

Levels of Psychological Stress and Social Isolation Among Palestinian Media Professionals Working in Palestinian Media Institutions During Covid-19 Pandemic



Oqab Jabali , Abed Alkarim Ayyoub , and Mohammad Suliaman

Abstract This study aimed to identify the level of psychological stress and social isolation among a sample of Palestinian media professionals working in Palestinian media institutions. Participants of the study incorporated (200) media professionals, aged between (60–25) years; they were selected using purposeful sampling. Two scales of psychological stress and social isolation were developed by the researchers. The results of the study showed that the level of psychological stress among the media professionals was high while the level of social isolation was medium due mainly to Israeli occupation and spread of Covid-19 pandemic. The study results also showed that there were no statistically significant differences at the level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the level of feeling psychological pressure and social isolation attributed to a number of demographic variables including age, marital status and years of experience.

Keywords Covid-19 pandemic · Psychological stress · Social isolation · Palestinian media professionals

1 Introduction

Psychological stress is related to many professions and fields especially those that entail coming into contact with individuals and following up on events and realities. The media profession is important as it is the fourth authority in society; it reveals facts, follows up on events and conveys them to public opinion; journalists should stand before their professional responsibilities while even if they are in a state of

O. Jabali (✉)

Faculty of Humanities, Language Center, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine
e-mail: oqab.jabali@najah.edu

A. A. Ayyoub

Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine
e-mail: ayyoub@najah.edu

M. Suliaman

Jordan University, Morogoro, Tanzania

tension and anxiety, which, by turn, may produce psychological pressures that accumulate over time. One of the reasons that result in existing pressures is the inability to separate the media professional life from the personal and social life especially during crises and epidemics or pandemics such as the current Covid-19. Conflict in the instructions issued to the media organizations may be another cause of more stressful situations that workers face in the media field [7].

The Palestinian media operates in a complex environment which affect its performance. The Israeli occupation constitutes one of the main obstacles that stand in the way of the Palestinian media cadres and prevent them from exercising their work freely. The occupation does not suffice with abusing journalists, it rather insists on violating the media freedoms and limiting their movement and communication with the outside world. This has impacted the media professionals and their performance negatively and made them unable to practice their work freely [2].

Another major hindrance that impacts media cadres negatively is the spread of Covid-19; it limited the mobility of most workers and employees and decreases their access to their job to the minimum [22]; it also caused many journalists to lose their jobs as in the case of An-Najah Broadcasting Channel (Nbc) and Ajyal Radio Network in Ramallah [16]. They felt more pressures and were pushed to live deep isolation beside the isolation caused by quarantine.

The nature of the work done by the media professionals dictates that they are often in the middle of the event and in the focus of the conflict, which makes them vulnerable to threats and dangers; it requires them to be on a high degree of alertness and they should be ready to work around the clock [10].

Psychological stress has different meanings for individuals, groups and professionals depending on their specializations and areas of interest. For psychologists, it is the psychological state that pushes the individual to a state of anxiety or distress and a feeling of discomfort and instability [4]. Sarafino [26] defines it as an event or group of events that the individual perceives as threatening and harmful to the extent that they make him/ her feel in a state of tension and instability; while Smither (2009) states that psychological stress as a physiological or psychological response that a person feels when being exposed to unpleasant events and situations. For [18] psychological stress is a disturbing psychological state for the individual that may make him/her feel tense and depressed and cause him/her a state of anxiety and disharmony.

The researchers believe that stress is a state of inequity especially when pressures exceed the human's ability to bear them. There are many sources that lead individuals to suffer from psychological stress. Duck [19] indicates that there are external sources that cause stress (e.g., family conflicts, financial and economic pressures, occupational such as working long hours, fluctuations and political events that afflict the Arab region and Palestine in particular). The internal sources may result from individual's suffering from psychological and health problems, the way of thinking and the way of interpreting events and situations [13]. Many theories explain psychological stress. Lazarus' theory considers that cognitive processes and the way in which the individual perceives situations and the way he interprets them is what causes

stress, while the psychoanalytic theory argues that the feeling of psychological pressure arises as a result of repressed instincts, motives, needs and desires. In Selye's theory, stress is a general response to multiple environmental events [14].

A lot of research was conducted the various types and levels of psychological stress among various sectors of professionals and workers including journalist (e.g., [1–3, 20, 21] other researchers investigated the level of burn-out and motivation among professionals [7, 11, 24]. All these studies found that pressure levels and burnout were somehow high and that burn-out is manifested in stress, dullness and lack of achievement. According to these studies, females experience more pressure and stress than males.

Psychological pressures may lead to an individual's feeling of social isolation which is a stressful experience related to lack of satisfaction of the need to belong to others and lack of social integration. Al-Rawajfa [8] defines social isolation as the extent to which the individual feels lonely and isolated or distant from them; it leads to the weakness of the social network to which the person belongs. Schaefer and Millman [27] argue that social isolation is an extreme pattern of disturbances in relations with the group, as the individual prefers to separate from others and remain alone most of the time due to circumstances that may be beyond his/her control. Maroldo [23] defines social isolation as the failure to participate in social situations in an appropriate and effective manner.

Social isolation greatly affects the personality of the individual and his/her relationship with social environment; it indicates a decrease in the individual's ability to effective social interaction. People who suffer from social isolation have lack of learning, social awareness, and cognitive growth; they tend to distrust others. Social isolation affects the individual at the personal and social levels. Many theories have explained the problem of social isolation. The psychoanalytic theory considers that the feeling of isolation and loneliness represents a state of repression of the surrounding experiences in the unconscious that was acquired during early childhood; the individual resorts to isolation in case s/he fails to obtain warmth and intimate relationships with others [17]. For the behavioral theorists social isolation is a learned habit from the surrounding environment; social learning theory sees that the individual's isolation behavior is caused by the failure to learn the most appropriate ways of dealing with people or the individual's lack of appropriate social skills [5].

The researchers believe that psychological stress and social isolation are linked to each other; both affect the human personality, especially the personality of the Palestinian media person. Normal people can adapt and coexist with others in natural relationships that enhance the level of psychological health of the individual. Avoiding effective communication leads the individual to engage in defensive and isolationist behavior. The loss of a sense of belonging and psychological security and the lack of clarity in the image of the future in front of individuals in society, especially the Palestinian media may result in psychological disorders.

Social isolation and seclusion was also investigated by researchers (e.g., [5, 6, 9, 15]). Most of these studies tackled different types of professionals rather than the media profession, they found that social isolation levels were medium among females

but high among males and that the unemployed feel more isolation than those with jobs. The current study is the first to investigate isolation among media cadres.

The state of alienation that Palestinian media professionals live in is attributed to the absence of a unified media body that brings them together under its umbrella and reflects the true picture of the current Palestinian situation due to the state of division and dispersion. The Palestinian territories have been subjected to many political, social and economic events that imposed many psychological pressures on media cadres as they do not receive sufficient attention and investigation. Palestinian media professionals are exposed to violations committed by the Israeli occupation which still practices its crimes within an organized and systematic policy to conceal the truth and silence mouths [12].

2 Statement of the Problem and Questions

The media profession is a profession full of psychological troubles especially in the Palestinian environment which abounds with risky and harsh events represented by incidents of martyrdom, Israeli atrocity and settles attacks. Most of these events impose new pressures on media cadres and institutions. The study's problem lies in identifying the level of psychological stress and its relationship to social isolation among a sample of media professionals working in media institutions operating in the Palestinian territories using a number of variables. Put simply, the current study aims to reveal the levels of psychological stress experienced by media professionals in the various media outlets operating in the Palestinian territories, and the extent of the impact of the variables (e.g., marital status, age, experience). The researchers meant to answer the following questions:

1. What are the levels of psychological stress and social isolation among media professionals working in media institutions operating in the Palestinian territories?
2. Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the level of psychological stress and social isolation among workers in media institutions attributed to the three variables?

3 Method and Procedure

The current study used the descriptive/ correlative approach. The study population consisted of all the (600) Palestinian media professionals; the study sample which included (200) media professionals whose ages ranged between (25–60) years was chosen purposefully due to the fact that it is cost-effective in time and cost and it helps choose the participants who are mostly more knowledgeable of the study phenomenon (Look at Table 1). Data was normally distributed and was analyzed

Table 1 Distribution of study sample based on the three variables

Variable		N
Age	25–40	118
	41–60	82
Total	200	
Marital status	Married	102
	Single	98
Total	200	
Experience	1–10 years	114
	11 years or more	86
Total	200	

using descriptive statistics; t-test was used to calculate the mean differences between the scores using SPSS version 26.

4 Study Results and Discussion

The results related to the first question.

“What are the levels of psychological stress and social isolation among media professionals working in media institutions operating in the Palestinian territories?” In order to answer this question, means and standard deviations of the sample members were calculated on the scale with its total degree. The mean was (3.88) and the standard deviation was (0.651). This means that the level of feeling psychological pressure among Palestinian journalists was high.

This can be attributed to the fact that Palestinian journalists are exposed daily to great psychological pressure and to a state of severe psychological and physical stress as a result of the nature of the work they do. A large number of media professionals is subjected to continuous, organized and systematic targeting by the Israeli occupation; it takes some of them checkpoints and interrogate them for long hours; it also prevents a large part of them from traveling in order to confuse them and deprive them of a sense of stability and the ability to perform their work completely freely. There is no sanctity or immunity for any journalist, place or person before the occupation and its security services. This is evident through the martyrdom of many journalists and the wounding of dozens of them.

Another important cause of psychological stress among journalists is the disruption of social life in the media's life; many media professionals suffer from continuous change in the social environment and geographical location. In addition, there is the pressure caused by the financial situation, economic instability, accumulation of needs, security threats, overwork, poor professional relations in some media institutions, and the absence of an official incubator, in the true sense of the word, to protect and defend media professionals and give them their rights and provide them with

their needs. The political division between the West Bank and Gaza has confused many media institutions and professionals; it also decreases their motivation. Such results are consistent with [2] and [7] which state that media cadres are exposed to stress and their motivation to do a better job decreases proportionally.

In terms of social isolation, the means (3.62) and standard deviations (0.189) of the sample members were calculated. This means that the level of social isolation of Palestinian media people was moderate; Palestinian media people watch many harsh and painful events on different television channels or through their direct contact with incidents of martyrdom, the funerals of the martyrs, and the continuous incursions into the various Palestinian villages, cities and camps. This creates a general feeling of fear and threat, accompanied by anxiety and anticipation of danger.

Some Palestinian journalists suffer from a feeling of alienation and confusion about their personal, social, academic and professional future, which ultimately leads to a state of helplessness and despair in life, dissatisfaction with life and psychological and social maladaptation that ultimately leads to a state of social isolation. This result is consistent with the results of the study [25], which indicated that individuals who were exposed to traumatic experiences in their lives had expectations of the future bearing a pessimistic view and an expectation of weak social relations in the future.

Social isolation among Palestinian media professionals can be explained by the life difficulties; it affects their existence, lives, affiliation and sense of the meaning of life. Many media professionals receive relatively little income and this leads them to working in other additional jobs in order to secure the harsh requirements of life especially if they are married and have children. They may resort to seclusion or to compensatory methods for direct social life such as social communication to compensate or enhance their social isolation. Such results are consistent with Crowe (2016) in that social support is one of the factors that promote mental health.

The results related to the second question:

“Are there statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the sense of psychological stress and social isolation among media professionals, attributed to the three variables?” To answer this question, the means and standard deviations of the study members’ estimates of the total score of the psychological stress and social isolation scale were calculated and a t-test was conducted. Table 2 shows the results:

The study results showed no statistically significant differences at the significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) in the sense of psychological stress and social isolation among media professionals, attributed to the three demographic variables.

The researchers attribute this result to the fact that the Palestinian media person, regardless of their age group, marital status, and experience, is subjected to the same conditions and the same policy of violation and prosecution. A large part of the media cadres is subject to targeting and arrest by the Israeli occupation; this makes the Palestinian media person to live in a state of psychological pressure which, by turn, prevents them from defining their future goals and achieving their dreams and ambitions. Suffering constant psychological stress helps isolate them from the social life.

Table 2 T-test of the average estimates of the study members in psychological stress and social isolation according to the three variables

Domain	Age	Mean	SD	t	p
Psychological stress	40–25	3.91	0.541	0.892	0.11
	60–41	3.85	0.492		
Social isolation	40–25	3.64	0.671	0.764	0.62
	60–41	3.59	0.645		
Domain	Marital status	Mean	SD	t	p
Psychological stress	Married	3.89	0.732	0.742	0.54
	Not-married	3.86	0.682		
Social isolation	Married	3.63	0.671	0.683	0.18
	Not married	3.61	0.547		
Domain	Marital status	Mean	SD	t	p
Psychological stress	Married	3.89	0.732	0.742	0.54
	Not-married	3.86	0.682		
Social isolation	Married	3.63	0.671	0.683	0.18
	Not married	3.61	0.547		

Moreover, the suffering experienced by the Palestinian journalist is one; it begins since the journalist joins the journalistic work and continues with until advanced years of his life. The researchers believe that the years of experience of the media person are not an indication of his enjoyment of psychological strength, but rather it depends on psychological construction, the ability to withstand difficulties and the extent of his awareness and belief in the justice of the issue.

5 Conclusion

The current study aimed at investigating levels of psychological stress and social isolation among Palestinian media professionals working in Palestinian media institutions based on a number of demographic variables. The main study findings showed that Palestinian media cadres feel too much stress which results in moderate levels of social isolation and seclusion. The researchers also found that the demographic variables were not influential even during crises and tough situations like the spread of covid-19; in other words, cadres' ages, marital status and experience did not yield statistically significant differences on the level of stress and social isolation among these cadres. Each person involved suffers the same type of stress which is mostly attributed to the Israeli occupation as well as the various life hardships that prevail in Palestine. It is axiomatic that when people get stressful, they tend to isolate themselves socially so that they feel better or reduce the negative impacts of these feelings i.e., stress and isolation, on their families and surroundings.

The interested authorities and agencies should spare no effort in handling this problem and find solutions so that these cadres carry out their mission the right way. Counselling and guidance are supposed to be present by media institutions to their cadres; financial support is also needed to be given to those who may be victims of Israeli occupation and its practices.

6 Recommendations

The researchers call for the need to:

1. Work hard to provide qualified psychologists and social workers for early detection of stressors and psychological problems that media professionals may encounter especially during pandemics such as Corona.
2. Work on building counseling and training programs specialized in the psychological field and concerned with rehabilitating journalists on how to deal with the psychological stress or pressures that they may face.
3. Work to promote the concept of social integration through socializing and networking with relevant institutions in order to secure the economic situation and achieve stability and social welfare for them.

References

Arabic References

1. Abu Al-Hossein, M.: Psychological stress among nurses working for the government and its relationship to self-efficacy. Master's thesis, College of Education, Islamic University, Gaza, Palestine (2010)
2. Abu Own, D.: Psychological pressures and its relationship with motivation and self-esteem among a sample of journalists after Gaza war. Master's thesis, Gaza University, Palestine (2014)
3. Ahmed, H.: The Impact of the israeli siege on the media in the Gaza strip. Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms, Ramallah, Palestine (2010)
4. Al-Farmawi, H., Abdullah, R.: Psychological Stress in Work and Life. Daar Al-Safa'a for Publishing and Distribution, Amman (2009)
5. Al-Fatalawi, A.: Social isolation among Iraqi refugees. *J. Arts Baghdad Univ.* **91**, 383–413 (2009)
6. Al-Harbi, M., Abdullah, H.: Efficiency of a counselling program based social isolation among primary school pupils. Education Study Institute, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia (2017)
7. Al-Qarni, S.: Media and self burn-out: a study of levels of occupational stress in Saudi media institutions. *J. King Saudi Univ.* **3**(2) (2004)
8. Al-Rawajfa, A.: The effect of a group counseling program on reducing the feeling of social isolation of a sample of students from the first secondary stage in Jordan. *J. Educ. Sci.* **12**, 15–43 (2004)

9. Al-Zain, M., Al-Shar'a, H.: The level of meaninglessness and social isolation among employed and unemployed persons in al-Jisa district: comparative study. *Jordanian Educ. J.* **2**(1), 213–240 (2017)
10. Al-Zeyoudi, M.: Sources of social isolation and burn-out among special education instructors in Karak Governorate based on some variables. *J. Damascus Univ.* **23**(2), 189–219 (2007)
11. Barakat, F.: Self bur-out among a sample of journalist working in Damascus in light of some variables. *J. Arab Univ. Union Educ. Psychol.* **12**(2) (2014)
12. Hammad, A.: Impact of Israeli Occupation on Mass Media in Gaza. Palestine Center for Media Development and Freedom, Ramallah (2010)
13. Ibrahim, A.: Psychology: its foundations and features. Dar Al Uloom: Riyadh (2003)
14. Jabareen, R., Banat, S.: Violence against women and its relationship to genderic thought and psychological stress in the Lower Galilee region. Master's thesis, Amman Arab University, College of Educational and Psychological Sciences, Jordan (2016)
15. Jbara, K.: The relationship between excessive use of internet and social isolation among students of education at Ha'el University. *J. Irbid Commun. Univ.* **19**(3) (2018)

Foreign References

16. Anadolu Agency: Corona ravages the Palestinian media (2021). <https://www.aa.com.tr/ar> (2012)
17. Capuzzi, D., Gross, D.R.: Introduction to the counseling profession. Routledge: New York (2012). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203120064>
18. Daivs, S.: The relationship between optimism, loneliness and death anxiety. *Bull. Psychon. Soc.* **30**(135–136) (2000)
19. Duck, S.: Human Relationships. Stage Publications, London (1999)
20. Feinstein, A.: The emotional health of war journalists. In: The Annual Conference of Journalists in Danger, Toronto (2001)
21. Hayes, C.: Walking mean streets: journalists and adaptation. In: The Annual Conference of Journalists in Danger, Toronto (2001)
22. International Labor Organization impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labour market in the occupied Palestinian territory: a forecasting model assessment. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_774731. Last accessed 2022/1/20
23. Maroldo, G.: Shyness and loneliness among college men and women. *Psychol. Rep.* **48**(3), 885–886 (1981). <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1981.48.3.885>
24. Reinardy, S.: Women newsrooms show signs of in newspaper burn out from. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/603030602/p633623_index. Last accessed 2022/1/13
25. Rialon, R.A.: A comparative analysis of the children's future orientation scale ratings of traumatized urban youth with and without posttraumatic stress disorder. Doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, New York, NY (2011)
26. Sarafino, E.P.: Health psychology: biopsychosocial interactions (4th Ed.). New York, NY, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc (2002)
27. Schaefer, C., Milman, H.: How to help children with common problems. Jason Aronson, Inc: England (1999)