

## The effect of Israeli checkpoints on Palestinian students' psychology: An-Najah National University's students as a case study

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### ABSTRACT

This paper documents several key contributions made to the field of psychology and education. The main aim of this paper is to investigate the psychological pressures resulting from the Israeli military checkpoints on Palestinian university students who are passing through Azzun area to their university. The study focused on the negative impact of Israeli checkpoints on their daily life routine at the university such as their academic plans, intended goals, and time organizations. The researchers adopt the qualitative approach for this study. The sample of the study included (5) students of both genders who were randomly selected for this study. For data collection, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to identify the opinion of the study sample regarding the questions of the study. The researchers developed four main questions to collect data comprehensively. The results of the study show that Israeli checkpoints are considered their main concern every single day they come to university. The stay sample agreed among themselves on the fact that checkpoints cause headache, tension, low-academic achievements, and frustration. The study recommended An-Najah National University to facilitate their needs in case they miss an exam or arrive late at the university. Furthermore, the study recommended using technology to support and assist those who face psychological pressure through online platforms.

### Keywords

Israeli checkpoints; university education; psychological pressure; academic achievements; students' psychology.

### Introduction

Through life, people are exposed to many complicated situations and events that affect their lives in different ways one of which is psychological abilities. When people become unable to cope with their lives, researchers, psychologists, and educators call it "pressure" (Al-Ghamdi, 2015: 7).

The Palestinian educational system has gone through hectic phases characterized by being restricted and governed by occupation starting from the British Mandate up to the Israeli Occupation. The educational system in Palestine displays a mixed picture. The population in Palestine is considered one of the most literate, not only in the Arab world but also around the world (Ismail & Nageeb, 2020).

According to B'Tselem, by the end of January 2020, there are more than 100 checkpoints in the West Bank. Fifty-nine are internal checkpoints. These checkpoints include (18) in Area H2 in Hebron, where Israeli settlement enclaves are found. It is also found that (64) of the internal checkpoints are permanently staffed. Permanent checkpoints form the most severe restriction on the movement of Palestinians, who are subjected to checks that often cause prolonged delays.

When Palestinians travel to their work, they must take into account the time that it takes to pass through the checkpoints.

The pressure of the Palestinians in general and university students, in particular, are flying checkpoints, which aimed to dismember the Palestinian homeland and impede the movement of the citizens in a way that prevents the continuation of life or hindered its natural image. Palestinian university students are the most affected by these barriers because they need to travel every day to their universities. There is no doubt that these flying barriers are psychological pressure for the people, whether they are parents, teachers, or students.

This is the concept of psychological tension, which is defined as: "It is a suppressed energy, which does not have a way out, which affects the purity of thought and control of emotion, as well as muscular and organic pain (Dahdouh, 2010: 6).

The psychological pressure of students also results in many outcomes such as anxiety, headache, and

frustration, which in turn affects school achievement (Ahmed et al., 2015: 4).

The current study is looking at the impact of the Israeli occupation barriers on the psychology of students at An-Najah National University. The study is expected to prove the negative impact of the flying barriers on the psychology of the students who are traveling to An-Najah National University.

The current research aims at identifying the psychological pressures caused by military barriers to university students, revealing their impact on the student's life and their ability to achieve the educational and academic goals at the university. This study can contribute to overcoming the psychological pressures on students and finding appropriate solutions for them by revealing their causes.

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

Various studies have been carried out on the psychological effects of the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people. They have shown that the inhumane methods used on the Palestinian citizens by the Israeli authorities. Various psychological effects, as a result of the exposure of a large proportion of them to mental and behavioral disorders such as chronic anxiety, fear, physical and psychological distortions, childhood depression, nightmares during sleep, tension, frustration, helplessness, surrender, and various medical and educational problems (Assaf, 2002: 3).

Hence, it is of interest to study the psychological effects that might be a result of the military occupation barriers on An-Najah National University's students who are passing through Israeli checkpoints every day on their way to the university.

### 1.2 Purpose of the study

The study aimed at finding out the impact of the Israeli occupation barriers on the psychology of students at An-Najah National University and their impact on their academic life.

### 1.3 Questions of the study

This study seeks to answer these main questions:

- 1- What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?
- 2- Do the Israeli checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?
- 3- How do the Israeli checkpoints affect your daily academic routine at the university?

- 4- Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out of the university due to military barriers?

### 1.4 Significance of the study

The importance of the study, in theory, is to know the impact of the Israeli occupation barriers on the psychology of students at An-Najah National University from the students' point of view who frequently suffer from flying

checkpoints.

In practical terms, some data on the factors affecting the achievement of university students. These data will be taken into account from officials, policymakers, and the administrators of the educational process at An-Najah National University and the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Therefore, significant decisions can be made to promote students' psychology presented as remedial programs to reduce the psychological pressure of students.

## Literature Review

A large number of existing studies in the broader literature have examined the relationship between education and the psychology of students. The Israeli occupation authorities tightened students' movements in all Palestinian cities, villages, and camps under the pretext of security and turned them into a large prison. Israeli occupation prevented citizens from reaching their places of work on many occasions by erecting a large number of fixed and mobile checkpoints. Israeli occupation escalating their arbitrary measures and the practice of collective punishment against the Palestinian people by applying all forms of humiliation. The Israeli occupation authorities have continued to impose a comprehensive siege on the Occupied Palestinian Territories in addition to the imposition of an internal siege on the Palestinian cities by continuing their military reinforcements on the main roads and the entrances (Awad, 2010: 4).

Many studies have examined the psychological effects on pedestrians at the Israeli checkpoints in general and their role in the manifestations of psychological stress among students in schools and universities.

Assaf's study (2002) aimed to identify the level of psychological and academic stress that is resulted from the Israeli aggression on faculty members at Al-Najah National University and Birzeit University during Al-Aqsa Intifada.

The study of Shaheen and Hamdi (2008) also examined the relationship between irrational reasoning

and post-traumatic stress disorder in a sample of students from the Ramallah and Al-Bireh Educational District at Al-Quds Open University, who were randomly selected in class, taking into account the gender differences of the students.

The pilot study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of an emotional rational counseling program in reducing post-traumatic stress. The results showed a positive correlation between the degree of irrational thinking and post-traumatic stress in male and female students. The results also showed statistically significant differences between the experimental and control groups in the post-traumatic stress measurement, indicating the effectiveness of the indicative program.

A study completed by Awad (2010) tried to identify the psychological and social effects resulting from the festive military barriers of Al-Quds Open University students. The results of the study showed that the degree of psychological and social effects resulting from military occupation barriers was significant. The study also showed that there were statistically significant differences in the degree of psychological and social consequences from military occupation barriers due to the gender variable and age.

According to Shakshir (1995), the methods of repression vary and numerous in their type. Shakir concluded that flying checkpoints cause problems associated with student stress. The most important of these problems is the disruption of the educational process and the failure of students to reach their universities or schools on time.

Al-Badour et al. (1993) examined the effects of wars on Palestinian children in the Gaza Strip and Occupied Palestine (1948). The study sample consisted of (356) children. The study pointed out that the greater the pressure due to war and its aftermath, The emergence of symptoms of disorders and psychological problems. Thus, the previous studies confirm the existence of a negative impact on the psychological state of the students because of the pressures they are subjected to.

### Research methodology

This research is based on qualitative research. In the past two decades, the importance of qualitative research methods in the field of social research has increased due to the nature of social phenomena characterized by individuality and continuous change in addition to the distinguished relations between the researcher and the subject of the study. The researchers' interest in the qualitative research methods may be due to their ability to understand the nature of the phenomena deeply and honestly. This means that the researcher can understand reality and

gain the necessary skills to grasp the dimensions of the phenomenon (Qarni, 2008: 1).

### 3.1 Scope and sample

The research sample consists of An-Najah National University students who usually experience passing by the Israeli checkpoints in the Azzun area. The researchers chose this area because it sees on daily basis an Israeli barrier that impedes the movement of the students and causes them many obstacles; sometimes hitting and insulting.

The research sample included a random sample of five students, three male, and two female students during the academic year 2020/2021 (see table 1). Since the research sample is small, it cannot be representative of generalized for the whole country.

Table of distribution of the research sample by demographic variables

Students	Symbol	Gender	Specialty	Year
S1.	A	Male	Arabic	Second Y.
S2.	B	Male	methods of teaching	Third Y.
S3.	C	Male	Engineering	fourth Y.
S4	D	Female	Arts	First Y.
S5.	E	female	Science	Fourth Y.

Table (1)

### 3.2 Research instruments

The research tool is an interview prepared by the researcher targeting a sample of the students of An-Najah National University on the barrier of the Zionist occupation in Azzun area. The interviews cover many dimensions such as demographic information and questions related to the impact of the Israeli occupation barriers on the psychological pressure among students.

## Results

Interview (1)

Gender: Male

Specialization: Faculty of Arts, Arabic Language

Year: Second year

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?

A: It often takes a long time while standing at the military checkpoint. This causes headaches, especially in extreme heat conditions. Soldiers do not care about the air condition and cause distress, boredom, and tiredness while standing.

Second question: How do the Israeli military barriers affect your daily academic routine at the university?

A: The habit of having a military checkpoint will always force you to wake up earlier. If you are stopped by a military checkpoint, you will inevitably be deprived of the first lectures at the university

Third question: Do the Israeli military checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?

A: Certainly, early access to the university provides an atmosphere of comfort that helps you plan your day and achieve goals.

Fourth question: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out from the university due to military barriers?

A: In fact, I cannot leave my education for such a reason. I can understand that I am facing challenges on daily basis but we Palestinian wake up every morning to teach the rest of the world, life.

Interview (2)

Gender: Male

Specialization: Faculty of Education

Year: Third year

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?

B: The feeling of fear and confusion. I usually ask myself how long will the barrier delay us. Will my university instructor accept my excuse? Would the instructor extend the exam time to me or postpone it if I arrive late? I also feel pressure, sweating, fear of beatings, humiliation, and the order to return.

The second question: How do the Israeli military barriers affect your daily academic routine at the university?

B: In the absence of a lecture, the student often plans to visit the library or meet with colleagues, but your late arrival prevents you from all this.

Third question: Do the Israeli military checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?

B: I feel my time is not in my hand. Frankly, as a citizen who is waiting at the checkpoint, I cannot expect how long will the checking last at the checkpoint. I usually ask myself whether soldiers will allow me to pass or order me to go back. I spend most

of my time thinking about such topics rather than planning for my day. Spending a lot of time at checkpoints prevents you from doing some non-academic tasks. Accordingly, the fear of closing the military checkpoint will force you to do nothing at home and deprive you of engaging yourself in extracurricular activities.

Fourth question: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out from the university due to military barriers?

B: Sometimes yes. The economic level of my family is a little bit low. My father usually asks me to join him at work if the checkpoint is closed.

Interview (3)

Gender: Male

Specialization: Faculty of Engineering ..... Architecture

School Year: Fourth Year

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?

C: The feeling of headache, circulation, and tension due to the long time that we spend at the checkpoints. The longtime of waiting is of our daily biggest fears.

The second question: How do the Israeli military barriers affect your daily academic routine at the university?

C: Studying for my university requires a kind of calm, comfort, and time management. However, the military checkpoints cause us daily disturbance in all these matters. Every day we are delayed from the date of the lecture, or have to be at the checkpoint hours before the lecture time.

Third question: Do the Israeli military checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?

C: Yes, you are under the oppressive Israeli policy which means your time is not in your hand but theses. The main question that usually runs in my mind is how long I am going to wait at the checkpoint. There is always a chance that the vehicle might be detained for some time because one of the riders is wanted. Sometimes, Israeli stop cars for a long time because they are looking for someone. They check everyone's identity card to make sure the driver is not carrying with him any wanted person

Fourth question: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out from the university due to military barriers?

C: In fact, we in Palestine are facing different kinds of barriers from Israeli. If everyone wants to give up his or her dream, we will not live our life probably. I do

believe that everyone should resist differently, mine is education. Henceforth, I am not thinking to drop out of university.

Interview (4)

Gender: Female

Specialization: Faculty of Arts

School Year: First Year

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?

D: We are often frustrated by tiredness, exhaustion, and the accompanying pain in the head as a result of standing for long periods at the military checkpoint. Just waiting alone makes you stressed regarding your studying, especially when I am a first-year student. When I think that I still have three years, I feel sad because of these checkpoints. I asked my family to take a student dorm just to avoid all kinds of distributions.

The second question: Do the Israeli military checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?

D: I worried about how I can get back home. If there is no checkpoint in the morning, I am afraid it would be on my back. I am always afraid of being late to my lecture or to be marked as absent, especially as you are obliged to attend. What makes me feel sad is that some instructors do not care about the matter. Besides, away from arriving on time to the lecture, you always need time to rest, relax, or discuss colleagues and the instructor in some exam matters; however, I cannot do that. I am just wasting time at the checkpoint being deprived of what my university mates have. I lose this opportunity to improve my academic understanding as my university mates do so.

The third question: How do the Israeli military barriers affect your daily academic routine at the university?

D: I do not know how long I am going to wait. Sometimes they do not ask us anything so I complete my day as I have planned. However, I always have a plane (B) including a short to-do list if I lose my time at the checkpoint.

The fourth question: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out of the university due to military barriers?

D: I tell you frankly that I always feel sorry for registering at university, and I always wait for a reason to leave it. My family keeps insisting on me to leave the university and join them at work. Since we come from a traditional society, we need to marry at an early age. Therefore, my family thinks that going to

university is not necessary since I am going to marry after finishing it.

Interview (5)

Gender: Female

Specialization: Faculty of Science

School Year: Fourth Year

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?

E: Tired, anxious, fearful, and painful as a result of the long waiting at the checkpoint. Sometimes I have to overthink how I can arrive at my university on time. Once upon a time, Israeli soldiers insulted a man in front of his family. This memory comes to my mind every time I pass by this checkpoint. Sometimes I am afraid that they order us to go back. My university instructors forgive my absence but they cannot do that for me every single day.

The second question: Do the Israeli military checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?

E: The barrier is always a concern to me especially when I have an exam or a lab lecture at the university. If I arrive late at the university, I cancel my plans for reading at the library. All my plans for the day depending on the possibility of passing the checkpoint without being late.

The third question: How do the Israeli military barriers affect your daily academic routine at the university?

E: Israeli checkpoints are changing from time to time in terms of the place and type of the checkpoint. However, sometimes we pass freely and I achieve what I have planned to. On the other hand, I lose my academic day due to the time I waste at the checkpoint. My friends and I are planning to do the homework together but since I could not come early to the university, I lose the chance of discussing the academic matters with them. You need to adapt yourself to the length of time that you spend at the checkpoint.

The fourth question: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out of the university due to military barriers?

E: I have already postponed the last semester at the university. But I regretted it because this problem is not temporary but permanent. Flying checkpoints become a part of Palestinian daily life.

## Discussion

The research sample in their answer to the first question emphasized that flying checkpoints cause headache, distress, boredom, tiredness, feelings of fear,

disorder, sweating, and circulation. These psychological feelings are found among students regardless of what their academic year is. Students said that the checkpoint is their main concern every day. Most of them are afraid of their university instructor to not accept their excuse when they arrive late. For the second question, the study sample of the research agreed among themselves that these checkpoints force them to wake up early in the morning, at least 3 hours before their lecture starts, to arrive at the university without being late. Some students have both plans (A) and (b) to spend their day. Choosing which plan to follow depends on the length of the time that they spend at the checkpoint. Furthermore, it is found that the military checkpoints stand as a hindrance for organizing their daily life in a proper way. Students cancel their plans almost every day due to the checkpoints. They go through embarrassing situations with their university mates and instructors every time they are late to the university. Some of them decided to leave their family and live in a student dorm next to the university. Lastly, the sample of the study differed among themselves in their answer to the fourth question regarding postponing the semester or leaving the university because of the military barriers. Two of the students answered the desire to postpone or leave the university while three students replied that they are not planning to postpone it since military checkpoints are part of Palestinian students.

In terms of demographic variables (gender, specialization, academic year), the results of the interviews proved that there were no differences in the responses of the sample on the impact of the Zionist occupation barriers on the psychology of students at An - Najah National University.

### Conclusions

This study mainly attempted to shed light on the impact of barriers of the Israeli occupation on the students' psychology at AL-Najah National University during their passage from Azzun area to their university. Additionally, it tried to identify deeply how these barriers caused psychological compression. The qualitative data collected through interviews with two females and three males.

Generally speaking, Israeli barriers play a major role in an unstable life, particularly on the academic issue. In the light of the final analysis of the qualitative data and discussion, the findings confirmed that there were no differences in the responses of the sample on the impact of the Zionist occupation barriers on the psychology of students at An - Najah National University due to the variables gender, specialization, and academic year. As can be seen that the flying barriers are a daily nuisance source for students at An-

Najah National University. Aside from the tedious checks at security checkpoints, students have not known how long it will take to get to their lectures and exams. This strongly affects their psychology negatively, in terms of their fears, anxiety, fatigue, headaches, and distress.

As has been noted that Israeli military barriers also affect their academic achievement, scholastic achievement, the progress of the university day, and motivation towards education and time management. In a word, students tend to adapt to the psychological stress caused by flying checkpoints as they become part of a sustainable Palestinian reality. From their perspectives, this is better than postponing the semester or dropping out of the University.

### 6.0 Recommendations

In light of the findings and discussion, the researchers recommend the following:

- 1- The university appointed specialized academic facilitators for students who face psychological pressures resulting from the Israeli barriers during their arrival to the university.
- 2- Setting an additional backup schedule for exams and lectures for the state of emergency for the psychological state caused by the Israeli barriers for lectures and exams.
- 3- Investing technology in providing support and assistance to those who face psychological pressure as a result of the Israeli barriers through online platforms in a case that they are unable to attend the university.

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Question 4: Have you ever thought of postponing or dropping out of the university due to military barriers?
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Appendix

corresponding model

Gender .....

Specialization.....

academic year: .....

The first question: What are the psychological feelings that you have gone through while you are waiting at the Israeli checkpoints on your way to the university?
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Second question: Do the Israeli checkpoints prevent you from achieving your goals and organizing time?
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Third question:How do the Israeli checkpoints affect your daily academic routine at the university?
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