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Youth Coping with Oppression in Arab Spring and its Psychological and Socio-Political Dynamics: The Example of Palestinian Youth

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Arab Spring

- The catalyst of the Arab Spring was the suicide of Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi. Unable to find work and selling fruit at a roadside stand, on December 17 , 2010, a municipal inspector confiscated his wares. An hour later he doused himself with gasoline and set himself afire. His death (individually a mental health event) reflected the shared social distress and was the last straw that broke the camel's back igniting cascading events from Tunisian revolution that proliferate to Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries and forced oppressive dictators out of power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. Further, Islamist parties won the elections that followed the uprisings.

- Why Arab Spring? And Why religious groups became the dominant successors of the oppressors so far?

The Role of Youth and Collective Identity Development

- Arab Spring exemplified how distress due to cumulative dynamics of oppression, poverty and chronic stress can result in mental health events that prime shared distress and anger and trigger socio-political uprisings.

- Another important structural as well as psycho-developmental factor is the large percentage of educated but dissatisfied youth within Arab countries (60% are under 25). The development of collective and personal identity at youth age that enable them to cross to the stage of social interdependence, is one of the important factors.

- Additionally *resiliency* of youth (e.g., Ungar, 2004) operationalized here as *will to survive* is the source of their positive coping with oppression.

The Goals of current Research Project

- Unfortunately, most of our understanding of and interventions with trauma are focused on past traumas perpetrated by individuals, current and ongoing traumas perpetrated by social groups, such as oppression and discriminations are mostly unacknowledged as traumatic stressors.

- Our goal of the present research is to build and test a plausible theoretical models that explain the dynamics of such continuous collective identity trauma perpetuated by social groups, explain the dynamic intersection between psychological and social factors and investigate resiliency and coping strategies to related distress and suggest novel intervention strategies based on these tested models.

Structural Model Components

- Oppression is a systemic continuous traumatic stress, led either by insider dictator, outsider occupier or dominant social structures.

- Oppression can be practiced in the present, past and can be engrained in the collective memory. It defies, in all its forms the personal and collective identities especially for youth whom their identity development is in progress .

- Oppression primes the salience of collective identity, and may trigger collective annihilation/ subjugation anxiety that heightens individual's and groups' level of distress, and drives different psychological as well as social processes.

- There are different pathways to cope with resulted distress that originate *"will to survive"* and include, *political ideology, religiosity, seeking and giving social support, forgiveness, deception and revenge*. Coping strategies can reduce distress, and facilitate functional response to identity threats, and protect health. The following three diagrams illustrate different alternatives of this framework: the first illustrates the effects of oppression alone, the second contextualizes oppression with poverty and chronic stress, the third put all traumas together that includes oppression.
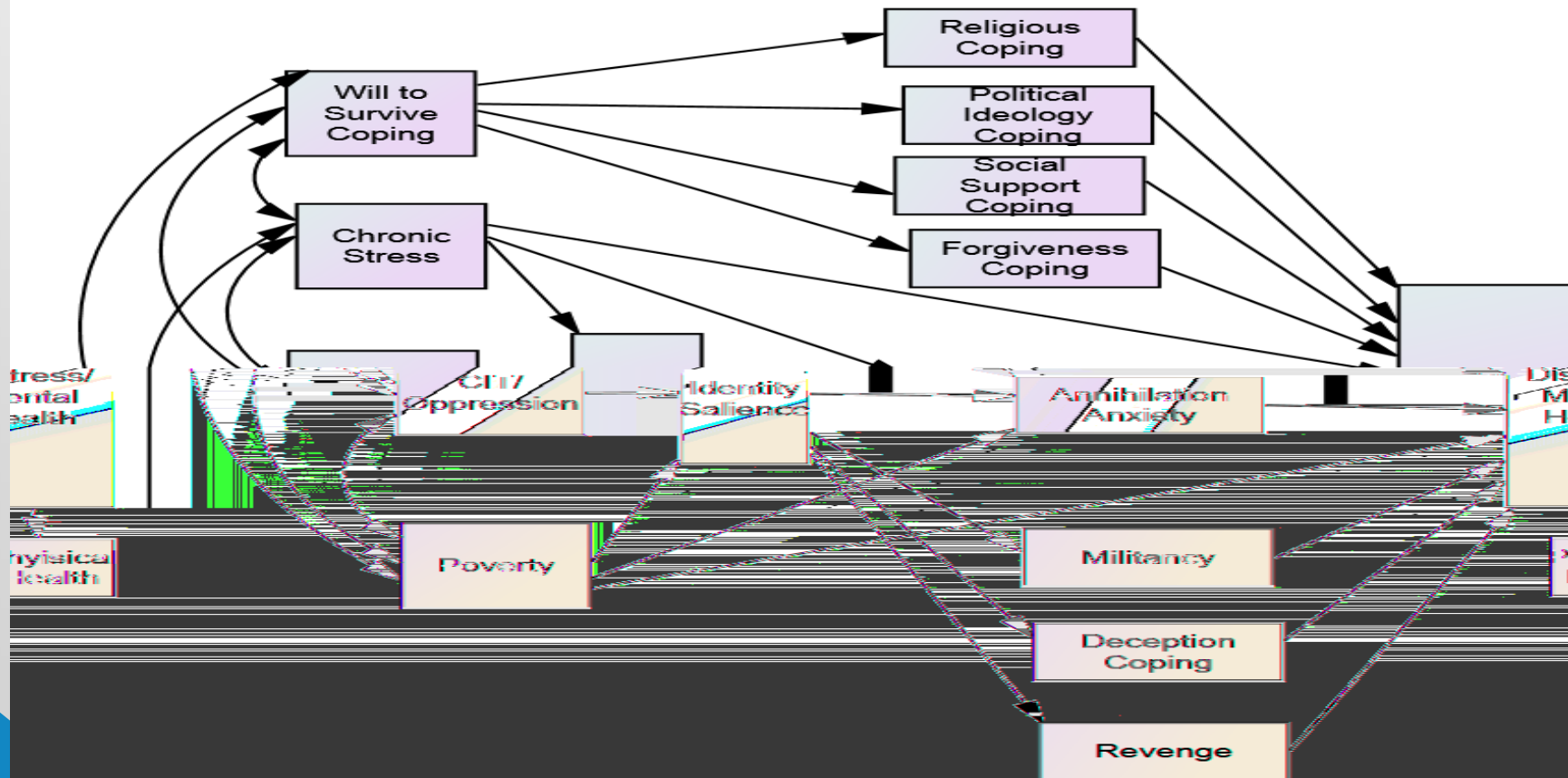
Alternative Theoretical Model (1)

Conceptual Model For
The Effects of Oppression and Will To Survive
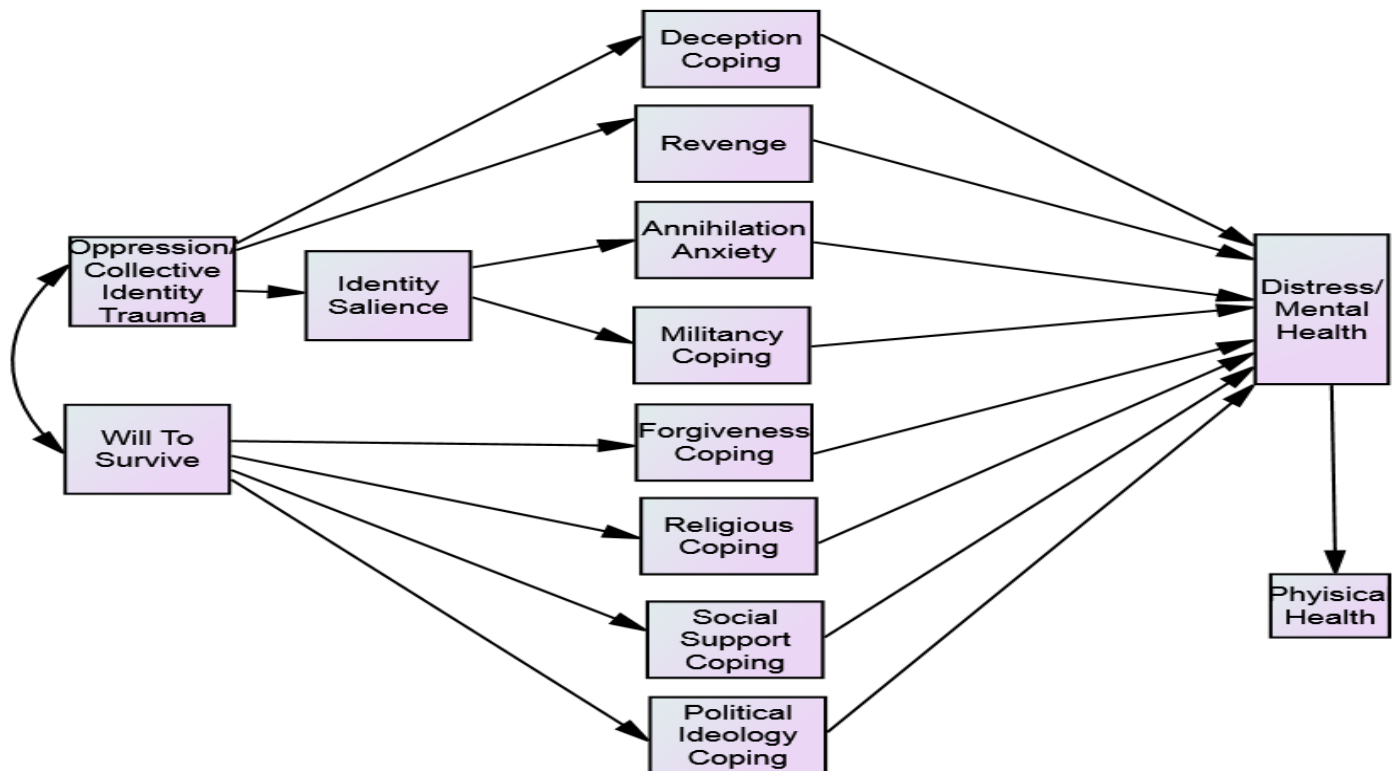
Alternative Theoretical Model (2)

Conceptual Model For
The Effects of Oppresssion, Will to Survive, Poverty, and Chronic Stress

Alternative Theoretical Model (3)

Conceptual Model For
The Effects of Cumulative Trauma and Will To Survive
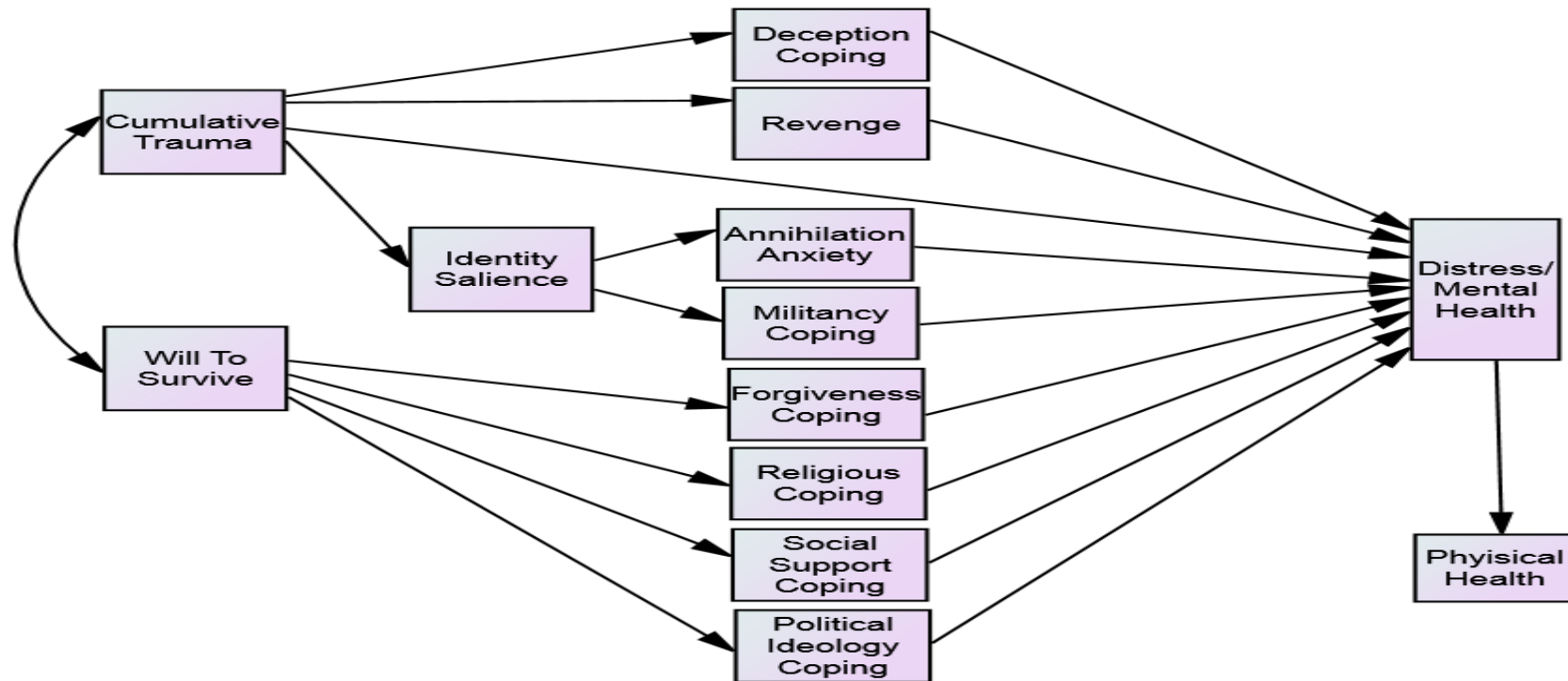
Structural Model Components (Continued)

- Some important dynamics in oppression, that are difficult to include in the diagrams , are the stress proliferation, stress generation and stress accumulation dynamics. According to development-based trauma framework (DBTF) (e.g., Kira, 2001; Kira et al., 2008,2013), accumulation of different stressors, related to oppression, and to other traumatic and chronic stressors, e.g., poverty, renders the individual and the group vulnerable to sudden unexpected eruptions. One moderate stressor can be the last straw that broke the camel's back and result in complete individual meltdown, and/ or trigger a social uprising.

Palestinian Adolescents Example

- We will test this framework on a sample of Palestinian Youth in the West Bank.

- Palestinian youth suffer from oppression by occupiers, which may be different from the oppression by insider dictators in Arab Spring. However, both kind of oppression especially challenge youth's collective identity.

- Participants were 438 Palestinian youth, age ranged from 12 to 19, 54% were males (N=239). Participants were randomly selected from 7 high schools that represent Jenin area in the West Bank.

- Measures used proved to have good reliability and validity in previous studies in Arabic populations. Measures included are:

- *Cumulative Trauma Scale long version (CTS-L)* is a 61 items (Kira et al., 2008). Each item describes extremely stressful event that belongs to one of 6 different types of traumas: attachment, personal identity, collective identity (e.g., oppression and discrimination), secondary, survival, and achievement traumas; It also includes measures for poverty and chronic stress.

- *Collective Identity Salience Scale (Kira, et al, 2011)* is 10 items measure. It has two sub-scales: Identity commitment and identity militancy. Identity salience or dormancy refers to the status of one group identity in their nested hierarchy, whether it is central, or peripheral. Identity militancy refers to willing to sacrifice including life for his/her group.

Palestinian Adolescents Study: Measures

- *Coping Strategies* is 7 item measure. Participant was asked to rate on a scale of 0 to 3(0= did not help, 1=not sure, 2= it helped, 3=it helped a lot), the coping strategy that helped him/ her survive the adversities with a list of strategies such as: religion, political ideology, social support, forgiveness, deception, will to survive, revenge. In this study we used each item as separate measure for the utilization of each coping strategy.

- *Annihilation Anxiety Scale (AA) (Kira et al., 2012a)*

- *PTSD:* Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS-2) (Blacke et al.1990).

- *Complex PTSD:* Cumulative Trauma Related Disorders Measure (CTD) (kira, et al.2012b).

- *Depression:* Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Measure, CES-D (Radloff, 1977)

- *Health problems measure:* is an index measure for the number of health problems the individual endures.

Palestinian Adolescents: Analysis and Results

- *Analysis:* We used structural equation model SEM (AMOS 21 software) with bootstrapping that calculate the direct and indirect effects and their confidence intervals to test three models. In the first model we tested the effects of oppression and will to survive on coping and health, in the second model, we added poverty and chronic stress to the independent variables to contextualize oppression. In the third model we used cumulative trauma that include all life-time stressors, including oppression, as the independent variable.

- *Results :* *The first model* fit the data well:(Chi Square=111.932, d.f.=66, p=.000,CFI=.960, RMSEA=.037). In this model **Collective Identity Trauma (Oppression)** directly primed youth's collective identity salience, and triggered annihilation anxiety (AA). Oppression predicted revenge and deception, political ideology, poor physical health and mental health distress (increase in depression, PTSD, and CTD).

Results (continued)

- ***Will to Survive*** directly predicted religious, political ideology, forgiveness, and social support coping. It predicts indirectly decrease in revenge and in mental health distress and in poor physical health. ***Collective Identity Salience*** had direct positive effects on AA and on increased mental health distress. It had direct positive effects on religious and social support coping, and negative effects on militancy. It had indirect positive effects on forgiveness, revenge, political ideology and deception. ***Annihilation Anxiety*** had direct negative effects on religious coping, social support and forgiveness, and direct positive effects on militancy and revenge. It had direct and indirect positive effects on increased mental and physical health distress.

Results (continued)

- *Religious Coping* had direct positive *effects on forgiveness and social support and direct and indirect effects on decrease* in mental and physical health distress. *Militancy* had direct effects on decrease in revenge, political ideology, deception, and in physical and mental health distress. *Forgiveness* had direct negative effects on revenge and positive effects on social support and indirect negative effects on political ideology. It had direct positive effects and indirect negative effects on mental health distress. However, its total effects on mental health distress were not significant. *Revenge* had positive effects on political ideology and deception coping, and positive effects on increase in mental and physical health distress. *Social Support and Political Ideology* coping had direct and indirect effects on decrease in mental and physical health distress. **Deception** has direct effects on increased poor physical health. **Poor Mental Health** has significant effects on increasing poor physical health

- The other two alternative models showed good fit as well and the patterns of relationships with coping strategies were similar to the first model that were presented. However, the third model that contextualized oppression with all the other traumas and chronic stressors had the best relative fit. The following three diagrams present the three path models. The table presents the direct, indirect and total effects of all significant variables in the first model.
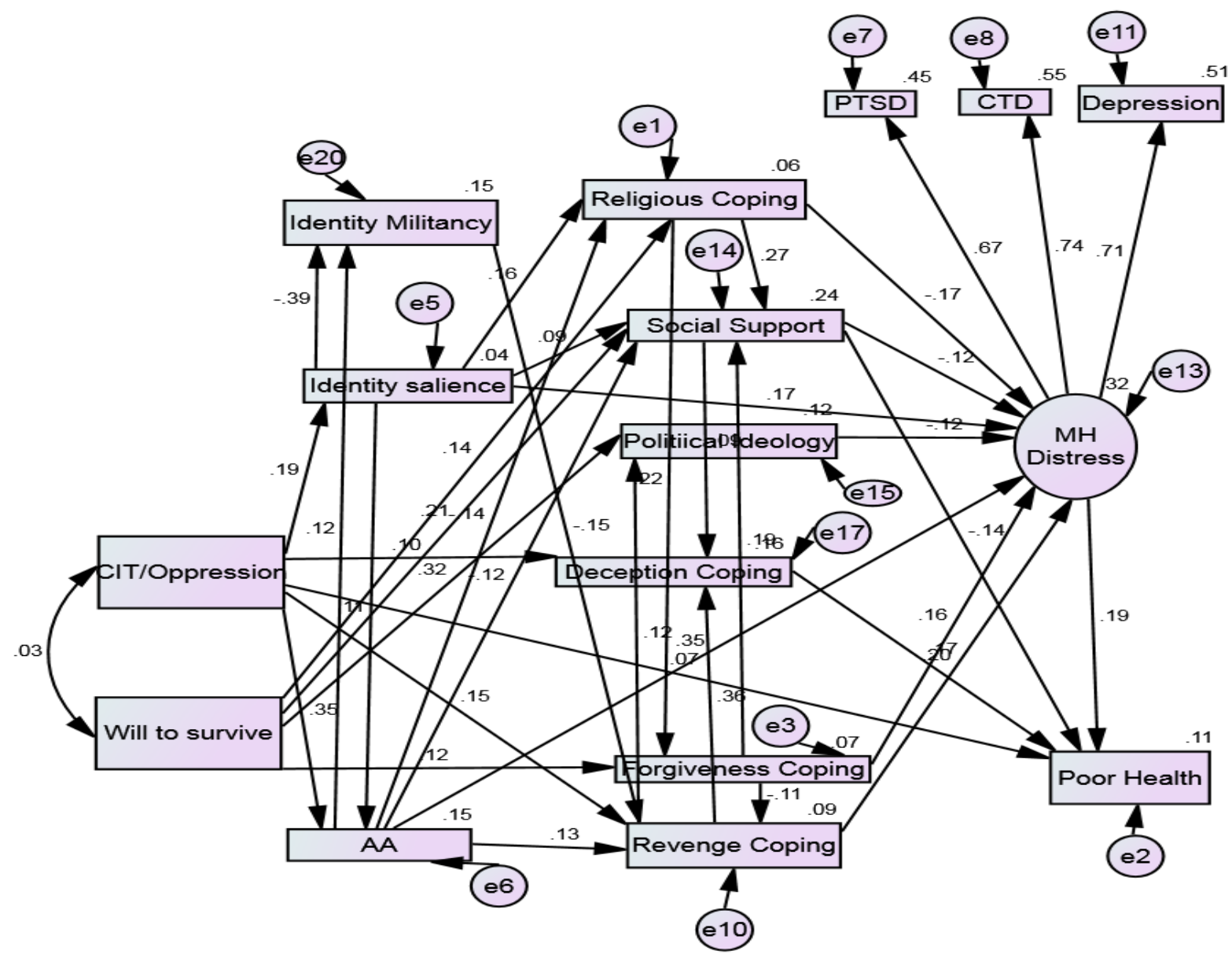
Table (1) The Direct, Indirect and Total Effects of / Oppression and Will To Survive

Dependent / Independent	IS	AA	RELG	MILIT	FORG	REV	SSC	POLC	DEC.	MH	DEP.	PTSD	CTD	HL
Collective Identity Trauma (Oppression)														
Dir. effects	.19**	.35**	___	___	___	.15**	___	___	.10*	___	___	___	___	.07
Ind. Effects	___	.02**	-.02	-.03	-.01	.06**	-.04+	.03*	.07**	.21**	.15**	.14**	.16**	.08**
Total Effects	.19**	.37**	-.02	-.03	-.01	.21**	-.04+	.03*	.17**	.21**	.15**	.14**	.16**	.15**
Will To Survive														
Dir. effects	___	___	.14*	___	.12*	___	.21**	.32**	___	___	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	.03**	-.02*	.07**	-.002*	.02	-.08**	-.05**	-.05**	-.06**	-.05**
Total Effects	___	___	.14*	___	.15**	-.02*	.28**	.32**	.02	-.08**	-.05**	-.05**	-.06**	-.05**
Identity Salience														
Dir. effects	___	.11**	.17**	-.39**	___	___	.09+	___	___	.17**	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	-.02**	.01**	.03**	.07**	.04+	.01*	.04**	.01	.13**	.12**	.13 **	.02
Total Effects	___	.11**	.15**	-.38**	.03**	.07**	.13**	.01*	.04**	.18**	.13**	.12**	.13 **	.02
Annihilation Anxiety (AA)														
Dir. effects	___	___	-.14**	.12**	___	.14*	-.13**	___	___	.35**	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	-.03**	-.02*	-.04**	.01*	.03	.06**	.29**	.28**	.31**	.11**
Total Effects	___	___	-.14**	.12**	-.03**	.12*	-.17**	.01*	.03	.41**	.29**	.28**	.31**	.11**
Religious Coping														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	.22**	___	.27**	___	___	-.17**	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	-.02*	.04**	-.01*	.02	-.01	-.13**	-.12**	-.13**	-.08**
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	.22**	-.02*	.31**	-.01*	.02	-.18**	-.13**	-.12**	-.13**	-.08**
Militancy														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	-.15**	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.02*	-.06**	-.03**	-.02**	-.02**	-.02**	-.02**
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	-.15**	___	-.02*	-.06**	-.03**	-.02**	-.02**	-.02**	-.02**

Dependent / Independent	IS	AA	RELG	MILIT	FORG	REV	SSC	POLC	DEC.	MH	DEP.	PTSD	CTD	HL
Forgiveness Coping														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	-.11*	.19**	___	___	.16**	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.01*	-.02	-.05**	.08+	.08*	.08+	-.01
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	-.11*	.19**	-.01*	-.02	.11+	.08+	.08*	.08+	-.01
Revenge Coping														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.12*	.36**	.20**	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.02*	.13**	.12**	.14**	.10**
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.12*	.36**	.18**	.13**	.12**	.14**	.10**
Social Support														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.09+	-.13*	___	___	___	-.13**
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.09*	-.08*	-.09*	-.02
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.09+	-.13*	-.09*	-.08*	-.09*	-.15**
Political Ideology coping														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.12*	___	___	___	___
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.08*	-.08*	-.09*	-.02**
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	-.12*	-.08*	-.08*	-.09*	-.02**
Deception Coping														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.17**
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.17**
Mental Health Distress														
Dir. effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.71**	.67**	.74**	.19**
Ind. Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Total Effects	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	.71**	.67**	.74**	.19**

Figure (2) Path Model for the Direct Effects of Oppression, Poverty, Chronic Stress and Will To Survive
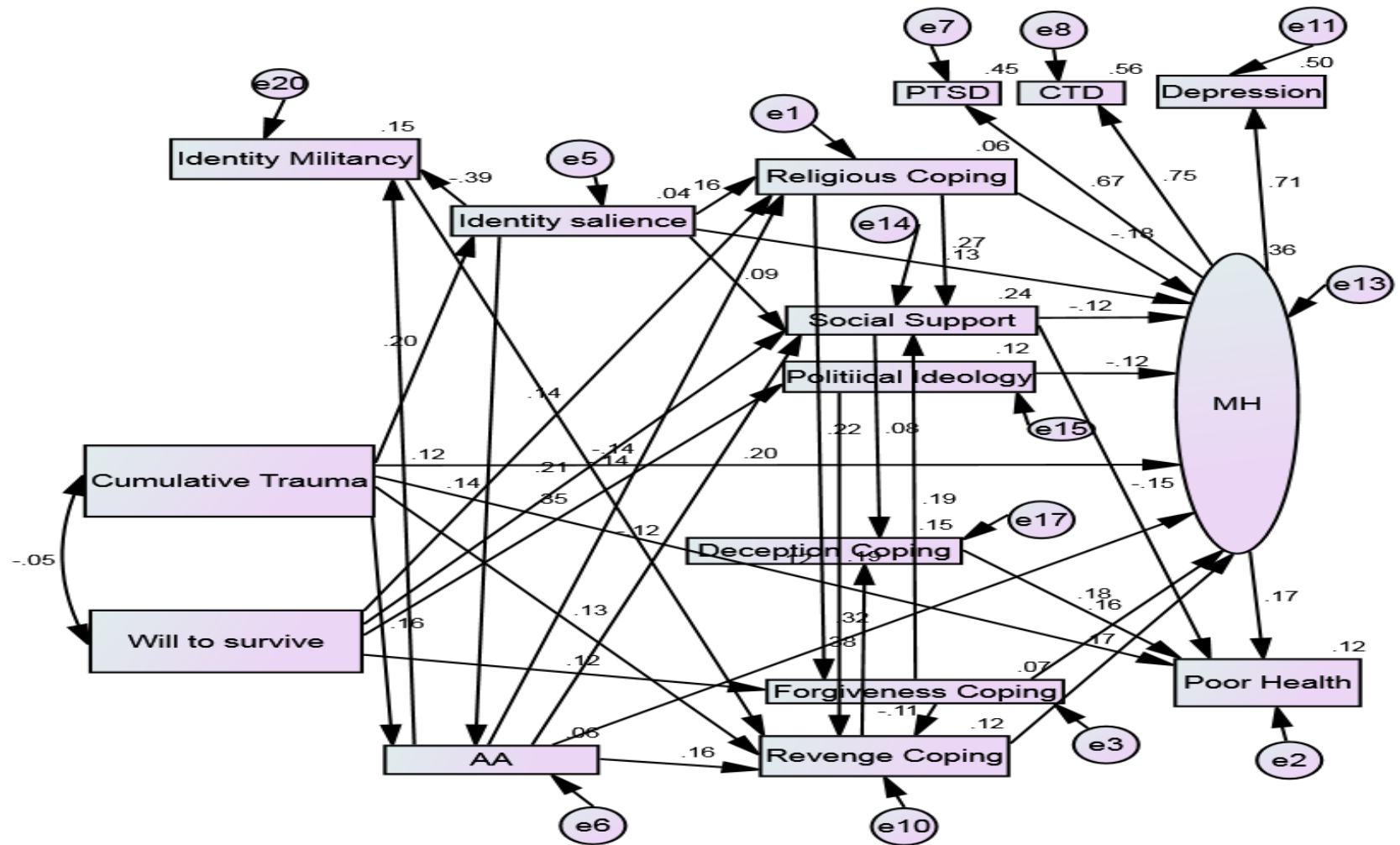
Conclusions

- Results across analyses generally validated the conceptual model. Oppression has significant negative effects on physical and mental health. Religiosity, political ideology, social support and militancy are effective coping strategies in terms of their positive effects on physical and mental health, while revenge and deception have negative effects. Will to survive (indicator of resiliency) seems to be the core organizing factor of the effective coping strategies.

- Religious coping seems to be the most powerful and prevailing coping strategy during oppression, which may explain, at least in part, the electoral success of religious parties post Arab Spring.

- While forgiveness has proved in previous studies to be effective coping to distress in interpersonal past traumas, its dynamics in inter-group and ongoing traumas had rather opposite or mixed results. It is counter-intuitive that the victim forgive a crime that is still in progress. Even in the case of past traumatic oppression, results are mixed. A study of intergroup forgiveness in Iraqi refugees post-Saddam regime elimination (Kira et al., 2009), found that forgiving the dictator predicted negative physical and mental health outcomes, while forgiving the collaborators predicted positive outcomes.

Agenda for Future Research

- The suggested framework can be a prototype for future development of a more comprehensive model that include all the significant variables , such as level of modernity and globalization, and collective memory, as well as developing more efficient measurement strategy and conduct a well-grounded research to explore in more detail such dynamics in Arab Spring countries, for example in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt.

- Evidence-based past –trauma focused interventions may not be appropriate for victims of ongoing trauma such as in oppression and discrimination. Utilizing the new understanding of the ongoing traumatic stress and its identity dynamics may help devise and test more appropriate interventions that address, in addition to past traumas current ongoing threats and identity related distress, stimulate will to survive, and disrupt proliferation, stress generation and accumulation dynamics and facilitate effective coping.

- However, the first order of interventions should be advocacy for justice, equality and fairness, conflict resolutions, and social and economic development to alleviate the continuous suffering and stop oppression.

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