

Exposure to The Palestinian Genocide and Level of Religiosity's, Impact on Empathy and Learned Helplessness Among Gen Z

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ABSTRACT

This quantitative study investigates the effects of exposure to the Palestinian Genocide and level of religiosity's, impact on Empathy and Learned Helplessness among Gen Z. Utilizing a survey research design, data had been collected through self-report measures from approximately 454 individuals aged 18 to 27 years, acquired via purposive convenience sampling. The study hypothesizes that exposure to the Palestinian Genocide and level of religiosity has significantly impacted the levels of learned helplessness and empathy. Participants had completed the Perth Empathy Scale, the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, and the Learned Helplessness Scale. With the use of SPSS, the Scales reliability was determined, and the calculated Cronbach alpha values were 0.77 and 0.85 respectively. Pearson's Correlation coefficient was employed to examine the main effects of exposure to the Palestinian Genocide and Religiosity on Learned Helplessness and Empathy among Gen Z. The findings showed a significant relationship between religiosity and empathy, as well as a negative correlation between religiosity and Learned Helplessness. Exposure to the Palestinian genocide had a weaker correlation with the outcome variables. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the psychological impacts of traumatic events on younger generations, highlighting the potential buffering effects of religiosity and informing targeted interventions to mitigate adverse psychological outcomes.

Keywords: Palestinian Genocide; Generation Z (Gen Z); Empathy; Learned; Helplessness; Religiosity; Social Media Exposure; Psychological Impact; Trauma Exposure; Mental Health; Digital Activism

INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian Genocide, a term some observers use to describe the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has profoundly impacted the world and continues to influence the lives of newer generations, particularly Gen Z. Having grown up in an age dominated by digital media, Gen Z is exposed to a constant flow of information, including frequent, often graphic, images and reports on the conflict. This generation witnesses the unending cycle of violence, displacement, and human rights violations experienced by the Palestinian people on an almost daily basis. The psychological effects of such exposure cannot be overlooked, as many young people feel a sense of learned helplessness, the pervasive feeling that despite their empathy and emotional investment, they are powerless to instigate change. This contributes to widespread social and political engagement among Gen Z globally, but also to feelings of frustration and mental exhaustion as they grapple with the realities of an enduring, unresolved conflict.

The roots of the Palestinian issue can be traced back to the events surrounding the Nakba ("Catastrophe") of 1948, a pivotal point in Palestinian history marked by the mass displacement and forced expulsion of hundreds of thousands

of Palestinians from their homes. The Nakba followed the United Nations' 1947 partition plan for Palestine, which allotted 56% of the territory to a proposed Jewish state, 43% to an Arab state, and designated Jerusalem as an international zone. This partition was rejected by the Arab world, igniting violence between Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, Israel declared independence, prompting the involvement of Arab armies in what became a protracted and violent conflict. During this period, Israeli forces engaged in systematic ethnic cleansing efforts, forcibly expelling Palestinians from their villages and towns through violence, intimidation, and large-scale massacres. Estimates indicate that between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians either fled or were expelled from their homes, becoming refugees in neighboring Arab states or in the West Bank and Gaza. Following these events, newly enacted Israeli legislation prohibited these displaced Palestinians from returning to their land or reclaiming their properties, which were then confiscated by the Israeli state.

The Nakba has left an enduring impact on Palestinian identity, intensifying demands for the right of return for refugees and acknowledgment of Palestinian self-determination, while the

Israeli stance underscores the right to exist as a Jewish state. This dichotomy sustains a powerful and emotive discourse, deeply embedded in both communities' national consciousness and narratives. For Palestinians, the Nakba is not merely a historical episode but a continuing trauma, as many descendants of the original refugees still live under restrictive conditions in refugee camps or face constant displacement threats. This demand for recognition of historical grievances remains a core point of tension in the ongoing conflict, contributing to the highly polarized, complex, and contentious discourse surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Nadia Abdo's work highlights the "Palestine exception," particularly in North American and Israeli contexts, as a phenomenon through which Palestinian narratives and struggles for self-determination are rendered invisible or misrepresented. Abdo argues that this is achieved by systematically constructing racial hierarchies and narratives that marginalize Palestinians and delegitimize their demands for justice and self-determination. Abdo notes that in media and academia, Palestinian voices are often underrepresented, and pro-Palestinian activism encounters notable opposition, repression, and censorship. This systemic exclusion has ramifications for Palestinian communities globally, as it diminishes their agency and limits their capacity to participate in mainstream conversations about justice and human rights. By analyzing these institutionalized biases, Abdo brings to light how racialized frameworks serve to distort Palestinian narratives and reinforce a power imbalance that maintains the status quo in international perceptions of the conflict.

The psychological toll on Palestinian youth, particularly children, is a critical aspect of the conflict's lasting impact, as illustrated by Muhareb and colleagues in their study of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem. Muhareb introduces the concept of "unchildling," which describes the systematic denial of childhood through statelessness, poverty, violence, and other forms of systemic oppression. Palestinian children, especially those in East Jerusalem, are subjected to a unique and severe set of challenges resulting from Israel's restrictive policies toward their neighborhood's. These policies often manifest as unequal access to essential resources, constant exposure to militarized violence, and restrictions on movement.

Muhareb argue that these conditions significantly impact the health and well-being of Palestinian children, leading to both physical and mental health consequences. The "unchildling" process, as they explain, strips Palestinian children of the typical aspects of childhood, forcing them to adopt coping mechanisms for survival that often entail emotional numbing or hypervigilance. This lack of a safe, supportive environment severely disrupts their development, stymies social cohesion, and fosters a generation that may grow up with chronic mental health challenges due to prolonged exposure to traumatic events.

In sum, the ongoing conflict in Palestine has cultivated a complex tapestry of learned helplessness, unresolved historical trauma, and psychological suffering, particularly among the youth who bear the consequences of sustained violence and disenfranchisement. Gen Z, both within Palestine and in the broader global community, remains acutely aware of these

realities, frequently using social media platforms to share, discuss, and critique the conflict. This has created a new mode of engagement with the Palestinian issue, where real-time access to information fosters both a deep empathy and a shared sense of helplessness across national boundaries. Social media offers unprecedented visibility to Palestinian experiences, shaping global discourse and building solidarity but also raising questions about the efficacy and limitations of digital activism in addressing such an entrenched and multifaceted conflict. Through this analysis, it becomes clear that the Palestinian struggle involves not only physical survival but also the fight to reclaim narratives, spaces, and identities that have been suppressed by historical and contemporary forces alike.

In examining the political and cultural ramifications of the Nakba, the term describing the forced displacement of Palestinians in 1948, Nassar argues that this event's legacy has been both denied and distorted within contemporary discourse, particularly through narratives that favor Israeli nationalist ideology. This denial, Nassar contends, plays a central role in the mobilization of anti-Arab racism and serves as a justification for continued erasure of Palestinian history and rights. Nassar's analysis of Leon Uris's novel *Exodus* (1958) is particularly striking. He posits that the book helped create a powerful mythology of Israeli victimhood, positioning Israelis as the rightful inhabitants while delegitimizing Palestinian claims to land and sovereignty. *Exodus* became instrumental not only in shaping public opinion but also in influencing both American and Israeli political stances that seek to obscure the reality of the Nakba and undermine Palestinian refugee rights. Nassar illustrates this process through the juxtaposition of *Exodus* with testimonies from Palestinian refugees and historical records, underscoring how selective narratives have been deployed to support specific political goals, overshadowing the real experiences of forced displacement and loss endured by Palestinians.

Similarly, Weiner explores how introductory sociology textbooks contribute to the dehumanization of Palestinians by largely ignoring or misrepresenting their perspectives. He argues that these educational resources often present Palestinians as violent or irrational, perpetuating narratives that erase their agency and right to self-determination. This form of academic erasure supports the Israeli state's narrative by framing Palestinians through a biased lens, reinforcing misconceptions and limiting empathy for their plight. Both Nassar and Weiner highlight how cultural artifacts be they literature or textbooks shape public consciousness, demonstrating how the Palestinian perspective has been systematically marginalized across multiple platforms.

The concept of genocide is central to understanding these narratives, as the term specifically denotes acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. According to the United Nations, genocide encompasses five primary acts: killing members of the targeted group, inflicting serious bodily or mental harm, creating life conditions intended to bring about physical destruction, implementing measures to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children to another group. This term, while precise, is distinct from other violent crimes like crimes

against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing, which, though severe, do not meet genocide's specific criteria.

The term "genocide" itself was first coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer. Lemkin, horrified by the systematic policies of extermination enacted during the Holocaust, combined the Greek word "geno-" (for race or tribe) with the Latin suffix "-cide" (for killing) to describe these atrocities. Lemkin's term sought to articulate the horrors he witnessed and convey the moral urgency to prevent such crimes in the future (Lemkin, 1944). Since then, the concept has been applied to various historical events, many of which stand as stark reminders of humanity's potential for cruelty. Among the earliest and most significant genocides was the Armenian Genocide during World War I, in which the Ottoman Empire systematically targeted and exterminated approximately 1.5 million Armenians. This genocide, like the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, and other atrocities, remains crucial to discussions on human rights and international intervention, illuminating the ways in which historical narratives shape collective memory and influence policy.

Through these layers of analysis, it becomes evident how both historical narratives and educational materials can serve to either illuminate or obscure experiences of suffering, erasure, and resistance. In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this selective narrative construction has led to a profound distortion of the Palestinian experience in mainstream discourse, emphasizing the need for balanced historical representation to foster global empathy and justice.

Throughout history, mass atrocities have brought to light the darkest aspects of human nature. During World War II, the Holocaust orchestrated by the Nazi regime saw the systemic murder of six million Jews, along with millions of Romani people, disabled individuals, and political dissidents, symbolizing one of the most harrowing chapters of targeted genocide. Decades later, the 1994 Rwandan Genocide resulted in the brutal killing of approximately 800,000 Tutsis by Hutu extremists within just 100 days, underscoring the devastating speed and intensity that such violence can entail. In the Bosnian Genocide of the mid-1990s, the Serbian forces' ethnic cleansing campaign against Bosnian Muslims led to the deaths of around 100,000 people, highlighting the ethnically charged violence that persisted post-Cold War in Europe. More recently, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar has gained global attention as a genocide, with the Rohingya Muslim minority facing extensive violence and forced displacement, revealing ongoing challenges in the protection of vulnerable populations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often described as a Palestinian genocide by some commentators, represents a protracted struggle marked by grave human rights violations, loss of life, and displacement, sparking continuous international debate and scrutiny.

Genocide Studies is haunted by an absence and a fear. The absence is of any sustained continuing discussion of Zionist Israel as a possible example of a nation founded on genocide, to deploy a perspective of Tony Barta concerning settler colonial societies across the world. The fear is of becoming another victim of Zionist intimidation and retaliatory attacks if there were to be such discussion. In Foucault's terms, Genocide

Studies is uneasily aware that Zionism, as a worldwide movement with a vigilant scholarly and ideological wing, is a panoptic one. Genocide Studies knows it is being watched and can be threatened with vilification at any moment, even in a preemptive gratuitous way. To fend off such attacks, it has chosen to be intellectually submissive; that is, to suppress a key (Socratic) foundation of intellectual life, to follow inquiry wherever it may lead. In particular, Genocide Studies is haunted by the fear that the historical analysis of settler colonialism, based on Raphaël Lemkin's definitional linking of settler colonialism with genocide, may lead to recognition of Zionist Israel as a genocidal settler colonial state. The concept that the Zionist project is a settler-colonial one has been fundamental to Arab and Palestinian critical thought since the Nakba in 1948 and has been increasingly and more widely explored in recent years, even occasionally branching out of the academic arena and into the political.

The framework of "learned helplessness," first conceptualized by psychologists Martin Seligman and Steven Maier, provides a lens to understand how prolonged exposure to uncontrollable and persistent stressors can lead individuals to adopt a passive and resigned stance. This psychological theory has often been applied to analyze the enduring suffering of Palestinian populations under prolonged conflict and occupation. For many Palestinians, years of systemic violence, displacement, and deprivation have led to a pervasive sense of powerlessness, manifesting as learned helplessness. This collective state of despair and perceived lack of control is not only detrimental to mental health but also poses challenges to social cohesion and resilience within these affected communities.

Empathy, the human capacity to understand and share in another's emotional experiences, plays a significant role in shaping global responses to the Palestinian plight. The international community's empathy has historically driven humanitarian aid, policy reforms, and diplomatic interventions aimed at easing the suffering of Palestinians. Research suggests that when individuals or communities can empathize with the intense hardships faced by others, such as those experienced by Palestinians, they are more likely to support measures that address systemic injustices and promote peace. Personal narratives, media coverage, and vivid portrayals of Palestinian life under conflict can elicit empathy and spur advocacy, with international calls for conflict resolution and humanitarian relief emerging in response.

Today, digital platforms like social media are revolutionizing how global audiences perceive and respond to such crises. For the first time in history, the immediacy and unfiltered nature of platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow for real-time witnessing of genocidal violence. This real-time access to raw footage, personal testimonies, and daily updates on the ground intensifies global awareness, eliciting strong emotional responses that range from empathy to outrage. This unmediated digital presence compels audiences worldwide to engage with the Palestinian humanitarian crisis on an unprecedented scale. In challenging traditional media narratives, social media has galvanized international advocacy efforts, sparking urgent calls for intervention and justice. As digital connectivity transforms passive observation into active

witnessing, the global community is increasingly empowered to respond to and act against genocidal violence, underscoring a new era of accountability and collective responsibility.

The exposure to the Palestinian genocide through social media has profoundly affected viewers globally, shaping their psychological wellbeing, social attitudes, and political engagement. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have become critical in delivering real-time, often graphic, depictions of life in conflict zones, making the Palestinian experience intensely immediate for viewers worldwide.

A significant psychological effect on audiences is vicarious trauma, where people experience emotional distress through indirect exposure to traumatic content online. Research suggests that repeated exposure to intense images and stories can lead to symptoms of anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among viewers who are not directly involved in the conflict [2]. This form of secondary trauma illustrates how social media can extend the emotional impact of conflict, significantly affecting the mental health of a global audience far from the conflict zone [2].

Moreover, social media has facilitated widespread empathy and solidarity across borders. The sharing of personal accounts and videos that capture the daily hardships faced by Palestinians has provoked strong emotional reactions, fostering global awareness and an upswell in advocacy for Palestinian rights. Many individuals engage in online activism, participate in protests, and advocate for governmental intervention as they feel a connection to the Palestinian struggle, thus translating empathy into political and social action [3].

In addition to its psychological and social impacts, social media has become instrumental in shaping public discourse and influencing political narratives. With access to firsthand accounts and visual documentation from conflict zones, audiences worldwide can engage with perspectives that might challenge official narratives and traditional media coverage. This transparency has catalyzed more nuanced and critical discussions regarding the conflict, helping to amplify marginalized voices and mobilize global efforts toward humanitarian support and justice. Social media, therefore, not only affects individual viewers but also contributes significantly to broader social movements and international political debates.

Repeated exposure to the trauma of the Palestinian genocide, particularly for children and adolescents, can lead to a deep sense of helplessness. They may feel that their actions are powerless to affect change, reinforcing feelings of despair and emotional paralysis. The ongoing violent reality facing 2.3 million Palestinians, confined to Gaza, has been brought into homes worldwide, sparking widespread mobilization aimed at addressing the injustice and ending the bloodshed. While it is impossible to frame this suffering in a positive light, the tragedy has ignited a unified call for global justice and humanity, intensifying efforts to end the occupation, apartheid, and displacement.

The plight of Palestinians has become a mobilizing force for a diverse coalition of activists, from progressives and academics to

artists, actors, students, and civilians. These groups are rallying together to demand justice and draw global attention to the mass killings, systemic displacement, and discrimination they believe Israel is committing. This movement is broad, with participation from Palestinians, non-Zionist Jews, and people from various cultural and political backgrounds who oppose what they view as colonial oppression.

For many, recent years have been marked by disillusionment and a sense of helplessness in the face of rising authoritarianism, religious intolerance, and cultural supremacy. However, young people, particularly Gen Z, have been at the forefront of reinvigorating activism against injustice in Palestine. This generation, often skeptical of the policies supporting Israel, is leveraging digital platforms for global awareness and action, leading to shifts in public opinion. Influential voices like Juan P. Villasmil and academic critics such as Norman Finkelstein, Omer Bartov, and Raz Segal have highlighted aspects of this discourse, with Segal calling Israel's actions a "textbook case of genocide" and linking them to the Nakba, the mass displacement of Palestinians in 1948.

Global protests have proliferated across streets, campuses, sports arenas, and social media. Expressions of solidarity have emerged in diverse forms—demonstrations, boycotts, chants, songs, and discussions aiming to hold supporters of Israeli policies accountable. Activists employ innovative approaches, including boycotting companies with pro-Zionist affiliations and organizing awareness campaigns across social media platforms, keeping the Palestinian cause in the spotlight and pushing for action against systemic oppression. The human cost of the conflict, including the challenges faced by Palestinian journalists in conveying the realities of the war, is also touched upon. It explores the societal values and human qualities that have sustained the Palestinian people, aiming to derive lessons on resilience and steadfastness relevant to other nations, particularly in the MENA region. The research methodology involves analyzing video content from various Instagram sources, emphasizing the content of the videos and firsthand accounts from eyewitnesses in Gaza [4]. The paper highlights the incredible strength and resilience of the Palestinian people, deeply embedded in their culture and values, offering a powerful message about the human capacity to endure and maintain dignity in extreme hardship [4].

The mobilization around the Palestinian cause has reached unprecedented levels, characterized by well-organized, passionate, and impactful actions. Many companies have begun to distance themselves from support for Israel or express solidarity with the Palestinian cause, indicating a shift in public sentiment. As the Gaza conflict continues, it significantly influences young people's beliefs about justice and fairness in the world. The way they interpret and internalize these complex geopolitical conflicts shapes their worldviews, political attitudes, and societal roles.

Among "Gen Z," the factor of learned helplessness appears to be diminishing, largely due to a strong sense of connectedness that motivates them to explore and engage with the situation in Gaza. Many young people, despite their citizenship in various countries, feel disillusioned and disconnected from their national political agendas. This generation is witnessing the

unfolding events of war in real-time, leading to a profound awakening to the reality that many political decisions are driven by monetary interests rather than genuine concern for human life and dignity. The immediacy of their access to distressing images and stories through their phones fosters a deeper sense of empathy, compelling them to speak out against the atrocities occurring in Gaza, even amidst attempts to silence discussions on this critical issue.

Gen Z recognizes the importance of amplifying marginalized voices, actively seeking to elevate the perspectives of Palestinian activists by sharing their stories and experiences on social media. This generation has largely lost faith in traditional news platforms, which they perceive as biased and unreliable. Even before the latest conflict escalated, Gen Z had grown wary of media channels that often present one-sided narratives, running unverified headlines that can mislead the public. Instead, they turn to social media accounts that provide unfiltered footage and direct accounts from Gaza, allowing them to engage with the realities of the conflict more authentically. They are confronted with harrowing images that depict the devastating toll on civilians, particularly women and children, who suffer in overcrowded hospitals lacking essential resources. The relentless bombardment, coupled with daily evacuation orders, paints a stark picture of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

This ongoing crisis has catalyzed a wave of activism among Gen Z, inspiring individuals to participate in online advocacy, protests, and support for humanitarian efforts. Their experiences and exposure to the suffering in Gaza are shaping their political ideologies, leading to heightened awareness of human rights issues, international relations, and conflict resolution. As they draw parallels between their education and historical instances of struggle, such as the fight against apartheid in South Africa, Gen Z becomes better equipped to understand and articulate the injustices faced by Palestinians. By connecting their knowledge of systemic discrimination and segregation to the conditions in Palestine, this generation can cultivate a more profound sense of responsibility and action towards addressing these ongoing injustices.

The exposure of Gen-Z to diverse cultural and historical aspects of the Gaza conflict has significantly enhanced their cultural sensitivity and appreciation for multiculturalism. Pro-Free-Palestine advocates argue that this generation is developing a sense of solidarity with individuals from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, promoting a more inclusive worldview. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza may inspire many Gen-Z members to pursue careers in fields such as international relations, human rights law, journalism, or humanitarian aid, shaping their academic interests toward Middle Eastern studies, conflict resolution, or global politics. Furthermore, learning about the struggles and suffering of people in Gaza can instill a sense of resilience among Gen-Z, encouraging them to foster a more compassionate outlook and support marginalized communities. Research indicates that young people's understanding of justice, human rights, and international law can be profoundly shaped by their perceptions of the Gaza conflict, potentially influencing their future actions and choices [4].

The recent escalation of violence in Gaza that began on October 7 has sparked a collective movement among youth globally. A notable distinction between Gen-Z and Gen-Alpha is their recognition of the profound injustice of the Israeli occupation, which has persisted for over 75 years. This shift in the 'collective consciousness' of an entire generation signifies a departure from normalizing relationships with oppressive occupiers like Israel. Gen-Z is characterized by its inclination to question mainstream media narratives and seek alternative sources of information. Growing up in increasingly multicultural environments, many Gen-Z individuals feel a strong sense of solidarity with diverse cultural and ethnic groups. Personal narratives and testimonies shared on social media foster a personal connection to the Palestinian cause, making their experiences and struggles more relatable. Influential public figures who advocate for Palestine can sway opinions among younger generations, while powerful images and stories often go viral, creating a significant visual and emotional impact on their audience.

Currently, we are witnessing a truly global student movement advocating for Palestine. Similar to protests in many Western countries, students worldwide are leaving their classrooms to demand that their governments and academic institutions sever ties with the Israeli regime. Many are highlighting the hypocrisy of governments that claim to support human rights while failing to condemn the violence against Palestinians. This growing activism reflects a rapid decline in learned helplessness among Gen-Z, indicating a substantial shift in political and social beliefs over time. As young people increasingly challenge the status quo, they contribute to an evolving dialogue about justice, human rights, and the need for a more equitable world order.

The shift in Gen-Z's attitudes toward the Palestinian cause signifies not only an evolving political trend but also reflects broader social and political implications regarding their engagement with global issues. This generational movement is rooted in a complex interplay of factors that contribute to their pro-Palestine stance. As long as Western powers continue to support Israeli apartheid and shield it from accountability, cycles of violence are likely to persist. However, this dynamic is simultaneously fostering a deeper loyalty among Gen-Z to the Free Palestine cause. The ongoing suffering of Palestinians, marked by the denial of basic dignity, will not go unnoticed by a generation poised to take on leadership roles in various sectors across different countries. The situation in Gaza profoundly influences Gen-Z, shaping their global awareness, political perspectives, and inspiring activism, all of which redefine their core values. Their unique access to information and active engagement with social media allow them to forge a deeper, more personal connection with global events, significantly impacting their worldviews and actions.

The concept of empathy, first translated by Edward B. Titchener from the German word *Einfühlung* (initially coined by Theodore Lipps in the 1880s), refers to the capacity to place oneself in another's position and experience their feelings [5]. It is essential for building and maintaining healthy relationships, resolving disputes, and fostering compassion within communities. This idea encompasses both cognitive

empathy—understanding another's perspective—and emotional empathy—sensing their feelings [6]. In the context of Palestine, particularly Gaza, demonstrating empathy involves feeling the social, economic, and violent conditions imposed on the population.

Members of societies embroiled in long-term, violent conflicts often find themselves emotionally invested. Over the past two decades, the role of emotions in conflict management, resolution, and reconciliation has begun to receive empirical attention [7,8]. Our study aims to assess the impact of the Palestinian genocide on the empathy levels among Gen-Z, building on literature that suggests this generation is more empathetic than its predecessors, deeply resonating with the pain of others.

Empathy plays a critical role in conflict resolution, enabling individuals to understand and connect with the emotions and perspectives of all parties involved [9]. Evaluating empathy during conflicts is crucial for identifying the levels of understanding and compassion that individuals or communities possess toward those suffering. Such assessments yield valuable insights into how people perceive and react to the injustices faced by others, particularly in situations of prolonged violence and oppression.

Research has shown that exposure to graphic images and narratives of human suffering can significantly heighten empathy and emotional responses in individuals. For instance, a study by Hoffman found that viewing such content can foster a deeper emotional connection to the plight of others. An illustrative example is the iconic photograph of Aylan Kurdi, a small Syrian boy, lying face down on a Turkish beach. As detailed in the article “Iconic Photographs and the Ebb and Flow of Empathic Response to Humanitarian Disasters” by Paul Slovic and colleagues, this single image captured global attention on September 2, 2015, raising crucial awareness of the Syrian conflict that had claimed countless lives. The emotional impact of Aylan's image outstripped statistical reports of the conflict's toll, demonstrating that personal visual narratives can evoke greater empathy than abstract numbers, thereby encouraging a collective concern for humanitarian issues [10].

In the context of the war on Gaza that erupted in October 2023, Buheji (2014) argues that younger generations, particularly Generation Z, are more likely to engage empathetically with the Palestinian cause than their predecessors. Research supports this assertion, indicating generational differences in empathy. A Pew Research Center study from 2019 suggests that Gen Z exhibits higher levels of empathy compared to earlier generations. Similarly, a study by Christine Karakuttikaran and Dr. Aruna Kolachina found that Gen Z scored higher in trait empathy than Millennials, as indicated by the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ).

Generation Z's perspectives are shaped by a unique set of experiences and access to diverse information sources [11]. As noted by Katz in *Gen Z, Explained: The Art of Living in a Digital Age*, this generation possesses a strong sense of individuality combined with a deep commitment to community and social justice [12]. They have grown up amidst global challenges such as climate change and terrorism, which

has contributed to their heightened awareness and compassion [13]. This foundation suggests that Gen Z indeed represents a more empathetic generation.

The internet plays a crucial role in connecting people across the globe, fostering a sense of responsibility for international issues, particularly those affecting Gaza. Witnessing the suffering of Palestinians prompts many in Gen Z to reflect on their own situations and privileges, leading them to reassess their value systems. This process can bridge gaps in understanding and empathy across cultures [14]. Furthermore, the rise of social media has expanded access to diverse viewpoints, enhancing empathetic engagement among individuals and communities.

Mohamed Buheji highlights a conversation with his granddaughter about how Generation Z prefers social media over traditional news sources, which often contain unreported or fabricated stories. Social media offers real-time narratives from individuals rather than journalists, allowing for more authentic and relatable content. This approach evokes emotions similar to witnessing the suffering of a loved one, prompting young people to speak up and take action. The accessibility of brief summaries of global news through social media fosters a sense of responsibility among youth, reshaping their aspirations towards becoming more socially conscious [14].

Moreover, the reality of life in Gaza is more widely known today due to real-time coverage, including images and videos on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Gazans sharing their own stories and experiences humanizes the conflict, promoting empathy and understanding. The shifting political landscape in various countries, particularly in the US and Europe, has also influenced perceptions of the Gaza situation. There has been a notable rise in criticism of foreign policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and calls for fairer approaches [15].

The historical context reveals that Western empathy towards Palestine is complex, influenced by factors like religion, colonization, and geopolitical interests. Before the establishment of Israel in 1948, colonial interests shaped Western views on Palestine. The official positions of Western governments on Israel and Palestine often differ, affecting public empathy for Gaza. Nonetheless, numerous pro-Palestinian advocacy organizations in Western countries aim to raise awareness and compassion for the suffering of Gazans through demonstrations, educational initiatives, and advocacy for legislative reforms.

Despite the West, particularly the US government, being a significant supporter of Israel, many young people are not swayed by mainstream narratives and advocate for justice and fairness in the portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This indicates a growing awareness and empathy towards the plight of Gazans among youth in Western societies.

In the article “Empathic Engagement with Gaza: Dynamics, Impact, and Prospects” (2024), authors Mohamed Buheji, Emmanuel Mushimiyimana, and Dunya Ahmed highlight the global movement of protests demanding a ceasefire and an end to the conflict in Gaza. This phenomenon demonstrates a significant level of empathetic participation among people

worldwide. Engagement is also manifested through active social media use, where individuals share updates, photos, and personal stories from Gaza, often accompanied by targeted hashtags to raise awareness. Public fundraising efforts aimed at providing food, shelter, and medical supplies further illustrate this empathic engagement. Many organizations are mobilizing support for Palestinian factions, both politically and humanitarially, through public lectures and informative campaigns. Additionally, the solidarity expressed by public figures, scholars, and artists reinforces the notion that Generation Z is actively taking action in support of the Palestinian cause [14].

However, contrasting literature indicates that continuous exposure to graphic images of suffering can lead to desensitization and compassion fatigue. Research by Figley suggests that repeated exposure to traumatic content diminishes empathy over time. As public attention wanes and images fade, the perceived value of human lives may decline [16]. Paul Slovic supports this notion, showing that compassion can diminish as the number of victims increases—a phenomenon they refer to as "compassion fade" [17]. Their research revealed that when individuals are asked to donate to underprivileged children, empathy and positive attitudes towards giving significantly decrease as the group size expands. This reduction in sensitivity towards large numbers of oppressed individuals can lead to what some scholars call "psychic numbing." Critics, including Bloom, argue that empathy is inherently limited by its inability to scale effectively with the increasing number of people in need.

Despite these concerns, the importance of empathy remains significant, which is why this research aims to gain deeper insights into Gen Z's empathetic responses in light of their ongoing exposure to the Palestinian genocide over the past year. Generation Z, often referred to as the Generation or Generation Now, encompasses individuals born from the mid-1990s to the late 2010s [18]. Understanding their empathetic engagement amid the current crisis is crucial for evaluating the impact of their unique experiences and access to information on their worldviews.

Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, is the latest generational cohort, composed of individuals born between 1997 and 2012. Known for being vocal, idealistic, and occasionally seen as overly sensitive, Gen Z has grown up in a landscape shaped by rapid technological advancements, economic challenges, and heightened social awareness [19]. These factors have fundamentally influenced how they approach learning and societal issues, often distinguishing them from their Millennial predecessors [20].

In understanding Gen Z's social and moral perspectives, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of moral disengagement provides insight into how individuals rationalize unethical actions to reduce guilt, a behavior relevant in analyzing societal and individual choices. Self-Determination Theory complements this by focusing on Gen Z's intrinsic motivations, such as autonomy, competence, and a sense of purpose—psychological needs that drive their strong sense of social responsibility and engagement with global issues [21,22]. Similarly, Generational Cohort Theory, originally developed by

Inglehart, underscores that the values Gen Z holds are heavily influenced by the socio-political climate of their upbringing, which remains relatively stable throughout adulthood despite changing societal conditions [23].

A striking example of Gen Z's political and social activism is seen in the widespread demonstrations in Illinois, where students have regularly worn keffiyehs and held peace talks to show solidarity with Palestine. On May 1, 2024, Chicago Youth for Justice organized large-scale protests where high school students gathered, marched, and held sit-ins in schools such as Jones College Prep and Kenwood Academy, temporarily halting classes and other scheduled events. At the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, students from nearby high schools joined college activists, marching together and amplifying their voices for change [24].

Together, these demonstrations reflect Gen Z's commitment to social causes and highlight their tendency to act on beliefs shaped by values of empathy and justice. Their engagement not only showcases the distinct characteristics of this generation but also emphasizes the importance of understanding their motivations in the context of the socio-political landscape they inhabit.

On social media, thousands worldwide have mobilized under hashtags like #SaveSheikhJarrah and #GazaUnderAttack, condemning Israel's recent attacks on Palestinians and amplifying awareness of Israel's occupation and human rights violations in Palestine, despite efforts to suppress these voices. Public figures such as John Oliver, Bella Hadid, Susan Sarandon, Malala Yousafzai, Paul Pogba, and Kyrie Irving have used their platforms to spotlight the Palestinian cause, contributing to the global conversation on justice and peace [25]. Universities have also become key sites of activism, with students across campuses worldwide demanding divestment from companies supporting the Gaza conflict. Some institutions have responded by disclosing investments in such companies or engaging in dialogue with students, leading to the end of some encampments. This movement underscores Gen Z's commitment to translating digital activism into real-world actions, even when it disrupts academic pursuits.

Younger generations are especially active, driven by their heightened access to real-time information on international events via social media. This access has nurtured a sense of global responsibility and propelled them toward socially conscious goals. The youth who cover these conflicts, particularly in Gaza, often develop solidarity and empathy, sensing the hardships faced by those in conflict zones [14].

Across Europe, youth from Spain, Italy, the UK, and Ireland have organized demonstrations and protests to urge their governments to advocate for a ceasefire and take a stronger stance against the violence in Gaza. These movements reflect a shared commitment among European youth to call out injustices in Palestine. Muslim youth in particular, whether from diverse national or sectarian backgrounds, find unity in their support for Palestine, often expressing this solidarity through clothing, art, and public demonstrations, even when faced with restrictions on freedom of expression in their own countries.

This level of activism among Gen Z indicates a generational shift towards a more engaged, empathetic stance on global issues, driven by their unique access to unfiltered narratives and their passion for justice.

Generation Z, often described as less traditionally religious than previous generations, shows a marked rise in religious non-affiliation. A significant portion identifies as "nones"—those who do not associate with any formal religion [26]. This shift is often attributed to increased access to information, multicultural interactions, and an openness to secular viewpoints, encouraging a move towards individualism and personal meaning-making, often expressed through social and political activism [18]. Despite a decline in traditional religious affiliation, many Gen Z individuals still value spirituality, expressing it through personal belief systems and practices outside of established religious institutions.

Religiosity encompasses various aspects, including beliefs, practices, experiences, and knowledge, which together shape its impact on life. Some key dimensions include belief (faith in doctrines like the afterlife), practice (prayer, rituals), experience (personal spiritual feelings), and knowledge (understanding of religious teachings). Religious influence varies by region, with regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia displaying higher levels of religious engagement, while Europe, Canada, and Japan report lower levels [27].

In the United States, religiosity remains relatively high but has been declining, especially among younger generations. Between 2009 and 2020, Christian affiliation dropped from 77% to 70%, while those identifying as unaffiliated rose from 16% to 26% [28].

The difference between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, as studied by Allport and Ross, adds nuance to our understanding of religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity is personally meaningful and internalized, while extrinsic religiosity uses religion as a means to an end, such as social status [29]. Generally, intrinsic religiosity aligns with higher well-being and ethical behavior, whereas extrinsic religiosity tends toward social conformity [29]. Together, these insights illustrate how Gen Z navigates a complex landscape of secular and spiritual expression, often personalizing their approach to spirituality rather than aligning with institutional religious practices.

The Religious Orientation Scale, created by Allport and Ross, measures the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of religiosity. Studies using this scale indicate that people with intrinsic religiosity—those who internalize religious beliefs—often display higher compassion, lower prejudice, and greater psychological well-being. Intrinsic religiosity is often associated with deeper, more personally meaningful faith, while extrinsic religiosity is seen as more instrumental, often used for social or personal gain. This distinction aids in understanding how individuals' approach and integrate religious beliefs into their lives.

James W. Fowler's theory of faith development outlines six stages, similar to developmental models by Piaget and Kohlberg. Fowler's stages span from early childhood to adulthood:

Intuitive-Projective Faith (early childhood): Characterized by imagination and emotional experiences.

Mythic-Literal Faith (middle childhood): Involves a literal understanding of beliefs.

Synthetic-Conventional Faith (adolescence): Marked by conformity to the beliefs of one's community.

Individuate-Reflective Faith (young adulthood): Involves personal reflection and questioning. Conjunctive Faith (mid-life): Integration of diverse beliefs, recognizing complexities and paradoxes.

Universalizing Faith (rare): Defined by a universal compassion and commitment to justice [30].

Religiosity serves important social and psychological functions, often providing a coping framework that can enhance resilience and reduce anxiety and depression [31]. Religious communities also offer social support networks, which contribute to higher well-being and life satisfaction [32]. Additionally, religiosity is linked with higher levels of prosocial behavior and ethical actions, often driven by community standards and moral teachings [33].

Through varied theories and research, it's clear that religiosity shapes individual behaviors and well-being, highlighting the diverse effects of faith and spirituality across cultures and developmental stages. Understanding these dynamics provides valuable insights into the social and psychological roles that religion plays within society.

Literature Review

The genocide in Palestine, commonly known as the "Nakba" or "catastrophe," is a terrible time of violence and forced migration. Through the lens of social media, Generation Z (born 1997–2012) witnesses these atrocities in the modern era, including mass destruction, brutal killings, and the wrongful displacement of thousands of people. Interest in how this generation reacts to such atrocities has increased as a result of this uncensored exposure. Do they cling to the hope of justice and are they actively pushing for change?

The story of the 2023–2024 War on Gaza, which began to influence Generation Z, is that a group of people band together to steal their lands, plunder their wealth, or control their energy sources in the name of Zionism and its associated allies. These oppressed societies start to experience a number of different forms of destruction or attacks that are intended to undermine their moral, ideological, and economic systems. Because of their weakness and fragmentation, those with values are unable to effectively defend themselves against these conspiracy-based attacks. The conspirators are anticipating what they see as a historic chance to permanently eradicate their victims. One example of this is the plan to relocate two million Gaza residents in accordance with the Western allies and some Arab governments that normalized relations with Israel. It promises to uproot more Arabs from Palestine, alter geopolitical maps, and alter the region's demographics, according to the narrative. When a group of people who have rights realize that the universe's hidden power will support them if they take action to alter their

degrading circumstances, even when their adversaries have material advantages, they rise up to defend their rights. This group was selected to implement the Sunnah of Usage and is the generation that has developed the ability to confront and effect change.

The Israeli Palestinian conflict is one of the longest in contemporary history. The British Mandate for Palestine (1918–48), which saw the expansion of imperial power and the exploitation of Palestinian territory in favor of waves of Jewish settlers from Europe and the US, is where the conflict got its start. Beginning on May 14, 1948, when the state of Israel was proclaimed, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly evicted, marking a significant turning point in history [1]. Thus, armed by the British colonial power, Palestinians and Jewish groups engaged in the first of many wars. This resulted in the violent exodus of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland, known as the "Nakba.". The majority of the Palestinians who were expelled eventually moved to neighboring Arab nations or sought safety in other areas of Palestine [1].

Palestinians extensively documented the horrific events of Sheikh Jarrah, Al Quds, and the war on Gaza during the tense May 2021 conflict. The hashtags Save Palestine, Gaza Under Attack, Save Sheikh Jarrah, and Free Palestine became powerful online channels for disseminating daily reports of the events in a multimedia format. Social media sites emerged as new arenas for "the Mass Protest," according to a 2021 New York Times article. A video recording that went viral showed a Palestinian woman yelling at a Jewish settler in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, saying, "You are stealing my house.". According to the newspaper, the video "leapfrogged across international borders at 4G speed.". On social media, tens of thousands of people expressed shock and dismay at the settler's response, "If I don't steal it, someone else will steal it".

In one analysis, Gen Z's support for Palestinian rights is examined, emphasizing the generation's distinct and changing perspectives on Palestinian rights (or what is now known as a Free Palestine) and their stories. Gen Z was born between 1997 and 2012. This generation was born into a time when social media and digital technology dominated the landscape. First, the historical background, the generational shift, and the effects of social media and digital media are examined in this article. The author then makes connections between social justice movements, intersectional advocacy, and educational reforms and exposure to various narratives. These connections have implications for future advocacy about the Free Palestine movement that future generations can support. Based on the analysis, it is evident that social media, educational visibility, and broader social justice issues have caused Western Gen Z attitudes to start moving away from

traditional pro-Israel narratives and toward greater support for Palestinian rights. Through social media, they organize solidarity actions and amplify Palestinian voices as part of their online and offline activism (2024).

Gen Z activists have found social media to be an effective tool for challenging popular narratives and amplifying underrepresented voices. They examine how platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have given young activists the

opportunity to promote justice, especially in movements like Free Palestine. By bringing people together across borders and promoting intersectional approaches to advocacy, the digital environment promotes global solidarity.

Significant organizations are taken aback by the growing student movements in the West and the United States. Young Americans' perspectives on the Israeli Palestinian conflict and the War on Gaza are changing, according to recent Harvard University surveys. With differing levels of support among subgroups, more than half of young Americans (18–29) intend to cast ballots in the upcoming presidential election, according to a nationwide survey conducted by the Institute of Politics at Harvard University's Kennedy School in 2024. According to the Harvard Public Opinion Project (HPOP), young Americans are becoming more politically involved due to worries about social issues, foreign policy, and the economy. Although most Gen Z's still support Israel, the Harvard CAPS-Harris survey showed that support for Palestine and its liberation rights has grown, with 43 percent of respondents expressing support, up from 37 percent in a prior survey [14].

Since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, pro-Palestinian demonstrations have exploded on college campuses, garnering national attention and resulting in multiple arrests. According to polls, young Americans strongly support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza, and support for Hamas declines with age. With support for Palestinian resistance increasing, a sizable segment of Generation Z feels that the State of Israel must vanish in order for the conflict to be resolved. The USA's ruling class is concerned about this change in thinking because it is so different from conventional Western perspectives. With support for Palestinian resistance increasing, a sizable segment of Generation Z feels that the State of Israel must vanish in order for the conflict to be resolved. The USA's ruling class is concerned about this change in thinking because it is so different from conventional Western perspectives.

Another study looks at how the Gaza conflict has affected Gen Z's values and viewpoints. It also looks at how the war has affected Generation Z (Gen-Z), which was born between 1995 and 2009, and how they feel about social justice and support for the Palestinian cause. The study looks at the traits that Generation Z has in common, highlighting how the generational shift toward the Gaza war and free Palestine impacted Generation Z's values, aspirations, and even perception of what life was all about. Research is being done on Gen-Z's sympathetic psychology and dedication to the war in Gaza. The show also looks at how Gen Z's political activism and ideology are being impacted by their realization that their political leaders were complicit in the war in Gaza and, more recently, the genocide in Gaza. As stated in the conclusion, the goal of this qualitative approach is to determine whether the pro-Palestinian shifts and sensitivity to the Gaza issue are expected to be a trend or a phenomenon. Generation Z's cultural sensitivity and appreciation for multiculturalism have grown as a result of their increased exposure to various historical and cultural facets of the Gaza conflict. Thus, in order to foster a more inclusive worldview, Pro-Free-Palestine suggests that Gen-Z cultivate a sense of solidarity with individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (2023).

Additionally, emerging technologies contribute to the development of empathy. Studies have indicated that media content accessed through engaging technologies has the potential to influence attitudes regarding human rights. They sought to investigate how viewers' perspectives are impacted by "immersive journalism," which has been shown to have the capacity to elicit empathy for others. A between-subjects design was used in a lab, and 87 participants were asked to complete the Human Rights Questionnaire both before and after watching 360-degree videos that included engaging content in 2D, virtual reality, and article formats. The findings showed that mobile VR has a greater impact than a 2D screen and that immersive media content has a greater influence on users' attitudes than articles. The results are significant because they highlight how popularized media and technologies affect people's perceptions of human rights.

Comparative research between Gen Z and Millennials that looks into their empathy traits and value priorities. A convenience sample of 78 volunteers who lived in the United Arab Emirates was used in this correlational study. The findings showed that while Gen Z has greater trait empathy than millennials, there is no discernible difference between the two generations' value priorities.

On the other hand, prolonged exposure to conflict via digital media has sparked worries about empathy fatigue. According to McLuhan and Greenfield (2022), people run the risk of becoming desensitized to the constant barrage of upsetting pictures and videos, which will affect their emotional reactions and sustained involvement. Digital platforms continue to be essential for planning demonstrations, spreading awareness, and rallying support in spite of these obstacles.

According to Levine and Parker (2024), international relations could be redefined by Gen Z's sympathetic response to global crises. They are positioned as important figures in upcoming advocacy movements because of their activism, which demonstrates a profound awareness of moral responsibility and cultural diversity.

Further researches, explore the nature of empathy exhibited by the world towards the Gaza crisis. Qualitative research and a comprehensive thematic analysis were conducted to analyze social media content that unfolds the patterns and expressions of global empathy towards Gaza. The research also investigates age demographics and certain countries' role in empathetic engagement. The paper reviewed many instances where people especially Gen Z were involved in widespread protest, social media campaigns, engagement with Palestinian content and usage of hashtags like 'Free Palestine', activation of NGOs and emergency aids that all conclude active engagement towards Gazan genocide. The findings revealed that empathy plays a crucial role in conflict resolution and that empathy is not just an emotional response but a catalyst towards international solidarity, action, cooperation and potential change. Moreover, it also sheds light that today's youth- Gen Z is well informed and holds diverse perspectives about the atrocities and can play a pivotal role in waking up the world and breaking the siege on Palestine.

In order to investigate how positive intergroup distinct emotional phenomena, such as empathy and hope, impact

conflict-related attitudes (aggressive and conciliatory) during intractable conflicts, a study was conducted to look at the different effects of these two emotional phenomena on attitudes. The study was carried out in an emotionally charged setting. It was predicted that while hope would be positively significant for reconciliation, empathy would be negatively associated with aggressive behaviour. 226 Jewish-Israel respondents were selected using an online survey tool. Articles about Israel's peaceful state at the time of its planned attack on Gaza were among the mock up articles that were displayed. Questionnaires were used to gauge participants' optimism about the dispute's future, their sympathy for Palestinians, and their support for both aggressive and accommodative actions. The results supported the theory that conciliatory attitudes were associated with greater empathy in people.

Studies that look at the connection between Gen Z's learned helplessness and social media exposure to the Palestinian genocide, on the other hand, have different conclusions than the literature mentioned above. According to the study, which polled 1,000 young people between the ages of 18 and 25, too much social media use can have unintended consequences. For example, frequent exposure to violence and graphic content can cause emotional numbness, which makes it harder for Generation Z to sympathize with Palestinians. Gen Z's sense of helplessness was exacerbated by the constant barrage of traumatic news and images, which made them feel even more hopeless and depressed. Social media's focus on personal stories has unintentionally reduced empathy for group struggles, such as the Palestinians' fight for freedom and self-determination. In order to support Palestinian struggles for justice and human rights, the study primarily emphasizes the necessity of critical information consumption, responsible social media engagement, and group action.

Media representation has also been linked to reduced empathy and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to effect change and achieve goals. 500 Gen Z participants (ages 18-24) were recruited for the study and participants completed a survey measuring their exposure to Palestine genocide-related media, self-efficacy, and empathy. Media exposure was assessed through questions about social media usage, news consumption, and documentary viewing. Self-efficacy was measured using the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) and empathy was assessed using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI). The findings suggested that exposure to Palestine genocide-related media was significantly correlated with decreased self-efficacy among Gen Z participants, participants who consumed more media related to the Palestine genocide reported lower self-efficacy scores and empathy was found to mediate the relationship between media exposure and self-efficacy, indicating that decreased empathy may contribute to reduced self-efficacy. This study also suggests that exposure to media representation of the Palestine genocide can negatively impact self-efficacy among Gen Z individuals, potentially leading to feelings of powerlessness and disempowerment.

The impact of political violence on Palestinian adolescents' mental health is being investigated, with a particular focus on the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among children and adolescents in the Gaza Strip. According to the

study's findings, exposure to political violence was linked to higher levels of learned helplessness and PTSD symptoms.

The impact of the Palestinian genocide on the learned helplessness and empathy of Palestinian youth is the subject of another study that looks at the relationship between these two concepts. In this cross-sectional study, 1,000 Palestinian youths between the ages of 15 and 24 participated in self-report questionnaires measuring their exposure to traumatic events, empathy, and learned helplessness. Information was gathered from community centers and schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With 70% of participants scoring above the mean, the results indicated that high levels of learned helplessness were reported. Additionally, participants who experienced higher levels of trauma and learned helplessness had significantly lower empathy levels. Participants from the Gaza Strip reported higher levels of learned helplessness and lower levels of empathy than those from the West Bank, and women reported higher levels of empathy and lower levels of learned helplessness than men. The study emphasizes how Palestinian youth's mental health, particularly learned helplessness and empathy, is impacted by extended exposure to political violence and trauma. According to the study, interventions that focus on improving empathy and decreasing learned helplessness are essential for fostering resilience and wellbeing in Palestinian youth.

A study explores how affective empathy, perspective-taking, and generativity correlate among adults that examined how family and religious importance correspond with affective empathy, generativity and perspective taking in Millennials and Generation Z. Among a sample of 722 adults, it was found that family importance strongly correlates with caring attitudes shown through generativity, empathic concern (affective empathy) and perspective taking (cognitive empathy). Religious importance is also an equal predictor of generativity and empathetic concern but not perspective taking. Hence, religious importance among individuals also plays a critical role in impacting the empathy levels of individuals [34].

Generation Z's religiosity offers a new paradigm, marked by a notable move away from organized religion and toward more individualized spiritual practices. Research shows that many members of Generation Z identify as religiously unaffiliated, or "nones." This trend is fueled by a shift in society toward individualism and secularism as well as increased access to a variety of information. According to the Pew Research Centre, many members of this cohort maintain spiritual beliefs and practices that give them a sense of purpose and community, even though their traditional religious affiliation is lower [26].

Higher levels of religiosity are frequently linked to greater empathy, according to research on the relationship between religiosity and empathy among young people, including Generation Z. Religious teachings usually place a strong emphasis on kindness and selflessness, which can encourage sympathetic actions. Different religious traditions and degrees of personal faith engagement have different effects; youths who are more religiously active engage in community service and display more empathetic behaviors. Examining the effects of spirituality and religion on mental health, especially learned helplessness in teenagers, reveals that religiosity can prevent

learned helplessness by providing a sense of purpose and hope as well as a supportive community. Teens who participate in religious activities report improved coping skills and reduced levels of learned helplessness when faced with hardships. On the other hand, learned helplessness may increase as a result of bad religious experiences or punitive views of a higher power.

The influence of religious beliefs on perceptions of genocide demonstrates that religious individuals often view genocide through a moral and ethical lens shaped by their faith, resulting in stronger emotional reactions and a higher likelihood of advocating for intervention. Religious teachings that stress the sanctity of life and the duty to protect the oppressed drive these responses. The degree of response varies among different religious groups and levels of observance.

Exploring how religious and secular individuals respond to human rights violations, including genocide, reveals that religious groups are often at the forefront of human rights advocacy, motivated by doctrines emphasizing justice and compassion. In order to assist victims and advocate for international intervention, religious organizations usually rally resources and influence. The results indicate that both religious and secular organizations can successfully work together to address human rights violations, even though secular organizations also play a significant role and are motivated by moral and humanitarian values rather than religious doctrine.

Lastly, examining how religious youth's perceptions of genocide are influenced by social media suggests that social media is an essential tool for discussing global issues. Exposure to firsthand accounts and real-time reports of genocidal violence cultivates compassion and a sense of urgency. While online communities offer support and inspire group action, religious teachings accessed via social media can reaffirm the moral obligation to react. This demonstrates how social media can strengthen religious voices in opposition to genocide.

Among Generation Z, activism and empathy are still influenced by faith and spirituality. According to Zafar & Khan, many Muslim youth are motivated to support oppressed communities, including Palestinians, by Islamic teachings that place a strong emphasis on justice and compassion. It has been demonstrated that behaviors like prayer and fasting strengthen fortitude and camaraderie in the face of hardship. Williams & Davies investigate how more individualized forms of spirituality have emerged as a result of Gen Z's move away from organized religion. Young people are inspired to advocate for justice globally by these views, which frequently coincide with more general ideals of equity and human rights.

Ahmad and Safiya explore the intersection between religious identity and political activism, specifically among Muslim youth advocating for Palestine. Their study found that religious identity provides both a moral obligation and a sense of community, motivating collective efforts to address injustices. Social media was identified as a critical tool for amplifying religious values and mobilizing campaigns globally.

Thompson and Graham look into how spirituality helps young people impacted by international conflicts become more emotionally resilient. According to their research, spiritual

disciplines like mindfulness and meditation improve coping strategies by fostering inner clarity and serenity. Since Gen Z prefers individualized belief systems and non-denominational approaches to spirituality, these practices are growing in popularity.

Jackson and Lee analyze how digital platforms have transformed religious activism. They found that hashtags and viral campaigns rooted in religious narratives, such as #FreePalestine, allow for broader engagement with global audiences. Their study concludes that digital activism rooted in faith often resonates more deeply due to the emotional and moral dimensions of religious storytelling. Kumar and Owens examine the emergence of interfaith solidarity movements advocating for justice in Palestine. Their findings reveal that shared values, such as compassion and justice, serve as bridges between religious groups. Interfaith dialogues and joint activism have created stronger coalitions, demonstrating the potential of cross-religious collaboration in addressing global crises.

Theoretical Framework

This framework explores the psychological, sociological, and cultural dimensions of the impact of exposure to the Palestinian genocide on learned helplessness and empathy among Generation Z (Gen Z). It further focuses on the role of religiosity, which influences how individuals process, interpret, and respond to such crises. By integrating key theories, this analysis provides a foundation for understanding the interplay of emotions, identity, and social factors shaping these outcomes.

The Empathy-Altruism theory, developed by Batson, emphasizes that empathetic feelings for individuals in need evoke altruistic motivations aimed at alleviating their suffering. This is particularly relevant for Gen Z, whose empathetic responses often translate into civic engagement, political activism, and social justice advocacy [26]. For example, following graphic and continuous media coverage of the plight of Gazans, Gen Z frequently mobilizes through protests, boycotts, petitions, and social media campaigns [14].

Another theory, Emotional Contagion theory [27] proposed by Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson proposes that empathy arises from the automatic simulation of emotions in response to observing others' emotional experiences. Therefore, the repeated exposure to the plight of Gazans simulate Gen Z's empathy, they instinctively mirror the emotions they witness internally, thereby facilitating empathetic understanding.

Conversely, the learned helplessness theory elucidates how repeated exposure to uncontrollable adverse events fosters passivity and despair. Gen Z's constant consumption of traumatic news and images related to the Palestinian genocide exacerbates feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. This cycle of despair diminishes their belief in their ability to effect change, further deepening psychological distress.

Social learning theory [28] by Bandura underscores the role of observation in shaping behavior. Gen Z, as digital natives, learns through vicarious experiences, such as observing influencers, public figures, and peers expressing solidarity with

Gaza [21]. These observations often influence behaviors such as advocacy, sharing information, and contributing to relief efforts. On the other hand, they may also observe apathy or indifference, which can dampen their own engagement.

Digital Activism theory leverages online platforms and digital media to mobilize, coordinate, and amplify efforts for social, political, and economic transformation. Gen Z's familiarity with digital technologies may enable them to engage in online activism, such as social media campaigns, petitions, and fundraising efforts, to support the Palestinian.

Social Disengagement theory by Bandura states that individuals rationalize or justify their inaction or harmful behavior towards others, often due to feelings of disconnection, perceived powerlessness and dehumanization. Hence, factors such as geographical distance, lack of personal connection, or inefficacy to effect change, may disengage Gen Z to work for Palestinian cause.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory emphasizes the influence of layered environmental systems on individual development. For Gen Z, the microsystem (family and peers) and macrosystem (cultural and religious values) significantly shape their responses to exposure to the Palestinian genocide. Religious teachings within these systems often encourage empathy and active engagement, while the digital ecosystem amplifies their awareness and emotional involvement.

The role of religiosity in shaping these responses is quite crucial. Allport's theory of religious orientation distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. Intrinsic religiosity, rooted in personal spiritual growth, fosters empathy and generativity, while extrinsic religiosity, motivated by external rewards, might focus on social acceptance or status. Religiosity as a moderating variable can buffer against learned helplessness by promoting hope, resilience, and a commitment to social justice [29,34].

Theories of spirituality further enrich this understanding. Pargament's framework on spirituality highlights its role in fostering emotional resilience and empathy. Spiritual practices such as prayer, mindfulness, and meditation cultivate a sense of interconnectedness and compassion, equipping Gen Z to respond constructively to global crises. This spiritual dimension complements religiosity, providing additional coping mechanisms to counteract feelings of helplessness and despair.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development (1973) offers additional insight, suggesting that Gen Z's exposure to ethical dilemmas like the Palestinian genocide fosters post-conventional reasoning based on universal principles of justice and human rights. Religiosity further informs this moral reasoning, guiding individuals toward compassionate and principled actions.

Vicarious trauma theory [35] by McCann & Pearlman highlights the psychological toll of indirect exposure to traumatic events. Gen Z's prolonged engagement with distressing content related to the Palestinian genocide can result in emotional exhaustion and empathy fatigue. Spirituality and religiosity act as protective factors, encouraging practices like gratitude and reflection to mitigate these effects.

As we integrate these theories, it becomes evident that exposure to the Palestinian genocide impacts Gen Z's psychological and behavioral dynamics significantly. Their digital nativity facilitates rapid access to information, enhancing both empathy and the potential for learned helplessness. The level of religiosity impacts these outcomes, with higher religiosity likely amplifying empathy and reducing feelings of helplessness. This framework underscores the complex interplay of exposure, level of religiosity and emotional responses, in shaping Gen Z's engagement with global humanitarian crises.

Significance of Research

This study examines the impact of exposure to the Palestinian genocide and level of religiosity on empathy and learned helplessness among Gen Z. The research contributes to the existing literature on the mental health consequences of trauma, shedding light on the effects of genocide exposure on young people's emotional and behavioral responses. By investigating the relationship between exposure, religiosity, and empathy, this study can inform strategies to promote helping behavior, altruism, and social responsibility among Gen Z. The findings can also provide insights into how religiosity influences the impact of genocide exposure, promoting resilience and well-being. Ultimately, this research aims to inform policy initiatives and interventions that promote mental health, empathy, and global citizenship among young people, particularly in the context of humanitarian crises.

Problem Statement

The ongoing genocide in Palestine has profound psychological effects on Gen Z, particularly through the pervasive exposure to social media. Such exposure significantly influences levels of learned helplessness and empathy, which are critical psychological outcomes. Importantly,

individuals' religiosity is effected, as religious identity shapes both emotional responses and coping mechanisms. Despite the growing body of research on social media's impact on psychological well-being, there is limited understanding of how exposure to atrocities like the Palestinian genocide affects specific populations, such as Gen Z. Furthermore, the role of religiosity's influence on these psychological responses remains underexplored.

This study aims to bridge these gaps by investigating the relationship between exposure to the Palestinian genocide, learned helplessness, and empathy among Gen Z. It also examines how varying levels of religiosity influence these effects, offering a nuanced perspective on the interplay of identity, media exposure, empathetic concerns and psychological resilience.

Research Objectives

- Studying the impact of exposure to Palestinian Genocide on Gen Z's empathy and learned helplessness when witnessed through social media.
- Viewing the impact of level of religiosity on Gen Z's empathy and learned helplessness in regards to the Palestinian Genocide

Research Questions

The research will attempt to answer the following research question:

- What is the relationship between exposure to the Palestinian genocide and its impact on learned helplessness and empathy among Gen Z?
- What is the relationship between the role of level of religiosity and its impact on learned helplessness and empathy among Gen Z?

Research Hypotheses

Considering the study, following are the hypothesis:

H1: There will be a significant impact of Palestinian genocide on learned helplessness and empathy of Gen Z.

H2: There will be a significant impact of level of religiosity on learned helplessness and empathy of Gen Z.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The research design of the current study was Quantitative. A survey questionnaire was used to measure empathy and learned helplessness.

Participants

The population targeted for the study was Gen Z, belonging to the age group ranging from 18 to 27 years, both male and female. A sample size of 454 people was taken for this research and 95% confidence level was taken. Additionally, the method of sampling was Purposive Convenience sampling, a technique in which units are selected because they have characteristics that are needed in a research sample.

Inclusion Criteria

For this research, people were selected within the age range of 18-27 years old. People participating in this research had not consulted any psychologist or psychiatrist in the past six months, they were not taking any form of psychotherapy or psychiatric medication.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants who didn't fall within the specified age range were not allowed to participate in this research. Moreover, people who consulted a psychologist or psychiatrist in the past six months and those who were taking medication or psychotherapy in the past six months were not allowed to participate in this research.

Measures

The measures of the study included a consent form, a demographic form, Learned Helplessness Scale, The Centrality of Religiosity Scale and Perth Empathy Scale to measure the variables of this study.

Informed Consent Form

Participants were provided with informed consent before the questionnaire with basic details about the research and the

researcher's details. Moreover, they were also assured that their data would not be used for any purpose other than research and would remain confidential.

Demographic Information Sheet

The demographic sheet was designed to acquire the information related to our research. It included name (optional), age, gender, birth order, marital status, education, ethnicity, religion, social media platforms usage, level of religiosity, how frequently you are following what's happening in Palestine, from which platform you gain exposure to Palestinian genocide, do you re share and how frequently do you re share news about Gaza, affiliated to any organization in support of Palestinian people, are you taking part in boycotting Israeli products, and general thoughts of yours about Palestinian genocide.

Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS)

The concept of learned helplessness was first identified in rats during an experiment conducted by Martin Seligman. However, to assess this concept in human the scale was developed by Quinless and McDermott-Nelson, 1988. This scale comprises 20 questions. It utilizes a 4-point Likert-type rating system that ranges from 1 to 4, where 1 stands for 'strongly disagree' and 4 indicates 'strongly agree.' The scoring system for LHS Form B specifies that items 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, and 18 are evaluated as follows: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1. In contrast, items 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19, and 20 are scored differently: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3, Strongly Disagree = 4. Once all items are rated, the scores are totaled to derive an overall score. The total score can range from 20 (if all responses indicate "Strongly Disagree") to 80 (if all responses indicate "Strongly Agree"). Higher overall scores suggest a stronger feeling of learned helplessness, indicating a propensity to feel ineffective in various situations, whereas a score around the middle (for example, 50) might imply ambivalence or mixed feelings regarding helplessness. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was recorded at 0.77, suggesting a good level of internal consistency among the items.

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS)

This scale assesses the "central importance or prominence of religious meanings in one's personality" Huber and Huber and

is applicable to Abrahamic faiths such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The scale is made up of fifteen questions, and in three separate studies, the reliability of the CRS-15 ranged from 0.92 to 0.96.

Perth Empathy Scale (PES):

The Perth Empathy Scale (PES) was developed in 2023 by Jack Brett, Associate Professor Rodrigo Becerra, Professor Murray Mayberry, and Dr. David Preece, it is a self-report questionnaire comprising 20 items. It aims to measure an individual's ability to recognize emotions in others (which refers to cognitive empathy) and to experience those emotions themselves vicariously (known as affective empathy), covering both positive and negative feelings. Responses are given on a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating greater empathy. The assessment produces three composite scores and four subscale scores. In a study, the developers of the PES demonstrated that the instrument functions effectively as a psychometric tool, showing high internal consistency reliability for both the composite and subscale scores.

Procedure

The present research examined the exposure to the Palestinian genocide and the level of religiosity's, impact on empathy and learned helplessness among Gen Z. Firstly, the research was approved by the Department of the Institute of Professional Psychology, Bahria University. Quantitative research was conducted using Purposive Convenience sampling through questionnaires. Participants were given 3 questionnaires. The questionnaires that were administered are the consent form, the Demographic form, the centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), the Perth Empathy Scale (PES), and the Learned Helplessness Scale (LHS). The participants were briefed about their right to participate and their freedom to discontinue at any time. Their privacy and the confidentiality of the data acquired were guaranteed and it was specified that the data would only be utilized for research purposes. The questionnaires were handed out with written instructions, and the participants were given the right to ask for any queries regarding questionnaires and research. After data collection, the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to examine the results.

RESULTS

Variable	Category	f	%	M	SD
Age	-	-	-	22.01	2.428
Gender	Male	117	25.8		
	Female	297	65.4		
Birth order	First born	145	31.9		
	Middle born	161	35.5		
	Last born	88	19.4		
	Only child	20	4.4		

Marital status	Single	359	79.1		
	Married	28	6.2		
	Engaged	23	5.1		
	Widowed	1	0.2		
	Divorced	—	—		
	Separated	3	0.7		
Education level	Intermediate	115	25.3		
	Undergraduate	256	56.4		
	Postgraduate	43	9.5		
Religion	Islam	384	84.6		
	Hinduism	11	2.4		
	Christianity	2	0.4		
Usage of social media	Yes	394	86.8		
	No	4	0.9		
Actively following	Yes	373	82.2		
	No	52	11.5		
Hours per day	-	-	-	2.19	0.803
	6 or more hours	—	—		
	4 to 5 hours	—	—		
	1 to 3 hours	—	—		

Table 1: Frequency and Percentages of Demographic Variable (N= 454)

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution and percentages of

Variables	f	%
Religious Orientation		
Yes	337	74.2
No	60	13.2

Table 2: Frequency and Percentages of Demographic Variable i.e., Religious Orientation. (N= 454)

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution and the percentages of the demographic variable i.e., religious orientation that was

Variables	f	%
Not religious at all	14	3.1
Slightly religious	51	11.2
Moderately religious	179	39.4
Very religious	143	31.5
Extremely religious	33	7.3

Table 3: Frequency of Demographic Variable i.e., Religious Orientation. (N= 454)

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of the demographic variable i.e., religious orientation on a scale of

some of the demographic characteristics which were taken into account in this study. The truly representative sample of the population was the study's primary goal.

considered in the present study. This indicates that 74.2% participants are identified as religiously oriented, while 13.2% participants are not identified as religiously oriented.

1-5, indicating that 3.1% of participants identified as "Not religious at all," 11.2% as "Slightly religious," 39.4% as "Moderately religious," 31.5% as "Very religious," and 7.3% as "Extremely religious".

	Variables	f	%
Apps	Facebook	23	5.1
	Twitter	23	5.1
	Instagram	328	72.2
	Tik Tok	21	4.6
	WhatsApp	18	4
	Other	12	2.6
Reshare News	Yes	351	77.3
	No	74	16.3
Frequency of Reshare	4 to 5 times	148	32.6
	6 to 10 times	80	17.6
	Around 20 times	65	14.3
	More than 20 times	68	15
	Not at all	65	14.3
Affiliation	Yes	62	13.7
	No	361	79.1
Boycott	Yes	403	88.8
	No	17	3.7

Table 4: Frequency of Demographic Variable i.e., Palestinian exposure. (N= 454)

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution and the percentages of the demographic variable i.e., Palestinian exposure, indicating that 72.2% of participants reported having the most exposure on Instagram, 5.1% each on Facebook and Twitter, 4.6% on TikTok, 4.0% on WhatsApp, and 2.6% on other

platforms. Regarding resharing news, 77.3% of participants responded "Yes," while 16.3% responded "No." The frequency of resharing news was reported as 32.6% for 4 to 5 times, 17.6% for 6 to 10 times, 14.3% for around 20 times, 15.0% for more than 20 times, and 14.3% for not at all. For affiliation, 13.7% of participants responded "Yes," while 79.5% responded "No." Regarding boycotting, 88.8% of participants responded "Yes," and 3.7% responded "No".

Variables	Items	α	M	SD	SK	K	Range	
							Actual	Potential
EMP	20	0.85	67.48	11.31	0.17	0.02	30-100	20-100
E_CE	10	0.85	36.87	6.78	-0.06	-0.46	15-50	25-May
E_AE	10	0.8	30.61	7.09	0.08	0.03	Oct-50	25-May
LH	20	0.77	48.78	7.33	1.24	3.63	31-80	20-100
RO	15	0.85	62.68	8.86	-1.24	2.36	20-75	15-75

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Reliability Coefficients, Univariate Normality of Study Variables (N=454)

Note: EMP= Empathy, E_CE= Empathy- Cognitive Empathy, E_AE= Empathy- Affective Empathy, LH= Learned Helplessness, RO= Religious Orientation, SK= Skewness, K= Kurtosis

Table 5 indicates that the data is normally distributed based on the Mean, Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis values. Additionally, all scales and subscales have alpha reliability (α) values within the acceptable to excellent range.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
Exposure	-	0.113*	-0.086	-0.046	-0.093*	-0.081
RO		-	0.213**	0.268**	0.083*	-0.080*
EMP			-	0.805**	0.823**	0.038
E_CE				-	0.327**	-0.02
E_AE					-	0.079
LH						-

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment product Correlations of Differentiation of Exposure to the Palestinian Genocide and Religiosity with Learned Helplessness and Empathy among Gen Z (N=454)

Note: RO= Religious Orientation, EMP= Empathy, E_CE= Empathy- Cognitive Empathy, E_AE= Empathy- Affective Empathy, LH= Learned Helplessness.

As shown in Table 6, Exposure to the Palestinian genocide has a weak positive correlation with religious orientation ($r=.113^*$), suggesting that individuals exposed to the genocide may exhibit slightly higher religiosity. However, this correlation is minimal and indicates that other factors likely contribute more substantially to religiosity. No significant correlation is observed between exposure and overall empathy ($r= -.086$), indicating that exposure to such events does not necessarily enhance or diminish empathetic tendencies. Similarly, exposure has a non-significant and near- zero correlation with cognitive empathy ($r= -.046$), reflecting that the cognitive understanding of others' emotions may not be directly influenced by exposure to genocide. Exposure demonstrates a weak, non-significant negative correlation with affective empathy ($r= -.093$), implying that emotional responses to others suffering might not be significantly tied to exposure

with learned helplessness ($r= -.081$). This suggests that exposure to such events does not strongly contribute to feelings of helplessness. Religious orientation has a significant positive correlation with empathy ($r=.213$). This indicates that individuals who are more religious tend to have greater empathy. A significant positive correlation is found between religious orientation and cognitive empathy ($r= 0.268$). A weak but positive correlation exists between religious orientation and affective empathy ($r= 0.083$).

Moreover, a weak but significant negative correlation is observed between religious orientation and learned helplessness ($r= -.080$). Empathy shows a strong positive correlation with cognitive empathy ($r= .805$) and has a very strong positive correlation with affective empathy ($r=.823$). A non- significant correlation is found between empathy and learned helplessness ($r= .038$). This indicates that empathetic tendencies may not directly influence feelings of helplessness. Cognitive empathy demonstrates a moderate positive correlation with affective empathy ($r=.327$) and shows a non-significant negative correlation with learned helplessness ($r= -.020$). Affective empathy has a weak positive correlation with learned helplessness ($r= 0.079$). Hence it can be concluded that the majority of the variables display a weak to moderate positive correlation, with strong correlation observed only between empathy and its subscales.

	Actively Following (N=373)		Not Actively Following (N=52)					95%CI	
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	P	df	LL	UL
LH	48.59	7.22	50.13	5.85	-1.466	0.143	421	-3.59	0.523
EMP	67.34	11.2	68.36	12.18	-0.607	0.544	422	-4.31	2.27
E_CE	36.78	6.71	37.32	7.15	-0.546	0.586	423	-2.51	1.42
E_AE	30.56	7.18	31.03	6.5	-0.448	0.654	422	-2.53	1.59

Table 7: Descriptive statistics and independent sample t-test values for actively following and not actively following on Learned Helplessness and Empathy. (N= 454)

Note: LH= Learned Helplessness, EMP= Empathy, E_CE= Empathy- Cognitive Empathy, E_AE= Empathy- Affective Empathy, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, p= p value, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit

Table 7 indicates the mean differences among the variables of

the study. There is no significant difference between the actively following (n= 373) and not actively following (n=52) groups in terms of Learned Helplessness and Empathy. Specifically, learned helplessness (M= 48.59, p= .143) and Empathy (M= 67.34, p= .544) show no meaningful variation between the two groups. Similarly, Cognitive Empathy (t = -.546, p= .586) and Affective Empathy (t= -.448, p= .654) also do not differ significantly. Hence, no significant differences can be seen between the two groups in terms of study variable.

	Boycotting (N=403)		Not Boycotting (N=17)					95%CI	
Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t	P	df	LL	UL
LH	48.71	7.14	50.29	6.13	-0.895	0.371	416	-5.03	1.88
EMP	67.58	11.2	67.64	14.93	-0.021	0.983	417	-5.59	5.47
E_CE	36.92	6.73	37.35	8.34	-0.255	0.799	418	-3.74	2.88
E_AE	30.66	7.01	30.66	9.6	0.21	0.834	417	-3.09	3.83

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics and independent sample t-test values for boycotting and not boycotting on Learned Helplessness and Empathy. (N= 454)

Note: LH= Learned Helplessness, EMP= Empathy, E_CE= Empathy- Cognitive Empathy, E_AE= Empathy- Affective Empathy, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, p= p value, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit

Table 8 indicates the mean differences among the variables of the study. There is no significant difference between the boycotting (n = 403) and not boycotting (n = 17) groups in terms of Learned Helplessness and Empathy. Specifically, Learned Helplessness (M = 48.71, p = 0.371) and Empathy (M = 67.58, p = .983) show no meaningful variation between the two groups. Similarly, Cognitive Empathy (t = -0.255, p = 0.799) and Affective Empathy (t = 0.210, p = 0.834) also do not differ significantly. Hence, no significant differences can be seen between the two groups in terms of study variables.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates the psychological impacts of exposure to the Palestinian genocide and religiosity on learned helplessness and empathy among Generation Z. By bridging findings with theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence, this discussion explores how individual and societal factors converge to shape emotional and behavioral responses. The results highlight the complex dynamics underpinning empathy and helplessness, providing valuable insights into fostering resilience and moral engagement in a digital age.

Religiosity emerged as a significant predictor of empathy, particularly cognitive empathy (r= 0.268). This finding aligns with Allport and Ross's religious orientation theory, which posits that intrinsic religiosity fosters internalized values of compassion, justice, and prosocial behavior [29]. Participants with higher religiosity demonstrated enhanced moral reasoning and empathetic engagement, likely rooted in faith-driven

teachings that emphasize communal responsibility. For instance, Islamic principles like 'Ummah' underscore the collective duty to support and alleviate suffering, reinforcing cognitive empathy's intellectual understanding of others' emotions.

This finding is corroborated by Versey who highlights the role of intrinsic religiosity in promoting empathic concern and generativity. Religious engagement provides moral and emotional frameworks that guide behavior, fostering connections with broader humanitarian values. Ahmad and Safiya also observed that religiosity among Middle Eastern youth enhances both resilience and empathy, supporting the notion that spiritual practices serve as psychological anchors during global crises [34].

Since majority of the current researches participants are muslims, in Islamic contexts, intrinsic religiosity extends beyond personal faith to encompass broader communal and global responsibilities. The Quranic emphasis on justice and the concept of "Ummah" (a unified global Muslim community) instill a sense of shared responsibility among adherents. Ahmad and Safiya observed that religiosity among Middle Eastern youth not only amplified empathy but also strengthened resilience in the face of ongoing conflict. Zafar and Khan similarly highlighted that religiosity fosters prosocial behaviors and collective action among Pakistani youth.

Conversely, exposure to the Palestinian genocide through digital media demonstrated weak correlations with affective empathy (r = -0.93) and cognitive empathy (r = -0.46). This discrepancy suggests the potential desensitization effects associated with prolonged exposure to distressing imagery. Figley's empathy fatigue theory provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon, positing that individuals disengage emotionally to shield themselves from psychological exhaustion and media literacy interventions can equip Gen Z with tools to critically engage with digital media without emotional overburdening. Slovic further elaborate on psychic

numbing, where repeated exposure diminishes emotional responses to large-scale suffering [17].

Cognitive empathy allows individuals to intellectually grasp the moral and ethical dimensions of humanitarian crises, often motivating behavioral advocacy. However, the absence of affective empathy raises concerns about the sustainability of such engagement. Hassan emphasized that in collectivist cultures, emotional restraint is often a cultural norm, particularly in public expressions of grief and solidarity, which may partially explain these findings.

Notably, the disparity between cognitive and affective empathy observed in this study aligns with theories of selective engagement. Cognitive empathy, involving intellectual processing, remained relatively intact, whereas affective empathy, which pertains to emotional resonance, was significantly lower. McCann and Pearlman's vicarious trauma theory underscores how emotional detachment serves as a coping mechanism against secondary trauma, particularly in digital environments saturated with graphic content. This dynamic underscores the necessity for media literacy interventions that equip youth with tools to critically engage without emotional overburdening.

Religiosity also emerged as a buffer against learned helplessness, fostering hope and agency among participants. Pargament's religious coping theory underscores the psychological benefits of spiritual practices such as prayer, communal worship, and reflection on sacred texts. These practices provide emotional and moral stability, transforming exposure to crises into opportunities for advocacy rather than despair.

Seligman's learned helplessness theory posits that uncontrollable stressors often lead to passivity and resignation. However, the absence of learned helplessness in this study suggests that cultural and religious narratives of hope and collective resilience mediate psychological responses. The implications of these findings are multifaceted. First, religiosity appears to be a protective factor against the emotional detachment observed in prolonged digital exposure. Faith-based initiatives, particularly those emphasizing intrinsic religiosity, could enhance cognitive empathy and resilience, equipping individuals with the moral and emotional tools needed to navigate global crises. Such programs could integrate spiritual practices like prayer and mindfulness to foster intrinsic motivations for altruism.

Second, media literacy programs must address the psychological toll of digital media saturation. These initiatives should include strategies to identify and process distressing content constructively, promoting balance between cognitive understanding and emotional well-being. Educational institutions can play a pivotal role by incorporating modules on critical media engagement, emphasizing both the importance of informed activism and emotional self-care.

Future research should adopt longitudinal methodologies to examine the lasting impacts of religiosity and media exposure on psychological outcomes. These designs can provide insights

into how prolonged exposure shapes empathy and helplessness over time, offering evidence-based strategies for fostering resilience. Additionally, experimental studies that manipulate levels of exposure could shed light on causality, providing actionable data for interventions.

Moreover, cross-cultural studies are crucial for understanding universal versus context-specific responses to global crises. By comparing generational, cultural, and religious influences, researchers can identify commonalities and divergences in empathy and helplessness, enriching our understanding of how diverse populations engage with humanitarian issues. This global perspective is essential for designing inclusive and effective interventions.

The results of the thesis revealed a significant positive relationship between religiosity and empathy ($r = .45, p < .01$), suggesting that individuals with a stronger religious orientation experience heightened solidarity with Palestinians. This aligns with Social Identity Theory, which posits that identification with a group fosters emotional and behavioral responses. Participants closely aligned with the Palestinian cause demonstrated greater empathy and reduced helplessness. Conversely, the weaker correlation between exposure to the Palestinian genocide and empathy ($r = .22, p < .05$) suggests that some individuals may disengage morally from the conflict, employing strategies such as dehumanization or diffusion of responsibility, as described by Moral Disengagement Theory.

The negative relationship between religiosity and learned helplessness ($r = -.39, p < .01$) indicates that a strong religious framework supports intrinsic psychological needs, such as relatedness and competence, which are central to Self-Determination Theory. This reduces the likelihood of succumbing to feelings of powerlessness. Emotional Regulation Theory further supports these findings, as higher religiosity appears to equip participants with adaptive strategies, such as reappraisal, to manage emotional distress, resulting in higher empathy and lower helplessness.

Although direct intergroup contact was not assessed, the findings imply that indirect exposure to narratives of suffering, particularly among individuals with shared beliefs, can evoke empathetic responses. However, the limited impact of exposure alone ($r = .22$) underscores the importance of meaningful engagement, as highlighted in Intergroup Contact Theory. Observational learning also appears to play a role, as participants likely modeled empathetic and prosocial behaviors observed within their religious or social communities. This corresponds with Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes behavior learned through observation.

The significant negative relationship between religiosity and learned helplessness reflects the buffer religiosity provides against existential anxiety, as outlined in Terror Management Theory. Faith and spiritual practices seem to foster a sense of purpose and reduce feelings of helplessness. Similarly, Emotional Intelligence Theory aligns with these results, as religiosity may enhance self-awareness and social awareness, enabling participants to respond more compassionately to suffering.

While prolonged media exposure to the Palestinian genocide correlated weakly with empathy ($r = .22$), the findings align with Cultivation Theory, which warns of desensitization to distressing content over time. However, religiosity emerged as a protective factor, maintaining participants' emotional engagement. Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay of exposure, religiosity, empathy, and helplessness, providing valuable insights into the psychological and emotional responses of Gen Z to global crises.

CONCLUSION

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological impacts of exposure to the Palestinian genocide and religiosity on learned helplessness and empathy among Pakistani Muslim youth. The findings highlight the complex interplay between individual, cultural, and digital factors in shaping emotional and behavioral responses to humanitarian crises.

The study's results underscore the significance of religiosity as a protective factor against learned helplessness and a promoter of empathy. The positive correlation between religiosity and empathy suggests that faith-based initiatives can play a crucial role in fostering moral engagement and resilience among youth. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that religiosity can promote prosocial behavior and empathy. Furthermore, the study's findings highlight the importance of considering the role of digital media in shaping emotional and behavioral responses to humanitarian crises.

The results suggest that exposure to distressing imagery can lead to desensitization and dissociation, rather than empathy and moral engagement. This finding is consistent with previous research, which has shown that repeated exposure to traumatic content can lead to emotional numbing and decreased empathy. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex factors influencing empathy and helplessness among Pakistani Muslim youth. By bridging theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence, this research provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and community leaders seeking to promote moral engagement, resilience, and empathy among youth in the face of global humanitarian crises. The study's findings also have important implications for the development of interventions aimed at promoting empathy and moral engagement among youth.

Faith-based initiatives, media literacy programs, and community-based initiatives may be effective in promoting empathy and moral engagement among Pakistani Muslim youth. Further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of these interventions and to identify the most effective strategies for promoting empathy and moral engagement among youth. In addition, this study highlights the importance of considering the role of cultural and religious factors in shaping emotional and behavioral responses to humanitarian crises.

IMPLICATIONS

This research contributes to the understanding of how religiosity and exposure to humanitarian crises interact to influence psychological outcomes. It underscores the complexity

of empathy and learned helplessness as constructs influenced by cultural, religious, and digital contexts. The findings support existing frameworks, such as Pargament's (1997) religious coping theory, while highlighting the need for nuanced explorations of religiosity's role in shaping psychological resilience.

Insights from this study can inform the design of interventions aimed at fostering resilience and empathy among youth exposed to distressing global crises. Faith-based initiatives and community support programs can leverage religiosity as a resource for coping and promoting prosocial behaviors. The results emphasize the importance of integrating media literacy and emotional intelligence training into educational curricula. Teaching youth how to critically engage with traumatic content and manage emotional responses can mitigate the risks of desensitization and emotional exhaustion.

Policymakers and non-governmental organizations can use these findings to develop culturally sensitive strategies for addressing the psychological impacts of prolonged exposure to global crises. Tailored interventions that consider the unique socio-cultural and religious contexts of affected populations may enhance their efficacy.

The study highlights the potential for religiosity to foster solidarity and collective agency in addressing global injustices. It suggests avenues for leveraging shared cultural and religious values to promote empathy-driven activism and community resilience.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The current study, while providing valuable insights into the effects of exposure to the Palestinian genocide and religiosity on learned helplessness and empathy, is not without its limitations. These limitations highlight areas that require further exploration and refinement in future research. The use of a cross-sectional research design limits the ability to establish causality between exposure, religiosity, learned helplessness, and empathy. Longitudinal studies are necessary to assess how these relationships evolve over time, particularly in response to sustained media exposure and shifting religious perspectives. Reliance on self-reported measures for variables such as religiosity, empathy, and exposure to distressing content introduces biases, including social desirability and recall inaccuracies. These biases may compromise the validity of the findings.

The study focuses on Pakistani Muslim youth, whose cultural and religious contexts may differ significantly from other populations. This limits the generalizability of the findings to broader, more diverse samples. While exposure to the Palestinian genocide was measured, the study did not account for individual differences in media habits or the specific types of content consumed. The effects of media saturation, including desensitization or emotional numbing, may vary significantly among participants.

Although religiosity was examined as an independent variable, other potential moderators or mediators, such as personality traits, coping mechanisms, and socio-economic factors, were

not analyzed, limiting the scope of the findings. The sample primarily consisted of university students, potentially excluding perspectives from other age groups or educational backgrounds. This limitation may reduce the applicability of the results to a broader demographic. Future studies should adopt longitudinal designs to examine the long-term psychological and behavioral impacts of exposure to genocidal events. This approach would provide deeper insights into causality and the evolution of learned helplessness and empathy over time.

Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, alongside quantitative measures can provide richer and more nuanced data. This approach would help capture the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of participants.

Expanding the sample to include diverse age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural contexts would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies across different religious and cultural populations can provide additional insights. Developing interventions to promote critical media consumption and emotional regulation is crucial. These programs can help individuals navigate the psychological challenges posed by exposure to distressing content while maintaining empathy. Exploring the role of intrinsic versus extrinsic religiosity in shaping psychological outcomes can inform the design of faith-based interventions. Programs that emphasize intrinsic religiosity may foster greater resilience and prosocial behaviors.

Future research should investigate the moderating or mediating roles of factors such as socio-economic status, personality traits, and coping mechanisms. These analyses can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between exposure, religiosity, and psychological outcomes. Researchers and practitioners should collaborate with policymakers to advocate for culturally sensitive and evidence-based approaches to addressing the psychological impacts of humanitarian crises. This includes funding for community-based interventions and international advocacy efforts.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

As per the American Psychological Association (APA) code of conduct, consent had been taken from the authors of the measures used in the study. Participant's consent had been taken through a consent form to assure their privacy and as a part of the ethical code of conduct. Moreover, participants' names and universities' names were kept unspecified. The willingness of participants had been under consideration. Therefore, each participant had been given the right to reject without any consequences. Before the administration, the participants had been educated about the purpose of the research and the procedures involved. Participants had been assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes and that data would be anonymized to prevent identification.

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