(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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# The role of the United States in shaping youth mental health advocacy and suicide prevention through foreign policy and media in conflict zones

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## Abstract

This article explores the significant role of the United States in shaping youth mental health advocacy and suicide prevention through its foreign policy and media initiatives in conflict zones such as Iraq, Syria, and the Israeli-Gaza War. The U.S. has actively contributed to improving mental health outcomes by supporting humanitarian programs, facilitating mental health services for displaced youth, and funding initiatives aimed at addressing trauma caused by war. The paper highlights how U.S. foreign policy, through diplomatic efforts and peace-building interventions, has promoted human rights and stability in these regions, providing essential aid to vulnerable populations. In addition, the United States remains a global leader in promoting peace and safety, advocating for the protection of civilians, and upholding international standards of human rights. By working with international organizations, the U.S. has played a key role in ensuring that mental health and suicide prevention programs are integrated into post-conflict recovery efforts, creating safer environments for youth affected by war. Media coverage of U.S. efforts has also helped raise global awareness of the mental health challenges faced by young people in these conflict zones, further amplifying the need for continued advocacy and international support. This paper aims to demonstrate the United States' commitment to fostering global peace and ensuring that young populations have the resources they need to recover from the impacts of conflict, thereby strengthening mental health advocacy on a global scale.

**Keywords:** Youth Mental Health; Suicide Prevention; Conflict Zones; U.S. Foreign Policy; Post-Conflict Recovery

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Review of U.S. Foreign Policy in Conflict Zones

U.S. foreign policy has played a significant role in shaping mental health advocacy for youth affected by armed conflict, particularly in regions like Iraq, Syria, and Gaza. The United States, through its humanitarian interventions, has focused on providing mental health services for displaced populations, recognizing that youth are especially vulnerable to the psychological effects of war. By supporting initiatives aimed at addressing trauma and providing psychological first aid, U.S. policies have contributed to improving mental health outcomes for war-affected youth as presented in Table 1 (Hassan et al., 2016).

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In conflict zones, the U.S. government collaborates with international organizations to integrate mental health services into broader recovery efforts, reflecting a growing awareness of the long-term impact of war on mental health (Balogun, et al. 2024). Moreover, U.S. diplomatic strategies have been instrumental in promoting peacebuilding efforts that prioritize human rights and the protection of civilian populations, further aiding in youth mental health advocacy (Miller & Rasmussen, 2017). These efforts demonstrate the critical intersection between foreign policy and mental health intervention in conflict-affected regions.

**Table 1** U.S. Foreign Policy's Role in Youth Mental Health Advocacy in Conflict Zones

| Aspect | Description | Impact on Youth | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Role of U.S. Foreign Policy | U.S. foreign policy shapes mental health advocacy for youth affected by armed conflict. | Youth are especially vulnerable to psychological effects of war. | (Hassan et al., 2016 |
| Humanitarian Focus | U.S. focuses on providing mental health services, particularly for displaced populations and youth. | Mental health outcomes for war-affected youth improve through trauma support and psychological aid. | (Hassan et al., 2016 |
| Collaboration with International Organization | The U.S. works with international organizations to integrate mental health into broader recovery efforts. | Long-term mental health effects of war are addressed through collaborative recovery efforts. | (Balogun et al., 2024) |
| Diplomatic Strategies | U.S. diplomatic strategies promote peacebuilding, human rights, and civilian protection, supporting youth mental health. | Advocacy for youth mental health is reinforced through human rights protection and peacebuilding. | Miller & Rasmussen, 2017) |

## 1.2. The Importance of Youth Mental Health Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Regions

Youth in conflict-affected regions are disproportionately affected by psychological trauma, leading to significant long-term mental health challenges. Advocacy for mental health services in these areas has become critical, particularly in addressing issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and suicide among displaced youth. The U.S. has recognized the importance of mental health as part of its humanitarian response, integrating psychological support into its broader foreign aid initiatives as shown in Figure 1 (Patel et al., 2018). Given the widespread disruption in healthcare systems in conflict zones, U.S. foreign policy emphasizes the need for targeted interventions that cater specifically to the mental health needs of young populations. Through its partnerships with international organizations, the U.S. has been instrumental in advocating for youth mental health, ensuring that post-conflict recovery includes comprehensive mental health services to foster resilience and recovery (Ijiga, et al., 2024).

Figure 1 illustrates the critical components of youth mental health advocacy in conflict-affected regions, with the central focus on addressing the psychological challenges faced by displaced youth, including PTSD, depression, and suicide risk. It emphasizes the importance of advocacy for mental health services, highlighting the need for trauma-informed care, international partnerships, and targeted interventions tailored to young populations. U.S. foreign policy plays a pivotal role in integrating mental health into humanitarian aid, emphasizing youth-specific needs and long-term recovery strategies. The diagram also explores the importance of comprehensive services and resilience-building efforts to foster community reintegration and sustained mental well-being.
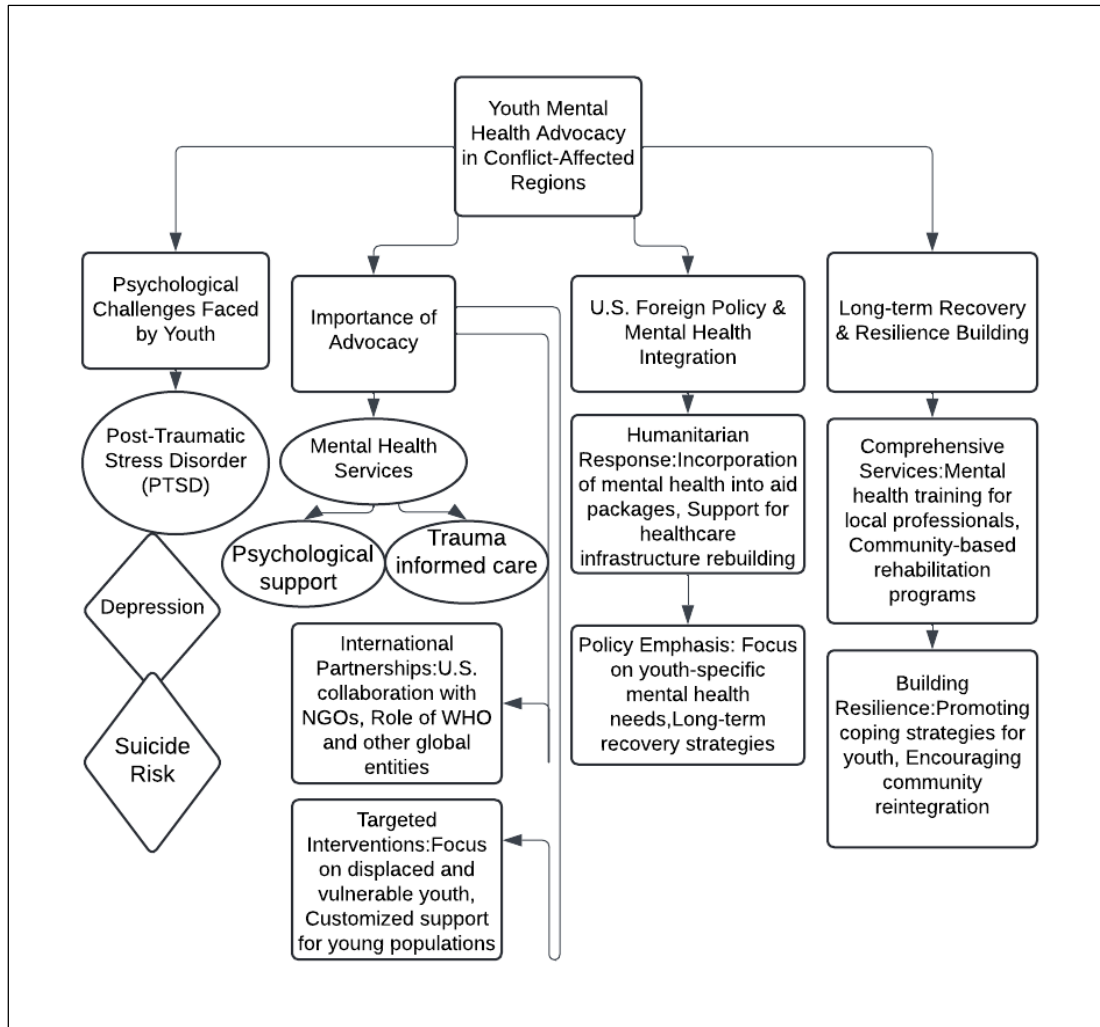
**Figure 1** A block diagram of Youth Mental Health Advocacy in Conflict-Affected Regions

## 1.3. Purpose and Scope of the Study

This study aims to examine the United States' role in promoting youth mental health advocacy and suicide prevention through foreign policy and media efforts in conflict zones. The paper explores U.S. involvement in shaping mental health services, particularly for children and adolescents who are vulnerable to the effects of war-related trauma. By addressing the psychological needs of displaced youth, U.S. initiatives contribute to the resilience and recovery of young populations affected by conflict. The study also investigates how U.S. diplomatic efforts integrate mental health advocacy into post-conflict recovery frameworks, ensuring long-term stability in war-torn regions. Through its global leadership, the U.S. plays a pivotal role in advocating for mental health services that support youth in overcoming the trauma associated with armed conflict.

## 1.4. Organization of the Paper

This paper is organized into seven sections. The introduction provides an overview of U.S. foreign policy in conflict zones and highlights the importance of youth mental health advocacy in these regions. Next, the historical context explores the U.S. involvement in Iraq, Syria, and the Israeli-Gaza conflict, examining the impact of war on youth mental health. The third section delves into the role of U.S. foreign policy in promoting mental health advocacy, followed by a discussion on how media amplifies awareness of these issues. The paper then examines partnerships between the U.S. and international organizations, showcasing collaborative efforts in mental health service provision. Challenges and criticisms related to U.S. policy and media representation are addressed in the penultimate section. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations and a summary of the U.S.'s contributions to mental health advocacy and suicide prevention in conflict zones.

## 2. Historical Context of U.S. Involvement in Conflict Zones

### 2.1. U.S. Foreign Policy and Interventions in Iraq, Syria, and the Israeli-Gaza War

The United States has played a pivotal role in the geopolitics of the Middle East through its military interventions and foreign policy decisions, particularly in Iraq, Syria, and the Israeli-Gaza conflict. U.S. interventions in Iraq and Syria were primarily driven by national security concerns, with the goal of combating terrorism and promoting regional stability as shown in Figure 2 (Wittes, 2015). These interventions, however, have had profound effects on civilian populations, especially on youth, as they grapple with displacement, trauma, and loss. In Iraq, for instance, U.S. policies have been criticized for their role in exacerbating violence, particularly against women and children (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2011). Similarly, in the Israeli-Gaza conflict, U.S. diplomatic efforts, while aimed at promoting peace, have often struggled to protect vulnerable populations, including youth, from the psychological toll of ongoing violence (Idoko, et al., 2024).



**Figure 2** A picture of U.S.-Iraqi Joint Military Collaboration: A Symbol of Partnership in Conflict Zones. (Cristol, 2018)

Figure 2 shows U.S. military personnel and Iraqi soldiers standing together holding the U.S. and Iraqi flags, symbolizing collaboration and joint military efforts between the two nations. Figure 2 aligns with the themes discussed in U.S. Foreign Policy and Interventions in Iraq, Syria, and the Israeli-Gaza War, where U.S. interventions, including military involvement in Iraq, were driven by goals of regional stability and combating terrorism. The military partnership highlighted in Figure 2 illustrates U.S. foreign policy in action, promoting peacebuilding and stability while addressing the security needs of the region. The presence of both the U.S. and Iraqi flags signifies cooperation and joint efforts to manage post-conflict recovery, including addressing the broader social and mental health impacts of war on local populations, especially youth.

### 2.2. The Impact of War on Youth Mental Health: A Synopsis

War and conflict have devastating psychological effects on youth, leading to long-term mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Displaced youth, particularly those exposed to direct violence, face significant challenges in adapting to post-conflict environments. Prolonged exposure to war has been shown to impair the emotional and psychological well-being of young people, often leading to behavioral problems and suicide risk as shown in Figure 3 (Betancourt et al., 2013). In conflict zones like Iraq and Syria, youth are not only displaced from their homes but also witness traumatic events, exacerbating their vulnerability to mental health disorders (Oloba, et al., 2024). The instability of these regions, coupled with the disruption of education and healthcare services, further compounds the mental health crisis among the younger population. Addressing these issues is critical to ensuring the resilience and recovery of war-affected youth (Ijiga, et al., 2024).
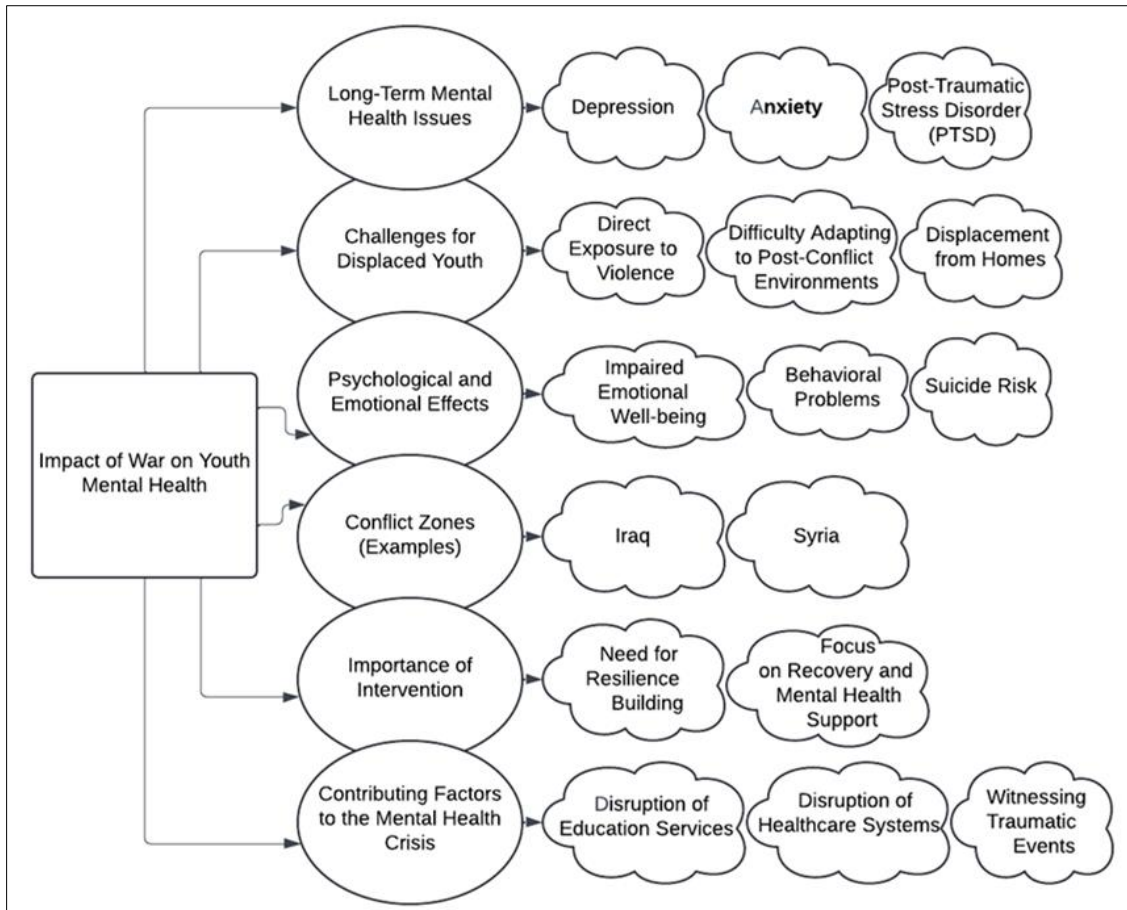
**Figure 3** An Illustration of the Impact of War on Youth Mental Health

Figure 3 illustrates the multifaceted impact of war on youth mental health, with the central focus on the long-term psychological effects such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. It highlights the challenges displaced youth face, including direct exposure to violence, displacement from homes, and difficulty adapting to post-conflict environments. The diagram emphasizes the emotional and psychological toll, showing how war impairs well-being, leads to behavioral problems, and increases suicide risk. It uses examples from conflict zones like Iraq and Syria to illustrate these effects, while also identifying key contributing factors such as disruption in education and healthcare. The importance of interventions to promote resilience and recovery in war-affected youth is also highlighted.

## 2.3. U.S. Diplomatic and Military Strategies for Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Support

U.S. diplomatic and military strategies in conflict zones have focused on peacebuilding and humanitarian support, emphasizing the protection of civilians and the promotion of mental health services for displaced populations. Through initiatives like post-conflict recovery programs, the U.S. has aimed to address the psychological needs of war-affected youth as presented in Table 2 (Ghanem & Roudi-Fahimi, 2014). These efforts include funding for mental health interventions and collaborations with international organizations to provide psychosocial support. In addition, U.S. military strategies often incorporate humanitarian operations that safeguard civilians and facilitate access to critical resources, including mental health services (Silove et al., 2017). By integrating mental health into peacebuilding frameworks, the U.S. contributes to both immediate trauma care and long-term recovery, helping to stabilize regions and support youth resilience (Enyejo et al., 2024).

**Table 2** U.S. Diplomatic and Military Strategies in Peacebuilding and Humanitarian Support

| Aspect | Description | Key Programs | Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| Focus of U.S. Strategies | U.S. strategies emphasize peacebuilding and humanitarian support, protecting civilians and promoting mental health services. | Post-conflict recovery programs, civilian protection. | (Ghanem & Roudi-Fahimi, 2014) |
| Mental Health Interventions | U.S. funds and collaborates on mental health interventions with international organizations to support displaced populations. | Funding for mental health, international collaboration for psychosocial support. | (Ghanem & Roudi-Fahimi, 2014) |
| Military's Humanitarian Role | U.S. military operations integrate humanitarian efforts; ensuring civilians have access to essential resources, including mental health services. | Humanitarian operations embedded within military strategies. | (Silove et al., 2017) |
| Impact on Youth Resilience | These efforts help address both immediate trauma and support long-term recovery, contributing to youth resilience and regional stability. | Programs aimed at trauma care and long-term mental health support. | (Enyejo et al., 2024 |

## 3. The Role of U.S. Foreign Policy in Shaping Mental Health Advocacy

### 3.1. Foreign Aid Programs Supporting Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention
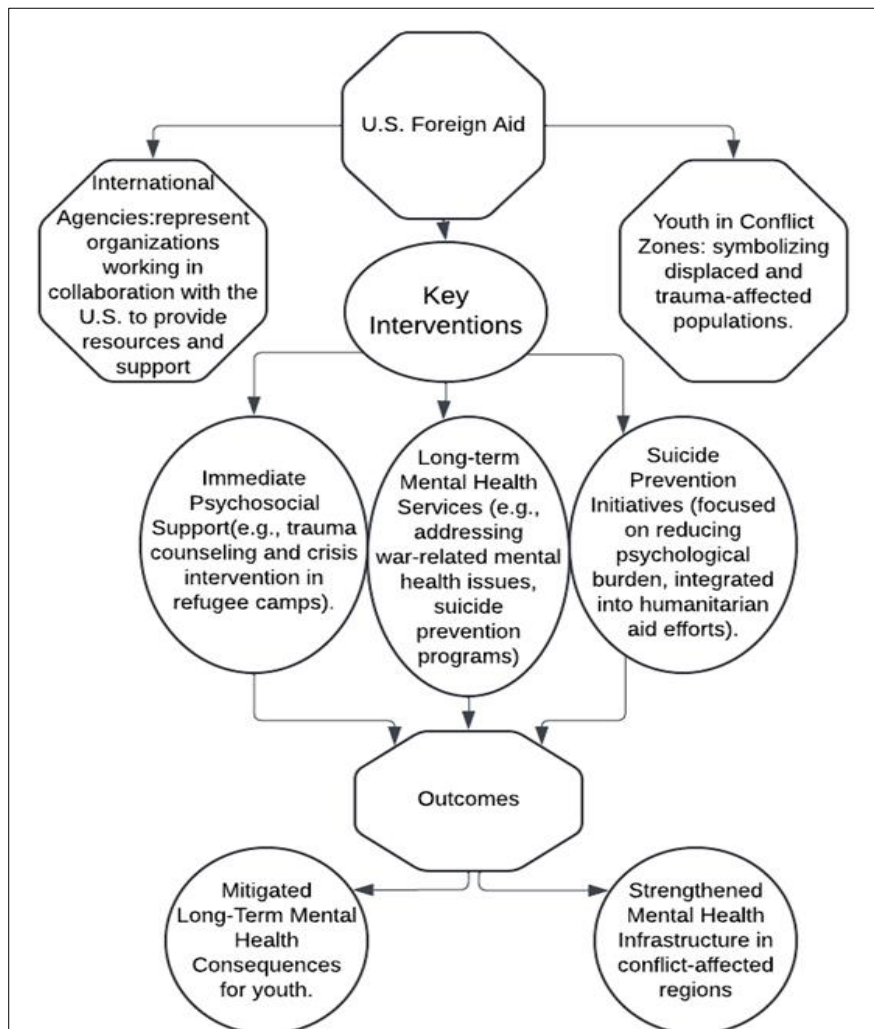


**Figure 4** A Classification of Foreign Aid Programs Supporting Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

U.S. foreign aid programs have been instrumental in supporting youth mental health and suicide prevention in conflict zones. These programs focus on providing immediate psychosocial support and addressing long-term mental health issues stemming from the trauma of war. By working with international agencies, the U.S. allocates resources to fund mental health interventions targeting displaced youth and survivors of conflict as shown in Figure 4 (Charlson et al., 2019). Foreign aid initiatives have included the establishment of mental health services in refugee camps, trauma counseling, and suicide prevention programs aimed at reducing the psychological burden on young populations (Enyejo et al., 2024). The integration of mental health into U.S.-funded humanitarian aid programs reflects a broader commitment to promoting global mental health, particularly in regions where healthcare infrastructure has been weakened by conflict. This support is vital for mitigating the long-term mental health consequences of war on youth (Owolabi, et el., 2024).

Figure 4 begins with the U.S. foreign aid programs at the center, connected to international agencies and youth in conflict zones. The three key interventions—immediate psychosocial support, long-term mental health services, and suicide prevention initiatives—stem from this aid, aiming to alleviate the mental health burden on youth affected by war. The outcomes of these interventions are highlighted as mitigating long-term mental health consequences and strengthening healthcare infrastructure. This flowchart emphasizes the comprehensive nature of foreign aid in addressing both immediate and future mental health needs of youth in conflict areas.

## 3.2. U.S. Policy Interventions in Trauma Healing and Psychological Support

U.S. policy interventions have prioritized trauma healing and psychological support for youth affected by conflict. Through targeted foreign aid, the U.S. has facilitated the implementation of mental health programs that address the profound psychological impacts of war, including trauma recovery and resilience-building initiatives as presented in Table 3 (Bwirire, et al., 2022). These interventions often involve collaboration with local and international organizations to provide trauma counseling, mental health education, and community-based support systems. Additionally, U.S. policies emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive psychological support, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of youth in conflict settings (Roberts & Browne, 2011). By focusing on both immediate and long-term trauma recovery, U.S. efforts contribute significantly to reducing the mental health burdens faced by displaced youth, ultimately improving their overall well-being and capacity for recovery (Ibokette, et al., 2024).

**Table 3** U.S. Trauma Healing and Psychological Support Interventions

| Aspect | Descriptions | Key Programs |
|---|---|---|
| Focus of U.S. Interventions | U.S. policy interventions prioritize trauma healing and psychological support for conflict-affected youth. | Trauma recovery, resilience-building initiatives. |
| Collaboration with Organizations | Collaboration with local and international organizations facilitates trauma counseling and community support. | Mental health education, community-based support systems. |
| Culturally Sensitive Support | U.S. policies ensure psychological support is culturally tailored to meet the needs of youth in conflict zones. | Culturally sensitive trauma counseling and mental health interventions. |
| Impact on Youth Recovery | Interventions focus on immediate trauma recovery and long-term well-being, improving youth resilience and recovery capacity. | Programs aimed at both immediate trauma care and long-term mental health improvement. |

## 3.3. Collaboration with International Organizations for Mental Health Advocacy

U.S. foreign policy has strongly emphasized collaboration with international organizations to enhance mental health advocacy in conflict zones. By partnering with entities such as the United Nations and non-governmental organizations, the U.S. ensures that mental health services are integrated into broader humanitarian efforts. These collaborations facilitate the delivery of trauma counseling, suicide prevention, and psychosocial support programs to displaced youth affected by war as shown in Figure 5 (Tol et al., 2011). Furthermore, U.S. partnerships help to standardize mental health interventions and ensure that they are culturally relevant and effective across different regions. This approach strengthens the capacity of local organizations to implement sustainable mental health programs, ensuring long-term support for youth in conflict-affected areas (Ijiga, et al., 2024). Through such collaborative efforts, the U.S. has contributed significantly to global mental health advocacy, particularly in addressing the needs of vulnerable young populations in post-conflict recovery (Atache, et al, 2024)

**Figure 5** Pictures Showing the Collaborative Efforts in Mental Health Advocacy (Torrance, 2023, Syehat, 2023)

Figure 5 illustrate partnerships aimed at integrating mental health advocacy into various sectors, figure A highlights the collaboration between the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) and the U.S. Center for Mental Health & Sport, promoting mental health awareness within youth sports. This initiative supports young athletes by providing access to mental health resources, fostering resilience through sports. Figure B features the International Center for Peace Psychology's mental health advocacy project on "Social Media, Wellbeing & Safeguarding," emphasizing the importance of mental health in digital environments, particularly for safeguarding vulnerable individuals. Both initiatives underscore the critical role of partnerships in expanding mental health services and advocacy, demonstrating how different sectors—sports and education—can collaborate to address mental health needs.

## 4. Media as a Tool for Raising Awareness and Advocacy

### 4.1. U.S. Media's Coverage of Mental Health Issues in Conflict Zones

The role of U.S. media in covering mental health issues in conflict zones has been significant in shaping public awareness and global advocacy. Media coverage often highlights the psychological impact of war on vulnerable populations, particularly youth, drawing attention to the urgent need for mental health services in regions affected by conflict as Figure 6 (Van Bavel et al., 2019). By showcasing stories of trauma and resilience, U.S. media plays a pivotal role in mobilizing international support and influencing foreign aid policies. However, media representation can also skew perceptions, focusing more on suffering rather than resilience, which may perpetuate stereotypes of conflict-affected populations (Hirschberger, 2018). This dual role of the media both in raising awareness and in shaping narratives demonstrates its power in driving mental health advocacy on a global scale, especially in U.S.-supported interventions (Igba, et al., 2024).

Figure 6 illustrates the multifaceted role of U.S. media in raising public awareness and driving global advocacy for mental health support in conflict zones. The media informs the public about the struggles of affected populations, increasing understanding and visibility of mental health issues. It also drives global advocacy by mobilizing international aid and influencing foreign aid policies. Media focus areas include highlighting the psychological impact of war on youth, covering mental health conditions such as PTSD and depression, and sharing stories of both trauma and resilience. The effects of this media coverage can shift policies and influence how resources are allocated towards mental health services. However, media representation may also create skewed perceptions, often stereotyping conflict zones and underreporting stories of resilience. Ultimately, media attention boosts NGO involvement, public donations, and shapes both global and local narratives surrounding mental health in war-torn regions.
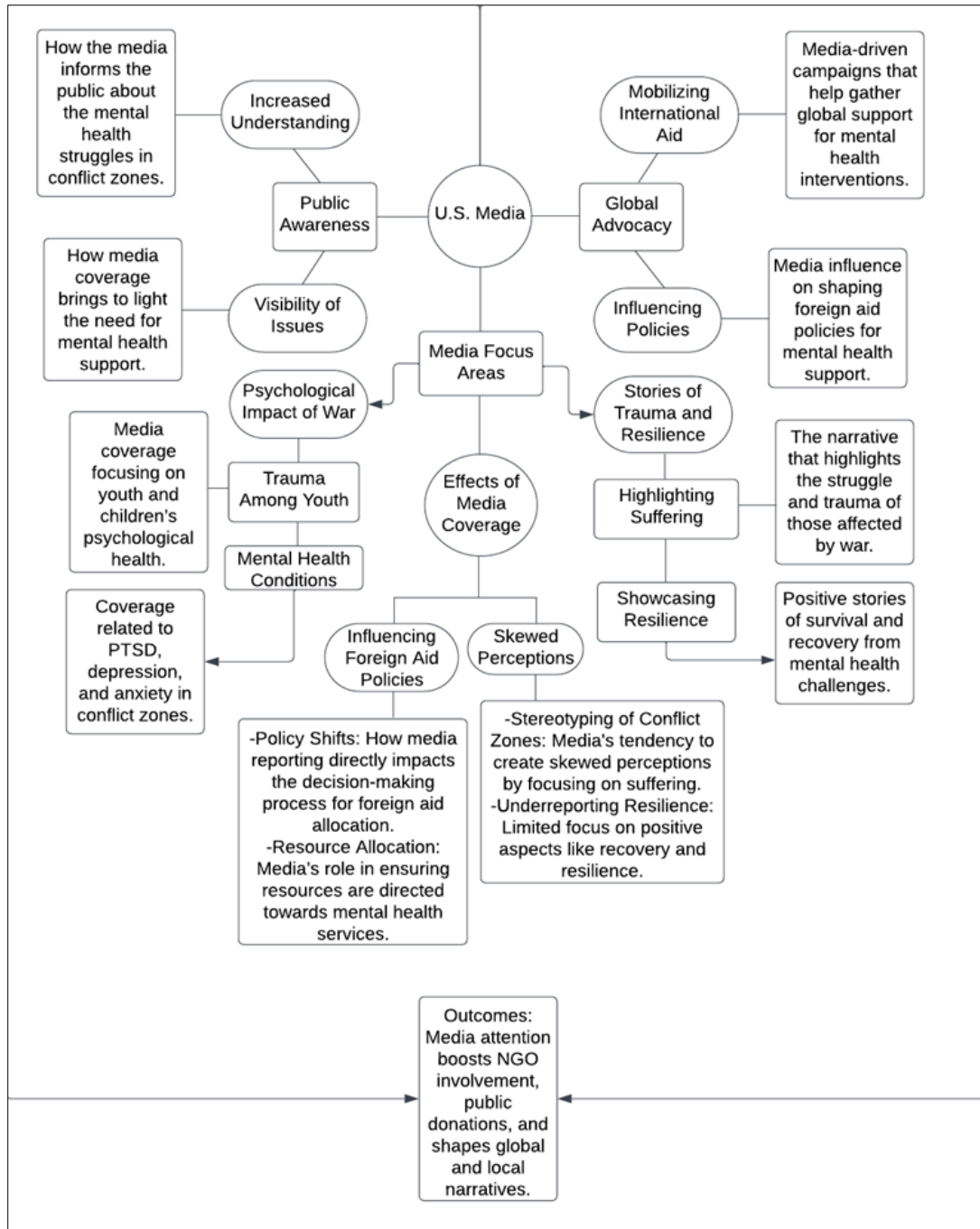
**Figure 6** A diagram of the Impact of U.S. Media Coverage on Global Mental Health Support in Conflict Zones

## 4.2. Influence of U.S. Media on Global Mental Health Advocacy

U.S. media has a profound influence on global mental health advocacy by shaping public perceptions and informing international responses to mental health crises in conflict zones. Through extensive coverage of mental health challenges faced by displaced youth, U.S. media outlets amplify the need for psychological support and suicide prevention programs, fostering global awareness and action (Thompson & Chambers, 2012). By framing mental health as an integral part of humanitarian aid, media narratives encourage international organizations and policymakers to prioritize mental health services in their recovery efforts (Ijiga, et al., 2024). This media-driven advocacy has contributed to the integration of mental health into global discussions on human rights and post-conflict recovery, reinforcing the U.S.'s role in advancing mental health solutions. However, the way media portrays these issues can also affect public understanding, underscoring the need for balanced and accurate reporting (Aboi, et al., 2024).

## 4.3. The Role of Digital Media in Promoting Suicide Prevention Among Displaced Youth

Digital media has become a crucial tool in promoting suicide prevention among displaced youth in conflict zones. Social media platforms, in particular, provide accessible channels for disseminating mental health resources and raising awareness about the importance of psychological support. U.S.-based mental health organizations leverage these platforms to reach vulnerable populations, offering online counseling and crisis intervention services tailored to displaced youth affected by war as represented in Table 4 (Keles et al., 2020). Moreover, digital campaigns driven by U.S. media amplify advocacy efforts by creating global visibility for youth mental health issues, encouraging international cooperation in addressing suicide prevention (Idoko, et al., 2024). These online initiatives foster a sense of community and provide essential support networks for youth dealing with trauma. The influence of digital media thus plays a significant role in ensuring that mental health interventions are accessible to those most in need, particularly in regions where traditional services are limited (Enyejo et al., 2024).

**Table 4** Digital Media in Suicide Prevention Table

| Aspect | Description | Impact |
|---|---|---|
| Role of Digital Media | Crucial tool in promoting suicide prevention among displaced youth in conflict zones. | Ensures mental health interventions are accessible to those most in need. |
| Social Media Platforms | Provide accessible channels for disseminating mental health resources and raising awareness about psychological support | Helps vulnerable populations receive timely mental health resources and support. |
| U.S.-based Mental Health Organizations | Leverage platforms to offer online counseling and crisis intervention services tailored to displaced youth affected by war. | Supports displaced youth through online mental health services, crisis interventions, and psychological support. |
| Digital Campaigns | Amplify advocacy efforts, creating global visibility for youth mental health issues and encouraging international cooperation. | Fosters global cooperation and provides support networks for youth dealing with trauma. |

## 5. Partnerships with International Organizations

### 5.1. U.S. Cooperation with the United Nations and NGOs for Youth Mental Health

The United States has established strong partnerships with the United Nations and various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to advance youth mental health in conflict-affected regions. These collaborations focus on integrating mental health services into humanitarian aid, ensuring that displaced and traumatized youth receive the psychological support they need as shown in Figure 7 (Wainberg, et al., 2017). The U.S. works closely with the United Nations to prioritize mental health in global recovery efforts, funding initiatives that include trauma counseling, psychosocial support, and suicide prevention for vulnerable populations. Additionally, NGOs play a crucial role in implementing these services at the local level, where resources are often scarce (Ijiga, et al., 2024). These partnerships enable the U.S. to extend its influence in improving mental health outcomes for youth, while aligning with international goals of promoting well-being and resilience in conflict zones (Godwins et al., 2024).

Figure 7 illustrates the U.S. cooperation with the United Nations and NGOs for advancing youth mental health in conflict-affected regions. At the core, it highlights U.S. partnerships with the United Nations to integrate mental health services into humanitarian aid and with NGOs to implement these services locally. Key focus areas include trauma counseling, psychosocial support, and suicide prevention for displaced and traumatized youth. It also emphasizes U.S. funding for these initiatives and global recovery efforts, ultimately aiming to improve mental health outcomes for vulnerable populations. The collaboration aligns with international goals of promoting well-being and resilience in conflict zones.
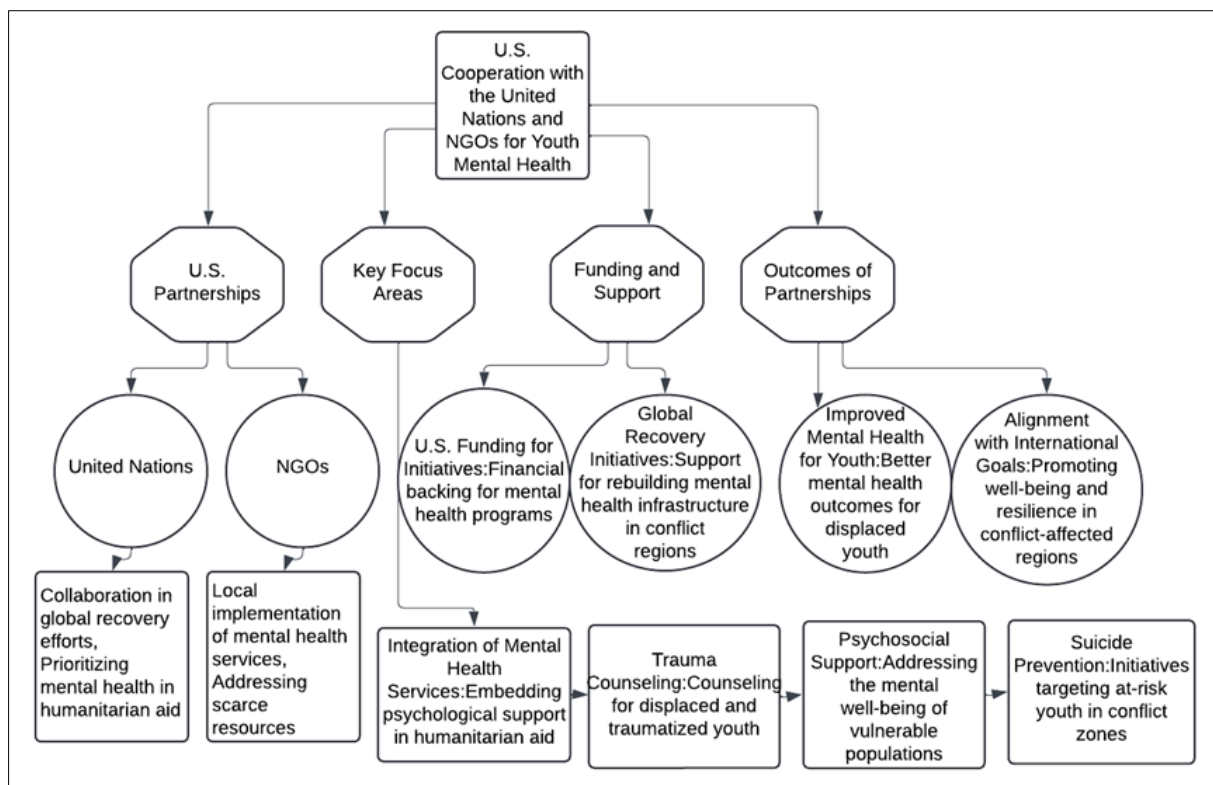
**Figure 7** A diagram of U.S. Collaborative Efforts with the UN and NGOs to Enhance Youth Mental Health in Conflict Zones

## 5.2. The Integration of Mental Health Services in Post-Conflict Recovery Programs

U.S. collaborations with international organizations emphasize the integration of mental health services into post-conflict recovery programs. These efforts ensure that mental health is a core component of rebuilding efforts in conflict-affected regions, addressing both immediate trauma and long-term psychological support needs as presented in Table 5 (Tol et al., 2013). By funding and facilitating mental health interventions, the U.S. promotes holistic recovery frameworks that include counseling, community-based psychosocial programs, and capacity-building for local health providers. These initiatives recognize the intergenerational impact of conflict on mental health, particularly how trauma experienced by caregivers affects the psychological well-being of children (Betancourt et al., 2015). Through this integrated approach, U.S.-supported programs foster resilience among youth and ensure sustainable mental health support systems in regions recovering from conflict (Igba, et al, 2024).

**Table 5** Mental Health Services in Post-Conflict Recovery Programs

| Aspect | Description | Actions |
|---|---|---|
| Integration of Mental Health Services | Mental health services are integrated into post-conflict recovery programs as a core component. | U.S. collaborates with international organizations to fund and implement these programs |
| Holistic Recovery Frameworks | Programs include counseling, psychosocial support, and capacity-building for local providers. | Provides funding for counseling and community-based mental health interventions |
| Impact on Caregivers and Children | Recognizes trauma's intergenerational impact, particularly on caregivers and their children. | Acknowledges the psychological impact of caregiver trauma on children in conflict areas. |
| Sustainable Mental Health Support | Ensures long-term resilience and sustainable mental health systems in recovering regions. | Builds capacity for local health providers to maintain mental health support systems. |

## 5.3. Case Studies: Successful Collaborative Programs and Outcomes

Collaborative programs between the U.S. and international organizations have demonstrated success in delivering mental health services in conflict zones, particularly through targeted interventions for youth. For instance, U.S.-funded initiatives in partnership with global mental health organizations have provided trauma counseling, community-based mental health support, and suicide prevention resources, significantly improving outcomes for displaced youth (Patel et al., 2018). These case studies reveal that integrating mental health into humanitarian aid not only addresses immediate psychological needs but also strengthens long-term resilience and recovery in conflict-affected regions (Abdallah, et al, 2024). Programs implemented in post-conflict settings, such as those in Syria and Iraq, highlight the importance of sustained international cooperation in providing accessible mental health services, resulting in reduced suicide rates and improved psychosocial well-being among young populations. These successful outcomes underscore the critical role of U.S. partnerships in fostering comprehensive mental health care in post-conflict recovery (Ijiga, et al., 2024).

## 6. Challenges and Criticisms

### 6.1. Limitations of U.S. Foreign Policy in Conflict Zones

While U.S. foreign policy has significantly contributed to mental health advocacy in conflict zones, there are notable limitations to its effectiveness. One major challenge is the difficulty of implementing mental health programs in regions where ongoing conflict and political instability persist, often hindering the provision of consistent care as shown in Table 6 (Betancourt, & Williams, 2008). Furthermore, U.S. interventions sometimes face criticism for prioritizing short-term solutions over sustainable, long-term mental health infrastructure. In areas like Syria and Iraq, local communities often lack the resources and trained personnel to maintain mental health services once U.S.-funded programs end (Ibokette, et al., 2024). Additionally, the politicization of U.S. foreign aid can lead to uneven distribution of mental health resources, leaving certain vulnerable populations underserved. These limitations highlight the complexities of addressing mental health needs in conflict zones, where a balance between immediate humanitarian support and long-term recovery strategies is essential (Balogun et al., 2024).

**Table 6** Limitations of U.S. Foreign Policy in Conflict Zones

| Limitation | Details | Examples/Implications |
|---|---|---|
| Difficulty in Implementing Programs | Ongoing conflict and political instability hinder consistent care provision. | Regions like Syria and Iraq face challenges in consistent program implementation. |
| Short-term vs. Long-term Solutions | Focus on short-term solutions over sustainable, long-term mental health infrastructure. | Programs may end without establishing long-term support networks, affecting sustainability. |
| Resource and Personnel Limitations | Lack of resources and trained personnel in local communities once U.S.-funded programs end. | Communities struggle to maintain mental health services after program completion. |
| Politicization of Foreign Aid | Uneven distribution of mental health resources due to political influences, leaving some populations underserved. | Certain vulnerable populations may not receive adequate mental health support. |

### 6.2. Criticisms of Media Representation and Global Coverage of Mental Health Initiatives

Media representation of mental health issues in conflict zones has faced significant criticism, particularly regarding its tendency to perpetuate negative stereotypes. U.S. media often emphasizes the dangerousness and unpredictability of individuals affected by mental illness, which can lead to stigmatization and fear as sown n Figure 8 (O'Connor & Joffe, 2014). Furthermore, coverage of mental health initiatives in conflict zones frequently focuses on extreme cases, overshadowing the resilience and recovery of affected populations. This skewed portrayal can detract from the broader narrative of healing and advocacy. Additionally, media messages may influence public perception and policy, as seen in studies linking media coverage of mass shootings with shifts in attitudes toward mental illness and support for gun control policies (McGinty et al., 2013). Such biases in representation hinder the development of balanced, compassionate approaches to mental health advocacy in conflict-affected regions (Ebenibo, et al, 2024).

Figure 8 outlines the criticisms of media representation and global coverage of mental health initiatives, focusing on the negative consequences of skewed portrayals. The media's tendency to emphasize dangerousness and extreme cases creates a biased narrative that overshadows resilience and recovery, leading to stigmatization and fear. Furthermore, media influence on public perception can shape policies and attitudes toward mental illness, often negatively. These biases hinder the development of balanced, compassionate approaches to mental health advocacy, particularly in conflict-affected regions.
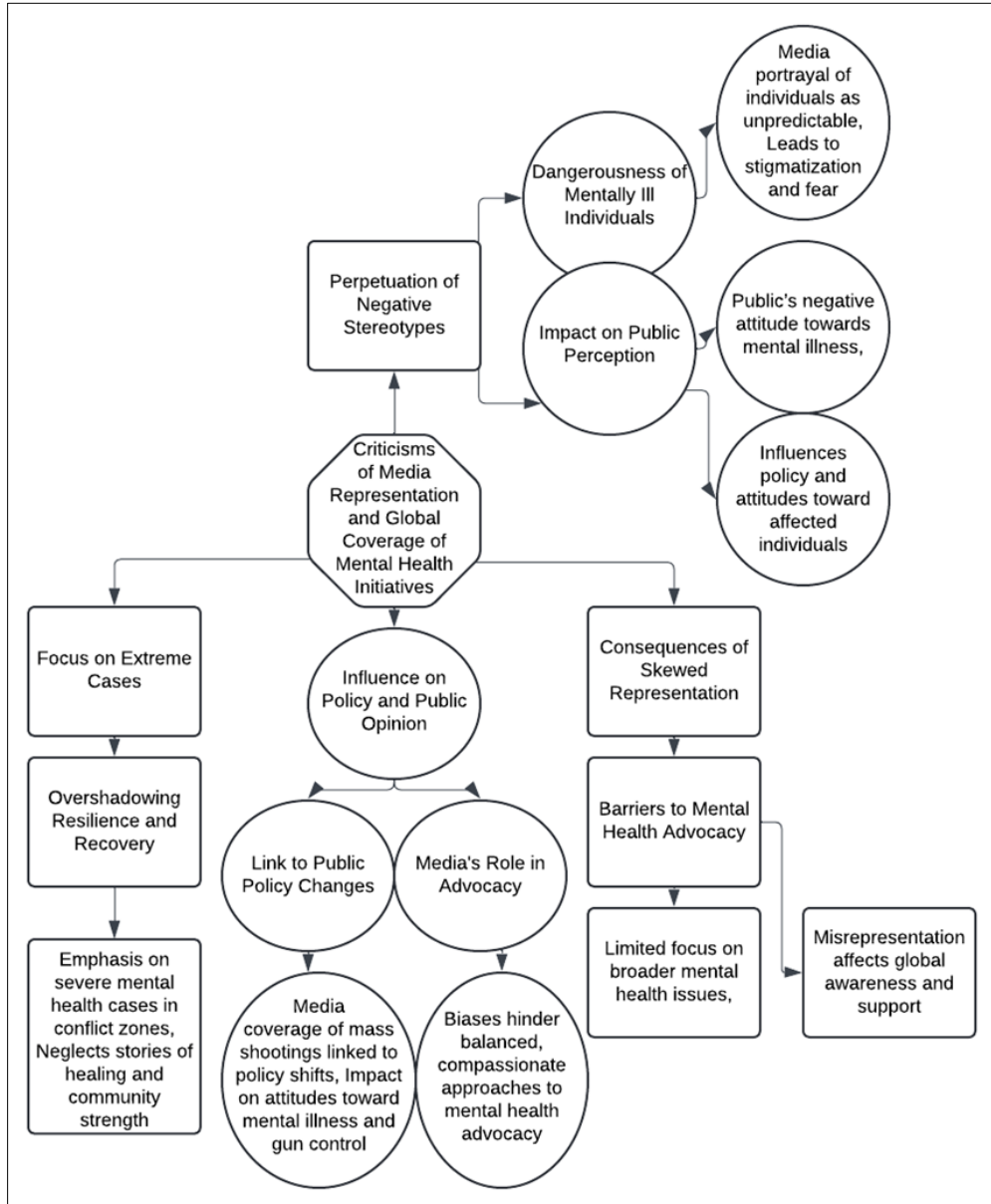


**Figure 8** A Classification of Criticisms and Consequences of Media Portrayal of Mental Health in Conflict Zones

## 6.3. Barriers to Effective Youth Mental Health Advocacy and Suicide Prevention

Despite the U.S.'s efforts in youth mental health advocacy and suicide prevention in conflict zones, several barriers hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Limited infrastructure, cultural stigma surrounding mental health, and a shortage of trained professionals often prevent the proper implementation of mental health services (Humphreys, & Richards, 2005). Additionally, the volatile nature of conflict zones poses challenges in delivering consistent and sustained care, particularly for displaced youth who may lack access to stable healthcare environments (Idoko, et al., 2024). Moreover, cultural and societal differences can impede the success of Western mental health models, necessitating more localized approaches tailored to the specific needs of conflict-affected communities. These barriers highlight the complexities of addressing mental health in post-conflict recovery and underscore the need for long-term, culturally sensitive interventions that go beyond short-term humanitarian aid (Ijiga, et al., 2024).

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 7.1. Summary of U.S. Contributions to Youth Mental Health Advocacy and Suicide Prevention

The U.S. has played a crucial role in advancing youth mental health advocacy and suicide prevention in conflict zones through its foreign policy and humanitarian interventions. By funding mental health programs, collaborating with international organizations, and leveraging media to raise awareness, the U.S. has helped address the psychological needs of displaced and traumatized youth. Initiatives such as trauma counseling, suicide prevention campaigns, and community-based psychosocial support have demonstrated the U.S.'s commitment to promoting mental health as part of post-conflict recovery. These efforts have contributed to improving mental health outcomes, fostering resilience, and advocating for the protection of vulnerable youth populations in war-torn regions.

### 7.2. Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Mental Health Interventions

To enhance the effectiveness of U.S. mental health interventions in conflict zones, several policy recommendations are proposed. First, the U.S. should prioritize long-term mental health infrastructure development by supporting local capacity-building efforts and training mental health professionals in conflict-affected regions. Second, culturally tailored mental health models should be incorporated to ensure interventions align with local customs and societal norms, increasing their acceptance and sustainability. Third, greater emphasis should be placed on integrating mental health into broader development frameworks to address the socio-economic factors that contribute to mental health issues in conflict zones.

### 7.3. Future Directions for U.S. Leadership in Global Mental Health Advocacy

Looking ahead, the U.S. has the opportunity to further its leadership in global mental health advocacy by promoting a more holistic approach to youth mental health in conflict settings. Future strategies should focus on expanding partnerships with international organizations and local communities to create comprehensive, culturally informed mental health systems. Additionally, the U.S. should continue advocating for mental health to be a core component of humanitarian aid and foreign policy, ensuring that displaced youth receive consistent and accessible care. By championing global mental health initiatives, the U.S. can help build more resilient post-conflict societies and contribute to lasting peace and stability

## Compliance with ethical standards

*Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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