International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Exploring the Effects of War on the Educational Performance of Afghan Students in India: The Mediating Influence of Social Support and Mental Health

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of war on Afghan students' educational performance in India, focusing on the mediating roles of social support and mental health. Using a mixed-method approach—including thematic analysis, regression analysis via the PROCESS macro, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA)—data were collected from 218 Afghan students across Indian universities through a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed that war does not directly impact educational performance but significantly affects it through social support and mental health, underscoring the role of coping mechanisms. Thematic analysis highlighted recurring issues such as hopelessness, financial struggle, resiliency, and the importance of social support. Despite emotional and financial challenges, institutional support—particularly from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)—was found essential for both academic success and psychological well-being. These findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions in mental health services, educational access, and institutional backing to improve academic outcomes and overall well-being among displaced students.

Introduction

War and conflict have devastating effects on societies, leaving indelible marks on the lives of individuals, particularly the younger generation. One of the most profound impacts of prolonged conflict is on the educational systems and the academic performance of students (Swimelar, 2013). Around the globe, numerous regions have experienced the brunt of war, resulting in disrupted education, displacement of populations, and psychological trauma among students (Khrushch et al., 2023).

In recent years, several countries have faced significant challenges due to ongoing conflicts. For instance, in Ukraine, the ongoing conflict has severely affected the education sector. Schools have been damaged or destroyed, and the constant threat of violence has led to irregular attendance and a shortage of qualified teachers (Khrushch et al., 2023). The war between Russia and Ukraine has caused the economy to plummet, the Ukrainian people to suffer, historical culture to be lost, and educational institutions, schools, and infrastructure to be destroyed. International students have suffered from psychological trauma and academic stress as a result of the present war-related suspension of instruction at the majority of Ukrainian universities. Not only those who directly involved in the battle will be at immediate risk for post-traumatic stress disorder, but there will also be an increase in depression, anxiety, and other stress-related illnesses,

such as drug and alcohol abuse, which can have long-lasting and even intergenerational effects (Sheather, 2022).

Similarly, in Palestine, the prolonged Israeli-Palestinian conflict has disrupted the education of countless students. Many schools operate in unsafe environments, and students often face psychological distress that hampers their ability to learn effectively (Head, 2020). A study discovered that anxiety and depression were prevalent among Palestinian university students, with 60.9% and 65.9%, respectively (Ahmead et al., 2024). Additionally, the study shown that humor, emotional support, and active coping were successful in lowering these symptoms2. Palestinian pupils' scholastic difficulties have been made worse by the continuous conflict, which has also resulted in numerous school closures and interruptions (Mahmid et al., 2021). In Syria, the civil war has created one of the most severe humanitarian crises of our time. Millions of children have been displaced, and the education system has been left in tatters. Many Syrian students have sought refuge in neighboring countries, where they struggle to access quality education due to language barriers, lack of resources, and overcrowded schools (Ferris & Kirisci, 2016). Another study shows that 44% of participants in the study had signs of PTSD and severe mental anguish, indicating an alarmingly high frequency of serious mental problems among Syrian children (Kakaje et al., 2021). Furthermore, Syrian children in refugee camps have a difficult time getting an education since many of the schools are overcrowded and underfunded (*The Hidden Costs of Armed Conflict*, 2024). These elements play a part in Syrian students' continuous battle for both academic achievement and emotional health (Das & Dhar, 2023).

Meanwhile, in Iraq, decades of conflict have left the education infrastructure in a precarious state. Schools are often used as shelters or military bases, disrupting the education process and creating a generation of students who have limited access to formal education (Al-Jadiry & Rustam, 2006). Reports shows that 70% of the almost one million displaced children have missed a full school year (*Removing Scars of War in Iraq through Education | UNESCO*, n.d.). The difficulties experienced by Iraqi students have been made worse by the 67 attacks against educational institutions and staff that have been documented in the past year (Richards, 2004). In conflict-affected governorates like Salah al-Din and Diyala, where over 90% of school-age children are excluded from the educational system, the situation is particularly grim.(Allington & Gabriel, 2012) Students have also experienced severe psychological trauma as a result of the continuous violence and displacement, which has impacted their capacity to learn and achieve academically (Paradies, 2024).

The protracted conflict in Afghanistan has had profound and multifaceted effects on its citizens, particularly on students who have sought refuge and education abroad. Since the transition in leadership in August 2021, millions of Afghans have fled the country to escape poverty and persecution (Kumar, 2023). Many now find themselves in a state of uncertainty in countries around the world, where they face restricted freedoms and rights, with limited prospects for a brighter future (Stepansky, n.d.). The school system has been negatively harmed by the new regime (*"Schools Are Failing Boys Too": The Taliban's Impact on Boys' Education in Afghanistan | HRW*, n.d.). Secondary school for girls has been prohibited, and the education of boys has declined as a result of the restriction on female teachers and the increase in physical punishment (*"Schools Are Failing Boys Too": The Taliban's Impact on Boys' Education in Afghanistan | HRW*, n.d.). This has led to a significant decline in educational quality and access, forcing many Afghan students to seek education in refugee camps or foreign countries. Many Afghan pupils are attending schools in countries like the United States after fleeing their homeland. Furthermore, the situation has been exacerbated by the economic collapse and rising unemployment, leaving many families

struggling to make ends meet, let alone afford their children's education (*Toolkit-Supporting-Afghan-Students-in-Schools-and-Youth-Programs*, n.d.). The sudden termination of foreign aid and the sharp decline in the value of the national currency have also contributed to these difficulties. As a result, Afghan students studying overseas often face financial hardships and limited access to educational resources ("Three Years of Taliban Rule," 2024).

Furthermore, it is inconceivable to ignore the psychological effects of the conflict and relocation. Many Afghan students suffer from trauma, anxiety, and depression, which makes it more difficult for them to excel academically and adjust to new educational institutions (Darwish & Wotipka, 2024). Significant level of stress, anxiety, and depression among students, underscoring the necessity of mental health care (Matin & Ahmadi, 2024). Another study discussed how the mental health of Afghan society, including schoolchildren, is affected by protracted combat, economic hardship, and forced relocation (Alemi et al., 2023). High rates of stress, anxiety, and depression in the general population, with strong correlations between sociodemographic characteristics and mental health conditions (Neyazi et al., 2024). Conflict in Afghanistan has not only disrupted the lives of its citizens but also created significant barriers to education and mental well-being for Afghan students abroad (Darwish & Wotipka, 2024).

Among those affected are Afghan students in India the war has disrupted their educational trajectories, leading to gaps in learning, psychological trauma, and a host of other challenges. Despite these obstacles, many Afghan students in India strive to continue their education, often relying on social support networks and mental health resources to cope with their new realities (*Afghan Students Feel Abandoned as India Restricts Visas | News | Al Jazeera*, n.d.), (*Afghan Students Urge India to Extend Visas and Restart Scholarships | Reuters*, n.d.), (*Amid Afghanistan Crisis, 2,200 Students in India Stare at an Uncertain Future | Mumbai News - Hindustan Times*, n.d.).

While factors such as social support and mental health play a crucial role in shaping the educational performance of Afghan students in India, there remains a lack of comprehensive research examining these influences. Social support whether from family, friends, or community organizations can be instrumental in helping students adapt to their new environments and overcome the difficulties posed by displacement (Agarwal, 2022). Additionally, mental health remains a critical factor, as students who have experienced trauma may struggle with anxiety, depression, and other psychological challenges that impact their academic performance (Bakhtyari & Rahimpour, 2018). However, the specific ways in which these factors interact and influence Afghan students' educational success in India remain underexplored, highlighting a crucial gap in existing studies.

This study seeks to investigate the impact of war on the educational outcomes of Afghan students in India, addressing a research gap that has not yet been explored. With a particular focus on the mediating influence of social support and mental health. Understanding these mediating factors is essential for developing effective interventions that can help students thrive despite their difficult circumstances. By examining the experiences of Afghan students in India, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on the impact of war on education and to highlight the importance of providing adequate support to displaced students around the world. As the political and social landscape of Afghanistan remains turbulent, the repercussions are felt beyond its borders, profoundly impacting Afghan students pursuing higher education in foreign countries such as India nearly 14,000 Afghan students are now enrolled in 73 Indian universities and other educational institutions (*Year After Kabul Fell To Taliban, Afghan Students' Wait For Indian Visa Continues*, n.d.). This study seeks to examine the extent to which the war in Afghanistan has

influenced the educational performance of these students, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of mental health and social support.

Research has consistently shown that experiences of war and conflict can lead to significant psychological distress, which in turn affects academic performance and overall well-being (Seleznova et al., 2023). Afghan students in India, who are away from their home country and support systems, face unique challenges that can exacerbate these effects. Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are prevalent among individuals who have experienced war (Fazel et al., 2005). These mental health challenges can severely hinder academic performance, leading to difficulties in concentration, motivation, and cognitive function.

The impact of war on education is a critical issue that affects students' academic performance and overall well-being (Lai & Thyne, 2007). This study focuses on Afghan higher education students in India, examining how the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan influences their educational outcomes. Key variables in this research include the impact of war, social support, mental health, and educational performance.

The impact of war encompasses the various ways in which ongoing conflict disrupts the lives and education of students (Lai & Thyne, 2007). Social support refers to the emotional and practical assistance provided by family, friends, and community networks.(Cohen et al., 2000) Mental health, including anxiety, depression, and trauma, plays a significant role in students' ability to succeed academically (Elshewey et al., 2024). Educational performance is measured by students' academic achievements and progress in their studies.

By examining these relationships, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between conflict, mental health, and education. It highlights the importance of providing adequate support systems for Afghan students, which can enhance their academic success and overall well-being, ultimately enabling them to build a brighter future despite the challenges posed by their past experiences.

Literature Review

War has a profound and detrimental effect on education, disrupting the learning process and displacing students, teachers, and educational resources. Conflicts lead to the destruction of educational infrastructure, creating unsafe environments for both teaching and learning(Gates et al., 2012). The psychological trauma inflicted by war further hampers students' ability to concentrate and perform academically (Justino, 2010). Another study explored the effect of the Ukraine crisis on the national and international economy, which is intrinsically tied to education, research, and science (Al Gharaibeh et al., 2023). This displaced many local and international students, teachers, and educators at Ukrainian universities, schools, and institutes, including girls and women.

Similar situations are observed in other conflict-affected regions like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, where educational performance is severely impacted by ongoing violence and instability (Savell, 2023). Providing social support and resources to displaced students is crucial in mitigating these adverse effects and helping them continue their education despite the challenges posed by war. Mental health acts as a mediator between trauma exposure and individual outcomes. Students affected by war may experience symptoms of hyper arousal, emotional numbness, and intrusive thoughts, which hinder their academic and social functioning (Roehr, 2013). Tools such as the DASS-21 and PCL-5 are frequently used to assess

such conditions, providing a standardized framework for evaluating mental health outcomes in post-conflict populations (Gomez, 2016). Based on the review of the existing literature, we hypothesize that:

H1: There is a significant impact of war-related experiences on the educational performance of Afghan students.

Social support, defined as the perception and actuality of being cared for and having assistance available from other people, plays a crucial role in mitigating the adverse effects of mental health issues (Cohen et al., 2000). It has been found that social support can buffer the negative impact of stress and enhance psychological well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985a). For Afghan students in India, social support can come from various sources, including peers, educators, family members (even if remotely), and the broader community. This study aims to evaluate the relationship between social support and mental health among Afghan students and assess the role of social support in alleviating the impact of war-related experiences on their current lives and academic performance. The importance of social support in post-war coping is well-documented. People use many different coping strategies to deal with their traumatic recollections. Twenty-five British World War II veterans were interviewed regarding the ways they used social support both during the war and in the years afterwards. The findings demonstrate that social support is used in fundamentally different ways. During the war, comradeship was particularly important, and even fifty years after the war, comrades are still a valuable resource for discussing war experiences and dealing with the emotional content of traumatic recollections. Veterans rely on wives and families to help deal with the more physical and practical elements of coping but tend not to discuss their traumatic memories with them. The findings show that social support is an important lifelong coping strategy for World War II veterans (Hunt & Robbins, 2001). Social support, which offers real, emotional, and informational support, improves psychological resilience and reduces stress. In academic settings, strong social support networks contribute to better mental health and academic performance (Wilks & Spivey, 2010). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) has been widely validated for assessing social support across diverse populations, making it suitable for evaluating the experiences of Afghan students in India.

In light of the identified gaps and findings in the current literature, we hypothesize that:

H2: Social support positively mediates the relationship between the impact of war and students' educational performance.

H3: Social support is positively associated with better mental health outcomes among Afghan students.

Individuals, particularly those who are displaced or directly impacted, are profoundly impacted psychologically, socially, and economically by war and conflict. Conditions including anxiety, sadness, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are frequently brought on by prolonged exposure to war-related trauma (Mollica et al., 1992). These mental health challenges can impede individuals' ability to function effectively in educational and social environments. Afghan populations, having experienced decades of war, are particularly vulnerable to such effects (Saleem et al., 2021). War leaves deep scars on individuals, affecting their mental, emotional, and social well-being. The trauma of conflict can lead to long-term psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Miller & Rasmussen, 2010). Social support plays a crucial role in mitigating these effects and aiding in the recovery process. Based on the analysis of existing studies, we put forward the hypothesis that:

H4: Mental health significantly mediates the relationship between war-related experiences and educational performance.

Research highlights the interplay between mental health, social support, and educational performance in post-conflict populations. The inclusion of social support as a variable acknowledges its potential to moderate the adverse effects of trauma on mental health and, consequently, academic outcomes. By examining these relationships, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of Afghan students' experiences and the broader implications of war on education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory,(Bronfenbrenner, 2005) which offers a thorough framework for comprehending how many environmental layers interact to influence a person's development. In the context of Afghan students, this theory offers a valuable lens through which to explore the impact of war, social support, and mental health on educational outcomes.

Bronfenbrenner's model consists of five interrelated systems:

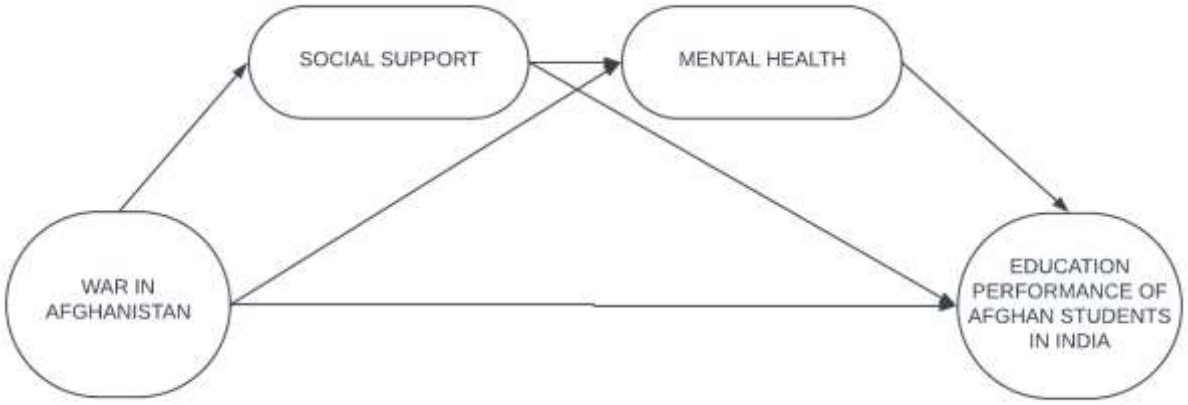
Microsystems: Stressors from the larger social and cultural context, such the protracted war in Afghanistan, have an indirect impact on pupils' academic achievement and mental well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). **Exosystem:** Indirect factors that might affect pupils' psychological moods, such as political instability and experiences of displacement. **Mesosystem**: the relationships between microsystems, such as those between families and schools, which influence how well pupils are supported socially. **Microsystem**: immediate environments, such as homes, schools, and classmates, where pupils may get relationships and direct assistance to help them deal with the trauma of war. **Chronosystem**: the temporal dimension, acknowledging the impact that prolonged exposure to conflict has on a student's growth and resilience throughout their academic career. To delve deeper into how students respond to stress from war, the **Stress and Coping Theory** by (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) also supporting the study. The theory highlights that individuals manage stress through cognitive appraisal and coping strategies. In the case of Afghan students, the war introduces significant psychological strain, and their ability to cope whether problem-focused or emotion-focused directly influences their mental health and academic outcomes. In parallel, the **Social Support Theory** explains how support networks buffer the effects of stress and contribute to psychological resilience. (Cohen & Wills, 1985b) assert that instrumental, emotional, and informational assistance can improve wellbeing, lessen the negative consequences of stress, and eventually promote academic performance. Educational Resilience Theory sheds light on the protective function of both internal and external resources, which helps to further understand why some kids succeed academically in spite of hardship. According to (Waxman et al., 2003) resilience arises when pupils sustain academic achievement in the face of severe adversities like war and displacement by relying on both internal and external motivation.

Together, these theories reinforce the logic of the conceptual framework: the war in Afghanistan (macro stressor) affects students' mental health, while **social support** acts as a **mediator**, influencing their **resilience** and **ability to perform academically**.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the impact of war in Afghanistan on the educational performance of Afghan higher education students in India, considering the mediating roles of mental health and social support.
- To evaluate the relationship between social support and mental health among Afghan students.
- To assess the role of social support in mitigating the effects of war-related experiences on Afghan students' current lives and academic performance.

Conceptual Model:



Research Methodology: Study 1

Research Design

In order to investigate how the conflict in Afghanistan has affected the mental health, social support, and academic achievement of Afghan students in India, this study uses a quantitative research design. To collect standardized data from participants and ensure effective measurement of variables and their interrelationships, a cross-sectional survey method was used (Olsen & St George, 2004). Data were collected through structured questionnaires, which included validated scales for measuring Impact of war Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ), social support (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support), mental health DASS-21 (Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scales), and educational performance Measured through The 9-item Academic Self-Efficacy (ASE) scale. Data collection was carried out through direct, in-person surveys among Afghan students residing in India. Participants were approached, briefed about the study, and provided with a paper-based questionnaire to complete. Simultaneously, online data collection was conducted via WhatsApp and Facebook, where an invitation message detailing the study's objectives was shared. Interested participants accessed an online survey link, where they provided informed consent before completing the questionnaire. The survey included sections measuring the impact of war, social support, mental health, and educational performance.

The data collection period lasted three months, from November 2024 to January 2025 with follow-up reminders sent periodically to encourage participation. All responses were securely stored, and ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University, ensuring confidentiality and adherence to ethical standards.

Results:

The sample for this study consisted 218 Afghan higher education students in India, the detail characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic

		Gender	Age	Level of Education	Field of Study	Institute Name	State	City	Years Spent in India	Course completed
N	Valid	218	218	218	218	218	218	218	218	218
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		1.10	1.32	2.35	9.72	10.89	4.94	6.27	2.92	1.42
Std. Deviation		.302	.504	.636	5.287	10.269	4.665	6.320	1.300	.495
Minimum		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum		2	3	3	18	36	18	18	5	2

The dataset comprises 218 participants, with males forming the majority at 196 individuals (89.9%) and females accounting for 22 individuals (10.1%). All statistical metrics, including Percent, Valid Percent, and Cumulative Percent, are consistent for each group, with females reaching a cumulative percentage of 100%. Most participants fall within the 21–30 age group (153 individuals, 70.2%), followed by those aged 31–40 (61 individuals, 28.0%), while the smallest group consists of participants aged 41–50 (4 individuals, 1.8%). The cumulative percentage reaches 100% by the 41–50 age group. Regarding education levels, the majority have a Master's degree (103 individuals, 47.2%), followed by PhD holders (96 individuals, 44.0%), and a smaller group with a Bachelor's degree (19 individuals, 8.7%). The cumulative percentage confirms all participants, reaching 100% at the PhD level. The largest field of study is Management (94 individuals, 43.1%), followed by Engineering (19 individuals, 8.7%). Minimal representation is observed in fields such as Gender Disparities and Journalism (1 individual each, 0.5%). Punjabi University has the highest representation of participants (76 individuals, 34.9%), followed by Panjab University (45 individuals, 20.6%). Other universities contribute smaller shares, with some accounting for only 1 participant (0.5%). Patiala emerges as the most represented city (76 individuals, 34.9%), followed by Chandigarh (45 individuals, 20.6%), while cities such as Delhi and Ludhiana contribute minimally (0.5% each). When it comes to the number of years spent in India, the largest group has spent 4 years (68 individuals, 31.2%), followed by those who spent 5 years (63 individuals, 28.9%). Smaller groups include those with 3 years (27 individuals, 12.4%), 6 years (16 individuals, 7.3%), and more than 6 years (44 individuals, 20.2%). The cumulative percentage reaches 100% with the "more than 6 years" group. Finally, a majority of participants (126 individuals, 57.8%) have completed the course, while 92 individuals (42.2%) have not, bringing the cumulative percentage to 100%.

Pilot Test and Data Collection

Researchers used the stratified sampling strategy to conduct a pilot study prior to data collection. For the pilot study, 50 responses in total were gathered. The pilot study's KMO value was.701 and its alpha value was.862.

Table 2
Shows the EFA results
Rotated Component Matrix[a]

	Component			
	Mental Health Challenges	Supportive Relationships	Academic Confidence	War Echoes
IW2				**0.516**
IW5				**0.614**
IW6				**0.653**
IW7				**0.687**
IW8				**0.678**
IW9				**0.600**
IW11				**0.572**
IW12				**0.587**
IW14				**0.616**
IW15				**0.436**
SS1		**0.591**		
SS2		**0.675**		
SS3		**0.630**		
SS4		**0.708**		
SS5		**0.701**		
SS6		**0.754**		
SS7		**0.719**		
SS8		**0.536**		
SS9		**0.668**		
SS11		**0.605**		
SS12		**0.683**		
MH2	**0.574**			
MH3	**0.709**			
MH4	**0.709**			
MH5	**0.670**			
MH6	**0.672**			
MH7	**0.740**			
MH8	**0.698**			
MH9	**0.764**			
MH10	**0.764**			
MH11	**0.768**			
MH12	**0.658**			
MH13	**0.763**			
MH14	**0.716**			
MH15	**0.713**			
MH16	**0.684**			
MH17	**0.716**			
MH18	**0.682**			

MH19	**0.700**			
MH20	**0.710**			
EP1			**0.613**	
EP2			**0.649**	
EP3			**0.810**	
EP4			**0.682**	
EP5			**0.639**	
EP6			**0.744**	
EP7			**0.746**	
EP8			**0.718**	
EP9			**0.706**	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

This exploratory factor analysis (EFA) table 2, the KMO value for the data was .964 and alpha .972 derived through principal component analysis with Varimax rotation, highlights the relationships between variables such as Impact of war(IW), social support (SS), mental health (MH), and education performance (EP), and their respective components. Each row represents an item (e.g., IW2, SS1, MH2), while each column corresponds to a factor, with factor loadings indicating the strength of association between the variables and the components. Higher loadings (e.g., > 0.5) suggest stronger connections, with mental health variables loading predominantly onto Component 1, social support items onto Component 2, IW items onto Component 3, and emotional processing variables onto Component 4. This rotation simplifies the factor structure, clarifying the grouping of items, such as the strong loadings of MH2 (0.740) and MH3 (0.764) on mental health and SS1 (0.754) and SS2 (0.719) on social support. Components capture unique data dimensions, like mental health and emotional regulation, contributing to targeted psychological assessments or interventions. While variables like IW6 (loading 0.653) strongly align with their factor, weaker loadings (e.g., IW15 with 0.436) might indicate less relevance, and cross-loading items would need further evaluation. Overall, this analysis unveils coherent factors, helping to uncover the underlying structure of the data. Item 1,3,4,10, and 13 removed from variable IW, and item 10 from social support(SS), Item 1 from mental health variable (MH) has been removed due to have low loading value.

Regression analysis:

A mediation analysis Process macro model 6 revealed that IW (impact of war) does not directly affect EP (education performance) but has a significant indirect impact through SS and MH. IW significantly predicts SS ($\beta = 0.6265$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.3652$, $F(1,216) = 124.26$, $p < .001$), which in turn influences MH ($\beta = 0.2710$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.5063$, $F(2,215) = 110.23$, $p < .001$). IW also has a direct effect on MH ($\beta = 0.5773$, $p < .001$), indicating its role in shaping mental health outcomes. In the final model, IW, SS, and MH collectively explain 40.83% of the variance in EP ($R^2 = 0.4083$, $F(3,214) = 49.23$, $p < .001$), with SS ($\beta = 0.3419$, $p < .001$) and MH ($\beta = 0.2601$, $p < .001$) significantly contributing to EP, whereas the direct effect of IW on EP is no significant ($\beta = 0.0398$, $p = .5801$). The total effect of IW on EP (without mediators) remains significant ($\beta = 0.4484$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.2298$, $F(1,216) = 64.45$, $p < .001$), confirming mediation. Indirect effects show IW influences EP through SS (Ind1: $\beta = 0.2142$, $p < .001$), MH (Ind2: β

= 0.1502, p < .001), and a combined pathway through SS and MH (Ind3: β = 0.0442, p < .001). These findings underline the significance of addressing social support and mental health in psychological therapies by highlighting their crucial mediation roles in the link between IW and Educational performance.

Discussion:

These findings emphasize how crucial indirect effects are in revealing the connection between education performance and impact of war. Strong social networks and mental health assistance greatly enhance education performance outcomes, even while IW by itself has little direct effect on EP. This conclusion is consistent with previous research that suggests social support helps people better manage trauma by acting as a buffer against IW-related discomfort. Resilience is mostly fostered by social support and mental health therapies, according to the strong explanatory power (R2 values) across mediation models. Furthermore, the intricate and multi-layered character of IW's influence on education performance is confirmed by the noteworthy indirect effects—Ind1 (IW → SS → EP), Ind2 (IW → MH → EP), and Ind3 (IW → SS → MH → EP). This emphasizes the need for community-based therapies, social support programs, and integrated mental health programs to lessen the long-term impacts of IW and improve education stability in those who are impacted.

Thematic analysis:

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns (themes) within textual data. It is useful for understanding experiences, perceptions, and meanings in responses, making it ideal for exploring the effects of war and related challenges.(Clarke & Braun, 2014) We have used thematic analysis because it allows us to capture common themes across individual narratives, providing in-depth insight into psychological, social, and educational impacts.

Procedure and methodology: Study 2

To conduct thematic analysis, the researcher first familiarized with the responses it means going through questions and responses and getting the idea. Second, identifying recurring ideas. Then, coded the data by assigning labels to significant patterns, such as despair, resilience, and economic hardship. Next, grouped similar codes into broader themes, ensuring they accurately represented key experiences. After that, reviewed and refined the themes to enhance clarity and coherence. Finally, interpreted and reported the findings with the help of copilot, linking them to the research context and implications. This structured approach helped uncover meaningful insights into the psychological, social, and academic challenges faced by individuals.

Findings: The thematic analysis revealed the devastation caused by the war in Afghanistan, which has a profound impact on everyday life and long-term objectives by producing hopelessness, uncertainty, economic hardship, and disruptions in schooling. While some people show fortitude in the face of hardship, many experience psychological distress, loneliness, and insecurity. The war and studying in India have had a major impact on mental health, with despair, trauma, anxiety, and disappointment being common, as well as issues with focus and emotional stability. The majority of people have declining mental health, which is made worse by academic pressure and prior trauma, even though some people express hope and wellbeing. This highlights the need for supporting measures. Social support is essential for coping; friends and family can provide both financial and emotional support, and some people can overcome obstacles with the help of institutional support (such as supervisors or ICCR) and prayer. But a lot of people feel alone and unsupported, which emphasizes the need for more robust social networks and mental health services to promote resilience and well-being in those impacted.

Discussion:

The results of the theme analysis highlight the complex effects of displacement and conflict, exposing profound social, psychological, and educational challenges faced by those impacted. The frequency of hopelessness, ambiguity, financial difficulties, and disruptions to education emphasizes how conflict radically changes life paths, requiring people to negotiate instability while trying to reconstruct their futures. The enduring effects of migration and violence are highlighted by the chronic mental health issues, including as trauma, anxiety, and emotional discomfort, which are frequently made worse by the demands of academic life abroad. Even if some people are resilient and hopeful, the overarching theme of uncertainty and loneliness implies that many people lack access to adequate support networks.

The importance of social support systems, especially those of friends, family, and institutional assistance (ICCR, supervisors), supports psychological studies that shows how community and emotional ties may help reduce suffering. However, the high number of people who report feeling alone points to a lack of easily available mental health services and support networks, indicating the urgent need for programs that promote social integration, psychological resilience, and educational accessibility. These results urge focused efforts in institutional structures, mental health services, and policy to guarantee that displaced people receive the all-encompassing assistance required for their rehabilitation and general well-being.

Limitation and Future Research Agenda:

This study contains a number of limitations that should be taken into account, even if the quantitative and qualitative approaches were fully integrated. Future study must include larger, more varied populations since the limited sample size may limit the findings' generalizability. Furthermore, the self-reported form of the data raises the risk of response biases, in which participants may exaggerate or underreport their experiences, particularly in the context of theme analysis. Although the study's primary focus is on trauma and social support associated to conflict, it did not thoroughly examine other significant elements including cultural adaptability, financial stability, and governmental effects, which leaves potential for more research. Finally, the cross-sectional approach restricts inferences on causality, even while the PROCESS macro validates mediation effects. This emphasizes the necessity of longitudinal research to evaluate long-term psychological trajectories. Building on these results, future studies should focus on longitudinal analyses to document the changing effects of relocation and conflict on mental health. Results will be more applicable if sample variety is increased across cultural and geographic contexts. Furthermore, analyzing institutional policies like funding for schooling and refugee aid initiatives will offer important insights into structural interventions that promote trauma healing. Thematic analysis combined with neuroscientific measurements (such as stress biomarkers or cognitive tests) might provide a more profound psychological viewpoint, bolstering empirical and experiential conclusions. In order to ensure that displaced people receive the psychological and educational help they need to reconstruct their futures, research should also concentrate on intervention measures that promote academic achievement, social reintegration, and mental health resilience.

Implications of the Study:

The findings of this study highlight how crucial it is to address the social and psychological aspects of education for pupils who have experienced war. Although there may not be much of a direct effect of war on academic achievement, but there are significant indirect consequences that are mediated via social support networks and mental health issues. This emphasises the necessity for policymakers and institutions of higher learning to carry out focused interventions that give mental health services top priority, cultivate

robust social support systems, and guarantee ongoing institutional support, like that offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Host nations may greatly improve the educational results and general resilience of displaced student populations by using a comprehensive strategy that combines academic support with emotional well-being.

Conclusion:

This research offers a multifaceted examination of how the conflict has affected Afghan students' academic achievement in India, highlighting the mediating roles of mental health and social support. The study confirms that the interrelated dimensions of impact of war (IW), social support (SS), mental health (MH), and education performance (EP) significantly influence academic results by identifying important factor structures via the use of EFA and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). These associations are further supported by the PROCESS macro regression analysis, which shows that while war has an indirect influence on education achievement through SS and MH, it does not directly affect it. These mediation effects demonstrate the importance of coping strategies by demonstrating that those who have stronger social networks and better mental health outcomes are more resilient emotionally and academically. Notably, IW strongly predicts SS ($\beta = 0.6265$, $p < .001$) and MH ($\beta = 0.5773$, $p < .001$), supporting the notion that supportive surroundings and mental health therapies might lessen the anguish associated with conflict.

These quantitative results are enhanced by the theme analysis, which provides more in-depth individual insights into the difficulties of Afghan students encounter. The recurring themes of hopelessness, unpredictability, financial struggle, and disturbances in the classroom highlight the pervasive psychological and pedagogical challenges brought on by conflict. Even if some people are resilient, many others struggle financially, emotionally, and socially, which emphasizes the importance of strong support networks. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations, or ICCR, is a key provider of institutional assistance, scholarships, mentorship, and advice that help displaced Afghan students succeed academically and maintain psychological stability. Notwithstanding the importance of ICCR, many students continue to encounter obstacles because of inadequate financial resources, visa problems, and mental health resources, underscoring the need for improved institutional frameworks and easily available counselling services.

Collectively, these results highlight the devastation caused by war, the difficulties in psychological healing, and the critical role that social support networks play in schooling. A balanced viewpoint that captures both statistical importance and lived experiences is ensured by the integration of factor analysis, regression models, and theme narratives. This study reaffirms the need for focused interventions in social support, education accessibility, and mental health to enhance Afghan students' long-term academic performance and emotional wellbeing in India. To guarantee long-term healing for those impacted by violence, future initiatives should concentrate on boosting mental health services, developing social resilience, and increasing institutional support (scholarships like ICCR).

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