

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

RELIGIOSITY AND RESILIENCE AMONG SCHOOL-AGED
CHILDREN IN THE ARAB WORLD: A SYSTEMATIC
REVIEW

by
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Children growing up amid political unrest in the Arab world face sustained exposure to violence, displacement, and instability, placing them at heightened risk for psychological distress. Within these contexts, religiosity is often embedded in children’s everyday lives and may shape how they cope with adversity and maintain resilience. Guided by the PRISMA framework, this systematic review synthesized empirical evidence on the relationship between religiosity, resilience, and psychological wellbeing among school-aged children and adolescents (approximately 6–18 years) living in conflict-affected Arab settings.

Comprehensive searches of major academic databases identified peer-reviewed studies published in English. Following title, abstract, and full-text screening based on predefined inclusion criteria—focusing on Arab conflict contexts, school-aged populations, and explicit measures of religiosity and mental health—57 empirical studies were retained, of which 17 met criteria for inclusion in the main synthesis. The evidence primarily represented Palestinian and Lebanese contexts, including children living under occupation, siege, or displacement, as well as refugee populations in host countries. A narrative and thematic synthesis was conducted, integrating findings from quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies, with methodological quality assessed using standardized appraisal tools.

Across the core evidence, religiosity was often associated with lower levels of post-traumatic stress and emotional distress, particularly when expressed through supportive beliefs, personal practices such as prayer, and involvement in religious communities. Qualitative studies further highlighted meaning-making, emotional regulation, communal belonging, and identity as key pathways linking religiosity to resilience. However, the review also identified mixed and null findings, and in some contexts, rigid or punitive forms of religiosity were associated with increased distress. Most included studies were cross-sectional and rated as having moderate risk of bias.

Overall, the findings suggest that religiosity can function as a context-dependent resilience resource for some war-affected Arab children, rather than a uniformly protective factor. The review underscores the need for nuanced, culturally grounded approaches in research and practice, as well as for more longitudinal, child-focused studies that better capture the complex role of religiosity in resilience under political violence. These findings highlight the relevance of culturally grounded religious and spiritual dimensions for understanding resilience in conflict-affected childhoods, while

also underscoring the need for cautious interpretation given the methodological limitations of the existing evidence.

Key terms: religiosity, resilience, school-aged children, political unrest, Arab World.

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*This thesis is dedicated to every prayer and every whispered tasbih my parents offered in the small rooms of our many homes.
To the faith they carried quietly, the patience they practiced daily, and the resilience they lived long before I learned its name.*

*It is also dedicated to every parent and every human being in Palestine, the South, Sudan, and in all places marked by oppression, who continues to hold on to the light of hope amid loss, uncertainty, and fear.
To those who nurture dignity, meaning, and care in the most difficult circumstances, and who teach resilience not through words, but through living.*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Children in many parts of the Arab world are raised amid ongoing political unrest, armed conflict, and chronic instability. These conditions profoundly shape their developmental, emotional, and psychological trajectories. These conditions expose them to repeated stressors and potentially traumatic events that threaten their psychological wellbeing and healthy development (Khamis, 1998, 2000, 2005, 2008, 2012; Qouta, Punamäki, & El Sarraj, 2008; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2004). Yet, despite such adversity, many children show signs of resilience, continuing to function, learn, and maintain hope. Understanding what supports this resilience—especially in contexts where religion is central to personal and collective identity—is essential for informing effective mental health and psychosocial support.

Religion and religiosity are deeply woven into everyday life in much of the Arab world. Religious beliefs, practices, and communities can offer meaning, comfort, and a sense of order in times of crisis. Across different cultures, research has shown that religious involvement is closely linked to emotional experiences and perceived wellbeing, and that religion can shape how people interpret and respond to stressful events (Corrigan, 2009; Emmons, 2005; Edara, delCastillo, Ching, & del Castillo, 2021; Kowalczyk et al., 2020; Sundararajan, Ting, Hsieh, & Kim, 2020). Theoretical and empirical work suggests that religion may foster resilience through multiple pathways, including personal beliefs, religious coping strategies, and social support within

religious communities (Pargament, 1997; Pargament et al., 1998; Ai, Peterson, & Huang, 2003; Hodge, 2005; Khan & Watson, 2017).

For children and adolescents living amid political unrest in the Arab world, these religious resources may be particularly important. Practices such as prayer, fasting, and scriptural study can provide structure, a sense of purpose, and feelings of closeness to God, while religious communities can offer belonging, practical support, and shared narratives that help make sense of hardship (Hood Jr, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Walsh, 2016). Observations from settings such as Palestine and Lebanon suggest that many young people draw on faith to endure the strain of political unrest and violence, indicating that religiosity may play a significant role in how they cope and remain resilient (Amine et al., 2008; Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, & Westman, 2018; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2015; Hill & Pargament, 2017). At the same time, not all religious influences are uniformly positive, and the ways in which religiosity supports—or potentially complicates—children’s adjustment can vary with context, family dynamics, and the intensity of unrest. Not to mention that the Arab world is not a uniform context. It holds significant diversity in religious practices, political conditions and cultural norms that may shape children’s experiences differently.

Given the significant role of religion in shaping societal dynamics and individual coping mechanisms in the Arab World, this thesis aims to explore the specific mechanisms through which religion influences resilience among school-aged children in areas of political unrest. It seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on child development and mental health in conflict-affected settings, with potential implications for other regions experiencing similar conflicts.

Purpose Statement

This systematic review aims to synthesize empirical evidence on how religiosity relates to resilience and psychological wellbeing among school-aged children living in conflict-affected contexts in the Arab world.

Specifically, the review examines reported patterns of association between religiosity and mental health outcomes, and explores how different dimensions of religiosity—such as beliefs, practices, and community involvement—are described as supporting or complicating children’s adaptation to political violence and instability. Where the reviewed studies allow, variations related to gender, religious upbringing, and conflict exposure are noted descriptively, in order to clarify contextual differences rather than to test causal or moderating effects.

This focus directly addresses the gap identified in the literature, namely the absence of a systematic, child-focused synthesis that treats religiosity as a multidimensional construct within conflict-affected Arab settings.

Research Questions

After collating and studying various research studies on religiosity and resilience, and taking into consideration the sensitivity of school-aged children and the effect of living in areas of political unrest in the Arab World, it is crucial to examine the influence of religion on school-aged children’s resilience in these areas. Therefore, a systematic review study is needed to address the following research questions:

1. What patterns of association are reported between religiosity and resilience or indicators of psychological wellbeing among school-aged children living in areas of political unrest in the Arab world?

2. How do the included studies describe or conceptualize religiosity as a coping resource for school-aged children exposed to political violence and instability?
3. Which dimensions of religiosity (e.g., religious beliefs, personal practices, and involvement in religious communities) show the most consistent associations with indicators of resilience across the reviewed studies?

Together, these questions are designed to capture the direction, mechanisms, and dimensions of religiosity in relation to resilience, while remaining descriptive and comparative in line with the scope and methodological limits of a systematic review.

Rationale

Resilience in children has been studied from multiple disciplinary perspectives, resulting in a wide range of definitions, measures, and methodological approaches. While this diversity has enriched the field, it has also produced a fragmented body of evidence, making it difficult to identify consistent factors that support children's adaptation under adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2021; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016). This challenge is particularly evident in disaster and conflict research, where studies vary widely in types of exposure, outcomes assessed, and study design. Although recent reviews have clarified certain patterns—such as the dose–response relationship between exposure and post-traumatic stress symptoms (Furr, Comer, Edmunds, & Kendall, 2010)—substantial conceptual and methodological heterogeneity remains (Brown et al., 2018; Gutermann et al., 2016).

Within this complex literature, religiosity is often treated as a peripheral variable—embedded within broader constructs such as social support or culture—rather

than examined as a central and potentially independent dimension of resilience. At the same time, resilience frameworks increasingly emphasize that adaptation is shaped by multilevel systems, including families, communities, institutions, and belief systems (UNISDR, 2015; Masten, 2021). In the Arab world, where religion frequently structures daily life, moral frameworks, and communal belonging, this omission is particularly striking.

Decades of political unrest in contexts such as Palestine and Lebanon have exposed children to chronic stress, displacement, and violence. Yet empirical work consistently documents that many children continue to function and adapt despite these conditions (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2015). Several studies suggest that religiosity—through faith, religious identity, and community life—may contribute to this resilience, but findings are mixed and unevenly reported. Some studies highlight protective associations, while others point to null or ambivalent effects, particularly when religiosity is experienced as rigid, punitive, or ideologically demanding.

Focusing specifically on school-aged children is developmentally important. Middle childhood and early adolescence are periods in which cognitive, emotional, and moral frameworks are still forming, and religious beliefs and practices are often mediated by family and community rather than chosen autonomously. This developmental positioning means that religiosity may operate differently for children than for adults—both as a source of comfort and as a potential source of pressure—yet child-focused syntheses remain limited.

Despite the relevance of these issues, research on religiosity, resilience, and psychological wellbeing among conflict-affected Arab children remains scattered.

Studies vary in how they define resilience, how they operationalize religiosity, and which outcomes they prioritize, making it difficult to identify overarching patterns or contextual differences. To date, there is no PRISMA-guided systematic review that integrates quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods evidence on this topic with a specific focus on school-aged children in the Arab world.

This thesis therefore undertakes such a review to organize and critically synthesize existing evidence, clarify areas of convergence and divergence, and inform culturally grounded understandings of resilience in conflict-affected childhoods.

Significance of this Study

This thesis contributes to the literature by systematically synthesizing existing empirical evidence on the relationship between religiosity and resilience among school-aged children living in conflict-affected contexts in the Arab world. While individual studies have examined aspects of faith, coping, and psychological wellbeing, this review brings together dispersed findings to clarify patterns, inconsistencies, and conceptual gaps within this body of work.

By applying a transparent and structured review methodology, the study does not aim to establish causal claims or definitive prescriptions for practice, but rather to provide a clearer evidence-informed picture of how religiosity has been studied, conceptualized, and linked to resilience outcomes in these settings. In doing so, it highlights both areas where religiosity appears to support adaptation and areas where findings are mixed or limited.

The findings have potential relevance for practitioners, educators, and policymakers working with war-affected children in the Arab world. Rather than promoting religiosity as a uniformly protective factor, the review underscores the importance of understanding how religious beliefs, practices, and community involvement function differently across contexts and developmental stages. This nuanced perspective may help inform culturally sensitive psychosocial approaches that recognize spiritual resources when they are meaningful, while remaining attentive to possible risks or limitations.

At a broader level, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about resilience in conflict-affected childhoods by foregrounding religion as a multidimensional and context-dependent factor. It also identifies directions for future research, including the need for longitudinal designs, more consistent measurement of religiosity and resilience, and greater attention to children's own perspectives across diverse Arab contexts.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

To gain a better understanding of religious influence on school-aged children's resilience in areas of political unrest in the Arab World, this chapter introduces systematic reviews, and then reviews the theoretical frameworks for understanding and conceptualizing religiosity and resilience in school-aged children, and areas of political unrest in the Arab World.

Because research on religiosity and resilience among war-affected children is scattered across disciplines and uses inconsistent definitions and methods, a systematic review is particularly appropriate. Synthesizing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies allows for comparison across contexts and for identifying patterns, contradictions, and gaps that cannot be seen in single studies. The present review therefore adopts a PRISMA-guided approach to examine how religiosity relates to resilience and psychological wellbeing among school-aged children in areas of political unrest in the Arab world.

Background

The enduring political unrest in the Arab world has profound and far-reaching effects on children's everyday lives. Many grow up with repeated exposure to danger, loss, and instability, experiences that can disrupt their psychological, social, and physical wellbeing (Fernando & Ferrari, 2013). In this context, understanding how children manage to cope, regain a sense of safety, and continue with daily life is not only an academic concern but also a humanitarian one.

This thesis focuses on a dimension that is deeply embedded in the social fabric of the region: religion. In much of the Arab world, religion is not simply a private belief but a shared framework through which events are understood, emotions are expressed, and support is sought within families and communities (Hassan et al., 2015). For school-aged children living amid political unrest, religious ideas and practices may influence how frightening or confusing experiences are interpreted, how emotions such as fear or sadness are regulated, and where children turn for comfort. Studies that assessed religious coping frequently reported associations with emotional adjustment and coping-related outcomes, and a sense of protection, particularly when religious practices are familiar and reinforced by caregivers and the wider community (Khamis, 2000; Pargament, 1997).

For example, activities such as prayer, reciting scripture, and participating in religious rituals may help children feel less alone, foster hope, and maintain a sense of connection to God and to others who share their beliefs. In addition, religious communities often play an important role in providing emotional and practical support to families affected by conflict, which may indirectly support children's adjustment and sense of stability (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Punamäki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001). At the same time, religion can also be linked to experiences of guilt, fear, or fatalism, particularly in contexts of intense or prolonged violence.

Resilience in this setting is therefore not only about “bouncing back” from trauma, but also about finding ways to adapt to ongoing hardship and, in some cases, grow through adversity—a view that is increasingly reflected in contemporary resilience research (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013). This thesis examines how

religious beliefs, practices, and community ties may either support or strain children's resilience and emotional adjustment while living under conditions of political unrest, focusing on the intersection between exposure to violence and children's spiritual and religious worlds (Karam et al., 2019).

Because political tensions and social divisions in the Arab world often have a religious dimension, it is particularly important to ask whether and how religion can function as a protective factor for children, and under what conditions this protection may hold (Jones et al., 2019). By establishing this background, the present systematic review seeks to move beyond broad assumptions such as "religion helps people cope" and instead lay the groundwork for a more nuanced examination of how religiosity relates to children's coping strategies, emotional wellbeing, and resilience. The findings aim to inform future research, guide culturally sensitive interventions, and contribute to policy discussions on supporting children growing up amid political unrest (King, Mangan, & Riveros, 2023).

Across the literature, findings on religiosity and child adjustment in conflict settings are notably inconsistent. While some studies describe religiosity as a protective factor associated with lower distress, others report neutral or even adverse associations. Importantly, these differences do not appear random. Rather, they cluster around three recurring sources of variation: (a) the socio-political context in which children live (e.g., chronic siege versus post-conflict recovery), (b) how religiosity is conceptualized and measured (belief-based, practice-based, or ideological), and (c) the developmental stage of the children studied. These patterns suggest that the effects of religiosity on resilience

are conditional rather than uniform, underscoring the need for a systematic synthesis that explicitly compares studies across these dimensions.

Conceptualization of Religion, Resilience, School-aged children, and Political unrest in the Arab World

Generally, religion is a multifaceted concept that has been defined in different ways across disciplines, reflecting its complexity and the diverse perspectives from which it is studied. At its core, religion involves systems of beliefs, practices, and symbols through which individuals and communities understand and engage with the world, often in relation to a higher power or ultimate reality (Smart, 1998). Classic sociological and psychological definitions emphasize that religion is not limited to doctrine or formal institutions, but also encompasses the search for meaning, belonging, and a sense of the sacred that shapes worldview and everyday life (James, 1902; Durkheim, 1915; Weber, 1963; Geertz, 1973; Pargament, 1997; Koenig, 2009).

For Arab children living amid political unrest, these dimensions of religion—meaning-making, belonging, and shared sacred frameworks—are particularly salient. In contexts marked by fear, loss, and instability, religion may offer children culturally familiar ways to interpret frightening events, maintain a sense of connection to family and community, and preserve coherence in their sense of self and purpose (Khamis, 2000; Punamäki, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2001).

Contemporary research builds on these foundational theories by examining how religion operates in lived experience, particularly in relation to emotions, coping, and social support. Pargament's work conceptualizes religion as a process through which

individuals search for significance and draw on spiritual resources when facing stress and adversity (Pargament, 1997), while Durkheim's and Geertz's perspectives underscore the social and cultural functions of religion in creating shared meanings and collective solidarity. These approaches are especially relevant in conflict-affected settings, where religious beliefs and practices are often embedded within family life, community structures, and broader socio-political narratives.

In this thesis, religion is therefore operationalized not as a single belief or level of personal faith, but as a multidimensional, lived system encompassing religious beliefs, practices (such as prayer and ritual), and relational contexts (including family and community religious engagement). This operationalization aligns with contemporary models of religiosity that emphasize lived religion and religious coping rather than abstract affiliation alone (Pargament, 1997; Mahoney, 2010; Koenig, 2009). Within this framework, religion is examined in terms of how these dimensions are described and measured across studies, and how they relate to school-aged children's emotional adjustment and resilience in contexts of political unrest.

Resilience as a concept emerged in psychology, psychiatry, and related fields from efforts to understand why some children develop psychological difficulties following adversity while others show relatively positive adjustment (Luthar, Grossman, & Small, 2015; Masten, 2021). Early work by Garmezy (1974), Rutter (1987), and Werner (1993) shifted attention away from pathology alone and toward the processes and conditions that enable individuals to adapt in the face of serious challenges. Since then, resilience has been used to describe patterns of adaptation that

involve personal capacities, coping processes, protective factors, and environmental supports.

Within developmental psychology, resilience is most often understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed trait, referring to the capacity for positive adaptation or the maintenance of functional wellbeing despite significant risk or adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Luthar et al., 2000). From this perspective, resilience encompasses how children regulate emotions, sustain social relationships, and continue to function in age-appropriate ways even when exposed to ongoing stressors. Importantly, this view recognizes that resilience can fluctuate over time and is shaped by both individual and contextual factors.

In the context of school-aged children living in the Arab world amid political unrest, resilience involves more than recovery from isolated traumatic events. It includes children's ability to continue learning, maintain relationships with family and peers, and manage emotional distress while living under conditions of chronic insecurity and instability (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013; Khamis, 2015). Protective processes in these settings often extend beyond the individual child to include family practices, community resources, and culturally embedded systems of meaning.

In this thesis, resilience is operationalized as indicators of children's emotional adjustment, social functioning, and adaptive coping in the context of political violence, as reported across empirical studies. This operationalization aligns with contemporary resilience frameworks that emphasize adaptation as a process shaped by protective factors rather than the absence of distress (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2021). Within this framework, religiosity is examined as one such protective process that may

support—or in some contexts strain—children’s capacity to adapt to prolonged adversity.

Bringing these strands together, the present review draws on classic theories of religion as meaning, belonging, and sacred practice, alongside modern resilience research that conceptualizes adaptation as a dynamic, context-sensitive process influenced by multiple interacting protective factors.

School-aged children and adolescents, the population under study in this thesis (approximately 6–18 years), traverse critical developmental stages in which emotional regulation, social competence, and identity formation are actively shaped by daily contexts such as family, school, and peer relationships. In middle childhood, Erikson’s stage of industry versus inferiority highlights the importance of mastering academic and social tasks, with supportive adults and predictable routines serving as powerful buffers against stress (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022). As children move into adolescence, developmental priorities expand to include identity formation, autonomy, and meaning-making, rendering social belonging, moral frameworks, and future-oriented hope increasingly salient (Erikson, 1968; Steinberg, 2014).

In the Arab world, many children and adolescents grow up amid protracted political unrest, displacement, and economic insecurity, conditions that frequently disrupt schooling and destabilize family life. Such disruptions undermine precisely the structures—regular routines, learning environments, and adult guidance—that support competence, emotional stability, and adaptive development across childhood and adolescence (Samara et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2025). This makes the extended school-age period both developmentally vulnerable and highly relevant for policy and intervention.

Evidence from conflict-affected settings in Palestine and Lebanon suggests that school-based and community-anchored supports can play a meaningful role in strengthening coping and emotional wellbeing across this age range. Randomized and quasi-experimental studies report reductions in emotional distress and improvements in functioning when psychosocial curricula and counseling are delivered through schools, even under conditions of ongoing instability (Maalouf et al., 2020; El-Khodary et al., 2020). These findings align with developmental models of resilience that emphasize adaptation as a process supported by external protective systems rather than an individual trait alone.

Crucially for this review, the protective processes available to school-aged children and adolescents in Arab contexts often extend beyond formal institutions to include religious and culturally grounded systems of meaning. As discussed earlier, religiosity in this thesis is understood as a lived system of beliefs, practices, and relationships embedded in family and community life. Within this framework, concepts such as *sumud* (steadfastness) have been used to interpret children's and adolescents' capacity to endure chronic adversity while maintaining social and emotional functioning (Marie, Hannigan, & Jones, 2017). Empirical work with Palestinian samples demonstrates how children's coping repertoires under war exposure relate to mental health outcomes (Khamis, 2015), while other studies show that positive emotions, hope, and life satisfaction can persist—and be actively nurtured—within faith- and community-influenced ecologies despite political violence (Veronese et al., 2023).

Accordingly, in this thesis, school-aged children are operationalized as individuals aged 6–18 whose resilience is examined through indicators of emotional

adjustment, social functioning, and adaptive coping within school, family, and community contexts. Taken together, these findings justify a focus on school-aged children and adolescents as a single, developmentally continuous group. Across this period, individuals are particularly responsive to structured routines, caregiving relationships, peer connections, and culturally meaningful sources of support. In contexts of political unrest in the Arab world, religiosity and locally embedded constructs such as *sumud* operate alongside schooling and family life as interlocking protective processes that help explain variability in resilience and emotional adjustment. Although much of the available evidence draws on adolescent or mixed-age samples, the findings are interpreted cautiously in relation to middle childhood, with attention to developmental differences in cognitive appraisal, emotional regulation, and reliance on caregivers.

Moving to the area under examination, in this review, the term Arab World refers to the 22 member states of the League of Arab States across North Africa and Western Asia (Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen). This usage follows regional and UN practice (e.g., the League of Arab States; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [UN ESCWA]) and aligns with standard reference definitions that treat the Arab World as the set of Arabic-speaking states in these subregions (EEAS, 2025; League of Arab States, 1945/2025; UN ESCWA, 2024; Britannica, n.d.).

This area encompasses a complex geographic and cultural region often associated with political turmoil, which has profound effects on the psychological and social well-

being of children and adolescents (Lustick, 1997; Milton-Edwards, 2018). For example, Palestinian youth in Gaza and the West Bank have been repeatedly exposed to political violence, notably during the intense conflicts such as the 2008-2009 Gaza war, which imposed severe stressors from occupation and traumatic experiences such as injuries and loss (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2010). Similarly, Lebanese children have endured the scars of multiple wars, including the 2006 conflict in South Lebanon, which left indelible marks on their psyche (Amine et al., 2008).

In the conflict zones of this region, where infrastructures are destroyed and access to essential services is limited, the role of religion in fostering resilience is of special interest (Cleveland & Bunton, 2016; World Bank, 2011). Religious coping strategies manifest in various forms across the region's diverse religious landscape. Studies suggest that engagement in religious practices can mitigate the psychological impacts of conflict, underscoring the need for context-specific, culturally sensitive approaches to intervention (Khamis, 2015; Klasen et al., 2010).

For this review, areas of political unrest are settings where organized political violence and/or sustained collective protest disrupt civilian life and public services. Following established taxonomies, we treat unrest as evidenced by (a) organized violence (UCDP)—including state-based conflict, non-state conflict, and one-sided violence against civilians (armed conflict ≥ 25 battle-related deaths/year) (UCDP, 2024); (b) political violence and protest events (ACLED)—battles, violence against civilians, explosions/remote violence, riots, and demonstrations (ACLED, 2019); and (c) civil unrest understood by disaster-risk authorities as “sporadic but continued collective physical violence” amid political or social instability (UNDRR, n.d.). We additionally recognize fragility, conflict and violence (FCV) contexts where institutional stress and

violence degrade social systems (World Bank, 2025). Accordingly, eligibility is determined by study location: sites in LAS member states are classified as “areas of political unrest” when contemporaneous UCDP records of organized violence, ACLED event activity, or UN/OCHA crisis designations indicate conflict, political violence, or sustained protest at the time of data collection (ESCWA, 2024; UCDP, 2024; ACLED, 2019; OCHA, 2024/2025). Illustrative cases include Syria (protracted armed conflict; very high child need), Yemen (war with acute malnutrition and recent constraints on UN operations), Sudan (nationwide conflict since 2023; extreme humanitarian need), Libya (recurrent conflict and access constraints), and Lebanon 2019– (mass protests and episodes of excessive force)—all clearly meeting the above criteria in their respective periods (UNICEF; OCHA/ReliefWeb; HRW/Amnesty).

Religion occupies a central place in Arab societies, functioning not merely as a private belief system but as a core marker of communal identity shaped by the historical coexistence of the Abrahamic faiths and, within Islam, Sunni and Shiite traditions (Khamis, 2015). Classical sociological perspectives have long emphasized religion’s role in shaping cultural values and social action (Weber, 1904/1930), a role that becomes particularly salient in contexts of war and political violence. In such settings, religion often provides a cognitive and affective framework through which individuals interpret suffering and loss, influencing coping strategies and psychological adjustment (Khamis, 2000).

Across studies conducted in conflict-affected regions of the Arab World, religious beliefs consistently emerge as an important lens for appraising war-related trauma. However, the mechanisms through which religiosity operates are neither

uniform nor consistently beneficial. For instance, religious schemata may guide the interpretation of trauma in ways that reduce self-blame by attributing suffering to divine will, a process that has been associated with lower levels of guilt and shame in some trauma-exposed populations (Johnson & Thompson, 2008; Foa & Rothbaum, 1998). At the same time, research suggests that such attributions may function differently depending on the nature of the trauma—deliberate political violence versus accidental harm—resulting in divergent psychological outcomes (Khamis, 2008).

Comparative findings across regions complicate the assumption that religiosity functions uniformly as a protective factor for children exposed to political unrest. While several studies report that religious engagement is associated with emotional comfort and reduced post-traumatic stress symptoms (Aflakseir & Coleman, 2009; Khamis, 2012), other findings suggest that religiosity may be linked to heightened distress under certain conditions. For example, interpretations of suffering as divine punishment or unavoidable fate have been associated with increased emotional burden rather than relief (Exline & Rose, 2005; Khamis, 2012). Notably, Khamis (2015) observed that religiosity was associated with higher levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms among adolescents in the Gaza Strip, while appearing protective among adolescents in South Lebanon. Taken together, these findings highlight the context-dependent nature of religiosity and underscore the need for a systematic synthesis that examines how socio-political conditions, exposure intensity, and the form of religious engagement shape children's resilience.

One possible explanation for these inconsistencies lies in how religiosity is conceptualized and measured across studies. Some research emphasizes belief-based dimensions, such as faith in God's will, while others focus on collective practices or

ideological components such as martyrdom. For example, martyrdom has been framed within Islamic discourse as a morally meaningful sacrifice for the collective, a concept that parallels Durkheim's notion of altruistic suicide (Durkheim, 1951; Qur'an, 3:169). Comparable narratives of sacrifice and communal suffering have also been documented among Christian communities in Southern Lebanon (Pestieau, 1992). For children and adolescents, such narratives can shape how loss and danger are interpreted, sometimes supporting dignity and meaning, but also potentially reinforcing emotional burden when sacrifice and endurance are idealized. This suggests that the psychological impact of martyrdom-related beliefs depends less on religious affiliation per se and more on how these narratives are socially and developmentally transmitted.

Research focusing on children and adolescents highlights similar ambiguities. While several studies suggest that religious beliefs can foster meaning, hope, and purpose, contributing to better long-term adjustment following war exposure (Laor et al., 2006; Oren & Possick, 2010), others report associations between religiosity and heightened anger, spiritual struggle, or emotional distress (Exline & Rose, 2005; Nelson et al., 2002). These mixed findings are difficult to interpret due to methodological limitations common in the literature, including reliance on cross-sectional designs, self-report measures, and inconsistent operationalizations of religiosity.

Taken together, the existing evidence points to a complex and context-dependent relationship between religiosity and mental health among war-affected children in the Arab World. Although religion is frequently invoked as a protective factor, its effects appear to vary according to socio-political context, type of religious engagement, and developmental stage. Crucially, few studies systematically compare different

dimensions of religiosity or examine how religious beliefs interact with other protective factors such as family support, socio-economic conditions, and community cohesion.

Taken together, the reviewed literature reveals substantial inconsistency in the reported relationship between religiosity and psychological adjustment among war-affected children in the Arab World. While some studies portray religiosity as a protective resource, others document neutral or even adverse associations. Importantly, these inconsistencies appear to reflect not only contextual differences between regions such as Gaza and South Lebanon, but also considerable variation in how religiosity is conceptualized and measured. Studies that treat religiosity as a unitary construct often obscure meaningful distinctions between belief-based, practice-based, and ideological dimensions, limiting comparability across findings. Moreover, few investigations systematically examine how these dimensions interact with socio-political conditions, developmental stage, and cumulative exposure to trauma. These conceptual and methodological gaps underscore the need for a systematic synthesis that critically compares existing evidence and clarifies the conditions under which religiosity functions as a protective or risk factor for resilience among school-aged children in conflict-affected Arab contexts.

This systematic review seeks to address these conceptual and empirical gaps by synthesizing evidence on how religiosity—understood as a lived system of beliefs, practices, and relationships—shapes resilience among school-aged children in contexts of political unrest in the Arab World. By critically comparing findings across studies and contexts, the review aims to clarify inconsistencies in the literature and inform culturally grounded models of psychosocial intervention.

The reviewed literature highlights substantial conceptual and empirical gaps. Few studies systematically compare different dimensions of religiosity within child samples, and even fewer examine how these dimensions interact with developmental stage and exposure severity. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative findings are rarely integrated within a single framework, limiting cumulative understanding. These gaps motivate the present systematic review, which aims to critically compare existing evidence and clarify the conditions under which religiosity functions as a protective or risk-related factor for resilience among school-aged children in conflict-affected Arab contexts.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter describes the research design, search strategy, eligibility criteria, and analytic procedures used in this PRISMA-guided systematic review. The review aims to synthesize empirical evidence on the relationship between religiosity and resilience or psychological wellbeing among school-aged children living in areas of political unrest in the Arab world. The methods outlined here are designed to ensure transparency, rigor, and alignment with the research questions guiding the study.

Research Design: Systematic Review Study

This study employs a PRISMA-guided systematic review. Systematic reviews originated in the medical and health sciences and have increasingly been adopted in psychology, education, and the social sciences to synthesize complex and heterogeneous bodies of evidence (Mallett et al., 2012; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2020). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews use transparent, pre-specified methods to identify, appraise, and synthesize empirical studies addressing clearly defined research questions.

This approach is particularly well suited to the present topic. Research on religiosity and resilience among school-aged children in conflict-affected settings is dispersed across disciplines, employs diverse conceptualizations of key constructs, and relies on a mix of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods designs. A systematic review allows these heterogeneous findings to be examined side by side, facilitating

comparison across studies, identification of patterns and inconsistencies, and evaluation of how differences in context, measurement, and study design shape reported outcomes.

In this thesis, a PRISMA-guided systematic review is therefore used to synthesize existing evidence on how religiosity relates to resilience and psychological wellbeing among school-aged children living in areas of political unrest in the Arab world. By applying explicit inclusion criteria, systematic screening procedures, and structured synthesis methods, this design supports a critical comparison of findings across studies and provides a transparent basis for identifying conceptual and empirical gaps relevant to the research questions.

While both literature reviews and systematic reviews aim to summarize existing research, the systematic review approach adopted here emphasizes methodological transparency, reproducibility, and critical appraisal of study quality (Mallett et al., 2012). These features are essential given the variability in how religiosity and resilience are defined and measured across studies in conflict-affected Arab contexts. Accordingly, the systematic review design directly supports the aims of the study by enabling an empirically grounded and methodologically rigorous synthesis of the available evidence.

Search Strategy

Peer-reviewed journal articles and doctoral dissertations were identified through comprehensive searches of the following databases: Academic Search Ultimate, Education Research Complete, ERIC, APA PsycINFO, APA PsycArticles, Scopus, Web of Science, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Search strings combined keywords related to religiosity (e.g., religiosity, religious coping, faith), resilience (e.g., resilience, positive adaptation, psychological wellbeing), population (school-aged children), and context (political unrest, conflict, occupation), alongside terms identifying Arab world settings. Full search strategies and Boolean expressions for each database are provided in Appendix 4, in accordance with PRISMA-S guidelines (Rethlefsen et al., 2021).

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Population: school-aged children typically 6–18 years.
- Setting/Region: Study sample country is a member of the League of Arab States (see Appendix 1).
- Context: Exposure to political unrest, armed conflict, occupation, displacement, or post-conflict instability.
- Exposure/Construct: Religiosity, religious coping, or religious practices explicitly defined as such by study authors.
- Outcome: Resilience or related indicators of positive adaptation (e.g., coping competence, hope, emotional regulation).
- Study design: Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods empirical studies
- Publication type: Peer-reviewed journal articles and dissertations
- Language: English
- Time frame: No lower bound; include studies up to the search end date in the protocol.

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies focusing exclusively on adults or preschool-aged children without extractable data for ages 6–18.
- Samples from non-Arab countries or mixed-region studies where Arab-world data could not be separated.
- Contexts unrelated to political unrest or conflict.
- Studies lacking measures of either religiosity or resilience.
- Theoretical papers, commentaries, protocols, or case studies with $N < 10$.

Search Procedure (PRISMA-aligned)

Study Selection Procedure

Titles and abstracts were initially screened for relevance. Full texts of potentially eligible studies were then assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Reasons for full-text exclusion were recorded. The study selection process is summarized in a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram presented in Chapter 4.

Data Extraction

For each included study, data were extracted on: country and context, sample characteristics, age range, measures of religiosity and resilience, study design, analytic approach, and key findings. Where available, reliability indices for primary measures were recorded. Data extraction procedures were designed to support comparison across studies and address the review's research questions.

Data Analysis

Construct operationalization:

Religiosity.

Consistent with the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, religiosity is operationalized as a multidimensional construct encompassing religious beliefs, practices, and coping processes. Studies were included if they used validated or clearly defined measures of religiosity, such as the Khamis Religiosity Scale (Khamis, 2012), or explicitly framed religious coping or practice as a central construct.

When studies employed non-standard items, these were coded as religiosity only if authors explicitly identified them as religious beliefs or practices rather than general spirituality. This operationalization allows comparison across diverse conceptualizations of religiosity and directly addresses Research Question 3, which examines differential effects of religiosity dimensions.

Resilience/positive adaptation.

Resilience is operationalized as positive adaptation in the context of adversity, rather than as the absence of psychological distress (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2021). Eligible studies included validated measures such as the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), or clearly defined indicators of adaptive functioning (e.g., emotional regulation, social competence). This operationalization supports Research Questions 1 and 2 by enabling synthesis of how religiosity relates to adaptive outcomes under conditions of political unrest.

Data Synthesis

Given the heterogeneity of study designs, a convergent narrative synthesis was conducted. Quantitative findings were summarized descriptively, with effect directions

and magnitudes compared where possible. Qualitative findings were synthesized using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in how religiosity functions as a coping and resilience resource for children (Clarke & Braun, 2016).

Risk of bias and certainty

The methodological quality and risk of bias of the included studies were assessed using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools, which are widely used in systematic reviews and are specifically designed to accommodate diverse primary study designs (Aromataris et al., 2015; JBI, 2020). The JBI tools assess potential sources of bias related to study design, conduct, and analysis through a series of structured items addressing key domains such as clarity of the research question, appropriateness of the study design, adequacy of sampling, validity and reliability of measurement, management of confounding variables, and rigor of data analysis. Given that most included studies were quantitative and cross-sectional, the JBI checklist for analytical cross-sectional studies was applied to the majority of included studies.

Each included study was appraised using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist corresponding to its study design (e.g., analytical cross-sectional or qualitative research). Items were rated as Yes, No, Unclear, or Not Applicable, in accordance with JBI guidance. Appraisal was conducted systematically, and responses of Unclear reflected insufficient reporting rather than assumed methodological weakness.

The overall risk of bias judgment for each study was determined based on the pattern and relevance of responses across checklist items, rather than a single numerical score, allowing for a holistic assessment of methodological quality. Consistent with JBI recommendations, studies were not excluded solely on the basis of appraisal outcomes;

instead, risk of bias assessments were used to inform the interpretation and synthesis of findings.

Studies were classified as having low, moderate, or high risk of bias based on the number and nature of unmet or unclear appraisal criteria, with particular emphasis on domains most relevant to internal validity. Studies were considered to have a moderate risk of bias when most core methodological criteria were met, but one or more domains—such as sampling procedures, measurement validity, or control of confounding variables—were rated as No or Unclear. This approach reflects the methodological constraints commonly encountered in research conducted in conflict-affected contexts, where such limitations do not necessarily invalidate study findings.

The JBI Critical Appraisal Checklists applied in this review are provided in Appendix 5.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overview

This chapter presents the results of the systematic review on the relationship between religiosity and resilience among school-aged children in areas of political unrest in the Arab world. It begins with a brief summary of the study selection, then describes the characteristics of the included studies, including countries, types of conflict, age groups, and study designs. Finally, it synthesizes how religiosity and spirituality were linked to resilience and mental health outcomes, using the categories Core, Extended, Excluded and Discussion-only as defined in Chapter 3.

This chapter reports the empirical findings of the review without extended theoretical interpretation. Results are presented descriptively, focusing on patterns observed across the Core and Extended studies. Interpretation of these findings and their implications are developed in Chapter 5.

The quantitative PRISMA flow is based on 57 empirical studies. Coded and extended articles form the basis of the descriptive and thematic synthesis presented here. Discussion-only and excluded studies are used in a more limited way to contextualize the findings. The final sample reflects a broad but methodologically diverse evidence base. Only 17 studies were classified as Core or Extended and therefore contribute to the main synthesis, which means that conclusions should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Across the included studies, religiosity was associated with resilience and psychological wellbeing in heterogeneous ways. While several studies reported positive associations between at least one dimension of religiosity—such as religious coping, personal practices, or the perceived importance of faith—and indicators of emotional adjustment, other studies reported null, mixed, or risk-related associations. Mixed patterns were observed across different contexts and age ranges within the broader school-aged population, and variation in results corresponded with differences in study design, operationalization of religiosity, outcome measures, and the socio-political context of participants. This heterogeneity is reflected in the structure of the synthesis below, which distinguishes between Core and Extended evidence while using Discussion-only and Excluded studies only for limited contextual framing.

In line with the convergent narrative synthesis approach adopted in this review, results are first presented separately for quantitative and qualitative studies, followed by an integrated synthesis that brings both strands together. Specifically, the chapter reports (a) patterns of statistical association between religiosity and resilience or psychological wellbeing (Research Question 1), (b) qualitative descriptions of religiosity as a coping resource in contexts of political unrest (Research Question 2), and (c) dimensions of religiosity most consistently linked to indicators of resilience (Research Question 3).

Study Selection

The database search initially yielded 3,545 records. After applying database filters and screening titles and abstracts for relevance to religiosity or spirituality,

resilience, war or political violence, and Arab children or adolescents, this number was reduced to 121 records.

Following removal of duplicates, 87 unique full-text articles remained and were retrieved for detailed assessment against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. At this full-text stage, 30 articles were excluded: 26 because the main focus was not sufficiently related to religiosity/spirituality or resilience in the target population, and 4 because they were book chapters or other non-empirical publications that did not meet the criteria for inclusion.

This process resulted in 57 empirical studies that were retained for coding in the master table. Within this set, I then differentiated between Core studies ($n = 5$), which directly met all inclusion criteria (Arab school-aged children and adolescents in conflict-affected contexts, with explicit measures of religiosity/spirituality and resilience or mental health); Extended studies ($n = 12$), which did not fully meet every criterion but offered closely related evidence (for example, slightly older youth, Arab-origin refugee samples in host countries, or studies where religiosity was a secondary but still relevant focus); Discussion-only and Excluded studies at the synthesis stage ($n = 40$), which were empirically or conceptually relevant to the topic but did not qualify for inclusion in the main synthesis (for instance, adult samples, broad theoretical reviews, or studies where religiosity was mentioned only tangentially).

For the purposes of the main qualitative synthesis in Chapters 4 and 5, I therefore rely primarily on the 17 Core and Extended studies, while using the remaining 40 as contextual material to enrich the discussion. The overall flow of records through

the review process is summarized in the PRISMA-style diagram (Figure 1) and in Table 1 below.

Figure 1

PRISMA 2020 Flowchart

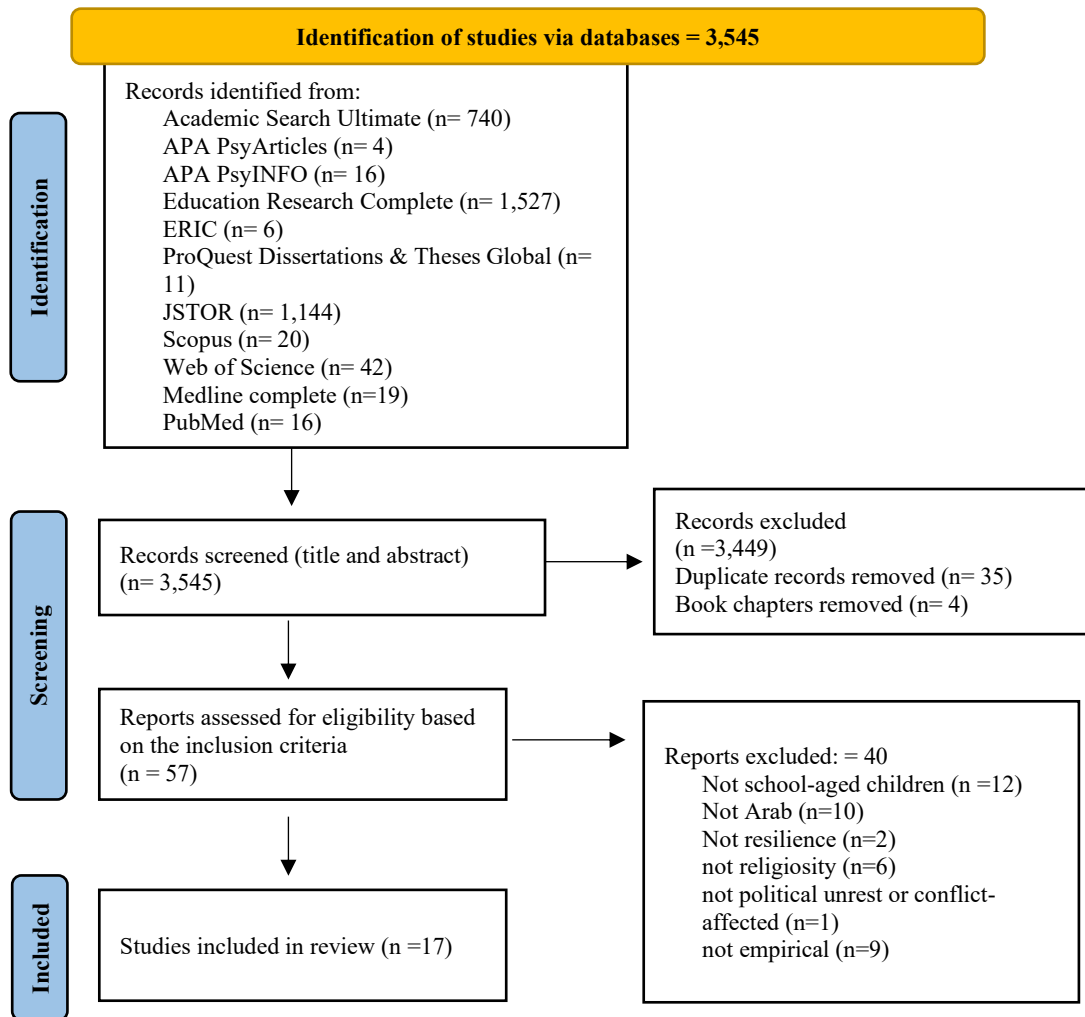


Table 1*Summary of Study Selection*

Stage	n
Records identified through database searching	3,545
Records after title/abstract screening	121
Full-text articles after removing duplicates	87
Full-text articles excluded	30
Irrelevant topic	26
Book chapters / non-empirical	4
Empirical studies retained for coding	57
Included in main synthesis (Core + Extended)	17
Discussion-only / excluded from main synthesis	40

Characteristics of the coded studies*Geographic and conflict contexts*

The coded subset of 57 studies covers a range of Arab settings and diasporic contexts. A large proportion of the core and extended studies focus on Palestinian children and adolescents living in Gaza and the West Bank, exposed to chronic political violence, occupation, and repeated military incursions (e.g., Khamis, 2012; Veronese et al., 2018, 2020; Veronese, Mahamid, & Bdier, 2025). Another important cluster of studies takes place in Lebanon, including both Lebanese youth and Syrian refugee children living in camps or host communities in the Bekaa Valley and other regions (Fayyad et al., 2017; Betancourt et al., 2015; Nagi et al., 2021).

Several Extended studies examine Syrian refugees in neighboring host countries, such as Jordan and Turkey, focusing on adolescents and families who have fled war and are now negotiating new stressors in displacement (Alwan et al., 2020; Ramadan, 2021; Arenliu et al., 2020; Asici et al., 2024). Other work centers on Iraqi civilians living with the aftermath of bombings and protracted conflict (Freh et al., 2021), or on mixed samples of Syrian and Iraqi adolescent refugees resettled in Western countries (Kira et

al., 2024). In addition, several narrative and systematic reviews in the sample synthesize evidence across multiple conflict-affected countries, including but not limited to Arab settings (Peltonen, 2025; Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

Across these different contexts, children and adolescents are exposed to a broad range of conflict-related adversities. The studies describe shelling and bombardment, direct witnessing of injury and death, the detention or imprisonment of family members, life under long-term military occupation, forced displacement, and life in refugee camps or informal settlements (Punamäki, 1988; Veronese et al., 2018; Betancourt et al., 2015; Peltonen, 2025). Many papers also highlight chronic economic hardship, social instability, and ongoing uncertainty about safety and the future as part of the everyday environment for these children (Fayyad et al., 2017; Nagi et al., 2021). In line with the aims of this review, nearly all core and extended studies involve direct or indirect exposure to war, occupation, or forced displacement.

To avoid repetition, the synthesis below reports findings primarily by evidence category (Core vs. Extended) rather than re-describing each geographic context in multiple places.

Participants and age groups

Participants in the coded studies are predominantly children and adolescents, broadly within the 6–18 year age range defined for this review. In the core studies, the age groups clearly fall within this band. For example, Khamis (2012) examines Palestinian children and adolescents exposed to war in Gaza and the West Bank, while Fayyad et al. (2017) focus on war-exposed Lebanese adolescents in a large epidemiological sample. Other core or near-core studies address Palestinian school-age

children and adolescents growing up under occupation and siege (Veronese et al., 2018; Veronese, Mahamid, & Bdier, 2025).

Some extended studies include slightly older youth or young adults but were retained because they shed light on mechanisms of religious coping and resilience in populations closely adjacent to the target group. For example, Nagi et al. (2021) explore resilience as a communal concept among Syrian refugee adolescents in Lebanon, including older teens; Alwan et al. (2020) and Arenliu et al. (2020) examine Syrian refugee families and adolescents in host countries; and Kira et al. (2024) include adolescent refugees from Syria and Iraq in late adolescence and early adulthood in their participatory work on temporality and trauma. These Extended studies help illuminate processes that likely operate in slightly younger age groups as well.

Across the full coded subset, the age distribution ranges from: Primary-school children, early adolescents in middle school, older adolescents, and, in some Extended cases, young adults in late adolescence (e.g., 17–19 years or slightly older) in settings of war, displacement, or post-conflict resettlement (Fayyad et al., 2017; Nagi et al., 2021; Asici et al., 2024).

In cases where age was not precisely reported, the original authors often used broad terms such as “children”, “youth”, or “adolescents”. In this review, such studies were included when the description clearly implied school-age participants or when families and children were described together (for example, in family-based qualitative research with Syrian refugees; Alwan et al., 2020; Arenliu et al., 2020). These studies are used accordingly in the synthesis, and their broader age ranges are acknowledged when interpreting the findings.

(As detailed in Chapter 3, eligibility decisions related to age bands and “near-age” samples are documented in the master table; this section summarizes the pattern rather than re-justifying inclusion decisions.)

Study designs

The coded studies are methodologically diverse, which is both a strength and a challenge for synthesis. They include: (1) Cross-sectional quantitative surveys, such as studies relating war exposure, religiosity or spirituality, and PTSD or other mental health outcomes among Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents (Khamis, 2012; Fayyad et al., 2017; Ramadan, 2021; Veronese, Mahamid, & Bdier, 2025; Asici et al., 2024). These studies typically use standardized symptom measures and self-report indicators of religiosity or coping. (2) Longitudinal surveys, though less common, are represented in the wider set of studies used for discussion, for example in research on societal resilience in conflict-affected populations (Kaim et al., 2024). While not always focused directly on Arab children, these designs provide useful insights into how resilience and related constructs change over time. (3) Qualitative studies, using interviews, focus groups, participatory activities, or ethnographic approaches, are especially prominent in work with Palestinian and Syrian children. For instance, Veronese et al. (2018, 2020) examine how Palestinian children narrate hope and resistance and exercise spatial agency under occupation, Alwan et al. (2020) explore Syrian refugee parents’ beliefs and practices around children’s adjustment, and Nagi et al. (2021) investigate how Syrian adolescent refugees conceptualize resilience as communal. These studies give rich accounts of how children talk about faith, suffering, and hope in their own words. (4) Mixed-methods designs, which combine questionnaires with in-depth interviews or participatory components, appear in studies such as Veronese (2018) on socio-political

stressors and well-being in Palestinian children, where quantitative measures of distress are complemented by qualitative exploration of meaning-making and coping. (5)

Systematic and narrative reviews and conceptual papers, such as Peltonen (2025) on children and war, Betancourt and Khan (2008) on the mental health of children affected by armed conflict, and Hurlburt et al. (2024) on Syrian refugees' mental health, have mostly been classified as Discussion-only or Excluded in the empirical synthesis. However, they provide important background and help situate the child-focused findings from Arab contexts within a broader international literature.

Detailed methodological characteristics are provided in Chapter 3. Here, study design is noted only when it helps contextualize the patterns reported in the Core and Extended results. This diversity of study designs allows the review to consider both statistical associations between religiosity and mental health and children's own narratives of what faith and spirituality mean in violent contexts. Cross-sectional and, to a lesser extent, longitudinal surveys help quantify links between religiosity, exposure, and psychological outcomes, while qualitative and mixed-methods work offers insight into the lived, everyday dimensions of religious coping, identity, and resilience. This diversity of designs informed the analytic strategy adopted in the Results, whereby quantitative and qualitative findings were synthesized separately before being integrated through convergent narrative synthesis.

Religiosity and spirituality: Measures and forms

Across the coded studies, religiosity and spirituality are operationalized in several overlapping ways. In many quantitative papers, religiosity appears as a combination of religious practices, beliefs and the importance of faith, and specific religious coping strategies. For example, in Khamis (2012), religiosity and ideological beliefs are

assessed through items capturing the centrality of religion and commitment to particular political–religious ideas alongside measures of war exposure and psychiatric symptoms. In Ramadan (2021), spirituality is measured using a brief belief-based scale reflecting belief in God’s design and thankfulness to God, capturing how far participants see their lives as guided by purpose. Similarly, in Skalisky (2022), religiosity is assessed as a protective factor for children exposed to trauma, although the exact scale is not clearly described in the article, and likely combines frequency of practice with self-reported importance of religion.

Other quantitative studies focus more directly on religious coping. For instance, Freh et al. (2021) measure religious coping using the Brief Arab Religious Coping Scale in their study of Iraqi civilians exposed to a suicide car bombing, distinguishing between more positive and more negative patterns of turning to God. Discussion-only sources note that religiosity is measured in diverse ways across health and social research, underscoring the measurement heterogeneity that also appears in the present dataset (Koenig, 2012; AbdAleati et al., 2016). Papaleontiou-Louca (2024) similarly argues that religiosity is rarely captured by a single scale and synthesizes multiple ways it has been linked to mental health.

Alongside these structured measures, many Extended and qualitative studies in this review capture religiosity through children’s and families’ own language. For example, Veronese et al. (2018, 2020) document Palestinian children speaking about God, martyrdom, hope, and steadfastness when describing their everyday lives under occupation. Al-Issa (2020) shows how Palestinian adolescent ex-detainees discuss their experiences using religious and political concepts of sacrifice and resilience. In these qualitative accounts, religiosity is less a set of items on a scale and more a lived

framework that shapes how children interpret suffering, imagine the future, and position themselves in relation to God and community.

Taken together, the studies in the coded subset show that religiosity and spirituality appear in at least four main forms: (1) Religious practices – such as the frequency of prayer, mosque or church attendance, fasting, and Qur’an recitation; (2) Religious beliefs and the importance of faith – including how central religion is to the child’s life, trust in God, and gratitude to God (Ramadan, 2021; Khamis, 2012); (3) Religious coping – items about turning to God in times of distress, viewing suffering as a test, or seeking comfort in prayer (Freh et al., 2021); (4) Spirituality – a broader sense of meaning, thankfulness, and connection to something larger than oneself, as conceptualized in spirituality scales and reviews (Ramadan, 2021; Koenig, 2012; AbdAleati et al., 2016; Papaleontiou-Louca, 2024). This diversity in measurement reflects the multiple roles that religion plays in children’s lives—behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and relational—and needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

For clarity, the thematic results below focus on what studies reported (direction and consistency of associations, and recurring qualitative patterns) rather than providing extended conceptual explanations of religiosity constructs.

Quantitative Synthesis of Core and Extended Studies

To keep the evidence base transparent, findings are reported first for Core studies and then supplemented with Extended studies. Discussion-only and Excluded sources are used only to contextualize points that clearly extend beyond the main synthesis.

Quantitative study characteristics and analytic approach

This section synthesizes findings from quantitative Core and Extended studies only, focusing on statistical associations between religiosity or spirituality and resilience or mental health outcomes. These studies are predominantly cross-sectional surveys using standardized measures of trauma exposure, religiosity or religious coping, and psychological outcomes. Due to heterogeneity in measures and analytic models, findings are synthesized descriptively rather than through meta-analysis.

Associations between religiosity and mental health outcomes

This subsection addresses Research Question 1 by summarizing patterns of association between religiosity and resilience or psychological wellbeing reported in the quantitative Core and Extended studies.

Resilience and mental health outcomes

The studies included in this review also use a wide range of resilience and mental health outcomes, reflecting different disciplinary traditions and research aims. In many conflict-focused quantitative studies, the primary outcomes are post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and trauma-related distress. For example, Khamis (2012) uses standardized PTSD and psychiatric distress measures to examine how war exposure, religiosity, and ideology jointly predict mental health among Palestinian and Lebanese youth. Ramadan (2021) uses a modified version of the PCL-C PTSD Checklist to assess post-traumatic stress symptoms among Syrian refugees. Skalisky (2022) reports on PTSD symptoms and trauma impact in children exposed to traumatic events, again linking these outcomes to religiosity. Freh et al. (2021) measure PTSD using the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale and assess death anxiety alongside religious coping.

Other studies expand the outcome lens to include depression, anxiety, general psychological distress, and subjective wellbeing. For instance, some epidemiological and refugee studies in Lebanon and neighboring countries examine combinations of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and functional impairment among adolescents (Fayyad et al., 2017; Betancourt et al., 2015; Nagi et al., 2021). In contrast, qualitative and mixed-methods studies (reported in the following section) conceptualize resilience more broadly, highlighting children's positive adaptation and functioning, ability to maintain routines, and capacity for hope and agency in the face of adversity (Punamäki, 1988; Veronese et al., 2018, 2020; Al-Issa, 2020). Several reviews in my Discussion-only set focus specifically on post-traumatic growth and the ways in which religious and spiritual frameworks can facilitate growth after conflict and displacement (Fayaz, 2023; Peltonen, 2025).

In coding the master table, each study was classified based on whether religiosity appeared protective, mixed or ambivalent, null, or risk-related in relation to these outcomes. For some Core and Extended studies, higher levels of religiosity or positive religious coping were associated with lower PTSD symptoms, less distress, or better wellbeing (e.g., Khamis, 2012; Skalisky, 2022; Freh et al., 2021). In other studies, the association was non-significant, especially when models controlled for other protective factors such as social support or family functioning (Ramadan, 2021). A smaller number of studies suggested that certain forms of religiosity or ideological commitment might be linked to higher distress or internalizing symptoms, highlighting the possibility that religion can also act as a source of pressure or moral burden (Khamis, 2012; Freh et al., 2021).

Across the quantitative Core and Extended studies, protective associations were more consistently reported for positive religious coping and general religiosity, while null or mixed findings were more common when models adjusted for social support, family functioning, or exposure severity.

Religiosity as a protective factor (Core evidence)

This section addresses Research Question 1 by summarizing patterns of association reported in the Core studies between religiosity and resilience or psychological wellbeing outcomes.

Across the Core studies (n=5) in this review, religiosity or religion-related coping is often coded as protective. In Khamis (2012), for example, exposure to war in Gaza and South Lebanon predicted higher PTSD and psychiatric symptoms, but higher levels of religiosity and ideological commitment were associated with lower symptom severity for segments of the sample, suggesting a buffering role in the face of trauma. In Skalisky (2022), children who reported greater religious involvement appeared better able to maintain hope after traumatic events and showed reduced levels of distress, indicating that religious practice may contribute to adaptive coping. In the epidemiological study by Fayyad et al. (2017) on Lebanese adolescents, a subgroup of highly war-exposed youth nonetheless presented relatively good functioning. In my coding, this resilience profile was linked to a combination of individual, family, community, and religious factors.

Taken together, these Core studies suggest that, for at least some Arab children and adolescents, religious belief and practice are associated with reduced distress and stronger adaptation in contexts of political violence. Religiosity does not eliminate the

impact of war; however, several studies report associations consistent with a buffering pattern in specific subgroups and contexts described within those studies.

Ambivalent or mixed effects of religiosity

This section further addresses Research Question 1 by reporting null, mixed, or risk-related associations between religiosity and mental health outcomes observed in a subset of Core and Extended studies. In Ramadan (2021), spirituality is measured through belief and thankfulness toward God among Syrian refugees. When statistical models control for other variables, spirituality shows no significant association with PTSD symptoms, even though some participants describe subjective benefits from their spiritual beliefs. This finding indicates that spirituality, as operationalized in this study, was not statistically associated with PTSD symptoms once relevant covariates were included, despite participants' qualitative descriptions of spiritual meaning.

To keep results and interpretation distinct, the main empirical point from the Core and Extended studies is that religiosity shows mixed associations across outcomes and contexts, including null and risk-related patterns in specific subgroups. Broader theoretical explanations of guilt, fear, or “moral burden” are developed in Chapter 5 and are supported there with discussion-only sources.

Qualitative Synthesis of Core and Extended Studies

In contrast to the preceding quantitative synthesis, this section focuses exclusively on qualitative and mixed-methods studies, examining how children and families describe and make meaning of religiosity in their own words.

Qualitative study characteristics and analytic approach

This section synthesizes findings from qualitative and mixed-methods Core and Extended studies, focusing on how religiosity and spirituality are described, experienced, and narrated by children, adolescents, and families living in contexts of political violence and displacement.

Religious coping and meaning-making

Findings in this section speak primarily to Research Question 2, which concerns how religiosity is described as functioning as a coping resource for children and adolescents living amid political violence and instability.

Concerning religious coping and meaning-making, many Extended studies (n = 12), particularly qualitative and mixed-methods investigations, describe children and adolescents using religious language and ideas to interpret suffering and maintain coherence in contexts of chronic insecurity.

In qualitative work with Palestinian children and adolescents, Veronese and colleagues document children and adolescents using religious language (e.g., references to God and faith) alongside political and communal narratives when describing endurance under occupation (Veronese et al., 2018, 2019, 2020). In these studies, participants frequently describe faith-related meanings alongside political and communal narratives when explaining how they endure daily stressors. Adolescents in other studies describe transforming threatened spaces into arenas of agency and dignity, with religious ideas among the resources that sustain their perseverance (Veronese, Cavazzoni, & Antenucci, 2019; Veronese et al., 2020).

Similar processes appear in other Extended studies. Punamäki (1988) shows how Palestinian children's fears and coping strategies are embedded in historical-political

and religious narratives, while Al-Issa (2020) reports that Palestinian adolescent ex-detainees draw on religious and national meanings to frame detention as sacrifice and resilience rather than mere victimhood. Across these studies, religious coping is not only about saying prayers; it involves placing suffering within a broader moral and spiritual story, which can help preserve coherence, dignity, and a sense of purpose.

Community, identity, and collective religiosity

This theme contributes to Research Questions 2 and 3 by highlighting collective and relational dimensions of religiosity that are linked to coping and adaptive functioning in the reviewed studies. It highlights collective forms of religiosity. Rather than being only an individual attribute, religiosity often appears in these studies as part of a wider social and cultural system that supports adaptation. Religious communities, rituals, and symbols are described as providing a sense of belonging, continuity of identity, shared suffering and shared hope, and opportunities for mutual help and charity.

For example, Frounfelker et al. (2020) show how Somali Bantu refugees interpret resilience in explicitly communal terms, invoking shared faith, community support, and collective strategies of coping. Although this study does not focus exclusively on Arab children, it illustrates how religious identity and community-based practices are central to how young people understand their own resilience. In the context of Arab conflict settings, Betancourt et al. (2015) describe how war-affected children and families rely on social and communal structures, often intertwined with religious life, to sustain functioning and hope. In Al-Issa (2020) and Veronese et al. (2018), Palestinian adolescents refer to religiously informed community narratives and practices as part of

their coping repertoire, while Punamäki (1988) underscores the collective nature of political and religious identity among Palestinian children.

Some of the studies explicitly mention mosques, religious schools, or faith-based organizations as key elements of a resilience-promoting environment for children and adolescents (Frounfelker et al., 2020; Betancourt et al., 2015; Mohamed & Thomas, 2017). Conceptual work by Hill (2005) and Mohamed and Thomas (2017) further emphasises that religious institutions can provide social capital, moral guidance, and structured opportunities for mutual support. In these cases, religiosity functions not just as a personal belief system, but as a collective resource located in families, neighborhoods, and faith-based organizations.

In reporting these findings, the review treats collective religiosity as a contextual feature described in the included studies rather than as a claim about causality.

Convergent Narrative Synthesis

Integrated patterns across quantitative and qualitative findings

When considered together, the quantitative and qualitative findings converge on the view that religiosity functions as a conditional and context-dependent resource for resilience. Quantitative studies provide evidence of statistically significant but heterogeneous associations between religiosity and mental health outcomes, while qualitative studies illuminate the mechanisms through which these associations may operate, including meaning-making, emotional regulation, hope, and communal belonging.

Areas of divergence and complexity

At the same time, the convergent synthesis highlights divergence across methods. Quantitative associations are often attenuated when broader social and contextual variables are controlled, whereas qualitative accounts reveal persistent suffering alongside religious engagement. These qualitative insights help explain why religiosity does not consistently emerge as a strong protective factor in statistical models and why its effects vary by context, form, and lived meaning.

Risk of Bias Summary

All Core and Extended studies were judged to be at moderate risk of bias according to JBI critical appraisal criteria, mainly due to cross-sectional designs, non-random sampling, and variability in the measurement of religiosity and resilience. Discussion-only and Excluded studies were not formally appraised and are flagged as ‘Not assessed’ in the master table.

Table 2

Risk of Bias Results

Study group	n	Risk of bias (overall)
Core	5	Moderate
Extended	12	Moderate
Discussion-only / Excluded	40	Not assessed (discussion/excluded)

Summary and link to Discussion

This chapter synthesized quantitative and qualitative evidence on the relationship between religiosity and resilience among Arab children and adolescents in conflict settings. Taken together, the coded portion of the master table offers a coherent, if still incomplete, picture of how religiosity relates to resilience among Arab children and

adolescents in conflict settings. The Core studies (n = 5) provide the most direct empirical evidence that religiosity and spirituality can buffer the impact of war on PTSD and other mental health outcomes for at least some young people. Across these papers, higher levels of religious belief, practice, or spirituality are associated with lower levels of distress or better adaptation, while also showing that this association is not universal and can vary by context and subgroup (Punamäki, 1988; Khamis, 2012; Fayyad et al., 2017; Ramadan, Kheirallah, Saleh, Bellizzi, & Shorman, 2022; Skalisky, Wanner, Howe, & Mauseth, 2022).

The Extended studies (n = 12) add depth and descriptive detail that the Core studies alone cannot provide. These include qualitative, mixed-methods, and broader quantitative designs that report how religious narratives, practices, and community life are described in relation to meaning-making, hope, and steadfastness in the face of occupation, siege, and displacement (e.g., Al-Issa, 2020; Veronese et al., 2018, 2020; Alwan et al., 2020; Betancourt et al., 2015; Nagi et al., 2021). To improve readability, individual study-level detail is summarized in the master table and referenced selectively here when it illustrates a recurring pattern.

Finally, the Discussion-only and Excluded studies (n = 40), although not part of the empirical synthesis, play an important contextual role. They help situate the child-focused findings within broader debates about forced migration, faith-based resilience, and child and family mental health, and they highlight conceptual issues around religious coping, community resilience, and post-traumatic growth that are relevant to interpreting the results of the Core and Extended studies. As such, they support a more nuanced understanding of religiosity as a potential resource—and sometimes a source of strain—in the everyday lives of war-affected Arab children and adolescents.

In summary, the thematic patterns in the coded studies suggest that religiosity plays a multifaceted and sometimes contradictory role in the lives of Arab children and adolescents facing war, occupation, and displacement. On one hand, the Core studies provide evidence that religious belief, practice, and coping can be linked to lower levels of distress and better adaptation, particularly when faith is experienced as a source of protection, meaning, and communal support (Khamis, 2012; Fayyad et al., 2017; Skalisky, 2022). Qualitative and mixed-methods work further shows how children actively use religious narratives and practices to make sense of suffering, sustain hope, and maintain dignity and agency under extreme adversity (Punamäki, 1988; Veronese et al., 2018, 2020; Al-Issa, 2020).

On the other hand, the evidence also points to limits and risks. Not all forms of religiosity are associated with better mental health, and in some cases, spirituality shows no clear protective effect once other factors are controlled (Ramadan, 2021). Certain religious or ideological configurations appear to increase guilt, anxiety, or moral pressure, especially when beliefs are rigid or experienced as punitive, or when emotional vulnerability is discouraged (Khamis, 2012; Freh et al., 2021; Papaleontiou-Louca, 2024; Peltonen, 2025). Across the dataset, religiosity emerges less as a single “factor” and more as a dynamic set of resources and meanings that can support or strain resilience depending on context.

These findings form the empirical foundation for the next chapter. In Chapter 5, I move from describing patterns in the data to interpreting what they mean for our understanding of resilience in Arab conflict settings. I discuss in more depth how religiosity may foster resilience through meaning-making, emotional regulation,

community and identity, and when it may become a source of additional burden. I then consider the implications of these patterns for theory, research, and practice with war-affected Arab children and adolescents.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the findings of the systematic review in relation to the study's research questions and conceptual framework. Drawing primarily on the Core and Extended studies identified in Chapter 4, the discussion examines (a) the overall patterns of association between religiosity and resilience or psychological wellbeing among school-aged children in conflict-affected Arab contexts (Research Question 1), (b) the ways in which religiosity is described as supporting coping and adjustment under conditions of political violence and instability (Research Question 2), and (c) which dimensions of religiosity appear most consistently linked to indicators of resilience across the reviewed evidence (Research Question 3). Where relevant, discussion-only sources are used to contextualize and deepen interpretation, but not to extend the empirical findings beyond the reviewed data. Together, these questions structure the discussion by moving from overall patterns of association, to coping processes, to specific dimensions of religiosity relevant to children's resilience.

Restating the aim

This review set out to examine how religiosity and spirituality relate to resilience and mental health among school-aged children and adolescents living in conflict-affected contexts in the Arab world. By systematically identifying and synthesizing empirical studies, the review sought to clarify whether, and in what ways, religiosity helps young people cope with war, occupation, and displacement.

Main findings in relation to the research question

The findings of this systematic review indicate that religiosity may function as a meaningful resource for some school-aged children in conflict-affected Arab contexts, while also showing substantial variability across studies. Across the Core and Extended evidence, personal religious practices and religious coping were the dimensions most consistently linked to indicators of emotional adjustment and coping. At the same time, null or adverse associations were reported in some settings, particularly where religiosity was operationalized in more rigid, fear-based, or politicized ways. Overall, the review supports an evidence-based but qualified conclusion: religiosity is neither uniformly protective nor uniformly harmful, and its observed role depends on context and on how religiosity is measured and experienced.

Across the Core studies, a consistent pattern emerges in which higher levels of religiosity or positive religious coping are associated with lower PTSD symptoms and emotional distress, particularly in contexts of chronic exposure to political violence. However, the strength and direction of this association varies by context, age group, and the form of religiosity measured. Quantitative work with Palestinian and Lebanese adolescents, for example, suggests that religiosity or religious coping can buffer the impact of exposure to war on mental health, even in situations of chronic violence (e.g. Khamis, 2012; Skalisky, 2022). Extended and qualitative studies offered plausible accounts of how these associations may operate in everyday life. In these papers, children and adolescents often described their experiences through religious frames that emphasize testing, patience, divine justice, and collective steadfastness, especially in Palestinian and Syrian contexts (Punamäki, 1988; Veronese et al., 2018; Al-Issa, 2020). These frames appeared to support emotional regulation and to allow young people to

hold on to a sense of purpose and dignity despite ongoing threat. Although some Extended studies include older adolescents, the reported mechanisms—meaning-making, emotional regulation, community support, and identity formation—are developmentally salient for school-aged children and align with the age range defined for this review.

At the same time, the review also identified ambivalent and null findings. In some settings, spirituality showed no statistically significant association with mental health once other variables (such as social support or exposure severity) were taken into account. In a few studies, particular configurations of religiosity or ideological commitment were associated with higher levels of distress or internalizing symptoms, suggesting that strong religious or ideological involvement is not automatically protective, and may even increase moral burden for some adolescents (Khamis, 2012; Freh et al., 2021). These patterns reinforce my decision to treat religiosity not as a single, uniform construct, but as a set of beliefs, practices, and narratives that can function in different ways depending on how they are experienced.

In relation to the first research question, which asked about the documented effect of religiosity on resilience and psychological wellbeing, this review therefore suggests that religiosity is often associated with lower PTSD symptoms, reduced emotional distress, and better overall adaptation among war-affected Arab children and adolescents. Taken together, the evidence supports an affirmative but qualified answer: religiosity is often associated with better adjustment in these contexts, but the strength and direction of the association are inconsistent across settings and operationalizations.

The rest of this chapter unpacks the specific pathways through which religiosity seems to foster resilience, before returning to the risks and ambivalences outlined above.

Importantly, the interpretive pathways discussed in this chapter are grounded in how religiosity and resilience were operationalized in the reviewed studies. Quantitative findings draw primarily on self-report measures of religious belief, practice, and coping, alongside standardized symptom or resilience scales, while qualitative findings reflect children's and adolescents' own narratives of faith, suffering, and adaptation. This combination shapes both the strengths and limits of the conclusions that can be drawn.

How religiosity may foster resilience

Across the Core and Extended studies, several recurring pathways were described through which religiosity may support coping and adaptation under political violence and instability. This section speaks directly to the second research question, which asked in what ways religiosity helps school-aged children cope with the challenges of political violence and instability. In the sections that follow, the focus is on four pathways that recur across studies: meaning-making, emotional regulation and coping, community and belonging, and identity and dignity.

Meaning-making

A first pathway concerns meaning-making. Many of the children and adolescents in the reviewed studies used religious narratives to interpret suffering within a larger story that includes God, justice, and hope. Instead of seeing violence and loss as random events, they sometimes understood them as tests, sacrifices, or part of a broader struggle. This did not remove the pain, but it could transform chaos into something at least partially understandable and survivable.

This meaning-making pathway is especially visible in empirical work with Palestinian children and adolescents. Punamäki (1988) shows how political and religious narratives of struggle and steadfastness shape children's fears and coping in the occupied territories. More recent qualitative studies by Veronese and colleagues (2018) describe Palestinian children narrating hope and resistance under military violence, often weaving religious language into their accounts of daily life. Al-Issa (2020) similarly reports that Palestinian adolescent ex-detainees drew on religious and political meanings to reinterpret detention as sacrifice and resilience rather than simple victimization. Several discussion-only sources provide useful context for this interpretation, although they should not be read as extending the child-focused evidence. For example, broader work on religious coping and meaning-making under adversity describes how beliefs about patience, justice, and divine purpose can help individuals manage suffering, while also noting that these meanings may vary across contexts and individuals (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2010). Placed alongside the child and adolescent qualitative findings in this review, these frameworks help clarify why religious meaning-making may be especially salient in protracted conflict settings.

Across these studies, there is convergence in how meaning-making functions: religious narratives appear to help children and adolescents organize fear, loss, and uncertainty into coherent stories. Differences across contexts lie less in whether meaning-making occurs and more in the specific religious–political narratives available to children in each setting. This suggests that meaning-making is a shared mechanism, while its content is contextually shaped.

Emotional regulation and coping

A second pathway relates to emotional regulation and coping. Across several Core and Extended studies, religious practices such as prayer, Qur'an recitation, and remembrance appear as everyday strategies that children and adolescents use to calm themselves and regain a sense of control. For some, turning to God during bombing, displacement, or loss seems to reduce helplessness and offer comfort.

Quantitative work with war-exposed Arab youth supports this interpretation. In Khamis (2012), higher religiosity and ideological involvement were associated with lower PTSD symptoms in parts of the sample, suggesting a buffering effect for some adolescents. In Skalisky (2022), children who engaged more in religious practices showed better adjustment after exposure to traumatic events. In a different context, Freh et al. (2021) found that patterns of religious coping were closely tied to PTSD and death anxiety among Iraqi civilians exposed to a suicide car bombing. When religiosity took the form of positive religious coping—trusting God, seeking divine comfort—it was linked to reduced fear; when it involved more negative or punitive interpretations, distress increased. This distinction aligns with established work on positive versus negative religious coping, which emphasizes that religious coping can be supportive when it fosters comfort and trust, but can intensify distress when it is experienced as punitive or rejecting (Pargament et al., 1998; Exline & Rose, 2005).

Community and belonging

Third, religiosity often operates through community and belonging. Religious institutions and rituals connect children to families, neighbors, and wider communities. These social ties are themselves resilience resources, providing emotional support,

practical help, and role models. Across studies, communal aspects of religiosity appear more consistently linked to resilience than individual belief alone, suggesting that social embeddedness—rather than private faith per se—plays a central role in supporting adaptation among war-affected children.

The communal dimension of religion emerges strongly in studies of Arab adolescents living with war and displacement. In an epidemiological study of Lebanese adolescents, Fayyad et al. (2017) found that a subset of highly war-exposed youth maintained relatively good functioning. In the coding framework used for this review, this resilience profile was linked not only to individual characteristics but also to family and community factors, including (in some cases) religious involvement. Nagi et al. (2021), working with Syrian refugee adolescents in Lebanon, explicitly describe resilience as a communal concept: young people emphasized family solidarity, shared faith, and community support rather than individual toughness. Related refugee research included as Extended evidence echoes this pattern. Frounfelker et al. (2019) show that Somali Bantu refugees interpret resilience in terms of community, shared religious identity, and collective coping. Hamzah et al. (2025) highlight the role of family resilience in predicting youth well-being, and in many Arab families this family resilience is closely intertwined with religious beliefs and practices. At a more conceptual level, Wilson (2015) writes about community resilience and social memory, proposing that rituals, shared stories, and communal symbols help maintain continuity and meaning in the aftermath of trauma. The findings from my review suggest that in many Arab conflict settings, religion is embedded in precisely this kind of communal structure.

Identity and dignity

Finally, a fourth pathway concerns identity and dignity. In contexts of occupation, siege, or displacement, religiosity can anchor a sense of who children and adolescents are, and what their suffering means. Religious concepts such as steadfastness, sacrifice, and martyrdom can shape how young people interpret loss and risk, sometimes turning experiences of humiliation into narratives of courage and resistance.

This pathway is particularly evident in the Palestinian and Syrian studies in my corpus. Punamäki (1988) showed early on that Palestinian children's coping modes are deeply linked to political and religious identity. Later work by Veronese et al. (2018, 2020) describes Palestinian adolescents exercising "spatial agency" under occupation and framing their everyday resistance in both political and religious terms. Al-Issa (2020) reports that Palestinian adolescent ex-detainees often saw their experiences as part of a collective struggle, drawing on religious and national narratives to sustain dignity after imprisonment. Nagi et al. (2021) demonstrate that Syrian refugee adolescents in Lebanon similarly understand themselves through communal and often religious identities that help them make sense of marginalization. In the field of service delivery, Hamza and Hicks (2021) argue that mental health interventions in the Syrian context are more acceptable and effective when they respect and work with these local identity frameworks, rather than ignoring or pathologizing them.

Across these different contexts, religiosity appears to support children and adolescents in maintaining a sense of worth and agency in situations designed to strip them of both. This identity-based function is closely linked to the other pathways described above: meaning-making, emotional regulation, and communal belonging.

These mechanisms are visible in both quantitative associations (for example, religiosity buffering the link between war exposure and PTSD) and qualitative descriptions (children speaking in their own words about God, justice, and survival). Overall, this combination of statistical and narrative evidence is what makes the role of religiosity in resilience both compelling and complex.

Taken together, these pathways also help answer the third research question, which asked which specific dimensions of religiosity are most associated with resilience. Across the Core and Extended studies, four dimensions appear most consistently linked to better outcomes: (1) internalized religious beliefs about God, justice, hope, and patience, which support meaning-making; (2) personal practices such as prayer, Qur'an recitation, and remembrance, which children use to regulate fear and regain a sense of control; (3) participation in religious communities and rituals, which strengthens social support and a sense of belonging; and (4) religiously grounded identities that frame suffering as meaningful and dignified rather than purely humiliating. By contrast, more rigid or punitive forms of religiosity, or purely ideological commitment without supportive relationships, were less consistently protective and, in some cases, linked to higher distress. For school-aged children and adolescents, these identity-based functions of religiosity intersect with developmental needs for belonging, competence, and moral coherence, making religiously grounded identity a particularly salient resilience resource during prolonged conflict.

Risks and limitations of relying on religiosity

The reviewed evidence indicates that religiosity is not consistently protective across contexts or individuals. In some cases, religious coping appears supportive; in others, it coincides with greater distress, particularly when faith is experienced through

punitive interpretations, rigid expectations, or exclusionary social dynamics. Three recurring risks are discussed below.

Negative religious coping

First, several studies distinguish between positive and negative religious coping. Positive strategies—such as trust in God, gratitude, and feeling supported by a compassionate deity—are more often linked to better adjustment. In contrast, negative religious coping (for example, interpreting adversity as punishment, feeling abandoned by God, or experiencing spiritual rejection) tends to co-occur with higher distress. This distinction is well established in the religious coping literature: positive religious coping is often associated with better adjustment, whereas negative religious coping is more consistently linked to distress (Pargament et al., 1998; Exline & Rose, 2005). Within the conflict-focused studies included in this review, similar patterns appear. In Khamis (2012), higher religiosity and ideological commitment were not uniformly protective; for some adolescents in Gaza, stronger religiosity/ideology coincided with higher internalizing symptoms. In a different context, Freh et al. (2021) found that certain forms of religious coping were linked to higher PTSD and death anxiety when faith was experienced in fearful or punitive terms. Taken together, these findings suggest that when children and adolescents interpret adversity as a sign of divine anger or abandonment, religiosity may deepen guilt and anxiety instead of easing it.

Rigid or politicized beliefs

A second risk concerns rigid or politicized religious and ideological narratives. In some contexts, religiosity and political identity may become intertwined in ways that encourage stoicism, sacrifice, or emotional restraint, which may limit space for vulnerability and help-seeking. Khamis (2012) illustrates this complexity by examining

the interaction between war exposure, religiosity, and ideology among adolescents in Gaza and South Lebanon; certain ideological–religious profiles were associated with worse mental health in the Gaza sample, suggesting that not all belief structures function protectively in highly militarized environments. Qualitative and mixed-methods studies with Palestinian children and adolescents add detail to this picture. Punamäki (1988) and later work by Veronese and colleagues describe how young people draw on religious–national narratives of steadfastness and resistance. These narratives can support dignity and perseverance, but they may also set demanding expectations. When strength becomes a moral expectation, distress may be more difficult to acknowledge openly.

Unequal access to supportive religious environments

A third risk is that not all children have access to religious environments that are supportive. The reviewed studies highlight that religious environments are not uniform in their social and emotional quality. Some offer warmth, inclusion, and flexible, compassionate interpretations; others may be fragmented, overwhelmed, or convey harsh and exclusionary messages. Refugee and resilience-focused studies in the review illustrate how resources—including faith communities—can be unevenly distributed across families and settings (Betancourt et al., 2015). Related work also suggests that shared faith and community can be protective primarily when children and families have access to stable, caring communal structures (Frounfelker et al., 2019). In displacement contexts, spiritual care may be helpful or problematic depending on whether religious actors are sensitive to trauma, culture, and developmental needs (Hurlburt et al., 2024). Overall, it cannot be assumed that “religion” as a category is available to all children in the same way; unequal access and uneven quality of religious

support can shape whether religiosity functions as a resource or becomes another source of stress.

Taken together, these findings support a cautious and balanced conclusion. Religiosity can strengthen coping and resilience when it is experienced as compassionate, supportive, and socially embedded, but it may also contribute to guilt, fear, pressure, or exclusion when interpreted rigidly or delivered through coercive expectations. For this reason, it is important that research and practice avoid both idealizing and dismissing religiosity. A more useful approach is to attend to how religious meanings are constructed in children's everyday environments, and to distinguish supportive religious coping from negative or punitive forms.

Implications for practice

The evidence synthesized in this review supports cautious consideration of religious and spiritual dimensions within psychosocial interventions for children in conflict-affected Arab contexts. Rather than assuming uniformly positive effects, practitioners and policymakers should attend to how religiosity is experienced, interpreted, and embedded within children's social environments. Interventions that acknowledge culturally meaningful religious practices while remaining sensitive to potential sources of distress may be most appropriate. Given the predominance of cross-sectional designs and variability in measurement across studies, further longitudinal and methodologically rigorous research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of religiosity in promoting resilience among school-aged children.

A second implication concerns schools and community settings. Many of the studies in this review highlight the role of religious communities and leaders in

children’s lives. School-based and community programs can therefore benefit from working with religious leaders who are already engaged with children and families, provided that those leaders are open to trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate approaches. Where collaboration is appropriate, efforts can focus on supporting messages that validate children’s emotions and emphasize compassion, care, and solidarity rather than fear or punishment. Overall, this kind of collaboration has the potential to make support more culturally grounded and more acceptable to families, provided it remains trauma-informed and developmentally appropriate.

Third, the review suggests that psychosocial interventions can thoughtfully integrate spiritual resources when children find them meaningful. For some children, this may mean drawing on religious stories of resilience, using faith-consistent coping strategies, or allowing space for prayer or remembrance in ways that feel safe and voluntary. At the same time, interventions should always offer non-religious coping tools—such as relaxation, problem-solving, and peer support—so that children who are less religious, ambivalent about faith, or struggling with negative religious coping do not feel excluded or pressured. The overall aim is not to “make children more religious”, but to respect and use the spiritual resources that are already part of their worlds, while also widening the repertoire of coping strategies available to them.

Finally, the ambivalent findings in this review point to the importance of training for professionals who work in these contexts. Mental health workers, educators, and humanitarian staff need support to feel comfortable talking about religion, noticing when it is helping, and recognizing when it may be adding to a child’s burden. Without

this, there is a risk that religiosity remains either ignored, idealized, or pathologized, rather than understood in a nuanced way that reflects children's lived experiences.

Methodological limitations of the evidence

The findings of this systematic review must be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations in the existing evidence base. These limitations relate primarily to study design, measurement approaches, geographical coverage, and risk of bias, and reflect broader challenges in conducting research with conflict-affected child populations in the Arab world. Understanding these constraints is essential for contextualizing the patterns observed between religiosity, resilience, and psychological well-being.

A major limitation is that many of the included studies are cross-sectional. They show associations between religiosity, exposure to conflict, and mental health outcomes at a single point in time, but they cannot demonstrate causality. It remains unclear, for example, whether higher religiosity leads to lower PTSD symptoms, whether less distressed children feel more able to engage in religious activities, or whether both are influenced by a third factor such as family functioning.

A second limitation relates to measurement. In several studies, religiosity and spirituality are measured with only a few items, or with instruments that are not standardized or well validated for Arab child and adolescent populations. This makes it difficult to compare results across studies and to know exactly which aspects of religiosity (belief, practice, identity, coping) are driving the observed associations. The same applies, to a lesser extent, to resilience and mental health outcomes, which are sometimes measured with different tools or defined in different ways.

Third, there is a clear geographical concentration of the research. A large proportion of the empirical evidence concerns Palestinian children and adolescents living under occupation or siege, and Lebanese youth, including Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon. These contexts are central and highly relevant, but they do not capture the full diversity of conflict-affected Arab settings. There is comparatively less evidence from other countries in the region, which limits the generalizability of the conclusions.

Fourth, not all studies focus directly on children and adolescents. Some of the work in my initial search dealt primarily with parents, caregivers, or adult refugees, and only indirectly informed child resilience. These studies were either classified as Discussion-only or Excluded in my master table. While they offer valuable context, they do not replace the need for child-focused research.

Most Core and Extended studies were assessed as having moderate risk of bias using JBI checklists, reflecting common challenges in this field, such as cross-sectional designs, convenience sampling, and brief or non-standardised measures of religiosity and resilience. In addition, risk-of-bias judgments were conducted by a single reviewer, which may introduce subjectivity despite the use of structured tools. These factors should be kept in mind when interpreting the synthesis.

Acknowledging these limitations is important for framing the conclusions of this thesis. The results point to meaningful patterns that seem robust across different studies, but they should still be interpreted with caution, and as a starting point rather than a definitive answer.

Strengths and contributions of the review

Despite the limitations outlined above, this review makes several contributions to the field. First, it brings together scattered evidence on religiosity and resilience in Arab conflict settings, with a specific focus on children and adolescents. While there is a growing literature on religion and mental health in general, much of it draws on adult, Western, or non-conflict samples. By centering Arab children and adolescents who have grown up amid war, occupation, and displacement, this review highlights a group that is often underrepresented in both global resilience research and religion research.

Second, the review uses a transparent classification system—distinguishing between Core, Extended, Discussion-only, and Excluded studies. This approach respects the scarcity and heterogeneity of the evidence while maintaining methodological rigor. It allows me to make use of Extended and Discussion-only studies when they add context and depth, without blurring the boundaries of the empirical synthesis.

Third, the synthesis highlights the multifaceted role of religiosity. Instead of treating religion only as an individual belief, the review shows that religiosity also functions as a community resource, a marker of identity, and a framework for meaning-making. This multidimensional view is more consistent with how Arab children and families in conflict settings actually talk about their faith.

Finally, the synthesis identifies practice-relevant considerations by outlining both potential supportive pathways and potential risks, which may inform culturally grounded, trauma-informed approaches.

Conclusion

Overall, this review suggests that religiosity functions as a multidimensional and context-dependent resilience resource for many Arab children and adolescents living with war, occupation, and displacement, rather than as a uniform protective factor. The findings indicate that religiosity may foster resilience through at least four pathways—meaning-making, emotional regulation and coping, community and belonging, and identity and dignity—while at the same time carrying risks when it takes negative, rigid, or exclusionary forms.

Across the reviewed studies, religion appears to be deeply embedded in the everyday lives of many children in the Arab world, including those growing up amidst political violence. Ignoring this dimension would mean overlooking a major part of how these children understand themselves and their experiences. At the same time, romanticizing religiosity would obscure the ways in which certain beliefs and practices can intensify guilt, fear, or pressure.

Interventions in these settings may benefit from being culturally and spiritually sensitive—recognizing strengths children draw from faith, family, and community—while also remaining alert to harmful patterns of religious coping and rigid expectations. For researchers, the review points to the need for more longitudinal, child-focused, and geographically diverse studies, using better measures of religiosity and resilience that are grounded in local realities. Future reviews would benefit from multiple independent reviewers to strengthen reliability.

In sum, the relationship between religiosity and resilience in Arab conflict contexts is best understood not as a simple “protective factor” or “risk factor”, but as a dynamic set of resources and meanings that can support or strain children’s mental

health depending on how they are shaped, interpreted, and supported by the wider systems around them.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIVE REFLECTION ON RESILIENCE, SUMUD AND THE LIMITS OF DEFINITION

This research did not emerge from a purely academic curiosity. Rather, it was shaped by lived observations that have accompanied me throughout my life: scenes witnessed within my immediate and extended family, among people in my surrounding communities, and across conflict-affected and oppressed contexts—most painfully in Gaza—where individuals continue to say “*alhamdulillah*” in the midst of profound loss, fear, and uncertainty. These moments reflect a form of endurance that exceeds what is commonly captured by conventional psychological constructs. They embody what is locally understood as *sumud*: a steadfastness that is lived daily and sustained across generations.

In much of Western psychological and developmental literature, resilience is typically defined as the capacity to adapt, cope, or recover following adversity. These definitions often emphasize individual functioning, flexibility, and the restoration of equilibrium after stress or trauma. While such conceptualizations have produced valuable insights, they are rooted in specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts—often relatively stable environments where adversity is assumed to be time-limited rather than chronic. In contrast, the realities explored in this thesis are shaped by prolonged exposure to structural violence, occupation, displacement, and systemic inequality, where adversity is not episodic but embedded in everyday life.

Within Arab and conflict-affected contexts, resilience is more accurately articulated through the concept of *sumud*. As documented in culturally informed

literature, *sumud* refers to steadfastness and perseverance grounded in collective identity, resistance, dignity, and meaning-making (Hammad & Tribe, 2021). It is not limited to psychological coping or functional survival, but reflects a moral and political stance toward life under oppression. Unlike resilience as adaptation (*murūna*), *sumud* is oriented toward justice, continuity, and refusal—refusal to surrender one’s humanity, identity, or future. It is both a value and a practice, expressed through everyday acts that sustain family, community, culture, and hope (Hammad & Tribe, 2021).

This distinction is not merely semantic. Critical scholarship from the region highlights how dominant resilience frameworks—particularly those embedded in humanitarian and development agendas—risk depoliticizing suffering by framing crises as technical disruptions to be managed rather than as outcomes of historical and structural injustice. In education and psychosocial research, resilience is often operationalized as the ability of individuals or systems to absorb shocks and continue functioning. As argued by Shuayb and Brun (2025), such framings can normalize perpetual emergency, narrow political imagination, and shift attention away from questions of power, accountability, and transformation. In contrast, *sumud* insists on asking not only whether people endure, but what they endure for, at what cost, and toward which future.

These concerns strongly resonate with my own motivations for undertaking this research. While the ideas articulated by Shuayb and Brun reflect broader regional debates, they mirror tensions that I have long grappled with in my academic and personal engagement with resilience. Their work provided language and scholarly grounding for questions that were already central to my thinking, particularly the

concern that externally imposed definitions risk obscuring locally rooted forms of endurance and aspiration.

A similar tension applies to the concept of religiosity, which was central to this review. In the contexts examined, religion is not merely a set of beliefs or practices that can be easily quantified. It is a source of meaning, moral orientation, patience, hope, and collective belonging—often deeply intertwined with cultural identity and experiences of suffering. Research conducted in conflict settings demonstrates that religious faith frequently supports meaning-making, emotional regulation, and perseverance under chronic adversity, particularly when aligned with collective values such as *sumud* (Hammad & Tribe, 2021).

However, as a systematic review, this study necessarily relied on operational definitions of both religiosity and resilience drawn from peer-reviewed academic literature. This reflects the methodological requirements of systematic reviews, which prioritize transparency, replicability, and engagement with established scientific frameworks. While this approach strengthens the methodological rigor of the study, it also imposes conceptual boundaries that may not fully capture how these constructs are lived and understood in the communities under study.

Acknowledging this limitation is essential. The findings of this thesis contribute to existing literature by synthesizing empirical evidence on the associations between religiosity and resilience among school-aged children in conflict-affected Arab contexts. At the same time, they expose the limitations of adopting predefined constructs without sufficient cultural interrogation. The process of defining resilience and religiosity in this research was therefore both a methodological necessity and a conceptual compromise.

This reflection represents what I consider the core of this research. While the thesis works within dominant academic conventions in order to remain legible within psychological and educational research, it also gestures toward the need to move beyond them. If time, space, and future scholarly opportunity allow, this work calls for a deeper, bottom-up engagement with how resilience and religiosity are narrated, practiced, and understood by the communities themselves. Rather than adopting external definitions and imposing them onto lived realities, there is a need to reverse this process: to listen, to witness, to understand, and only then to theorize.

In this sense, *sumud* is not simply an alternative translation of resilience; it is a challenge to dominant epistemologies. It asks researchers to recognize that endurance in contexts of chronic oppression cannot be reduced to coping strategies or adaptive capacity alone. It calls for culturally sensitive, historically grounded, and politically conscious frameworks that honor lived experience rather than subsume it under universalized terminology (Hammad & Tribe, 2021).

This thesis therefore marks both an endpoint and a beginning: an endpoint in fulfilling the requirements of a systematic academic inquiry, and a beginning in articulating questions that remain unresolved. It is my hope that future research will build on this work to develop definitions of resilience and religiosity that emerge from the narratives, values, and struggles of the communities themselves—definitions that reflect not only how people survive, but how they remain dignified, connected, and hopeful in the face of enduring injustice.

APPENDIX 1

ARAB WORLD (LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES) — 22

MEMBER STATES

The Arab World is operationalized in this review as the 22 member states of the League of Arab States (LAS). This list follows LAS membership and UN regional usage (League of Arab States, 1945/2025; UN ESCWA, 2024).

- Algeria
- Bahrain
- Comoros
- Djibouti
- Egypt
- Iraq
- Jordan
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Libya
- Mauritania
- Morocco
- Oman
- Palestine
- Qatar
- Saudi Arabia
- Somalia
- Sudan
- Syria
- Tunisia
- United Arab Emirates
- Yemen

APPENDIX 2

SCREENING AND STUDY SELECTION

Screening will follow PRISMA 2020. Primary reviewer will (i) de-duplicate records, (ii) screen titles/abstracts against inclusion/exclusion criteria, and (iii) conduct full-text review. Disagreements will be resolved by supervisor. Reasons for exclusion at full-text will be recorded using standardized categories (e.g., wrong population/age, non-Arab country, not conflict context, lacks religiosity or resilience measures, insufficient data). A PRISMA flow diagram will document counts at each stage (identification, screening, eligibility, inclusion).

- De-duplication: using EndNote
- Title/Abstract screening: Include if potentially eligible on either religiosity or resilience and Arab-World context.
- Full-text screening: Apply age (6–18) and Arab-World (LAS) rules strictly
- Mixed-country/multi-site studies: Include if Arab-World subsample is separable; otherwise exclude.
- Data capture of exclusions: Record a single primary exclusion reason; secondary reasons optional.

APPENDIX 3
 DATA EXTRACTION FORM FOR FULL-TEXT
 EXTRACTION.

Table 3

Data Extraction Form

Title	
First author (and et al.)	
Country / main setting	
Conflict context / type of adversity	
Participants (age group)	
Measure for religiosity / spirituality	
Measure for resilience / mental health / wellbeing	
Resilience outcome / main result (direction)	
Study design	
Key findings (short – focused on religiosity × resilience/mental health)	
Eligibility classification	Core – Extended – Excluded - Discussion
Risk of bias	

APPENDIX 4

DATABASE SEARCH STRINGS

Table 4

Boolean Strings and Results for Major Databases

Database	Date of Search	Search String (Boolean)	Filters Applied	Results Found
JSTOR	September 16, 2025	("religious coping" OR religiosity OR spirituality) AND (resilien* OR "post-traumatic growth") AND (refugee* OR displacement OR "war trauma") AND (child* OR adolescent*) AND ("Middle East" OR Arab*)		1,144 After filters of content type, subject and language: 193 After title and abstract reading: 11
PubMed	September 16, 2025	((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND ((("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction")) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND (("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain"	Language: English and Arabic Age: Child: birth-18 years	16 After title and abstract reading: 10

		OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR "Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen"))	
Medline complete		((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND ((("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction")) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND (("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain" OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR	Results: 19 After: 7

		"Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR "Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen"))		
Scopus		(((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND (("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction")) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND (("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain" OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR "Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen"))))		Results: 20 After title and abstract reading: 7
Education Research Complete	September 16, 2025	TX (religion* OR religios* OR faith OR spiritualit* OR "religious coping") AND TX (resilien* OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "positive adaptation") AND		Results: 1,527 Then I added subject filters until I

		TX (conflict* OR war OR displacement OR refugee*) AND TX (child* OR "school-age*" OR "middle childhood") AND TX ("Arab world" OR "Middle East" OR Lebanon OR Jordan OR Egypt OR Palestine OR Syria OR Saudi OR Morocco OR Tunisia OR Algeria OR Iraq OR Yemen)		reached 45 results After reading title and abstract: 7
ERIC	September 16, 2025	(((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND (("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction"))) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND (("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain" OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR		6 After reading title and abstract: 1

		"Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen"))))		
APA PsycInfo	September 16, 2025	((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND ((("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction")) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND (("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain" OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR "Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen"))		16 After: 11
APA PsycArticles	September 16, 2025	(TI,AB(religion* OR religios* OR faith OR spirituality)) AND (TI,AB(resilien* OR "post-traumatic growth")) AND ANYWHERE(refugee* OR		Results: 4 After: 2

		displacement OR conflict* OR war) AND (TI,AB(child* OR "school-age" OR "middle childhood")) AND ANYWHERE("Middle East" OR "Arab world" OR Lebanon OR Jordan OR Egypt OR Palestine OR Syria OR Iraq OR Yemen OR "Saudi Arabia" OR Morocco OR Tunisia)		
Academic Search Ultimate		TX((religion* OR religios* OR faith OR spiritualit*) N5 (resilien* OR "post-traumatic growth" OR hardiness)) AND TX(conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP* OR "forced migration") AND TX("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "grade school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12") AND TX("Arab world" OR Algeria OR Bahrain OR Comoros OR Djibouti OR Egypt OR Iraq OR Jordan OR Kuwait OR Lebanon OR Libya OR Mauritania OR Morocco OR Oman OR Palestine OR Qatar OR "Saudi Arabia" OR Somalia OR Sudan OR Syria OR Tunisia OR "United Arab Emirates" OR UAE OR Yemen)		Results: 740 After subject and language filters: 498 After title and abstract reading: 48
Web of Science	September 16, 2025	((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR "religious practice*" OR faith OR "faith-based" OR spiritualit*)) AND	Document type: Article, Review Article	42 After filer: 38 After reading title and abstract: 13

		<p>((("resilien*" OR "positive adaptation" OR "coping competence" OR "post-traumatic growth" OR "PTG" OR "hardiness" OR "hope" OR "life satisfaction")) AND ((conflict* OR war OR "political unrest" OR "political violence" OR occupation OR displacement OR refugee* OR "internally displaced" OR IDP*)) AND ("school-age*" OR child* OR "middle childhood" OR "primary school*" OR "elementary school*" OR "6-12" OR "6 to 12" OR "ages 6 to 12")) AND (("Algeria" OR "Bahrain" OR "Comoros" OR "Djibouti" OR "Egypt" OR "Iraq" OR "Jordan" OR "Kuwait" OR "Lebanon" OR "Libya" OR "Mauritania" OR "Morocco" OR "Oman" OR "Palestine" OR "Qatar" OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Somalia" OR "Sudan" OR "Syria" OR "Tunisia" OR "United Arab Emirates" OR "UAE" OR "Yemen")))</p>		
ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global	September 16, 2025	<p>AB((religion* OR religios* OR "religious coping" OR faith OR spiritualit*) AND (resilien* OR "positive adaptation" OR "post-traumatic growth") AND (conflict* OR war OR "political violence" OR displacement OR refugee*)) AND (child* OR "school-age*" OR "middle childhood") AND ("Arab world" OR "Middle East" OR Lebanon OR Jordan OR</p>		11 After title and abstract reading: 4

		Egypt OR Palestine OR Syria OR "Saudi Arabia" OR Morocco OR Tunisia OR Algeria OR Iraq OR Yemen))		
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APPENDIX 5

JBI CRITICAL APPRAISAL CHECKLIST FOR ANALYTICAL CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDIES

Reviewer _____

Date _____

Author _____ Year _____ Record Number _____

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Were the criteria for inclusion in the sample clearly defined?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Were the study subjects and the setting described in detail?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Was the exposure measured in a valid and reliable way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Were objective, standard criteria used for measurement of the condition?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Were confounding factors identified?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Were strategies to deal with confounding factors stated?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Were the outcomes measured in a valid and reliable way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Was appropriate statistical analysis used?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Overall appraisal: Include Exclude Seek further info

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research

Reviewer _____

Date _____

Author _____ Year _____ Record Number _____

	Yes	No	Unclear	Not applicable
1. Is there congruity between the stated philosophical perspective and the research methodology?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the research question or objectives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the methods used to collect data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the representation and analysis of data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Is there congruity between the research methodology and the interpretation of results?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Is there a statement locating the researcher culturally or theoretically?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Is the influence of the researcher on the research, and vice-versa, addressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Are participants, and their voices, adequately represented?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Is the research ethical according to current criteria or, for recent studies, and is there evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Do the conclusions drawn in the research report flow from the analysis, or interpretation, of the data?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Overall appraisal: Include Exclude Seek further info

Comments (Including reason for exclusion)

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