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Resilience in Times of Crisis: The Psychological and Educational Impact on School-Aged Students

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Abstract: Students are among the most vulnerable populations during periods of crisis, including war, economic collapse, and pandemics. These events extend beyond academic disruption, significantly affecting students' emotional and social well-being. Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural changes are commonly reported, particularly among youth living in conflict-affected areas or economically disadvantaged households. This review examines the consequences of crises on school-aged students across both local and global contexts. A structured search strategy was employed to retrieve peer-reviewed articles published between 2005 and 2024 from databases including PubMed, ERIC, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The selected studies were thematically categorized into three primary domains: pandemics, economic hardship, and war-related trauma. The review emphasizes the identification of common psychological outcomes, contributing factors, and resilience strategies implemented at the school and community levels. The findings highlight the urgent need for early interventions, trauma-informed pedagogical approaches, mental health support programs, coping strategies, and emotional regulation skills. By examining the interplay between crisis-induced stress and student support mechanisms, this review seeks to inform educators, policymakers, and practitioners in their efforts to foster resilience and promote academic recovery.

Keywords: *Crisis and education, psychological distress in youth, resilience strategies, student's mental health, student-teacher relationship.*

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Introduction

The mental health of school-aged children is significantly influenced by large-scale crises, including armed conflict, economic instability, and global pandemics. These events disrupt the structure and stability of daily life, generating prolonged stress that increases the likelihood of anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and behavioral disturbances (Park & Lee, 2023; Shankar & Park, 2016). A growing body of research highlights the gravity of these impacts, emphasizing the urgent need for well-formulated interventions and sustained psychological support tailored to the needs of young learners.

This review is framed by the primary research question: In what ways do crises influence the performance and psychological well-being of school-aged students, and which intervention strategies are most effective in fostering resilience within such contexts? The central hypothesis posits that exposure to crisis conditions has a detrimental impact on students' mental health and educational outcomes, impairing both emotional stability and educational progress. The principal aim of this review is to critically examine existing literature from diverse regional and international contexts to assess the academic and psychological consequences of crises on school-aged youth. Specifically, the review seeks to (1) identify how various types of crises contribute to mental health challenges among students, (2) evaluate the role of schools in preventing or alleviating these effects, and (3) investigate evidence-based strategies that enhance resilience. These strategies include the implementation of mindfulness-based practices, adoption of trauma-informed pedagogical approaches, and promotion of adaptive coping techniques. Through this synthesis, the review intends to guide future research and policy by reinforcing the foundation of mental health provision within educational systems during and following times of crisis.

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Literature Review

Neurobiological Impact of Crises

The behavioral changes observed in students during times of crisis are intrinsically linked to neurological alterations induced by chronic stress. Prolonged stress disrupts the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, resulting in elevated cortisol levels that significantly impact brain regions essential for learning and behavior regulation (Masten & Narayan, 2012). When the human body encounters stress, it activates a physiological response by releasing the hormone cortisol. Cortisol, a hormone essential for survival, ensures that critical functions such as breathing and temperature regulation receive the necessary energy by directing glucose, the body's primary energy source, to these vital areas (Power of Patients, 2023.). However, as cortisol prioritizes essential functions, it reduces the amount of glucose available to brain regions involved in higher order thinking, decision making, and memory specifically, the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex. The figure below illustrates the locations of the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex, highlighting how chronic stress affects these areas (Hardy, 2016).

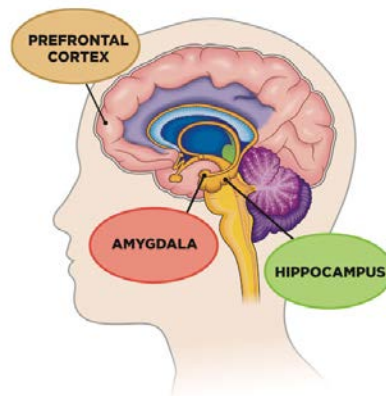


Figure 1. Brain Regions Affected by Chronic Stress (Hardy, 2016)

Research indicates that chronic cortisol exposure can impair hippocampal function, leading to difficulties in memory retention and cognitive processing (Masten & Narayan, 2012). The hippocampus, which plays a crucial role in learning and memory consolidation, and the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions and decision-making, both exhibits decreased functionality under chronic stress. Other parts of the brain suffer during the stress response. The amygdala, known as the 'fear promoting region', becomes overactive, heightening feelings of anxiety and stress. Such neurobiological changes hinder students' ability to concentrate, retain new information, and regulate emotional responses. For instance, D'Angiulli et al. (2024) highlight that children from low-income environments often experience greater challenges with attention, memory, and emotional regulation, directly correlating these difficulties with stress-induced brain alterations. This heightened stress response makes emotional memories more dominant than factual ones, thereby complicating the learning process.

The figure below illustrates the roles of the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex during the stress response. The hippocampus is associated with learning and memory, the amygdala regulates emotional responses and fear, while the prefrontal cortex is involved in working memory, self-control, and decision-making. Chronic stress can impair the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex while over activating the amygdala, leading to heightened emotional reactivity, impaired memory formation, and reduced ability to regulate behaviour and decision-making.

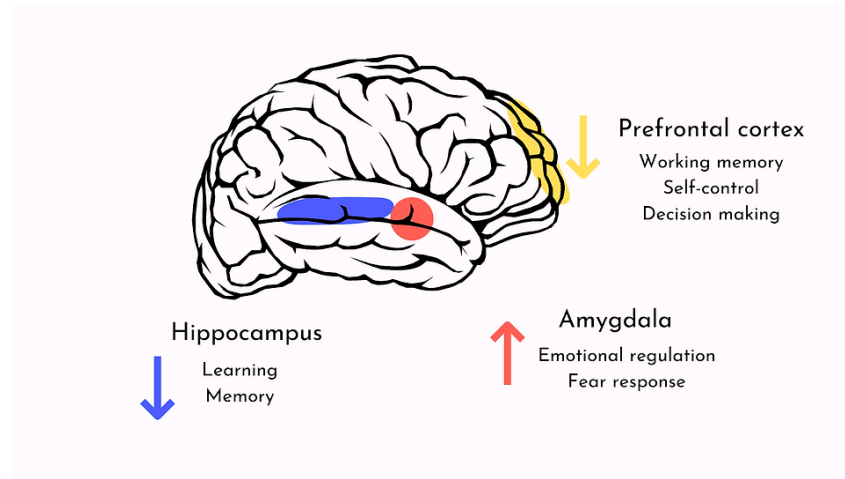


Figure 2. Brain Regions and Their Functions During Stress Response (Power of Patients, 2023)

Continuous stress leads to prolonged activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, increasing cortisol levels and creating a persistent cycle of physiological arousal (Power of Patients, 2023). Over time, this contributes to allostatic load, the cumulative strain on the body caused by chronic stress. As this burden grows, the body's ability to maintain balance weakens, resulting in impaired cognitive performance, emotional regulation, and adaptive functioning (Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013). Among students, particularly those facing poverty or trauma, chronic stress has been linked to weakened working memory and reduced self-regulation capacity. However, Evans and Fuller-Rowell (2013) found that students with stronger self-regulation skills demonstrate resilience, allowing them to maintain learning performance despite elevated stress levels. Gonzales (2021) further highlights the neurological effects of trauma on Lebanese students, noting significant changes in the amygdala and hippocampus that affect both cognition and emotional stability. In response, Maalouf et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of psychological counselling, which has been shown to improve emotional regulation and academic outcomes, emphasizing the need for accessible mental health support within schools. The figure below summarizes how stressors such as trauma and environmental challenges activate the HPA axis. While the body initially adapts, continued stress can raise allostatic load, negatively affecting health and learning capacity (McEwen & Wingfield, 2003).

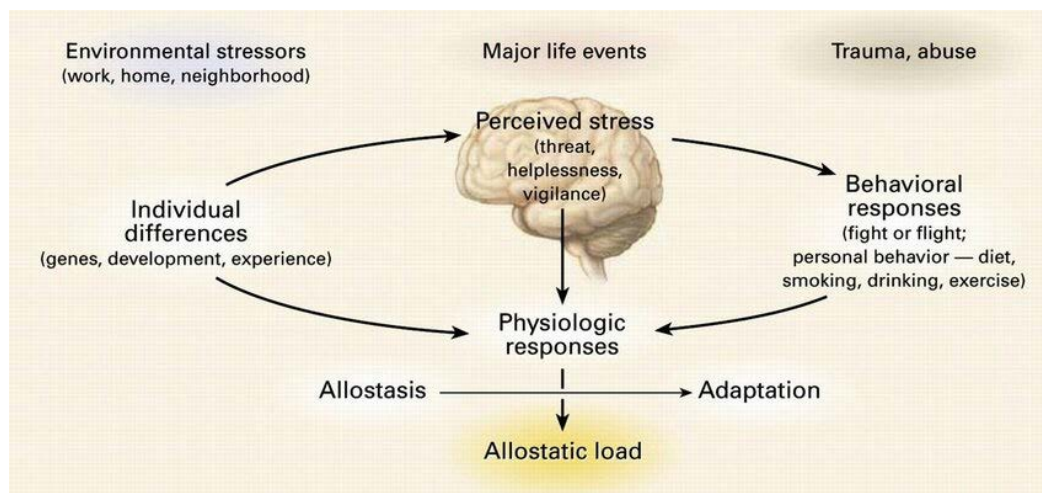


Figure 3. Allostatic Load and Stress Response (McEwen & Wingfield, 2003)

Economic hardship further worsens mental health challenges among students. Financial instability, parental unemployment, and poverty contribute to chronic stress, undermining overall well-being. Students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds frequently endure food insecurity, disrupted education, and limited access to mental health resources, all of which increase vulnerability to anxiety and depression (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2023). Research reveals that economic insecurity fosters feelings of helplessness and a loss of control over the future, which in turn diminishes self-esteem and motivation (Zoellner et al., 2024). Furthermore, children in financially strained households often internalize their parents' stress, worsening their emotional struggles (Romero et al., 2024).

Effects of Pandemics on Youth Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on youth mental health. It has intensified psychological, social, and educational challenges that, according to research, are neither uniform nor isolated. Instead, they are shaped by the interaction of socioeconomic conditions, family dynamics, and the ongoing pressure of overlapping crises. Zoellner et

al. (2024), Sforza et al. (2024), and Sheriff (2022) all highlight a clear rise in anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders among adolescents, caused by prolonged social isolation, disrupted routines, and ongoing uncertainty. Among these, routine disruption stands out as a major factor affecting youth well-being. Irregular sleep patterns and disordered daily habits have been closely linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, behavioral problems, and drops in academic performance. This shows that routine plays a key role in keeping emotional and mental health stable, and even small changes can throw young people off balance. For this reason, keeping some structure in daily life during difficult times becomes essential. Romero et al. (2024) also report that long periods of staying at home led to emotional and behavioral issues, including poor sleep, irritability, and lack of motivation. These problems were made worse by too much screen time and little physical movement. Gómez-Restrepo et al. (2023) support this, explaining how these changes in lifestyle affected the emotional and mental well-being of school-aged children.

Another important finding across the research is the role that family conditions and income play in shaping how young people were affected by the pandemic. During this time, the effect of losing a parent's income on a student's well-being often depended on the role that parent played at home. This pattern was especially visible in a study of grade 9 students in Cambodia, where Gehrke et al. (2022) found that when fathers lost their jobs, students' academic performance dropped, while a decrease in the mother's income was linked to improved school outcomes. This was mainly because mothers, in many cases, were more present at home and able to support their children's learning. The study shows that who provides care in the home can either help ease or increase the stress students experience during crises. These results underline the need to look closely at how families work when studying the mental health impact of the pandemic.

The effects of the pandemic were also felt in the physical and social lives of young people, especially those from families with fewer financial or health resources. A review by Bosmans et al. (2022) shows that many adolescents in these situations struggled with physical health and had fewer chances to connect with others. As a result, they experienced more stress and loneliness. Still, some students showed signs of recovery, especially when social restrictions were lifted and they could reconnect with others. This shows that helping young people stay strong during hard times means offering both personal support and ways to stay socially connected.

Building on these broader patterns, research in Lebanon shows how the pandemic affected students in a setting already facing deep political and economic problems. Disruptions to online learning, combined with unrest in the country, led to frustration and emotional strain among students (Trotta et al., 2024). Financial pressure, social separation, and major events like the Beirut explosion and the economic collapse added to students' stress and emotional struggles. These effects were especially strong among students who tended to avoid their problems rather than seek help (Chalhoub et al., 2022; El Khoury-Malhame et al., 2023; El Zouki et al., 2022). The situation in Lebanon shows how layers of crisis, including health, economic, and political challenges, can shape how young people feel and cope, and points to the need for support systems that take all these pressures into account.

Coping mechanisms and the availability of support systems emerged as central themes in understanding how adolescents dealt with the pandemic. Drawing from 104 studies, Naff et al. (2022) highlighted common stressors such as disrupted routines, shifting caregiver roles, and increased psychological distress across various settings. While some adolescents responded by adopting adaptive strategies like engaging in creative activities or maintaining digital connections, others struggled more deeply, particularly those without reliable family or community support. This variation indicates that adolescents' ability to manage crises was largely shaped by the presence or absence of consistent and responsive support systems.

Some studies also highlighted what supported adolescents during the pandemic, offering further insight into how adolescents coped with pandemic-related stress. Yang et al. (2022) and El Khoury-Malhame et al. (2023) both found that maintaining structured routines, prioritizing sleep quality, and practicing gratitude helped reduce feelings of loneliness and depressive symptoms, while also supporting emotional resilience. Yang et al.'s (2022) study, conducted in Texas, involved a youth-led mental health survey in which adolescents described their emotional state during the pandemic using up to five words. While many responses reflected negative emotions such as "bored" (60%), "lonely" (47%), and "sad" (25%), a portion of participants also expressed positive sentiments like "thankful" (22%), revealing that some adolescents were able to draw strength and meaning from their experiences despite the hardship. The overlap in findings from these studies reinforces the role of emotional self-regulation and positive reflection in managing adversity.

The synthesis of these findings illustrates that the pandemic's impact on youth mental health was not uniform but rather context-specific, shaped by a dynamic interplay of individual coping strategies, family support, and broader social conditions. Adolescents responded in varied ways depending on whether they had access to stable environments and the ability to maintain consistent routines. Supporting their mental health during crises requires an approach that not only addresses immediate psychological needs but also strengthens the social and structural supports around them. By promoting positive coping strategies, reinforcing stable daily practices, and ensuring reliable family and community networks, adolescents can be better equipped to handle ongoing challenges and recover more effectively in the aftermath of crisis.

The Psychological Toll of War and Conflict

Lass-Hennemann et al. (2024) emphasize that the psychological impact of large-scale crises such as armed conflict and global pandemics has been particularly acute among children and adolescents, manifesting in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and heightened anxiety. Conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war have imposed complex emotional and cognitive challenges on youth, with consequences extending into their academic and social functioning. The effects of displacement, familial loss, and prolonged insecurity have contributed to emotional exhaustion, impaired concentration, and social withdrawal. Even in regions geographically removed from conflict zones, continuous media exposure to distressing events has reinforced feelings of fear and helplessness (Zoellner et al., 2024). These psychological outcomes are not shaped by isolated incidents but are influenced by intersecting factors such as socioeconomic status, family dynamics, and the availability of supportive networks, all of which affect how adolescents internalize trauma and develop coping mechanisms (Gómez-Restrepo et al., 2023; Romero et al., 2024). A recurring insight across the literature is the detrimental effect of crisis-related trauma on cognitive functioning and social behaviour. Children exposed to war and violence often experience disruptions in memory, attention, and emotional regulation, which hinder their ability to engage academically and socially. Masten and Narayan (2012) found that war-affected children frequently exhibited deficits in memory and attention, accompanied by increased anxiety and hyperactivity, while Betancourt et al. (2013) observed that adolescents in post-conflict settings, such as Sierra Leone, continued to demonstrate aggressive behaviour and social impairment long after the immediate crisis. In brief, the findings highlight how conflict continues to deeply affect young people's development and stress the urgent need for well-rounded mental health interventions. These interventions should be sensitive to the students' specific circumstances and address both short-term emotional struggles and the broader conditions that influence their ability to recover and stay resilient.

Mental health disorders among adolescents living in post-conflict settings further illustrate the complex relationship between trauma and well-being. In post-conflict Tolima, Colombia, Gómez-Restrepo et al. (2023) assessed adolescents and identified significant rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD, with more than half reporting at least one mental health issue. Notably, these challenges were more prevalent among females and those experiencing family dysfunction, suggesting that gender and family stability play critical roles in mental health outcomes. Symptoms such as disinterest and persistent nervousness were common, reflecting how the aftermath of conflict disrupts emotional regulation and decision-making processes. The closure of schools during crises often reduces these issues by increasing family tensions and leading to risky behaviors, particularly among older students who may feel pressured to leave school to support their families. These findings highlight the importance of maintaining educational engagement as a means of reducing the long-term effects of trauma.

The situation in Lebanon exemplifies how ongoing socio-political instability further complicates the mental health landscape for adolescents. The chronic nature of conflict in the region means that many young people experience compounded stress, as socio-economic challenges merge with political unrest. Financial hardships, coupled with isolation, created a particularly challenging environment, as highlighted by Maalouf et al. (2022), who found that nearly one-third of Lebanese children exhibit psychiatric symptoms, though very few receive adequate support. In conflict settings like Afghanistan, Razjouyan et al. (2022) found that girls who witnessed attacks were more prone to PTSD and disengagement in the classroom, illustrating how exposure to violence undermines both mental stability and educational continuity.

Historical conflicts offer further insights into how trauma shapes long-term psychological well-being and significantly affects children's cognitive functions. Owoso et al. (2018) examined the enduring mental health effects of genocide exposure in Rwanda, revealing lasting symptoms of anxiety and impaired emotional control. Goli et al. (2022) similarly noted that children in war-torn areas often face not only psychological challenges but also physical hardships such as malnutrition and limited healthcare access. These intersecting stressors indicate that the consequences of conflict extend beyond the immediate aftermath, requiring sustained interventions that address both mental and physical health needs.

In the United States, Stark et al. (2021) demonstrated that Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs improved school engagement and reduced anxiety among refugee adolescents. These structured interventions emphasize the importance of emotional support within educational settings. In Lebanon, Miller et al. (2022) found that reducing caregiver stress through targeted programs positively influenced child well-being, reinforcing the interconnectedness between family stability and youth mental health. Innovative approaches also show promise. For example, the comic book "Somoud" effectively made mental health education accessible and relatable to Lebanese teens (Bosqui et al., 2020). However, challenges remain, as stigma and economic difficulties continue to limit access to mental health services, particularly in rural areas.

Economic and Social Stressors as Mental Health Catalysts

Economic instability exerts a profound influence on students' well-being, behavior, and academic performance. While financial challenges often go unnoticed, they significantly contribute to emotional dysregulation, disengagement from

learning, and various behavioral difficulties. A growing body of research emphasizes the ways in which economic hardship shapes students' emotional and cognitive development, emphasizing the importance of supportive interventions.

Multiple studies reveal how reduced financial resources negatively impact mental health and academic engagement. For instance, Zambeta (2014) highlights how budget cuts in Greece, Italy, and Spain compromised student well-being, highlighting the detrimental effects of diminished educational support. In a related context, Gibbons et al. (2023) observe that economic stress can impair memory and increase behavioral difficulties, particularly among boys. These findings converge on the notion that economic constraints not only affect financial security but also disrupt cognitive and emotional stability in educational settings.

The relationship between socioeconomic factors and mental health is further illuminated by studies that link poverty to emotional difficulties. White (2012) emphasizes that low income and limited maternal education are strong predictors of mental health challenges, suggesting that students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds face heightened risks of emotional instability. This aligns with the observations of Goodman et al. (2011) and Bisharat et al. (2020), who identify increased aggression and attention difficulties among youth facing economic hardships, particularly when trauma-sensitive teaching practices are absent. These insights indicate that without proper emotional support, financial struggles can escalate behavioral issues in schools. Moreover, the interplay between economic instability and academic motivation is evident in findings by Liu et al. (2021), and Quansah et al. (2023), who collectively demonstrate that students from low-income environments often exhibit lower motivation and greater emotional instability. This pattern points to a recurring theme: economic hardship not only hinders academic engagement but also affects emotional regulation. Additionally, Coley et al. (2018) suggest that poverty's impact on mental health, manifested as increased depression, is more pronounced compared to the influence of affluence on substance use, indicating that the adverse effects of financial instability are far-reaching and deeply rooted.

Economic crises tend to intensify these challenges, particularly among vulnerable groups. As García and Weiss (2020), Bera et al. (2022), and Anyaegbu et al. (2022) illustrate, economic strain during crises correlates with heightened anxiety, increased dropout rates, and increased challenges in behavioral difficulties. These studies emphasize that when economic pressures intersect with social vulnerabilities, students' emotional and cognitive stability are significantly compromised. In Lebanon, a systematic review by Jones et al. (2023) examined punitive behavior management policies in secondary schools during the 2019 economic crisis, highlighting that these approaches often worsen behavioral issues rather than resolve them. The study found that students subjected to punitive measures reported feelings of decreased motivation, which negatively affected their academic performance and emotional well-being. This suggests that punitive methods may not address the root causes of disruptive behavior, especially when students are coping with external stressors. A report by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2022) revealed that many young people have been forced to leave school to engage in informal labor to support their families. The survey indicated that 31% of youth are not in education, employment, or training, and school enrollment has dropped significantly from 60% in the 2020-2021 academic year to 43% currently. This decline is not just a reflection of economic hardship but also a consequence of families prioritizing immediate survival over education. The report highlights how the interplay between financial instability and educational disruption poses long-term risks to children's development. Supporting these concerns, Keane et al. (2022) conducted a study across four low- to middle-income countries, including Lebanon, to assess how child labor affects cognitive development. The research revealed that when children are involved in work, especially when it takes time away from school, their cognitive abilities are negatively impacted. This finding aligns with the UNICEF report, illustrating how economic challenges not only disrupt schooling but also impede cognitive growth, reinforcing the need to prioritize educational opportunities even in times of crisis.

Addressing the Challenges

Mindfulness Programs: Fostering Emotional Regulation

Mindfulness, defined as the practice of staying fully present in the moment with an attitude of acceptance and non-judgment, enables individuals to focus on their thoughts and emotions without being overwhelmed by them (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In schools, this practice has been shown to help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and enhance overall well-being (Bennett & Dorjee, 2015). Bennett and Dorjee (2015) conducted a study to examine the effects of a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) course on the well-being and academic attainment of sixth-form students. The study was carried out in 2015 and involved participants from a secondary school setting. The researchers implemented an MBSR program over an eight-week period, during which students participated in guided mindfulness exercises, meditation sessions, and group discussions. The primary objective was to assess changes in students' emotional regulation, stress management, and academic outcomes. The results demonstrated that students who participated in the MBSR course reported significant improvements in their ability to cope with stress and regulate emotions. Additionally, these students showed a positive shift in their academic performance, indicating that mindfulness practices not only foster emotional well-being but also contribute to better learning outcomes. The

findings align with the growing body of research advocating for the inclusion of mindfulness programs in educational curricula to support both mental health and academic success.

Zoogman et al. (2015) found that adolescents who participated in mindfulness programs reported lower levels of anxiety, depression, and overall psychological distress. For instance, a group of middle school students in the study practiced mindfulness breathing exercises before exams, leading to reduced test anxiety and improved performance. Dove and Costello (2017) found that mindfulness activities in Australian schools significantly reduced anxiety, improved focus, and strengthened peer relationships among 600 students. Similarly, Lebanese schools hosting Syrian students have reported behavioural improvements, such as reduced aggression and hyperactivity, following weekly mindfulness sessions (Brown et al., 2023).

Incorporating mindfulness practices into educational settings has been shown to enhance students' emotional regulation and social interactions. Semple et al. (2010) conducted a randomized controlled trial examining the effects of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Children (MBCT-C) on students aged 9 to 13. The study involved implementing MBCT-C sessions within a school environment, focusing on mindfulness exercises designed to reduce stress and improve attention. The results revealed that students who participated in the program showed significant reductions in attention problems and anxiety symptoms compared to a control group. These positive changes persisted at a three-month follow-up, suggesting the long-term benefits of integrating mindfulness interventions in schools.

One practical and widely applied mindfulness technique in schools is the "Five Senses Exercise," also referred to as the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique. This exercise guides students to focus on their immediate environment by identifying five things they can see, four they can feel, three they can hear, two they can smell, and one they can taste. Smith (2018) describes this method as an effective strategy to help individuals focus on the present moment, reducing anxiety and promoting calmness. This practice is particularly beneficial in classroom settings where stress management is crucial.

Another valuable approach is mindful walking, a technique that involves walking slowly and attentively, focusing on the movement of the body and physical sensations such as foot placement and breathing rhythm. In a randomized controlled trial, Teut et al. (2013) found that psychologically distressed individuals who participated in mindful walking sessions experienced significant improvements in psychological well-being, including reductions in perceived stress and enhancements in quality of life. These findings suggest that mindful walking can serve as a practical and accessible mindfulness tool for students experiencing restlessness or emotional distress, offering a calming and grounding activity during school breaks or physical education periods.

Integrating these mindfulness practices into school curricula not only supports students' mental health but also fosters a positive learning environment. Techniques like the Five Senses Exercise and Mindful Walking can help students manage stress, regulate emotions, and improve their overall well-being, making them valuable components of holistic educational practices.

Adaptability Training

Adaptability is the ability to adjust one's thoughts, behaviours, and emotions to handle changing circumstances effectively (Collie & Martin, 2016). In education, this skill is essential for both teachers and students, allowing them to respond to shifting demands, unexpected challenges, and evolving learning environments.

Building resilience in children and adolescents requires structured, evidence-based interventions that address social, emotional, and coping skills. In educational settings, fostering resilience is essential for helping students manage stress, navigate social interactions, and adapt to personal challenges. Recent studies emphasize the importance of equipping young individuals with practical tools to enhance their emotional regulation and problem-solving abilities, especially within school environments. Research by Betancourt et al. (2013) demonstrated the positive impact of adaptability training among 400 war-affected adolescents in Sierra Leone. The study found that students who participated in resilience-based programs developed stronger emotional stability and more effective coping mechanisms. These programs teach students how to manage their emotions, approach problems with flexibility, and set realistic goals, enabling them to better handle adversity. One effective method is designing group activities that focus on collaborative problem-solving. These exercises encouraged students to think critically, work with others, and build social-emotional resilience. One widely implemented intervention is the Resilience Builder Program for Children and Adolescents, which follows a structured group approach to promote self-confidence, self-control, and adaptive coping strategies. Alvord and Grados (2005) developed this program to address the needs of students struggling with self-regulation and social engagement. The intervention typically targets children and adolescents facing challenges related to peer relationships, behavioral adjustment, and stress management. Through guided group activities, participants practice skills that help them respond effectively to everyday academic and personal stressors. This structured approach not only supports individual development but also fosters a collective sense of resilience within the school community.

Linking resilience programs to broader educational practices, social-emotional learning (SEL) initiatives serve as a complementary framework. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of SEL interventions, highlighting that these programs improve social skills, emotional awareness, and academic outcomes. Incorporating

SEL into classroom instruction equips students with strategies to regulate emotions, build positive relationships, and effectively navigate social situations. Similarly, Evans and Fuller-Rowell (2013) demonstrated that integrating SEL into secondary education settings significantly reduced behavioral problems and created a more positive school environment. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive programs that integrate resilience training with social-emotional competencies.

By adopting a proactive stance on resilience building and integrating it into the educational curriculum, schools can create a supportive environment that helps students thrive academically and personally. Structured programs, such as the Resilience Builder Program and SEL initiatives, provide practical tools for emotional regulation and social competence. Preparing students to manage stress and adapt to change not only improves their immediate school experience but also equips them with essential life skills for future challenges.

Building Coping Mechanisms

Structured activities that teach students how to manage emotions and behaviours are essential for coping with adversity. Breaking tasks into manageable steps, practicing self-care, and seeking support are strategies that empower students to face challenges with confidence. Evans and Fuller-Rowell (2013) emphasized that such approaches contribute to long-term psychological well-being. To support the development of coping mechanisms, schools can implement activities that help students organize their thoughts and manage their emotions. In their 2021 study, Wilson, Joiner, and Abbasi examined the effects of time management training on academic performance among two groups of learners. One group received structured workshops on time management, while the other did not. The results showed that male participants who attended the training achieved significant academic improvement, whereas female participants did not demonstrate the same level of academic gain. Nonetheless, the female group benefited in other areas, including a reduction in subject failure rates and more positive attitudes toward managing time effectively. These findings emphasize time management as a critical coping mechanism for maintaining academic stability and resilience, particularly during periods of crisis. Complementing this, Siregar and Sari (2021) focused on high school students and found that journaling as a reflective practice helped participants articulate thoughts and monitor emotional growth, which in turn reduced stress and enhanced resilience. In a related exploration of psychosocial strategies, the authors also highlighted the role of peer-support groups and creative therapies among adolescents and reported that peer-support groups provided a safe space for sharing experiences, fostering a sense of community, while creative outlets like art and music therapy enabled non-verbal emotional expression, contributing to improved emotional well-being. Taken together, these studies highlight the importance of equipping students with practical strategies, whether through structured time management, introspective journaling, or expressive group interventions, to strengthen their capacity to adapt and cope in times of adversity.

Teachers' Role in Crisis

In the context of addressing the emotional and behavioural impacts of crises on students, trauma-sensitive teaching practices have gained increasing attention. White (2012) emphasizes that incorporating de-escalation techniques and positive reinforcement into classroom management is crucial for effectively responding to the emotional and behavioural challenges students face. Trauma-sensitive teaching highlights the importance of recognizing that sudden changes in student behaviour, such as withdrawal, aggression, or a decline in academic performance, often signify deeper emotional distress rather than mere defiance. Consequently, professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills to manage challenging classroom behaviours are essential, particularly when dealing with students affected by trauma.

Research indicates that structured interventions emphasizing active listening, non-confrontational communication, and respectful dialogue can effectively reduce disruptive behavior and enhance classroom dynamics. Such approaches foster a supportive environment conducive to both academic and emotional stability. Oliver and Reschly (2007) found that establishing clear behavioral expectations and routines helps prevent disruptive behavior by providing students with a framework for acceptable conduct. These strategies promote a structured and supportive environment, allowing students to feel secure while developing emotional regulation skills. Further studies in educational settings indicate that reinforcing positive behaviors through targeted praise and recognition helps build students' self-confidence and emotional regulation (Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013). This approach aligns with trauma-informed strategies that prioritize the creation of structured classroom environments, including consistent routines, clear expectations, and designated quiet areas, all of which contribute to a sense of safety and emotional stability. While the literature review provides a broad overview of published findings related to student psychological responses to crises, the results presented subsequently in the manuscript stem exclusively from the thematic synthesis of 50 studies selected through the methodology outlined below.

Methodology

Search Strategy and Sources

This study employs a narrative review methodology to develop a comprehensive understanding of how crisis conditions influence the psychological well-being and behavior of school-aged students. A narrative review enables the synthesis of diverse empirical and theoretical research drawn from various educational and geographical contexts (REF). This method supports the integration of findings from multiple disciplines, contributing to a holistic view of the effects of crisis on students' mental health, learning experiences, and resilience within school settings. The review includes peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and scholarly publications that meet criteria of methodological rigor and relevance to the research focus. The literature search is conducted across several academic databases, including PsycINFO, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, covering the period from January 2005 to March 2024. The search strategy is guided by predefined keywords related to student mental health, educational disruption, and resilience. Logical connectors known as Boolean operators are applied to structure the search process and refine the scope of results.

All relevant sources are catalogued and organized using Zotero reference management software (Version 7.0.15, 2025). Each study is assessed based on its research design, population characteristics, key findings, and implications for policy and educational practice. Studies that do not align with the inclusion criteria or that lack relevance to the review's objectives are excluded. The goal of this review is to examine the influence of crisis conditions on students' psychological and educational outcomes and to identify effective, school-based strategies that foster resilience and continuity in learning. The thematic synthesis conducted in this review is based strictly on the 50 studies included after applying the selection criteria. These are distinct from the broader references included in the literature review section, which aimed to contextualize the research topic.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection of studies for this narrative review follows a systematic framework to ensure the inclusion of high-quality and pertinent literature. Eligible studies were required to be peer-reviewed, published in English, and to specifically address school-aged children and adolescents, who are the population most affected by educational disruptions during crises. Priority was given to research examining the psychological impacts of major crises on educational outcomes and mental health. This focus allows for an in-depth analysis of the link between crisis exposure and its effects on student well-being and performance within formal educational settings.

Studies excluded from the review included non-peer-reviewed materials such as, opinion articles, due to their insufficient scholarly rigor. Clinical trials were also excluded, as their primary focus is on medical or clinical interventions rather than educational or psychological outcomes pertinent to school contexts (Higgins et al., 2019). Furthermore, studies concentrating exclusively on post-secondary students or adults were omitted to maintain developmental relevance to school-aged children and adolescents.

Implementing these inclusion and exclusion criteria ensures methodological rigor and relevance, thereby facilitating a focused synthesis of evidence on the psychological and educational impacts of crises on young learners. Such a structured approach bolsters the validity and reliability of the review's conclusions, providing a solid foundation for shaping educational policies and practices that support student resilience and learning during times of crisis (Mertens, 2019).

Data Organization and Synthesis

Once eligible studies were selected, the review adhered to a structured process to organize and synthesize the data in a meaningful way. The analysis was led by the first author, who conducted scanning and an in-depth reading of all included studies. Key information was extracted and organized into summary tables that captured the context, type of crisis, population, major psychological outcomes, and any reported resilience strategies. To bring clarity to the synthesis, the articles were thematically classified under three broad categories: (1) Impact and psychological effects of Pandemics, (2) Economic collapse, social hardship and their related stressors, and (3) War and conflict-related trauma. Major findings and recurring patterns and observations were summarized qualitatively and compared to explore and dive into common psychological disorders and outcomes (e.g., Anxiety, PTSD, School disengagement or dropout, coping strategies, etc.). This thematic grouping helped highlight similarities and differences in how various crises affect students' well-being.

During this process, the roles of the researchers were clearly defined. The lead author was responsible for collecting and performing the data analysis; while the second author provided supervision and reviewed the analysis to ensure coherence, accuracy and academic integrity. Both authors met regularly to discuss emerging themes and resolve any inconsistencies in interpretation.

To strengthen the reliability of the synthesis, cross-checking was applied throughout the process. Selected articles were revisited and skimmed to confirm that the identified themes accurately reflected the data. Zotero software was used to

manage and organize references and track the literature included in the review, ensuring a transparent and organized approach. Although this is a narrative review and does not follow quantitative measures of reliability, efforts were made to reduce bias and improve the consistency of the findings through careful reading, discussion, and thematic clarity. The study identification and selection procedures are illustrated in the flow chart below (Figure 4). It was inspired by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines but adapted for a narrative review approach.

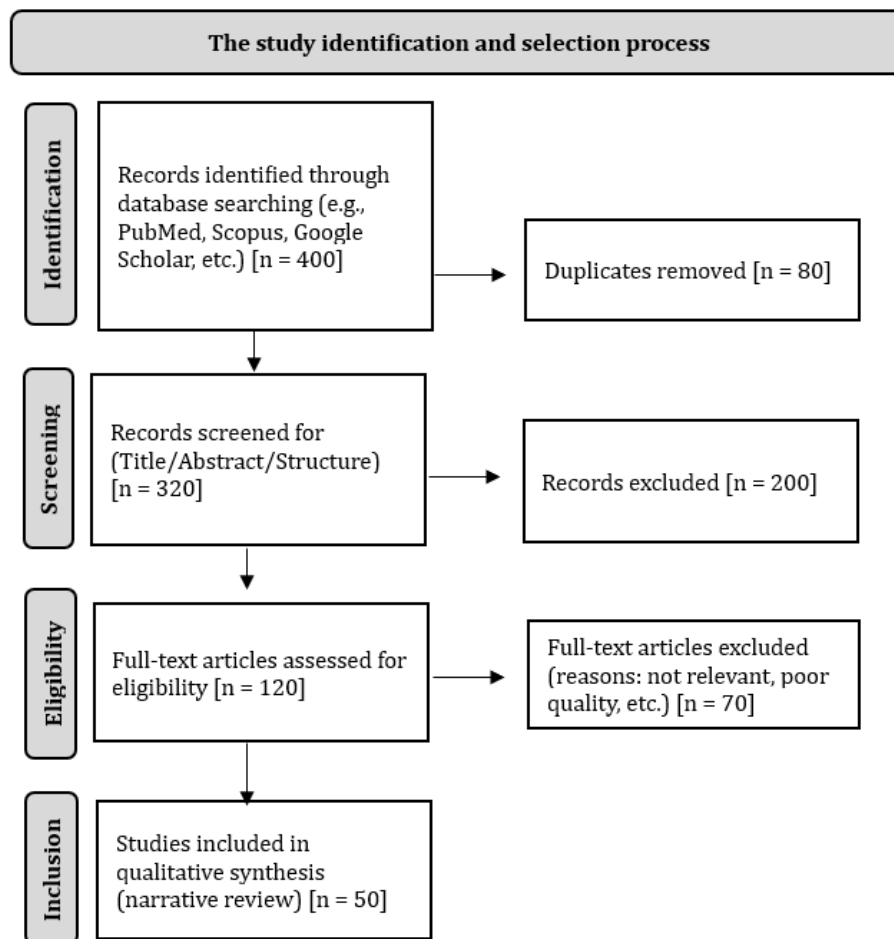


Figure 4. Summary of Steps in the Study Selection Process for Reviews

Results

Applying the narrative review methodology and thematic classification detailed in the study design, the findings revealed that student mental health is significantly affected by three critical crisis contexts: pandemics, economic hardship, and armed conflict. The 50 studies included in the qualitative synthesis were published between 2012 and 2024, reflecting recent global crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic. Geographically, most studies originated from the United States, United Kingdom, India, and Lebanon. The majority utilized cross-sectional survey methods, with some employing qualitative interviews or mixed-method designs. Across these settings, recurrent psychological outcomes such as anxiety, depression, behavioral dysregulation, withdrawal, and emotional instability were consistently observed. These manifestations were closely linked to the effects of chronic stress, which emerged as a central explanatory factor.

Psychological distress and emotional dysregulation

A significant number of the reviewed studies emphasized the surge in anxiety, depression, and stress-related symptoms among students. Research by Masten and Narayan (2012), along with more recent studies by D'Angiulli et al. (2024), confirmed that sustained stress activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, elevating cortisol levels and impairing the function of key brain regions responsible for memory, attention, and emotional regulation. Factors contributing to psychological distress included social isolation, uncertainty, academic disruption, and fear of infection, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, students exposed to crisis conditions frequently demonstrated difficulties with concentration, impulse control, and behavioral stability, which directly impacted their engagement in learning. Many students reported feelings of loneliness, sleep disturbances, and a sense of loss of control over their academic and personal lives.

The synthesis further highlighted that trauma-related behaviors often manifest in classrooms as defiance or disengagement yet are more accurately understood as neurological responses to prolonged stress. Authors such as Romero et al. (2024) and Zoellner et al. (2024) supported this interpretation by showing how emotional reactivity and cognitive fatigue are common in children affected by crisis, regardless of cultural or geographical context. These findings reinforce the argument for enhancing educator awareness of trauma's biological basis, enabling schools to replace punitive responses with informed, empathetic support.

Coping mechanisms and emotional resilience

Additionally, the review identified school-based protective factors that contribute to student resilience. Despite the mental health burden, several studies noted the emergence of positive coping strategies. Consistent with the work of Maalouf et al. (2022) and Tamirisa and Maringanti (2024), emotionally safe school environments with structured routines, relational continuity, and access to psychological support were found to reduce distress and foster a sense of stability. Mindfulness interventions, emotional regulation programs, and peer-based support were reported across multiple studies as effective mechanisms that enable students to develop adaptive coping strategies and rebuild disrupted emotional control. Therefore, students engaged in cognitive reframing, sought emotional support from peers and family, and adapted to online learning environments. The presence of institutional support and resilience-promoting interventions also played a significant role in mitigating adverse effects.

Academic and behavioral disruption

The role of educators was also emphasized as central to facilitating recovery. Crises were shown to negatively affect students' academic performance, motivation, and concentration. Online learning presented accessibility and engagement challenges. Behavioral consequences such as avoidance, absenteeism, and diminished classroom participation were frequently reported. Studies by White (2012) highlight the importance of professional development in trauma-informed pedagogy, equipping teachers to recognize the signs of distress and respond with relational sensitivity rather than disciplinary rigidity. When educators engaged students in respectful dialogue, maintained predictable routines, and encouraged emotional expression, students were more likely to regain a sense of security and motivation.

The findings point to the interconnected nature of crisis exposure, neurobiological disruption, and learning engagement. Authors across the reviewed literature converge on the importance of integrated responses that combine biological insight, psychological support, and structural adaptation within educational settings. Schools, therefore, must be recognized not only as academic institutions but also as primary spaces for psychological recovery. When trauma-informed strategies are embedded across school systems, they not only support student well-being but also enhance the overall resilience of educational communities in the face of recurring global crises. Figure 5 depicts the impact of crises on students and the corresponding support strategies identified through the thematic synthesis.

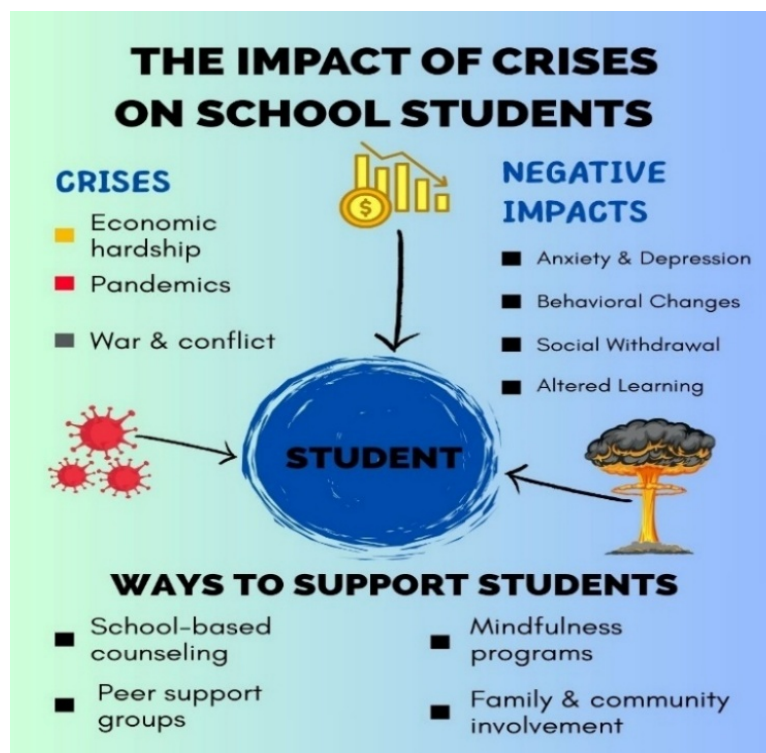


Figure 5. Impact of Crises on Students and Related Support Strategies

Conclusion

The results of this review bring forward a comprehensive understanding of how crises, whether related to pandemics, economic instability, or armed conflict, affect the mental health and learning experiences of school-aged children. Through a thematic narrative methodology, the review identified shared patterns across diverse contexts, showing that psychological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, emotional withdrawal, and behavioural dysregulation consistently emerge as responses to crisis exposure. These symptoms, often observed in classroom settings, call for a reconsideration of how student behaviour is interpreted within schools during periods of social and emotional disruption. Rather than treating such behaviours as isolated or disciplinary in nature, the literature reviewed supports an understanding of them as not defiance but manifestations of trauma, linked to disrupted environments and chronic stress.

Authors such as Romero et al. (2024), Zoellner et al. (2024), and Maalouf et al. (2022) emphasize that disengagement and emotional instability are frequently rooted in students' loss of routine, exposure to uncertainty, and reduced social connection. These responses are not limited to conflict zones or low-income regions but appear across different educational settings, highlighting the universal need for structured and supportive school environments. Resilience among students is shaped not by individual traits alone but by the presence of relational and institutional support. Research by Maalouf et al. (2022), Tamirisa and Maringanti (2024), and Yang et al. (2022) demonstrates that consistent routines, trauma-informed teaching, and access to psychological resources significantly contribute to students' emotional regulation and renewed engagement with learning. Programs focusing on mindfulness, peer interaction, and coping strategies were frequently identified as effective tools that help students recover from the emotional impacts of crises.

In settings marked by economic fragility or displacement, the vulnerabilities facing students are often intensified by external pressures such as food insecurity, parental stress, and limited access to services. In these contexts, schools play a central role as stable environments where emotional safety can be restored. The studies reviewed consistently recommend the integration of school-community partnerships, culturally responsive practices, and customized mental health interventions designed to meet the specific needs of students.

Effectively addressing the psychological consequences of crises among students requires a comprehensive and collaborative framework that integrates emotional, educational, and social supports. Existing interventions such as school-based counselling, mindfulness practices, adaptability training, and peer-support initiatives have demonstrated positive outcomes in reducing anxiety and enhancing emotional well-being (Lass-Hennemann et al., 2024). Alongside institutional support, meaningful family and community engagement plays a central role in promoting emotional security. When caregivers participate in emotional literacy programs and receive tools for routine stabilization at home, students are more likely to benefit from consistent emotional reinforcement. Reductions in caregiver stress have been shown to correlate with improved student outcomes and greater coping capacity (Delaney et al., 2024).

Building on this foundation, the adoption of trauma-informed pedagogical frameworks is widely encouraged. Schools are increasingly called upon to create environments grounded in psychological safety, trust, and emotional regulation. Incorporating mental health literacy into everyday teaching, providing access to mindfulness activities, and replacing punitive discipline with relational and reflective practices contribute to more supportive and resilient learning environments (Jones et al., 2023). In addition to structural changes in pedagogy, the integration of emotional coping strategies within school settings is essential. Programs such as resilience-building workshops, and gratitude journaling are linked to improved emotional regulation and adaptive behaviour.

Further reinforcement is found through the development of collaborative, multi-dimensional support systems that extend beyond the school. Strong partnerships between educational institutions, community-based health services, and family networks enable early identification of psychological distress and ensure access to culturally sensitive and affordable mental health care (Maalouf et al., 2022; Miller et al., 2022). These strategies highlight the need to reframe schools as emotionally responsive ecosystems. Educational environments are increasingly viewed not only as centres for academic learning but also as critical spaces for stability and recovery. By embedding neurobiological awareness, emotional skill-building, and cross-sector collaboration into the core mission of schooling, schools are better prepared to support students, even amid ongoing uncertainty. Through such cohesive strategies, students can be equipped not only to cope with crisis but to emerge from it with strengthened resilience and capacity for growth.

Educators carry a critical role in supporting students facing such crises by addressing not only their academic progress but also their emotional and social well-being. When schools embed trauma-sensitive pedagogy, cultivate emotional literacy, and implement customized supports across classroom, family, and policy levels, resilience becomes a tangible outcome. Inclusive and responsive school environments grounded in transparency, empathy, and collaboration help students move from vulnerability toward growth. Evidence-based practices such as mindfulness, adaptability training, and professional development equip educators to recognize subtle expressions of distress, which if unaddressed, risk deepening into long-term trauma. By empowering educators and fostering consistent, compassionate engagement along with community-based mental health support, schools become environments of recovery, affirmation, and sustained development.

Limitations

Although this review followed a systematic narrative approach with thematic classification and revealed significant and interesting findings on the effects of crises on students' psychological and educational outcomes, it was limited by the lack of primary empirical data. The absence of field-based interviews and quantitative data restricted the ability to evaluate intervention effectiveness statistically or across cultural contexts. Future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining structured interviews with teachers and students and quantitative surveys, to further support the findings and provide deeper insights.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no financial support or funding was received for the conduct of this research, authorship, or publication of this article. The authors have no financial interests or affiliations that could be perceived as potential conflicts of interest in relation to this manuscript.

Generative AI Statement

As the author(s) of this work, we used the AI tool [ChatGPT 4o] for the purpose of rephrasing some sentences and summarizing some paragraphs. After using this AI tool, we reviewed and verified the final version of our work. We, as the author(s), take full responsibility for the content of our published work.

Authors Contribution Statement

Jibai: Conceptualization, research design, data analysis, and manuscript drafting. Freiha: Supervision, manuscript review, and editing.

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