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War-Related Stress and Identity Formulation in Youth: A Synthesis of Conflict and Displacement of the Middle East, Ukraine, Israel, And Refugee Camps

Abstract

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Keywords: War-Related Stress, Youth Identity, Trauma, Dislocation, Resilience, Secondary Data Analysis

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Abstract

This research synthesizes available evidence between the years 2015 and 2025 on the effect of war-related stress on identity development in adolescents and young adults living in conflict-ridden areas and in refugee settings, including in the Middle East (Gaza, Syria) and Ukraine, as well as Israel and refugee camps worldwide. Using a secondary data analysis approach, thematic synthesis was performed across peer-reviewed studies, dissertations, and institutional reports focusing on young people aged 12-25, who were exposed to violence or forced migration. Findings show that chronic exposure to experiences of war leads to a significant increase in the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation, which affects capacities that are essential for identity development. The study concludes on the proposition that identity development in youth affected by war, interacting with effects of trauma, sociocultural context, and resilience, is rather dynamic. Implications include providing culturally based, developmentally informed interventions.

Keywords:

War-Related Stress, Youth Identity, Trauma, Dislocation, Resilience, Secondary Data Analysis

Introduction

Armed conflicts are still affecting the psychological, social, and developmental aspects of young people in the world, so the topic of war-related stress is an important area of inquiry within the field of contemporary youth studies. Youth are uniquely vulnerable in war zones as they simultaneously face

the normative developmental tasks of adolescence - identity formation, socio-emotional maturation, and community integration - while at the same time being exposed to the pervasiveness of trauma, displacement, and instability (Frounfelker et al., 2019; Catani, 2018). These conditions are not random, and empirical evidence consistently

demonstrates that exposure to chronic violence, loss, and forced migration in the war-affected youth contributes to perpetually heightened levels of stress-related states known as post-traumatic stress, emotional dysregulation, and lasting psychological distress (Khamis, 2019; Reed et al., 2012; Serdiuk et al., 2025). Such conditions result in acute interruptions to the developmental processes by which adolescents try to construct a coherent sense of themselves.

War-related trauma has been well-documented in young populations in several modern-day conflict areas such as Gaza, Syria, Ukraine, and Israel. Studies coming from the Gaza Strip show that the psychological suffering of students and the lack of resiliency in their identity are grave effects of repeated exposure to bombardment, displacement, and loss (Arjan & Qtoof, 2025; Hamamra et al., 2025). Similar tendencies have been observed for Palestinian youth, as long-term trauma causes lasting mental health struggles and lowered coping levels for children and teenagers, as well as susceptibility to post-traumatic stress disorder (Abudayya et al., 2023; Matani, 2024). Research on Ukrainian and Syrian adolescents further discusses the effect of war on psychological welfare and developmental stability, social functioning, and supports the interpretation of war trauma exposure and compromised identity development (Guo, 2025; Hashemi & Mahmoudzadeh, 2025). Evidence from the war in Russia-Ukraine also illuminates the increased risk of developing a mental disorder like post-traumatic stress disorder and feelings of ongoing psychological stress among young adults who were directly exposed to violence or displacement (Serdiuk et al., 2025; Melnyk et al., 2025).

Beyond immediate psychological damage, war conditions also interfere with the ability of young people to build stable identities, particularly in situations of migration, acculturation, and social marginalization. Identity challenges are especially strong among refugee and displaced youth who are required to negotiate between multiple cultural, social, and linguistic environments while dealing with unresolved trauma (Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Keles et al., 2018; Khawaja & Schweitzer, 2024). Studies have indicated that displacement has often triggered identity confusion, ethnic identity crisis, and vocational identity threats that make the

process of identity formation more fragile and conflict-ridden than for the non-refugee peers (Oppedal et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2018; Zettl et al., 2022). Multiethnic youth living in conflict-affected regions, such as in Israel, are similarly confronted with a conflicting demand on their identity and must develop coping strategies to deal with such opposite attachments to community, culture, and nation (Malul & Sokar, 2025; Kineret & Shirley, 2025).

Unaccompanied minors often face turning points and meaning-making processes substantially different from those experienced by non-refugee youth as they try to integrate past trauma with new sociocultural realities (Andersson et al., 2021; Dybdahl et al., 2021). Narrative and storytelling-based research has also disclosed youth from refugee backgrounds in negotiating their identities through the processes of personal meaning construction, belonging renegotiation, and survival and transition experience articulation (Abkhezr et al., 2018; Abkhezr et al., 2020; Kendrick et al., 2022). Even after resettlement, youth still struggle with discrimination issues, fragmented self-concepts, and the enduring impacts of trauma, hindering their well-being and diets in life while inhibiting their social integration (McGregor et al., 2015; Thommessen et al., 2015; Veronese et al., 2021). Thus, identity formation among war-affected youth is both a developmental task and a coping mechanism that is influenced by environmental stressors, cumulative in nature, before, during, and after conflict.

Recent analyses refer to youth mental health being in a global state of crisis exacerbated by living in war, and in an environment of state political instability and forced migration (McGorry et al., 2025). For young people "living through conflict," identities are intertwined with the tasks of survival, adaptation, and resilience building. However, according to psychosocial models of trauma, some interventions can offset the effects of trauma on developmental outcomes, including youth readiness programs or community-based support (Newnham et al., 2015; Panter-Brick et al., 2018). However, literature also refers to considerable variability in the response of young people to war-related stress. A range of issues, such as family support, ties to communities, cultural identity, and economic stability, influence not only mental

health but also identity consolidation pathways during and after conflict (Kuzmin et al., 2025; Chorna et al., 2025; Aloka et al., 2025; Hazer & Gredeback, 2023). As a result, any understanding of the process of identity formation in youth affected by war must involve a comprehensive analysis of psychological, social, and cultural processes operating in high-risk environments.

Given the persistence of troubles in today's actual conflicts, Gaza and Ukraine are just two examples, most notably from ongoing refugee crises, of the unresolved problem of the role that war-related stress plays in identity formation in youth, which has to date remained understudied, particularly through secondary data analyses that synthesize large bodies of empirical evidence. Existing research has shown robust links between trauma exposure, feelings of well-being, and processes of identity formation.

Rationale of the Study

Armed conflict remains one of the most disruptive global forces that impacts the lives of millions of young people. While there is a large body of research on the psychological, emotional, and developmental consequences of war exposure, there is still relatively little integrative understanding of how war-related stress, in particular, influences identity formation in adolescence and early adulthood. Identity development is a core task of development in youth, and exposure to trauma, processes of displacement, and sociopolitical instability may significantly disrupt the accumulation of a stable sense of self. However, oftentimes, current research focuses only on mental health outcomes, resilience, or symptoms of trauma, and disengagement relates to the development of identity processes across different contexts of conflict.

Furthermore, youths affected by war are heterogeneous populations, as we can find youth who remain in the war situation, those who migrate or seek asylum, and those who go through resettlement in a sociocultural context different from what they were accustomed to. Each group has specific forms of stress unique to their group, which interact with identity development in different ways. However, the fragmentation of the existing literature makes it hard to draw any comprehensive conclusions about cross-context

patterns and shared developmental challenges. A secondary data analysis approach enables the production of syntheses of empirical inquiries from various settings - Gaza, Syria, Ukraine, Israel, and global contexts (refugee camps) - to provide a global and more complex understanding of the role of war-related stress on trajectories of identities.

Additionally, there is a growing awareness in the world by policymakers, educators, mental health practitioners, and humanitarian actors that we need developmentally-informed interventions that address not only symptoms of trauma, but also conflicts about identity and disruption too. Without such insights, existing psychosocial programs might fail to address the needs of the war-affected youth in the long-term developmental needs. This study is thus needed to fill empirical gaps, guide specific interventions, and add to the global discourse on youth development in conflict settings. Understanding the impact of war-related stress on identity formation is critical to the provision of culturally sensitive, contextually grounded, and sustained support mechanisms that facilitate young populations in becoming more resilient and developing positive identities despite the risks of marginalization.

Research Objectives

- To identify a synthetic body of research on the psychological, emotional, and social consequences of war-related stress in youth in various settings of wars and conflicts.
- To explore gaps in the existing literature and suggest areas in which future research and intervention development might be conducted with respect to the process of youth identity formation in conflict situations.

Literature Review:

Constructing Identity Formation in Young People

Identity formation is a key developmental task in adolescence and emerging adulthood and involves the integration of the personal, social, cultural, and workable components of the self (Zettl et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2018). Eriksonian models focus on the need to balance exploration and commitment in various areas, such as values, beliefs, role in society, and identification with groups. However,

individuals experiencing stress related to war are at risk of facing often distressing developmental discontinuities that are barriers to normative identity development (McGorry et al., 2025; Kineret & Shirley, 2025). Trauma, displacement, and sociopolitical instability bring doubt, danger, and loss, leading to either fragmented or conflicting concepts of self-exploration and reliance on maladaptive coping skills (Malul & Sokar, 2025; Abudayya et al., 2023).

Narrative approaches also imply that identity is not only a process within any person, but it is established socially through narrative, belongingness, and identity in the community networks (Abkhezr et al., 2018; Chen and Schweitzer, 2019). In the case of the youth who are affected during the war situation, these narrative processes are usually interrupted by their own effort to save their identity, based on many possibilities of meaning creation and social inclusion, including emotional support. This twin conceptualization- that conceptualization of development as well as social- provides me with a certain background in explaining how a stress related to war can influence or alter the identity of a youth.

Psychological Effects of War-Related Stress

The literature on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation is all common findings among both conflict-zone and displaced populations (Serdiuk et al., 2025; Khamis, 2019; Chorna et al., 2025). For instance, Ukrainian and Syrian adolescents who have been exposed to extended periods of violence are more likely to report higher levels of psychological difficulty and hindered developmental functioning than peer groups that do not live in conflict (Guo, 2025). Similar trends have been reported in grants & sixth-prize amendments, Gazan in terms of a higher-than-normal prevalence with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as being trauma-related stress and social-emotional difficulties as a result of ongoing exposure to military aggression (Arjan & Qtoof, 2025; Hamamra et al., 2025; Abudayya et al., 2023).

Beyond the acute trauma itself, experienced from wars, the social and academic developmental

process is disrupted. Othman (2025) calls out that the newcomer students entering the schools in the US after experiencing war have difficulties in the aspects of social integration, emotional regulation, and even their academic performance, demonstrating the impact of a long-term effect of conflict on youth function. Additionally, Kuzmin et al. (2025) point to the fact that crisis and instability of employment during wartime exacerbate the stress and thereby further limit opportunities to positively develop identity. These findings taken together highlight that the psychological burden of war is multidimensional, affecting cognitive, emotional, and social capacities necessary for the normal development of an identity.

War-Related Trauma and Disruptions to Identity

Identity disruption in war-affected youth often arises as a result of the interplay between the exposure of the individual to trauma parameters and their developmental vulnerability. Research has shown that repetitive traumatic stresses of violence, displacement, and loss can undermine the cognitive ability of adolescents to form comprehensible concepts of self and negotiate social roles (Malul & Sokar, 2025; Kineret & Shirley, 2025). In multiethnic or refugee populations of young people, this is complicated by conflicting cultural, national, and family expectations (Zettl et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2018).

Narrative and qualitative studies show that youth are often in a state of internal conflict between maintaining connection with their cultural origins and adapting to the new sociocultural environment (Abkhezr et al., 2020; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Khawaja & Schweitzer, 2024). Identity may also be affected by discrimination, social marginalization, or disruption of schooling arrangements, leading to increased vulnerability to identity crises and maladaptive coping processes. From evidence provided from Gaza, Israel, and Ukraine, we know that the resilience of the self lies in supportive family structures, peer groups, and access to psychosocial interventions (Arjan & Qtoof, 2025; Malul & Sokar, 2025; Melnyk et al., 2025).

War-related identity disruption is not all negative; some studies document post-traumatic

growth where youth progress in the adaptive coping mechanisms, heightened social awareness, and emergent resilience over navigating the adversity (Hashemi & Mahmoudzadeh, 2025; Kineret & Shirley, 2025). However, these best outcomes are contextually contingent and mediated frequently by the social, cultural, and institutional supports.

The Role of Displacement and Migration

Displacement is a crucial factor of complexity in the formation of identities. Refugee and migrant youth are dealing with multiple transitions at once: loss of homeland, separation from families, and integration in unfamiliar sociocultural systems (Andersson et al., 2021; Dybdahl et al., 2021). The studies indicate that the unaccompanied minors, e.g., are in a condition of dangerous uncertainty of self, particularly when deprived of the principles of mentoring and societal embrace (Thommassen et al., 2015; Oppedal et al., 2022).

Digital storytelling, narrative interventions, and structured psychosocial programs have been identified to facilitate identity reconstruction and meaning-making, reducing the relevance of helping create platforms of a sense of meaning and resilience-building (Kendrick et al., 2022; Abkhezr et al., 2018). Other studies regarding conflict-affected adolescents also state that adolescent identity formation in displacement is actually a process that is profound in nature and facilitated by peer groups, host communities, and methods applied to cultural adaptation (Mattelin et al., 2024; Chen and Schweitzer, 2019).

Protective Factors and Resilience of Youth Faced by War

In spite of the risks of being stressed due to war, there is an accumulating literature that identifies protective factors that foster identity consolidation and enhance psychological resilience against stress.

The positive influence of social support in terms of relatives, peers, and school is always observed on the psychosocial level (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Keles et al., 2018). The opportunities to express yourself in a narrative way also have a positive effect at the psychosocial level (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Keles et al., 2018). Engagement in community-based programming, vocational training, and culturally responsive programming interventions can also help not only to promote agency and positive identity trajectories but also to promote them (Wehrle et al., 2018; Newnham et al., 2015).

The process of resiliency is not an individual characteristic, but rather the process by which the youth use the available resources to plan how to cope with adversity. One such study is that of an intervention that leads to self-efficacy, peer cohesion, and emotional regulation, which can mediate the influence of trauma on identity formation (Arjan & Qtoof, 2025; Malul & Sokar, 2025; Melnyk et al., 2025). Since this is the case, sufficient conceptualization of identity development in young people impacted by war should include factors that can disrupt it and protective measures due to the complexity and delicacy of the interaction between trauma, context, and adaptation.

The literature unequivocally confirms the monumental impact of the stress associated with war on identity formation among young people regarding their psychological well-being, social lives, and development patterns. Exposure to trauma, dislocation, and sociopolitical instability can lead to disruption of identity, emotional dysregulation, and chronic vulnerability, at least for individuals from refugee or multiethnic settings. However, resilience, narrative engagement, social support, and culturally context cognizant intervention provide the way for adaptive identity reconstruction.

Table 1

The Literature Review Synthesis Grid

Thematic Area	Representative Studies	Core Insights	Implications for Current Study
1. Psychological Impact of War on Youth	Arjan & Qtoof (2025). Guo (2025); Serdiuk et al. (2025); Melnyk et al.	War exposure is consistently linked to increased PTSD, anxiety, depression,	Establishes a foundational understanding of how conflict undermines

Thematic Area	Representative Studies	Core Insights	Implications for Current Study
1. General Overview of War-Related Stress and Identity	(2025); Chorna et al. (2025)	emotional dysregulation, and developmental disruption.	emotional stability and identity formation.
2. Identity Development Under Conflict Conditions	Malul & Sokar (2025); Hashemi & Mahmoudzadeh (2025); Kineret & Shirley (2025); Aloka et al. (2025)	Identity becomes fragmented due to fear, instability, and sociocultural pressures, but some youth show resilience or strengthened identity through coping.	Highlights identity as a multidimensional construct influenced by trauma and sociocultural systems.
3. Displacement, Acculturation & Refugee Adjustment	Othman (2025); Andersson et al. (2021); Keles et al. (2018); Reed et al. (2012); Khawaja & Schweitzer (2024)	Displacement introduces challenges to belonging, self-esteem, and cultural identity; acculturation stress predicts identity confusion and mental health problems.	Demonstrates relevance of social context and belonging for stable identity formation.
4. Narrative Meaning-Making & Coping	Hamamra et al. (2025); Abkhezr et al. (2018, 2020); Dybdahl et al. (2021); Kendrick et al. (2022)	Narrative expression (storytelling, reflection, digital narratives) helps youth process trauma, reconstruct identity, and build agency.	Provides rationale for interpreting identity development through meaning-making frameworks.
5. Mental Health Interventions & Resilience Factors	Panter-Brick et al. (2018); Newnham et al. (2015); Veronese et al. (2021)	Psychosocial programs enhance coping, emotional regulation, self-efficacy, and identity stability.	Supports grounding for recommending mental health and resilience-focused interventions.
6. Sociocultural & Vocational Identity Dimensions	Kuzmin et al. (2025); Wehrle et al. (2018); Zettl et al. (2022); McGregor et al. (2015)	Conflict influences career aspirations, vocational identity, and social functioning, often creating uncertainty and identity threat.	Shows broader social-developmental consequences of conflict relevant to identity research.

Research Methodology

This study attempts a secondary data analysis to explore the influence of war-related stress on identity formation of the youth by synthesizing existing empirical research conducted in multiple conflict situations. Secondary data analysis allows integration of the results obtained from diverse data gathering methods to provide a wider understanding of the patterns, risk factors, and protection mechanisms without the logistical and ethical issues involved in collecting data in conflict regions and zones. The data sources for this study are peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and institutional reports found between 2015 and 2025 on youth populations

affected by armed conflicts in Gaza, Syria, Ukraine, Israel, and refugee or resettlement contexts within nations worldwide. Studies were selected according to some specific inclusion criteria: (1) focus on adolescents or young adults, aged approximately between 12-25 years; (2) direct exposure to war-related stress, trauma, displacement, overexposure or forced migration; (3) measuring or discussing aspects of identity formation, social-emotional development, or psychosocial adjustment; (4) daily imperative methodology, including quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods designs. Studies were eliminated from review if they exclusively investigated adults over the age of 25, did not have empirical evidence, or focused on conflict-affected

populations with no viewpoint on youth identity or youth developmental outcomes. Analytical approach of the study: authoritative, also critical, methodological strategy, systematic review of results (thematic and comparative analysis), defining common trends, deviations, and influences (contextual). In this way, psychological, social, and cultural elements of identity formation in war-affected youth: weaknesses and resilience processes could be incorporated. The combination of results of numerous populations under conflict conditions makes it an option that brings some means of complete documentation and comprehensive knowledge of the impact war-related stress has on the paths of identity development among young people, as well as the understanding of the possible points of intervention, policy, and future studies.

Data Analysis

The main aim of the secondary data analysis in this research study was to use a systematic and multi-step process to ensure rigor, transparency, and relevance in the synthesis of findings of the sampled literature. On the first step, all the eligible studies were thoroughly reviewed, and the essential information about study context, sample characteristics, war-related exposures, and identity-related outcomes, as well as psychosocial measurements were extracted. A coding scheme was established based on the study purpose, and such broad themes as psychological effects of war, a sense of identity disruption, coping mechanisms, resilience determinants, and contextual factors (e.g., cultural, social, and environmental indicators) were identified. All of the studies were then coded in these areas so that it would be possible to see recurrence patterns, convergence areas, and areas of divergence between populations and conflict environments.

A synthesis strategy was employed after coding to synthesize qualitative and quantitative data, which involved the use of a thematic synthesis strategy. In the case of qualitative studies, narratives, interviews, and focus group data were examined in order to feature recurrent experiences, identity facing difficulties, and coping mechanisms cited by young people. Reviewed quantitative studies identified statistical correlations, risk, and protective factors between war-related stressors

and identity outcomes, including correlations, risk factors, and protective factors. Cross-contextualizing compared analysis was taken to identify similarities and differences in the lives of youth living in the circumstances of conflict zones, displaced and resettled populations of refugees. Age, gender, ethnicity, and culture were considered to be attentive without relying on simplistic thinking about trajectories of identity formation.

Lastly, synthesized results were conceptualized within a developmental and psychosocial theory, and the conceptualization centered on comprehending interactions between the war stress and normative identity formation and resilience mechanisms. This analytical research process was able to not only map out the available evidence base in a comprehensive way, but also permit the research gaps and policy- and intervention-implications to be identified, as well as future research. Combining systematic coding, thematic synthesis, and cross-contextual comparison, the study guarantees that conclusions over the impact of war-related stress on youth identity formation have an evidence base as well as are context-specific.

Although this study is based on secondary data analysis and involves no direct interaction with human participants, issues of ethics still constitute a critical part of the process to ensure integrity, transparency, and responsible use of research that has already been conducted. The main ethical issue is the correct representation and interpretation of the information from the original studies, as severe misrepresentation could inadvertently cause harm to the manipulated populations under study, and/or extend stigmatization of war-affected youth. To address this, all the selected studies were checked carefully to check the context details, methodology in rigor, and credibility of the findings. Only peer-reviewed journal articles, doctoral dissertations, and reliable institutional reports were considered so that the likelihood of bias or unreliable information was minimized.

Confidentiality and privacy, being at the core of research ethics, were taken into account despite the fact that it is secondary data. Individual-level participant data were not accessible, and analyses were based on aggregated results and outcomes reported; the identities of the individuals in the original studies were protected. Furthermore,

proper acknowledgement of all sources through accurate referencing and adherence to academic referencing standards protects all rights of intellectual property.

Another aspect of ethics related to sensitivity to subject matter; war-related stress, trauma, and identity disruption are sensitive topics. The study is sensitive in its presentation of findings without sensationalism and focuses on resilience and ways to cope as well as risks and challenges. Additionally, the implications and recommendations as a result of the analysis are formulated in ways that are youth-centered and aimed at the welfare and empowerment of those most impacted by youth and children, and the ensuing well-being and empowerment of those affected by war, and in line with the principles of beneficence and social responsibility.

Finally, transparency in methodological reporting was maintained to enable replication and critical scrutiny, i.e., research accountability fulfillment. By following these principles of ethics, such as accuracy, confidentiality, sensitivity, and transparency, this study seeks to ensure that this secondary analysis of data provides a responsible contribution to the understanding of the scholarly literature on the use of war-related stress and identity formation in youth, while not impeding upon the dignity and privacy of the populations they represent.

Findings and Discussion

This research presents the findings of the secondary data analysis regarding the impact of war-related stress on identity formation among the youth. Results are synthesized thematically to specifically identify psychological implications, identity disruption, coping mechanisms, factors indicating resilience, and variations in and across the population subjected to conflict. The discussion gathers evidence on a plethora of different studies where comparisons are made between youth living in conflict situations, displaced populations, and settled refugees. This method allows approaching the understanding of the response of stresses associated with the war experience to identity formation very closely and situating the results within the framework of developmental, psychosocial, and sociocultural determinants.

Psychological Effects of War-Related Stress

The discussion renders the thesis that there are no differences in the harmful psychological effects of being exposed to armed conflict on young people. Reports on Gaza, Syria, and Ukraine show that the symptoms of trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation, have a high prevalence among adolescents and young adults (Serdiuk et al., 2025; Guo, 2025; Arjan and Qtoof, 2025). These psychological issues lead to consequences on attention, social functioning, and academic performance, which are of paramount importance to normative identity formation (Melnyk et al., 2025; Othman, 2025). Interestingly, the cumulative effect of chronic trauma exposure appears to be great, and the exemplary changes keep ever-intensifying as provided by the youth with repeated or more prolonged exposure to violence, with disturbance in emotional regulation as well as in self-concept expansion in a broader context (Hashemi and Mahmoudzadeh, 2025).

Psychological consequences are also discussed with reference to the interaction of the individual and the environment. As an example, economic insecurity, whose effects are damaging to the education of young people and replacement of their families, exacerbates the effects of stressful conditions, making identity formation within broader social and structural frames (Kuzmin et al., 2025; Chorna et al., 2025). The findings are thus a major finding of how interventions are required to focus on mental health and identity development within various and multifaceted environments and consider the multiple contexts of stressors in the war environment.

Identity Disruption and Development Alterations

This is often littered with fragmentation or instability in the sense of self of the youth as they contend with more than one cultural, family, and social expectations that enter into conflicts (Malul & Sokar, 2025; Zettl et al., 2022). Displaced and refugee youth face further difficulties in navigating an identity in multiple sociocultural contexts and often face ethnic identity crises or uncertainty about jobs (Oppedal et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2018).

Narrative and qualitative research show that disrupted identity formation manifests an uncertainty in the context of personal goals, social roles, and belonging. Adolescents may experience conflicting feelings between maintaining relationships to their home culture and adjusting to host cultures, which may translate into emotional distress, social withdrawal, and/or diminished agency (Abkhezr et al., 2020; Chen & Schweitzer, 2019; Khawaja & Schweitzer, 2024). This shows that the process of identity formation does not constitute only an internal developmental phenomenon, but a relationship and context-dependent phenomenon, regarding which social inclusion, recognition, and the provision of appropriate supportive networks have a strong influence.

Coping Strategies and Processes of Resilience

In the literature, however, there is much evidence of the ways of resiliency and adaptive identity reconstruction despite these challenges. With the help of specific coping strategies (narrative storytelling, peer support, community programs, and meaning-making practices) (Abkhezr et al., 2018; Kendrick et al., 2022; Kineret and Shirley, 2025), youths address the issue. Family social support, peer support, and institutional support appear to be a rather stable protective factor in alleviating the adverse impacts of trauma on identity consolidation (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Keles et al., 2018).

Resilience is particularly conspicuous among the cohort of youth subject to guided interventions directed at the development of psychosocial adjustment, emotional regulation, and agency (Newnham et al., 2015; Melnyk et al., 2025). Even some studies indicate post-traumatic growth, that is, the ability of teenagers to demonstrate improved levels of social awareness, adaptive coping skills, and new self-efficacy in the presence of negative experiences (Hashemi and Mahmoudzadeh, 2025; Kineret and Shirley, 2025). These results highlight the concept that identity formation in youth affected by war is the process that is generated by risk factors and protective factors and cannot be reduced to a deterministic consequence of exposure to trauma.

Cross-Contextual Comparisons

Youth living in active conflict areas, such as Gaza and Ukraine, suffer in greater forms of acute psychological distress and in greater forms of tolerated identity disruption than those among resettled refugee groups who experience problems often mediated by forming adaptation processes and accessing social support (Arjan & Qtoof, 2025; Guo, 2025; Andersson et al., 2021). However, the displaced and resettled youth are faced with unique identity challenges around cultural integration, discrimination, and stress of acculturation (Oppdal et al., 2022; Dybdahl et al., 2021). Multiethnic youth in Israel, for instance, have to deal with a continual negotiation between conflicting cultural identities, and thus it highlights the role of the sociopolitical context on the trajectories of identity (Malul & Sokar, 2025).

These cross-contextual comparisons show that although war-related stress is a Pan-African threat to youth identity formation, specific manifestations of disruption and coping with resiliency are dependent on the environmental, cultural, and policy-related factors. As a result, interventions must be fit for purpose to address both trauma-related mental health needs and sociocultural dimensions of identity development within a given context.

Integration with the Development and Psychosocial Theory

The findings converge with the developmental and sociological theories about identity formation as a complicated interaction between internal processes as well as external social conditions (Zettl et al., 2022; Wehrle et al., 2018). The stress related to war may result into imbalance of exploration/commitment ratios, postponement of development milestones, and susceptibility to mental trauma. Concurrently, defensive forces that influence adaptive identity development, such as supportive relationships and narrative sense-making, may support an adaptive developmental process of identity. This dual position is concerned with the idea that identity development in young people affected by war never follows a straightforward process, but rather a dynamic process of anxious and resilient negotiation with adversity.

Key Findings

In short, the analysis of secondary data reveals that the effect of war-related stress is tremendous on identity development in the youth because it interferes with psychological well-being, social integration, and development processes. The active conflict zones experience identity disruption at the most intense levels, and culture adaptation and belonging are problematic for resettled populations and displaced populations. The effects are mitigated through coping strategies, resilience processes, and social support to highlight the possibility of positive identity reconstruction in the face of adversity. The patterns of cross-contextuality suggest the need for culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate interventions to deal with both the identity and trauma needs. The findings provide a broad platform on the aspects of policy and practice, which can be further researched to enable the holistic growth of the youth in war-torn societies.

Conclusion

In this study, a secondary data analysis of the existing literature was done to test the effects of stress related to the war on identity formation in young people. The results emphasize the fact that being exposed to armed conflict, displacement, and the societal and political turmoil significantly disturbs the psychological health and self-identity formation of adolescents and young adults. In active conflict regions, the youth have been reported to exhibit a high level of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional dysregulation, which collectively lead to immaturity in the ability to build a coherent sense of self (Serdiuk et al., 2025; Arjan and Qtoof, 2025). Other issues, such as acculturation, cultural adaptation, and social integration, are affecting displaced and resettled youth, and these are the issues that may complicate the issues of uncertain identity and failure to attain developmental milestones (Oppdal et al., 2022; Khawaja and Schweitzer, 2024).

Notwithstanding the weaknesses, the analysis highlights the truth that the identity-making process of war-affected young people is not an experience of mere disruption. Social support

provided by family, peers, and educational institutions, narrative sense-making, and designed psychotherapeutic interventions are among the aspects of protection that play a vital role in assisting in developing resilience and identity reconstruction in an adaptive way (Panter-Brick et al., 2018; Kineret and Shirley, 2025). Also, contextual factors that include the cultural setting, policy, and accessibility of educational and community-based resources can influence the degree to which identity is disorganized and the ability to attain favourable development prospects. In general, the findings indicate that identity development in the war-impacted young population is a dynamic process, which is contingent on the interplay between trauma, sociocultural context, and mechanisms of resilience, and necessitates multidimensional and context-specific interventions.

Recommendations

To enable identity building and recover the effects of the trauma, mental health and psychosocial programs to treat mental illness should consider cultural, social, and developmental aspects. The interventions must consider the experiences of the youngsters living in conflict zones, displaced ones, or resettled refugees. Policies/programs must be aimed at family cohesion, peer group, and possibilities of mentorship. School programs and neighborhood programs can provide a space of belonging, socialization, and peer education, which are the main elements in the cohesion of identity. There is a need for programs that are related to the special problems of acculturation, discrimination, and cultural adaptation. Vocational training, mentoring, and education may be useful to reduce identity-related stressors and maximize chances of positive development.

Further longitudinal as well as comparative research is needed to examine more about the long-term trajectories of identity development in youth affected by the war. Research is needed on the interplay between trauma, resilience, and sociocultural context, and the effectiveness of narrative and psychosocial interventions in various conflict settings.

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