

War Crimes against Syria's Children, "Human Devastation Syndrome": Syrian Doctor Coins New Term for Children's Extreme War-Trauma

By [The New Arab](#)

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Syria's children of war have experienced more trauma, physical and emotional pain, than any medical professionals have seen.

The oft-orphaned children, who have had members of their family blown apart by a regime barrel bomb or a Russian cruise missile or even a US airstrike, are suffering more than just post-traumatic stress.

These children are suffering from "Human devastation syndrome," Dr Mohammad K Hamza, a neuropsychologist with the Syrian-American Medical Society (SAMS), [told ATTN](#) on Friday.

Dr Hamza, who also chairs the mental health committee of [SAMS](#), believes the destruction witnessed by Syrian children is beyond what any soldier at war can see.

"We have talked to so many children, and their devastation is above and beyond what even soldiers are able to see in the war," Dr Hamza said.

"They have seen dismantled human beings that used to be their parents, or their siblings. You get out of a family of five or six or 10 or whatever - you get one survivor, two survivors sometimes. A lot of them have [physical impairments](#). Amputations. Severe injuries. And they've made it to the refugee camp somehow."

Dr Hamza told [ATTN](#) that the emotional and psychological problem does not stop there. The suffering of Syrian children continues as they endure poverty and exploitation of life in a refugee camp.

"You have children who are devastated," he said, "and this is not the end of it."

One in five of the millions of Syrians registered as living in refugee camps in [Lebanon](#), Turkey and Jordan are under the age of 11. The number of Syrians living outside refugee camps or unregistered in those countries surpasses five million.

A further 6.3 million Syrians are internally displaced, according to the UNHRC.

Iyad Alkhouri, a psychiatrist who volunteers with SAMS and has helped care for Syrian refugees at the Turkish border town of Antakay, said the root of the problem needs to be addressed.

"We try to fill the gaps," ATTN reported Alkhouri as saying, "but all the relief organisations – we're just putting a Band-Aid on the wound."

"Instead of providing resources to treat this 10-year-old child who was hit by a missile," he said, "We have to stop the missile before it hits them."

Dr Hamza believes that millions of children have been devastated by Syria's six-year conflict.

"You have to ask, 'Where is this going to lead?'," he told ATTN, adding that the future of Syrian children is "going to impact the whole world".

The Syrian conflict began when the Baath regime, in power since 1963 led by Assad, responded with military force to peaceful protests demanding democratic reforms during the Arab Spring wave of uprisings, triggering an armed rebellion fuelled by mass defections from the Syrian army.

According to independent monitors, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been killed in the war, mostly by the regime and its powerful allies, and millions have been displaced both inside and outside of Syria.

The brutal tactics pursued mainly by the regime, which have included the use of chemical weapons, sieges, mass executions and torture against civilians have led to war crimes investigations.

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