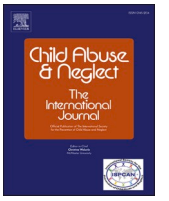
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Hope and life satisfaction in Palestinian children victim of military violence: The predictive role of agency, potentially traumatic experiences and symptoms of trauma

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ABSTRACT

Background: Children exposed political violence deploy resources to maintain functioning, hope and life satisfaction.
Objective: We sought to explore whether or not children promote hope and life satisfaction trough agency, psychological difficulties, potentially traumatic experiences and symptoms in Palestine.
Participants and setting: 965 children (494 males and 471 females) in multiple geographical contexts, and areas were involved.
Methods: We administered the *War Child Agency Assessment Scale*, *Child Hope Scale*, *Multilevel Students'Life Satisfaction Scale-Bref*, *the Strength and difficulties scale*, the *Child Revised Impact of events Scale*, and *Trauma Checklist*, and performed regression analysis; hope and life satisfaction were dependent and agency, strength and difficulties, trauma symptoms and traumatic events independent variables.
Results: Specific forms of agency predicted life satisfaction ($\beta = 0.219$; ** $p < .01$, *social agency;* $\beta = 0.11$; ** $p < .01$, with *agency in education*) and hope ($\beta = 0.07$; ** $p < .05$, *agency on free movement*), while mental difficulties (conduct problems, $\beta = -0.09$; ** $p < .01$; hyperactivity, $\beta = -0.07$; ** $p < .05$; $\beta = -0.15$; ** $p < .01$ with life satisfaction) (conduct problems, $\beta = -0.06$; ** $p < .05$, and difficulties in pro-social behaviour, $\beta = -0.21$; ** $p < .01$ with hope), traumatic events ($\beta = -0.16$; ** $p < .01$, with life satisfaction; $\beta = -0.15$; ** $p < .01$, with hope) and trauma symptoms ($\beta = -0.09$; ** $p < .05$, with hope) were negatively associated with the dependents variables.
Conclusions: We found a positive role of social, educational, and freedom of movement agentic behaviours in fostering hope and life satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Children and youth living in areas of conflict, war, and political violence are at significant risk of developing psychological

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impairments that may leave long-lasting impacts on their well-being and health (Agbaria et al., 2021; Bendavid et al., 2021; Cavazzoni et al., 2022; Kadir et al., 2019). Indeed, due to the dramatic increase in armed conflicts worldwide (UN, 2022), numerous contributions engaged in capturing and assessing the impacts on the physical and mental health of children and youth, identifying possible risk and protective factors (Ager, 2002; Gilligan, 2009; De Jong, 2005; Dubow et al., 2009; Betancourt, Meyers-Ohki, et al., 2013; Betancourt, Newnham, et al., 2013; Cummings et al., 2017). To date, many scholars have documented how children and youth manage their lives within contexts characterized by political violence, oppression, and war, depicting their capacities to mobilize resources within different spheres of family, community, education, work, as well as civic and political engagement (Abebe, 2019; Bell & Payne, 2009; Cavazzoni, Fiorini, Sousa, & Veronese, 2021, Oswell, 2013; Veronese, Sousa, et al., 2020). Since Prout and James' (1990, p.8) debate that "children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes but active in the construction and determination of their own social lives", both political agendas and scholarly research have come together in recognizing children's competencies and capabilities (Abebe, 2019; Edmonds, 2019; Spyrou, 2018). This focus on their capabilities has prompted a revision of the picture of children as only vulnerable and dependent, expanding it also characteristics that have to do with their competencies, practices, and attitudes (Oswell, 2013; Spyrou, 2018).

Therefore, the construct of agency – as "the ways in which individuals counteract their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder et al., 2003, p.5) – has gained much ground in recent years, resulting in the twentieth century being called the *age of children's agency* (Oswell, 2013). Even in situations of extreme poverty, vulnerability, and oppression, children can actively mobilize resources and survival skills to protect themselves from their challenging living environments and safeguard their well-being (Abebe, 2019: Cavazzoni, Fiorini, & Veronese, 2021; Edmonds, 2019; Lister, 2006; Spyrou, 2018; Valentine, 2011). Indeed, agentic capacities have often been explored and observed to be implicated in sustaining children's life satisfaction, increasing their sense of competence, hope, and well-being, thus mitigating the potentially traumatic impacts of their life environments (Alexander et al., 2015; Gilligan, 2009; Veronese, Cavazzoni, Fiorini, et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, despite the centrality of the construct, still few studies have attempted to explore the relationship between agency, hope and well-being in children living in armed conflict and political oppression. Thus, this study aims to investigate the role of agency in shaping children's sense of hope and life satisfaction, with a specific focus on its potential involvement in mitigating the impact of traumatic events on a group of children living under military and political oppression. Indeed, agentic practices are posited to act as a protective mechanisms, mobilizing children to cope with the challenges posed by their hostile environments (Cavazzoni, Fiorini, & Veronese, 2021; Lister, 2006; Spyrou, 2018). From this perspective, the existing literature highlights the significance of hope as a critical protective factor in the of traumatic events (Arai et al., 2021; Snyder, 2005). Indeed, the greater the opportunity for individuals to cultivate a sense of hope, the more likely they are to develop a sense of security regarding their future and overall well-being, which, in turn, contributes to an enhance satisfaction and quality of life. Additionally, research has consistently demonstrated a strong correlation between the sense of agency and of hope (Arai et al., 2021; Sheehan & Rall, 2011), underscoring how agency can play a pivotal role in fostering a heightened sense of hope, and conversely, how hope can reinforce a sense of agency in a mutually reinforcing manner. Hence, in this study, we aim to delve into this relationship between agency and hope, while also examining their combined impact on life satisfaction.

Furthermore, this work explores the influence of demographic characteristics such as age and gender on children's agentic practices, life satisfaction and hope (Boyden, 2003; Cavazzoni et al., 2022; Omaleki & Reed, 2019; Veronese et al., 2012). It has been more than documented how discriminations related to gender, age, ethnicity or status (fewer possibilities concerning freedom of movement, access to work, education, and the right to health) limit people's opportunities to exercise agency, undermining their hope and life satisfaction (Klocker, 2007). In the Palestinian context, where this study took place, several scholars have linked a majority of depressive symptoms and stress among girls to social norms that limit their freedom and privileges, negatively impacting their development and growth (Giacaman et al., 2007; Marshall, 2013). Similarly, higher rates of depressive symptoms and lower overall satisfaction with their lives have been documented in older children in comparison with younger ones (Giacaman et al., 2007).

2. The study

Therefore, our study sought to explore the role of potentially traumatic experiences, trauma symptoms, agency, and mental health (operationalized in terms of strength and difficulties) in predicting hope and life satisfaction among children living under political and military oppression. We also tested the role of demographic variables (age and gender) and their influence on children's agency, life satisfaction and hope. Namely, we hypothesized that agency would be positively tied to hope and life satisfaction (H1), and potentially traumatic experiences, trauma symptoms, and poor mental health would be negatively associated with hope and life satisfaction (H2 and H3). We expect gender and age differences, with younger and female participants more hopeful and satisfied with their life (H4).

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Children were selected and scrutinized for the survey according to age, gender, exposure to war and violence-related events, and geographical distribution in occupied Palestinian territories (oPts). We employed a purposive convenience sampling procedure in governmental or private primary schools and educational institutions for refugee children ruled by the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency). Inclusion criteria comprised children of Palestinian origins living in different contexts and geographical areas

belonging to the occupied Palestinian territories (oPts), being Arabic speakers, and not having been previously diagnosed with psychiatric complications. The sample size was calculated following a cluster sampling technique with a confidence level of 95 % and a 5 % margin of error on a total population of 2,115,370 children living in the oPts (385 children) (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The best final sample was about 1150 participants, 383 for each geographical area (Gaza, West Bank and East Jerusalem). After collecting the questionnaires, we conducted our study with 965 Palestinian children: 494 males and 471 females, with a response rate of 88 %. Of them, 60.5 % of the participants were from the West Bank, 9.7 % were from East Jerusalem, and 29.7 % were from the Gaza strip. 36.3 % of participants were aged 8–10, 36.2 % were aged 11–12, and 26.5 % were aged 13–14.

3.2. Instruments and procedures

Written parental consent was requested and obtained before starting the research. Participants and their families were carefully informed about the study's purposes. Children were free to respond partially and withdraw from the survey at any moment if distressed by any protocol questions. All the data were anonymous and analyzed in an aggregate mode. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no rewards were offered. Local trained social workers collected the questionnaires in the classroom during school hours. The accomplishment of the research protocol lasted about 40 min. The arranged settings offered a safe and relational space where pupils could freely express their perceptions and opinions (Veronese et al., 2015). The research protocol adhered to the APA's (American Psychological Association, 2010) ethical principles. Finally, the Institutional Review Boards of the University of Milano-Bicocca (Protocol N. 368) and An-Najah National University of Nablus (N. 18-Sept' 19) approved the research. The protocol implemented contained six self-administered questionnaires:

War Child Agency Assessment Scale - Palestinian version (*WCAAS-Pal*) (Veronese, Cavazzoni, Jaradah, et al., 2022): the questionnaire was developed to evaluate agency in children from a multidimensional and ecological perspective. The questionnaire score reproduces different domains of children's agency from a bottom-up exploratory multi-method approach (political agency and national identity, PANI; agency on free movement, FM; agency on political and military violence, PMV; agency on religion and spirituality, RS; agency on play and leisure, PL; social agency SA explaining agentic social behaviours toward children's family and community; agency in education, EDU). The scale consists of items rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Sample items include "I can identify places that I enjoy and that are relaxing", "I prefer to avoid places that remind me of the martyrs", and "Discovering things about the world helps me feel in control of my life".

Children's Hope Scale (*CHS*; Snyder et al., 1996): The Children Hope Scale comprises two broad domains thinking of children as goal-oriented beings: agency and pathways to the future. The agency's domain reflects the perception that children can initiate and sustain action toward a desired goal; pathways to the future reflect the children's self-perceived competence to produce directions to such purposes (Snyder et al., 1996). Hope demonstrates the combination of agentic and pathways thinking toward goals. As a result, a six-item dispositional self-report index has been validated and utilized with children aged 8–16. A Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (none of the time) to 6 (all the time) illustrates the instrument. Sample items included: "I think I am doing pretty well", "When I have a problem, I can come up with lots of ways to solve it", and "I am doing just as well as other kids my age". The scale was administered in Arabic, following the standard forward- and back-translation (Brislin, 1970).

Children Revised Impact of Event Scale-Arabic Version (CRIES-13A; Veronese & Pepe, 2020): the scale is a version of the Impact of Event Scale by Dyregrov et al. (1996) adapted for children and aimed at the evaluation of traumatic psychological symptoms in children exposed to potentially traumatic experiences. The original scale comprised three dimensions: intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale. Sample items included: "Do you think about erasing the event that shocked you from your memory?", "Do you have difficulty concentrating?" and "Do you try to avoid thinking about the shocking event?".

Strengths and Difficulties scale-Arabic version (Alyahri & Goodman, 2006). The SDQ is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that covers 25 attributes, some positive and others negative (Goodman, 1997). The 25 items are split into five sub-scales of 5 items (SDQ-c, conduct problems; SDQ-h, inattention-hyperactivity; SDQ-e emotional symptoms; SDQ-r, peer and SDQ-p pro-social behaviours problems). A total difficulties score (SDQ-total) is generated by summing all items (range 0–40).

The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) is a global life satisfaction measure for children detecting cognitive aspects of subjective well-being intended as a global evaluation by the person on the quality of their life. It assesses life satisfaction as an ecological construct comprised of multi-contextual levels (Seligson et al., 2003). This scale consists of 5 short items (family, friendships, school, myself, living environment, e.g., "I would describe my satisfaction with my family life/friendships/school experience/myself/where I live as…"), with 6 points (from very dissatisfied to very satisfied).

Trauma Checklist in Arabic (TCL) (Abu Laila, Thabet, & Vostanis, 2009). This list was initially devised to reflect the traumatic events that can occur in the Palestinian context and covers three main domains. We led EFA (exploratory factor analysis) and CFA (Confirmatory factor analysis) for TCL, with results of three principal components, yielded from the analysis: (1) *trauma due to material loss* (TCL-ML), (2) *military and political violence against individuals* (TCL-AI), and (3) *military and political violence against individuals and their families* (TCL-AIF). The initial model assumed that TCL is multidimensional and comprises a three-factor structure. The model fitting indicators led to $\chi 2 = 2492.1$, $DF = 79$ and $P \leq .001$, indicating no model fit. As the model lacked a good fit, modified indicators were used to determine whether covariance should be allowed among item errors. Byrne (2016) suggested using an adjusted index with residuals between two items ($\pm$ 2.58). Table 1 shows the covariance of the three-scale construct.

We also calculated incremental fit indices for a stepwise addition of error covariance, where a value closest to one indicates the best model fit. The resulting incremental indices values (CFI =0.97, GFI =0.98, NFI =0.95, RFI =0.96, IFI =0.97, and TLI =0.96) were all $\geq$0.95, showing very good model fit. The RMSEA value was.041, less than the cut-off value of close to 0.06. Finally, item loading values ranged from 0.50 to 0.75, within the acceptable range of high loading values (all >0.50).

Table 1
Covariance of the three TCL constructs.

Construct[a]	Estimate	SE	CR	P
TCL-ML	0.85	0.08	9.23	**0.001
TCL-AI	0.91	0.09	8.47	**0.001
TCL -AIF	0.87	0.06	9.54	**0.001

[a] TCL-ML: trauma due to material loss; TCL-AI: military and political violence against individuals; TCL-AIF: military and political violence against individuals and their families.
** P significance ≤0.001.

3.3. Data analysis

The Person correlation coefficient between the principal scales and their sub-scales was calculated to evaluate whether there was statistical evidence for a linear relationship among our study variables. Then, we used hierarchical regression analysis to predict life satisfaction and hope through demographic variables (gender and age) in step 1. At the same time, demographic variables with the sub-scales of war agency, strength and difficulties, traumatic events and child impact of events were used to predict life satisfaction and hope in step 2. The hierarchical regression analysis has been tested using SPSS 28 software for data analysis.

4. Results

Descriptive statistics related to war agency, strength and difficulties, life satisfaction, hope, trauma, and impact of events were calculated and shown in Table 2.

Participants reported high scores on the war agency assessment scale (WCAAS) in all its subscales and total scores, on the total traumatic checklist (TCL-total), strength and difficulties (SDQ), both in its subscales and total, the overall life satisfaction (BMSLSS), and hope (CHS). Moreover, participants reported moderate scores on potentially traumatic experiences (TCL-ML, TCL-AI, and TCL –AIF). Finally, participants reported mild scores on intrusions, hyperarousal and total trauma symptoms (CRIES-I, CRIES-H, and CRIES-total). Regarding internal consistency, our scales indicated a high level of reliability on Cronbach's alpha; scores ranged from.92 (TCL- total) to.72 (SDQ-r).

The results of the correlational analysis are described in Table 3. Specifically, agency positively correlated with life satisfaction and individual trauma experience. Furthermore, agency positively correlated with hope and negatively correlated with mental health (SDQ) and trauma symptoms (CRIES-total). Finally, traumatic experience (TCL) positively correlated with mental distress (SDQ) and trauma symptoms (CRIES) while negatively correlated with life satisfaction (BMLSLSS).

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for research variables ($N = 965$).

Variable	Mean	S.D	Min	Max	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis	Reliability
WCAAS-PANI*	4.3346	0.56830	1.17	5.00	3.83	−1.105	1.774	0.82
WCAAS-FM*	4.0212	0.72829	1.00	5.00	4.00	−0.638	0.288	0.86
WCAAS-PMV*	3.2449	0.61035	1.17	5.00	3.83	0.125	0.389	0.82
WCAAS-RS*	4.4986	0.65665	1.67	5.00	3.33	−1.513	2.040	0.80
WCAAS-PL*	3.9845	0.64006	1.00	5.00	4.00	−0.662	0.705	0.84
WCAAS-SA*	4.1083	0.54930	1.29	5.00	3.71	0.609	2.360	0.83
WCAAS-Edu*	4.4279	0.42660	2.44	5.00	2.56	−0.979	1.529	0.79
WCAAS-RS*	4.1159	0.65323	1.67	5.00	3.33	−0.459	−0.123	0.82
WCAAS-total*	4.0743	0.33925	2.74	4.86	2.12	−0.436	0.174	0.80
CRIES-I	2.2069	1.25794	0.00	5.00	5.00	0.024	−0.751	0.85
CRIES -A	1.8435	1.32044	0.00	5.00	5.00	0.381	−0.700	0.81
CRIES-H	2.1116	1.41799	0.00	5.00	5.00	0.203	−0.839	0.84
CRIES-total	1.9584	1.24486	0.00	5.00	5.00	0.403	−0.534	0.83
TCL-ML	1.1254	0.18368	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.943	3.419	0.91
TCL-AI	1.1072	0.12144	1.00	2.00	1.00	3.567	16.524	0.92
TCL -AIF	1.2589	0.21420	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.202	0.800	0.91
TCL-total	1.7696	0.22815	0.09	2.00	3.00	1.271	6.292	0.92
SDQ-e	2.0070	0.33134	1.00	3.00	2.00	−0.030	0.319	0.76
SDQ-c	1.5608	0.40690	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.664	−0.106	0.73
SDQ-h	1.7621	0.39343	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.169	−0.294	0.74
SDQ-r	1.9858	0.30447	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.017	0.304	0.72
SDQ-p	1.4504	0.40366	1.00	3.00	2.00	0.934	0.587	0.75
SDQ-total	1.7647	0.18303	1.32	2.44	1.12	0.485	0.137	0.76
BMSLSS	4.3469	0.59677	1.29	5.00	3.71	−1.377	2.393	0.75
CHS	3.7387	0.63439	1.00	5.00	4.00	−1.481	3.109	0.74

* WCAAS-PANI: related to political agency and national identity; WCAAS-FM: related to freedom of movement; WCAAS-PMV: related to political and military violence; WCAAS-PL: related to play and leisure; WCAAS-SA social agency; WCAAS—Edu: related to education; WCAAS-RS: related to religion and spirituality; WCAAS-Tot: total scale measuring agency.

Table 3
Correlations among study variables (N = 965).

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
WCAAS-PANI		0.27**	0.10**	0.31**	0.22**	0.37**	0.47**	0.27**	0.66**	−0.05	0.05	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.16**	0.06	0.03	−0.08**	−0.06	−0.04	−0.21**	−0.16**	0.21**	0.21**
WCAAS-AFM			0.05	0.22**	0.31**	0.23**	0.34**	0.23**	0.52**	0.01	0.05	0.04	−0.05	−0.09**	−0.02	0.02	−0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01	−0.03	−0.06	−1	0.12**	0.20**
WCAAS-APMV				0.01	0.10**	0.03	0.08*	0.02	0.34**	−0.15**	−0.01	−0.14**	−0.13**	−0.06	0.02	0.09**	0.04	−0.06*	0.05	−0.03	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.05
WCAAS-ARS					0.22**	0.18**	0.34**	0.18**	0.48**	−0.03	0.01	−0.05	−0.05	−0.03	−0.05	0.03	−0.01	−0.04	−0.09**	−0.01	−0.05	−0.14**	−0.12**	0.18**	0.22**
WCAAS-APL						0.29**	0.30**	0.24**	0.58**	−0.03	0.04	0.03	−0.07*	−0.04	0.04	0.06	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.11**	−0.10**	−0.07*	−0.05	0.11**	0.16**
WCAAS-SA							0.43**	0.38**	0.63**	0.01	0.06*	0.04	−0.04	−0.02	0.03	0.02	−0.01	−0.05	−0.06*	−0.05	−0.02	−0.20**	−0.15**	0.33**	0.23**
WCAAS-Edu								0.34**	0.73**	0.04	0.03	−0.01	−0.04	−0.05	−0.01	0.02	−0.02	0.06*	−0.12**	−0.09**	−0.02	−0.21**	−0.17**	0.29**	0.30**
WCAAS-RS									0.52**	−0.02	0.03	0.03	−0.04	−0.01	0.01	0.02	0.06	−0.02	0.02	−0.02	−0.07*	−0.11**	−0.09**	0.17**	0.16**
WCAAS-Total										−0.07*	0.05	−0.01	−0.09**	−0.04	0.01	0.09**	0.01	−0.02	−0.06*	−0.04	−0.06	−0.24**	−0.16**	0.32**	0.34**
CRIES-I											0.61**	0.63**	0.24**	0.09**	−0.02	0.08*	0.08*	0.04	0.10**	0.15**	−0.09**	0.01	0.02	−0.10*	−0.09*
CRIES -A												0.62**	0.23**	0.19**	0.04	0.15**	0.19**	0.07*	0.16**	0.16**	−0.09*	0.08*	0.13**	−0.09*	−0.04
CRIES-H													0.25**	0.13**	0.04	0.10**	0.13**	0.03	0.12**	0.18**	−0.08*	0.01	−0.08*	−0.05	−0.04
CRIES-Total														0.18**	0.02	0.08*	0.15**	0.07*	0.08*	0.11**	−0.07*	0.03	0.07*	−0.11**	−0.10*
TCL-ML															0.48**	0.50**	0.92**	0.10*	0.12*	0.08*	0.07	0.19**	0.19**	−0.19**	−0.18**
TCL-AI																0.50**	0.67**	0.04	0.16**	0.12**	−0.03	0.13**	0.16**	−0.12**	−0.07*
TCL -AIF																	0.70**	0.01	0.13**	0.13**	0.04	0.10**	0.13**	−0.11*	−0.04
TCL-Total																		0.08*	0.12**	0.10*	−0.03	0.16**	0.17**	−0.18**	−0.14**
SDQ-e																			−0.04	−0.08*	−0.02	−0.01	0.20**	−0.01	−0.03
SDQ-c																				0.40**	−0.09*	−0.29**	0.66**	−0.22**	−0.13**
SDQ-h																					−0.18**	0.18**	0.57**	−0.19**	−0.12**
SDQ-r																						0.11*	0.28**	0.02	−0.12
SDQ-p																							0.68**	−0.30**	−0.31**
SDQ-Total																								−0.31**	−0.26**
BMSLSS																									0.50**
CHS																									

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.1. Regression analysis

We performed hierarchical regression analysis to predict life satisfaction through demographic variables (gender, age) in step 1 (see Table 4). Demographic variables with the sub-scales of WCAAS, SDQ, TCL, and CRIES were selected to predict life satisfaction in step 2. Our findings revealed that life satisfaction was predicted by age (β = −0.06; ** $p < .05$) in favor of younger participants (8–10 years). Life satisfaction was predicted positively by social agency (WCAAS- SA) (β = 0.219; ** $p < .01$) and agency in education (WCAAS-Edu) (β = 0.11; ** $p < .01$). Moreover, life satisfaction was negatively predicted by potentially traumatic experiences due to material loss (TCL-ML) (β = −0.16; ** $p < .01$), and child's conduct problems (SDQ—C) (β = −0.09; ** $p < .01$), hyperactivity (SDQ-h) (β = −0.07; ** $p < .05$), and pro-social behaviour problems (SDQ-p) (β = −0.15; ** $p < .01$).

Likewise, we implemented hierarchical regression analysis to predict hope through demographic variables (gender, age) at step 1 (see Table 5).

Demographic characteristics and the main study's variable were included in the regression at step 2 to predict hope. Our findings showed that hope was predicted by gender (β = 0.08; ** $p < .01$) in favor of girls. Hope has been positively predicted by agency on free movement (WCAAS-FM) (β = 0.07; ** $p < .05$), agency on religiosity and spirituality (WCAAS-RS) (β = 0.09; ** $p < .01$), social agency (WCAAS-SA) (β = 0.07; ** $p < .05$), and agency in education (WCAAS-Edu) (β = 0.13; ** $p < .01$). Additionally, hope was negatively predicted by symptoms of intrusions (CRIES-I) (β = −0.09; ** $p < .05$), and trauma experiences due to material loss (TCL-ML) (β = −0.15; ** $p < .01$), child's hyperactivity (β = −0.06; ** $p < .05$), and difficulties in pro-social behaviour (SDQ-p) (β = −0.21; ** $p < .01$).

5. Discussion

Our study sought to explore the role of multidimensional and context-specific agency, mental health, potentially traumatic experiences and trauma symptoms in predicting life satisfaction and hope in children living under systematic military and settler-colonial violence and political oppression. We found a role of agentic behaviours in positively predicting both life satisfaction (H1) and hope, while mental distress and trauma symptoms and potentially traumatic experiences contributed to reducing children's satisfaction with their lives and hope (H2 and H3). Being younger children was predictive of more life satisfaction, while the female gender ensued being more hopeful (H4). In particular, a type of collective agency directed toward family and community (social agency), mainly in a context like the Gaza strip, seemed to contribute to fostering life satisfaction among children. These findings aligns closely with studies emphasizing the significance of social resources and social capital in mediating the enduring daily traumatic experiences (Cavazzoni, Fiorini, & Veronese, 2021; Jack & Jordan, 1999; Ungar, 2011). Social capital facilitates collectives action and collective engagement,

Table 4
Hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting life satisfaction (N = 965).

Variable	B	SEB	*B*	R2
Step 1				
Gender	0.070	0.039	0.058	
Age	−0.057	0.025	−0.076	0.01
Step 2				
Gender	0.044	0.035	0.037	
Age	−0.051	0.023	−0.067*	
WCAAS-PANI	0.009	0.037	0.009	
WCAAS -FM	0.007	0.027	0.008	
WCAAS -PMV	0.020	0.030	0.021	
WCAAS -RS	0.050	0.029	0.054	
WCAAS -PL	−0.009	0.031	−0.010	
WCAAS-SA	0.238	0.037	0.219**	
WCAAS -Edu	0.155	0.052	0.111**	
WCAAS -RS	0.016	0.030	0.017	
WCAAS -Total	0.219	0.291	0.124	
CRIES-I	−0.032	0.019	−0.068	
CRIES- A	−0.013	0.018	−0.028	
CRIES-H	0.003	0.018	0.008	
CRIES-Total	−0.034	0.015	−0.071	
TCL-ML	−0.551	0.140	−0.167**	
TCL-AI	−0.161	0.190	−0.031	
TCL-AIF	0.065	0.109	0.023	
TCL-Total	0.959	1.131	0.345	
SDQ-e	−0.035	0.054	−0.020	
SDQ-c	−0.140	0.050	−0.094**	
SDQ-h	−0.115	0.050	−0.076*	
SDQ-r	−0.007	0.059	−0.004	
SDQ-p	−0.226	0.048	−0.152**	
SDQ-total	−0.686	0.601	−0.209**	

** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

Table 5
Hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting hope (N = 965).

Variable	B	SEB	β	R2
Step1				
Gender	0.149	0.042	0.116	
Age	−0.013	0.026	−0.016	
Step 2				
Gender	0.114	0.038	0.089**	
Age	−0.006	0.025	−0.007	
WCAAS -PANI	−0.013	0.040	−0.011	0.22
WCAAS -AFM	0.068	0.029	0.077*	
WCAAS -APMV	0.009	0.032	0.009	
WCAAS -ARS	0.093	0.032	0.096**	
WCAAS -APL	0.028	0.033	0.028	
WCAAS – SA	0.091	0.041	0.078*	
WCAAS – AE	0.199	0.057	0.132**	
WCAAS -SS	0.017	0.032	0.017	
WCAAS -total	0.702	0.311	0.372**	
CRIES- I	−0.049	0.021	−0.095*	
CRIES -A	0.023	0.020	0.048	
CRIES- H	0.002	0.019	0.004	
CRIES-total	−0.017	0.016	−0.034	
TCL- ML	−0.546	0.152	−0.155**	
TCL -AI	−0.046	0.207	−0.008	
TCL AIF	0.160	0.119	0.053	
TCL-total	2.623	1.225	−0.884	
SDQ-e	−0.061	0.059	−0.031	
SDQ -c	−0.017	0.054	−0.010	
SDQ-h	−0.111	0.054	−0.068*	
SDQ-r	−0.039	0.064	−0.019	
SDQ-p	−0.346	0.052	−0.218**	
SDQ-total	0.778	0.651	0.222	

** $p < .01$.
* $p < .05$.

which fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose, ultimately bolstering hope and life satisfaction (Betancourt & Khan, 2008; Veronese et al., 2019; Veronese, Cavazzoni, Russo, & Ayoub, 2022).

Performing agency as active and situated social actors within a context particularly oppressed by an ongoing blockade and resources paucity helps enact children's life satisfaction, mainly at an earlier age when children might be lesser exposed to violence and military occupation's burdens (Marshall, 2013; Veronese et al., 2012). In addition, agency in education is a domain that empowers children to feel more satisfied and capable of mastering their lives, while mental distress (conduct problems, hyperactivity and pro-social difficulties) might make children feel isolated and incompetent (Veronese & Cavazzoni, 2020). Thus, conduct problems, hyperactivity, and pro-social difficulties can be considered forms of non-reflective and self-harming agency that negatively predict life satisfaction in children (David, 2013; Veronese, Montali, Cavazzoni, & Mattiuzzi, 2022). Accordingly, social agency and agency on education, together with agency on religiosity, spirituality, and free movement, predicted hope mainly in girls. On the other hand, girls seemed to be more protected and suffocated by a patriarchal societal structure that exposes more male children to potentially traumatic events, while women are confined in a less dangerous domestic sphere (Hamamra, 2021; Massad, 1995; Feldman, 2015; Veronese et al., 2012).

Material loss, trauma symptoms, and poor mental health risk compromising children's hope. Poverty and loss of home and land are a part of the Palestinian transgenerational and historical trauma affecting the new generations and increasing children's despair and fear (Afana et al., 2020; Dalgaard et al., 2019; Salam & Mahfouz, 2020). As a result, children deploy resources of resilience and resistance, showing their role as situated actors through socially informed agentic behaviours. Thus, agency in a collectivistic society should not be considered as an individual set of competencies but a collective and community-oriented initiative that children enact to serve their community and realize personal life satisfaction (Alaqra, 2019). Regaining control and feeling a communal space of resistance to sharing throughout religion and education helps children fight the psychological burdens of ongoing oppression and dispossession. On the other hand, losing a home, economic uncertainty, and material instability might be associated with unreflective forms of agency and hyper-agency, leading to conduct and behavioural problems, hyperactivity and pro-social behaviour impairments that might compromise children's hope and satisfaction with their lives (Veronese, Cavazzoni, Fiorini, et al., 2022).

We must acknowledge our project's exploratory and pilot nature that prevents us from generalizing the results. Rather than a crossectional research design, multi-wave studies will help understand trajectories of hope and life satisfaction and demographic, geographical and historical determinants of such fundamental antecedents of Palestinian children's survival skills. Moreover, conducting an analysis to explore potential distinctions in the contexts' backgrounds of the children could have provided valuable insights. Quantitative studies are recommendable but not enough to explain complex and historically situated phenomena, such as hope and life satisfaction. Hence, ethnographic, mixed and multi-method participatory research designs are the most necessary to draw complete pictures of children of Palestine.

Agency instruments such as WCAAS (Veronese, Pepe, et al., 2020) are innovative and state-of-art means to expand research on children's agentic behaviours. However, they still seem too tied to a Western tradition that looks at agency as an individual and quasi-exclusively positive concept, idealizing and romanticizing it and not fully grasping when and how agency is turning harmful and unreflective (Cavazzoni, Fiorini, & Veronese, 2021). In the future, more multifaceted and nuanced tools to detect agency's different shades will help better define hope and life satisfaction determinants in prolonged violence and oppression contexts.

6. Conclusion

Approaches exclusively aimed at containing children's symptoms could not be enough to empower survival skills, mainly when they live in chronic conditions of uncertainty and prolonged oppression (Bracken et al., 1995; Hodes & Vostanis, 2019). Only symptoms-focused interventions risk undermining reflective and healthy expressions of agency, psychiatrizing children's resistance and impairing children's hope and life satisfaction (Klein & Mills, 2017; Mitra & Hodes, 2019). Palestinian children seem to oscillate between ease and disease instances (Giacaman, 2018), constantly moving along the continuum between hope and despair, resilience, resistance and psychological disruption (Mahamid & Berte, 2020; Peteet & Peteet, 2005; Punamäki, 1996). Thus, empowering constructive forms of agency might help them potentiate survival skills in an environment that becomes more dangerous and unpredictable year after year (Veronese, Pepe, et al., 2020; Veronese, Sousa, et al., 2020). Participatory and inclusive programs oriented to the entire community will reinstitute a salutogenic role for children who risk losing competencies and being reduced to mere psychiatric patients (Boyden, 2003; Mahamid & Veronese, 2021). Accordingly, participation, inclusiveness in the care process and depathologization of children living in war-like conditions will contribute to advocating human rights and justice for child victims of systematic violence without romanticizing their resilience and struggle for existence.

Decolonized and human rights-informed approaches in clinical and community psychology (Diab et al., 2018) aimed at fostering hope and life satisfaction in children must reconsider the constructs of agency, mental well-being and functioning in a more collectivistic structure where social agency would be a possible antidote to social suffering fostering hope and life satisfaction.

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Data availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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