiety d) diligence at school e) willingness to engage in emotional debriefing. High scores in these areas increase their resilience and reduce symptoms of PTSD. The results shown in this study of adaptation are supported by several previous studies, e.g. Waller, 2001; Hyer, Rafalson, & O'Shea, 2004; Apfel & Simon, 1996.

The children in Gaza are losing their childhood because of the on-going violence and disorders. They can not ever feel safe or carefree. John Ging, Gaza's director of operations for the refugee agency UNRWA, indicated that UNRWA is responsible for 70% of Gaza's 1.5 million population, over the past two years, every hopeful opportunity has been irrationally dashed and followed by even worse circumstances. The UNRWA was unable to provide more than 61 percent of the necessary calories to refugees. At present, UNRWA do not have sufficient funding to provide just one high nutrient biscuit to 200,000 children in UN schools (The Independent, 26.Nov.2007).

The Palestinians adjust themselves to poverty and danger by becoming responsible, brave and cunning, or they give way to trauma and become passive, withdrawn and apathetic. The need to support, even save these children has become urgent. The fact that individual personality traits in children have become so important in protecting them from symptoms PTSD, in addition to social and family support. Some children are lucky enough to have a good support from their families. Others find spiritual and medical support in the community, but otherwise are out on the streets to earn money. Others get inspiration, confidence and hope from militias or martyrs or criminal groups. None of this support is consistent because the society itself is unstable. The schools are overcrowded; the lessons often interrupted by military operations. Effective psycho-social intervention has to be quickly adaptable to changing circumstances.

It is another circle in the network of support for the child in his or her home area. It has to be flexible and build on the positive influences that are already in the child's life. It also needs to monitor the children who do not express their lives. The research on these children, therefore, is ongoing. So that PTSD can be prevented, moderated, and more clearly understood.

8.8 Strengths and limitations

Several qualitative studies about the effects of exposure to war trauma have selected their participants from children or adolescents who suffered from PTSD. The current study tried to understand the different ways children coped, in spite of being exposed to severe traumatic experience (more than 15 traumas). The current qualitative study attempts a broader understanding of the reasons behind the normal reaction of children who are exposed to severe traumatic experiences. In addition, the researcher thinks that the qualitative study is important in order to fill in the gaps of the quantitative study.

The limitations of this qualitative study arose from collecting data, which was not easy because the field work was both dangerous and constantly interrupted by the conflict. In addition, the number of participants was not sufficient, but the researcher tried to increase the number of interviews. There were few interviewees because:

- a) The researcher spent a long period of time on the quantitative study with testing a large number of participants and then adapting the five questionnaires.
- b) Several attempts to return to Gaza over the past two years failed due to the unfortunate closure of the borders which form the only crossing points into and out of Gaza via Egypt.
- c) Interviewing for the second part of this study had to be delegated to others when it became impossible to get entry to Gaza.
- d) The children interviewed were often scared and so their concentration became very hard to sustain.
- e) Recording data on computers was often interrupted by power cuts – a familiar event in Gaza.

8.8.1 Clinical implications

The extent to which children in the Gaza Strip have been traumatized calls attention to the urgent need for clinical intervention to help alleviate their distress. Then, intervention will be offered depending on the severity of the disorders and the resources available for the treatment of trauma. The children, who did not show symptoms of PTSD, should still be kept under observation, because it might be that the symptoms of PTSD will occur later on. This group of children are still living in constant war and occupation circumstances and should be afforded preventive and supportive activities and programs as a precaution against arousing symptoms of PTSD

8.8.2 Future research

In future studies, the researcher suggests the following research to be done among the Palestinian children:

- a) Doing a comparative qualitative study among the children who are exposed to severe traumatic events between two groups: one from children suffering from PTSD and another who are doing well under similar circumstances.
- b) Developing preventive and supportive programmes for children exposed to severe traumatic experiences and yet are still doing well.

8.8.3 Reflections of the researcher

The researcher, through the qualitative study, had a good opportunity to discover the factors which might protect children from developing symptoms of PTSD, in spite of the continuing conflict. Appropriate intervention programs for the children who suffer from PTSD could be developed and adapted for use under the on-going circumstances of occupation and repeated violence. In addition, some preventive and supportive activities or programmes for children who seem to do well in the war and conflict could be designed.