



# The Importance of Psychological First Aid for the People of Gaza: Necessities and Challenges

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Received: 23 Nov 2024

Accepted: 26 Jan 2025

## Citation to this article

Saboohi Z. The Importance of Psychological First Aid for the People of Gaza: Necessities and Challenges. *J Iran Med Council*. 2025;8(3):632-33.

## Dear Editor

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has deeply impacted its population, causing not only significant loss of life but also a profound psychological toll, particularly on children, adolescents, and women. With over two million people living in Gaza, the need for mental health services has never been more urgent. The region's health infrastructure, already fragile before the conflict, has been further overwhelmed, resulting in a severe shortage of mental health professionals. This gap exacerbates the mental health crisis, leading to increased cases of anxiety, depression, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which, if not addressed, could have lasting consequences on future generations (1, 2).

In response to this growing need, Psychological First Aid (PFA) emerges as a critical intervention. PFA is a training program designed to equip individuals with the skills to offer initial support to those experiencing mental health crises. This program originated in Australia and has since become a valuable tool in numerous conflict and disaster zones. By teaching community members to recognize mental health symptoms, providing supportive communication, and guiding individuals toward professional help, PFA can significantly reduce the impact of psychological trauma in crises (3).

In Gaza, where access to professional mental health services is limited, and the population is under constant strain, PFA can play a pivotal role. It enables individuals, especially health workers, teachers, and caregivers, to provide immediate psychological support and ensure that those in need are connected to appropriate services. In a region where healthcare facilities are often damaged or overwhelmed, the role of laypeople in delivering early mental health interventions becomes even more crucial (4).

However, implementing PFA in Gaza faces several challenges. The primary obstacle is the lack of resources. Financial constraints and a shortage of qualified trainers hinder the widespread dissemination of PFA programs. Additionally, the ongoing conflict restricts access to training and education about mental health, particularly in remote and underserved areas. These barriers are compounded by the psychological strain on health workers themselves, many of whom are also dealing

with the emotional toll of working in such a high-stress environment (3,5).

Despite these challenges, potential solutions could mitigate the situation. One key approach is to train local health workers, teachers, and community leaders in PFA. This could ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive immediate support, even without professional services. International organizations could assist by providing training, educational materials, and resources to enhance local capacity. Lastly, strengthening Gaza's mental health infrastructure by developing community centers and academic programs could help raise awareness and

promote resilience among the population.

In conclusion, while Gaza faces numerous obstacles in addressing its mental health needs, implementing PFA could provide critical support during this ongoing crisis. With the proper training and resources, individuals can help mitigate the psychological damage caused by the conflict, fostering resilience and aiding in the long-term recovery of Gaza's population.

### **Keywords**

Armed conflicts, Post-traumatic stress disorder, Psychological first aid

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