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the british
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Nostalgia in the Gaza Strip: Psychological costs and benefits of nostalgia among Palestinian youth

Hisham M. Abu-Rayya[1,2] | Yasmeen Abumuhaisen[3] |
Tim Wildschut[4] | Constantine Sedikides[4]

[1]School of Social Work, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

[2]School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia

[3]Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Doha, Qatar

[4]School of Psychology, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

Correspondence
Hisham M. Abu-Rayya, School of Social Work, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel.
Email: haburayya@univ.haifa.ac.il

Abstract

Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for one's past, confers important psychological benefits: positive affect, social connectedness, meaning in life, self-continuity, self-esteem, optimism, and inspiration. Is nostalgia equally beneficial in populations that have experienced a difficult upbringing? We explored boundaries of nostalgia's psychological benefits in an experiment among Gaza Strip youth ($N = 416$). We hypothesized additionally that resilience would catalyse the impact of nostalgia, with high-resilience participants benefiting more than low-resilience ones. Nostalgia only augmented social connectedness. As hypothesized, however, resilience emerged as a moderator. Whereas nostalgia increased positive affect and social connectedness among high-resilience individuals, it reduced positive affect, meaning in life, self-esteem, and inspiration among low-resilience ones. Social environmental hardship plausibly limits the reach of nostalgia's benefits.

KEYWORDS
affect, Gaza youth, nostalgia, psychological benefits, resilience

INTRODUCTION

Nostalgia, a sentimental longing for one's past, has been garnering increased theoretical and empirical attention. A reason is its psychological utility: the emotion confers key psychological benefits. But does it do so under all circumstances? What are some limiting conditions or boundaries? We searched for boundaries by focusing on the Gaza Strip, State of Palestine—a region that may not necessarily constitute fertile ground for nostalgia's benefits.

NOSTALGIA AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Nostalgia is typically elicited by fondly remembering momentous events from one's life (e.g. birthday celebrations, culturally ritualized family gatherings) or interactions with close others (e.g. friends, partners, family members), but also by music or songs, images, scents, and foods (Reid et al., 2015, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022; Wildschut et al., 2006; Yang et al., 2021). In nostalgizing, the individual experiences contentment, tenderness, warmth, or joy in addition to yearning and sadness for the irredeemable passage of a valued past (Batcho, 1998; Hepper et al., 2012). Hence, nostalgia is bittersweet, but affectively more positive than negative (i.e., characterized by a positivity offset). That is, when people are in a momentary nostalgic state, whether it be experimentally induced or experienced in daily life, they feel more positive than negative (i.e. a positivity offset). Findings by Newman et al. (2020, Study 5) illustrate this point in relation to daily nostalgia. When instructed to rate the positivity and negativity of a nostalgic episode they had experienced in the course of daily life, participants evaluated the nostalgic episode as much more positive than negative (Table 6, p. 341). An integrative data analysis of 41 experiments likewise showed a large positivity offset among nostalgic participants (Leunissen et al., 2021, Table 6, p. 150).

By conservative estimates (i.e. based on the method of recollection), the emotion is experienced several times a week (Hepper et al., 2021; Wildschut et al., 2006). An ecological momentary assessment study indicated a comparable frequency estimate, with the average participant reporting nostalgia more than six times during a 2-week period (Turner & Stanley, 2021).[1] Similarly, in 484 daily reports, Newman et al. (2020, Study 5) identified 278 (57%) nostalgic days. Further, the emotion is experienced by individuals across ages (Hepper et al., 2021; Turner & Stanley, 2021) and cultures (Hepper et al., 2014; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022).

In the laboratory, nostalgia is induced by a variety of techniques (Wildschut & Sedikides, 2025), but the most frequent one is the Event Reflection Task (ERT; Sedikides et al., 2015; see also Fetterman et al., 2024). The ERT involves vivid autobiographical recall—a particularly effective procedure for eliciting emotions where high personal relevance is central to the affective experience (Joseph et al., 2020). Participants in the experimental condition bring to mind a nostalgic event from their lives, relive it, list a few keywords capturing the gist of it, and describe how it made them feel in writing. Participants in the control condition follow the same protocol but for an ordinary event. The ERT is easy to administer and reliably triggers nostalgia.

Experimentally induced nostalgia confers vital psychological benefits. First, it fosters social connectedness, a sense of belongingness and acceptance (Juhl & Biskas, 2023; Wildschut et al., 2006). Second, it augments meaning in life, a sense that life is purposeful, significant, and coherent (Abeyta & Pillarisetty, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018). Third, it strengthens self-continuity, a sense of connection between one's past and present (Sedikides et al., 2016; Van Tilburg et al., 2019). Fourth, it raises self-esteem, one's sense of worth as a person (Evans et al., 2021; Hepper et al., 2012). Fifth, it increases optimism, a sense of hopefulness and confidence about one's future (Cheung et al., 2013; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2020). Finally, it increases inspiration, a sense of moving away from the mundane, becoming aware of better possibilities, and having an urge to enact them (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2023; Stephan et al., 2015).

Nostalgia accords these benefits among both children (Juhl et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2008) and adults (Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2022), and across cultures (Hepper et al., 2024; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2022). However, in virtually all reported experiments, participants, most of them from the US and UK, generally enjoyed a stable, prosperous upbringing. Does nostalgia confer psychological benefits even when individuals were born and raised under adverse circumstances?

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[1]This is a conservative estimate, because participants were instructed that "An experience of nostalgia is an experience you were not actively seeking" (Turner & Stanley, 2021, p. 954). Hence, the estimate excludes nostalgic experiences that participants actively sought.

NOSTALGIA'S BENEFITS IN GAZA

The Gaza Strip (Gaza) is a case in point. According to the 2023 report from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA, 2023), 2.1 million people resided in that densely populated area. The report stated that the Israeli land, sea, and air blockades of Gaza, which started in 2007, had imposed substantial hardship on the civilian population: The majority (81.5%) lived in poverty, 63% experienced food insecurity and were dependent on international aid, and ~47% were unemployed with youth (ages 15–29) unemployment running at 62.3%. More relevant to the objectives of the current study, youths' development has occurred under adverse circumstances (e.g. military operations, bombings, loss of close others) during wars (2008, 2012, 2014, 2021, 2022) between Israel and Hamas, the political and military organization that rules Gaza. These circumstances have exerted a psychological toll (Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 2022). A study by El-Khodary et al. (2020) estimated that a large percentage of Gazan children and adolescents had endured war-associated trauma. Specifically, 88.4% of them experienced a personal trauma, 83.7% witnessed trauma happening to other residents, and 88.3% observed war-related property demolitions. Also, 53.3% of Gazan children and adolescents were diagnosed with PTSD, as per DSM-V criteria. Is nostalgia beneficial under these circumstances? Does nostalgia confer the same psychological benefits to Gazan youth as in individuals who did not experience these hardships? The primary objective of our research was to address these questions.

A prior experiment has explored the boundaries of nostalgia's benefits in a sample of Syrian refugees residing in Saudi Arabia (Wildschut et al., 2019). That experiment examined the possibility that in the case of refugee status, nostalgizing about one's former, settled, and satisfying life would be counterproductive, as it would evoke—implicitly or explicitly—an unfavorable contrast with one's present, difficult, and uncertain living conditions. Consequently, one would fail to reap the benefits of nostalgia. In the current research, though, the theoretical issues were different. There was no apparent contrast involved. Instead, there was a cultural or historical context of deprivation and harshness. Even in such conditions of risk, are individuals able to form and accumulate nostalgic memories that will bestow upon them psychological benefits at a later time? Can nostalgic memories be developed and function productively or advantageously even in the case of inopportune upbringing?

A secondary objective of our research was to find our whether nostalgia's benefits are moderated by resilience. This trait refers to a person's ability to bounce back from adversities or hardships and continue moving forward despite facing challenges (Wagnild & Young, 1993). Resilience involves generating and sustaining positive emotions in adversity (Fredrickson et al., 2003; Klohnen, 1996; Ong et al., 2006) through propitious use of autobiographical memory (Park et al., 2023). In particular, individuals high (vs. low) on resilience generate positive emotions by integrating and associating negative (e.g. sadness- or anxiety-inducing) life events with positive life events within their memory networks (Philippe et al., 2009, 2018).

The adaptive value of resilience has been demonstrated in various migrant and refugee settings (Arnetz et al., 2013; Ciaramella et al., 2022; for a review, see Ehrensaft & Tousignant, 2006). Relevant to the current research, Chinese migrant workers high (than low) on resilience were more likely to recruit nostalgia for counteracting loneliness (Zhou et al., 2008). This finding raised the possibility that migrants or refugees are especially skilled at harvesting the benefits of nostalgia and neutralizing its costs. Indeed, in the aforementioned experiment (Wildschut et al., 2019), Syrian refugees high (than low) on resilience were better positioned to glean nostalgia's benefits. On this basis, we hypothesized that nostalgia confers greater psychological benefits to Gazan youth who are high (than low) on resilience.

METHOD

Transparency and openness

The experiment was approved by the second author's Institution's Internal Review Board. We report how we determined our sample size, all manipulations, all measures, and data exclusions, and

we follow Journal Article Reporting Standards (Kazak, 2018). We did not preregister the study. We provide stimulus materials and report ancillary analyses (i.e. correlations among study variables, factor analyses for optimism and inspiration, manipulation check analyses, and tests of between-condition differences in affect and psychological benefits without employing resilience as a covariate) in Supporting Information S1. The data are available on OSF (osf.io/kzusc).

Participants

An a priori power analysis (G*Power 3.1; Faul et al., 2009), assuming a small effect size (Wildschut et al., 2019), indicated that 404 participants would yield 80% power to detect a small effect (f = .14, α = .05). Hedging against attrition, we recruited 473 Palestinian undergraduate students from two Gazan universities (Al-Aqsa University, Islamic University of Gaza). Participants volunteered: they received no financial compensation or credit. We administered the study face-to-face in 12 groups ranging in size from 18 to 50 persons (M = 35, SD = 9.69). We ascertained that participants in each group completed the materials individually to rule out potential sources of dependence (Carvajal et al., 2001). Also, we emphasized in our verbal instructions that participants should not talk to each other, and we can verify that they did not.

We randomly assigned half of the groups to the nostalgia condition and half to the control condition. We excluded 57 participants, because they did not follow instructions; that is, they only provided one keyword or a very brief (i.e. 3–4 word) description of the requested event. The final sample comprised 416 participants (217 men, 199 women; 261 from Islamic University of Gaza, 155 from Al-Aqsa University) ranging in age from 18 to 25 years (M = 20.18, SD = 2.39). Of them, 211 were allocated in the nostalgia condition and 205 in the control condition.

Procedure

Data collection occurred between November 2022 and April 2023. The first and second author contacted the Psychology and English Departments at the two aforementioned Gazan universities to introduce the 15 min experiment and request permission to administer it at the beginning of lectures. Core Psychology and English language courses are compulsory and taken by all university students; thus, our sample represented diverse academic disciplines. The study was run by a graduate-student volunteer in each university (a woman and a man), whom we trained. The research assistants visited the lecture hall and distributed to students a booklet that contained all stimulus materials.

The materials had already been translated in Arabic (Wildschut et al., 2019), participants' native language. The first and second author, native Arabic speakers and fluent in English, inspected the materials to ensure translational quality. They proceeded to make slight modifications such as enhancing linguistic accuracy to align with Arabic grammar, substituting certain words with equivalents that better conveyed the intended meaning in the original English version, and restructuring some statements to improve readability. Next, we conducted a pilot study (i.e. focus group) to ensure that the appropriateness of the revised materials for our intended sample. We individually presented the revised materials to 16 students from Al-Aqsa University and Islamic University of Gaza (half women, half men), randomly assigned them to the nostalgia (n = 8) or control (n = 8) condition, and inquired about comprehension, familiarity, and general concerns. All participants reported that they easily comprehended the materials and raised no further concerns. In addition, those in the nostalgia condition stated that they were familiar with the concept of nostalgia and the accompanying examples (e.g. momentous events, childhood, close relationships).

We manipulated nostalgia with the ERT (Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut et al., 2006). Participants in the nostalgia condition read:

> Nostalgia is defined as a 'sentimental longing for one's past' or as feeling sentimental for a fond and valued memory from one's personal past. Please think of a nostalgic event in your life. Specifically, try to think of a past event that makes you feel most nostalgic. Bring this nostalgic experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the nostalgic experience for a couple of minutes, and relive it.

Participants in the control condition read:

> Please think of an ordinary event in your life—something that happened this past week. Specifically, try to think of an event in the past week that was routine, typical, and normal. Bring this ordinary experience to mind. Immerse yourself in the ordinary experience for a couple of minutes, and relive it.

Participants completed the task in ~5 min. Next they filled out the measures in a fixed random order as below. We asked participants not to discuss the study with each other after they left the lecture hall, and we only debriefed them (via email or WhatsApp) upon conclusion of data collection.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree* or *not at all*) to 6 (*strongly agree* or *very*). We note that the choice of our measures (e.g. affect, benefits) was guided by the literature review we presented in the Introduction.

Manipulation check

We assessed the effectiveness of the manipulation with three items (e.g. 'I feel nostalgic at the moment'; Hepper et al., 2012; Wildschut et al., 2006) after both the delivery of the manipulation ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.54$) and the completion of the dependent measures ($\alpha = .90$, $M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.50$).

Affect

We assessed positive affect (PA; happy, excited, enthusiastic, calm, relaxed) and negative affect (NA; sad, anxious, fearful, bored, tired). These adjectives refer to two orthogonal, bipolar dimensions of affective experience: pleasantness and activation (Barrett & Russell, 1998). We assessed pleasantness PA with 'happy' ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.75$), activated PA with 'excited' as well as 'enthusiastic' ($r = .68$, $M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.61$), and deactivated PA with 'calm' as well as 'relaxed' ($r = .54$, $M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.50$). We assessed unpleasantness NA with 'sad' ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.72$), activated NA with 'anxious' as well as 'fearful' ($r = .77$, $M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.58$), and deactivated NA with 'bored' as well as 'tired' ($r = .62$, $M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.69$).

Psychological benefits

We assessed the abovementioned psychological benefits of nostalgia, with four items each: (1) *social connectedness* (Wildschut et al., 2006; e.g. 'connected to loved ones'; $\alpha = .67$, $M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.11$); (2) *meaning in life* (Routledge et al., 2011; e.g. 'life is meaningful'; $\alpha = .84$, $M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.28$);

(3) *self-continuity* (Sedikides et al., 2016; e.g. 'connected with the past'; $\alpha = .67$, $M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.04$); (4) *self-esteem* (Hepper et al., 2012; e.g. 'I have many positive qualities'; $\alpha = .83$, $M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.15$); (5) *optimism* (Cheung et al., 2013; e.g. 'optimistic about the future'; $\alpha = .85$, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.24$); and (6) *inspiration* (Stephan et al., 2015; e.g., 'filled with inspiration'; $\alpha = .87$, $M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.21$).

Resilience

We assessed trait resilience with the Wagnild and Young (1993) Resilience Scale ($1 = strongly\ disagree$, $7 = strongly\ agree$). It has high test–retest reliability across cultures (Baltaci & Karataş, 2014; Basim & Cetin, 2011; Nishi et al., 2010; Windle et al., 2011), indicating stability in this trait over time. The scale measures self-confidence and competence to withstand life stressors as well as ability to draw value from challenges encountered. Sample items are: 'I have self-discipline,' 'I am determined', and 'I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways'. The original scale had 25 items. Wildschut et al. (2019) added an item, 'I am resilient'. We used the 26-item scale ($\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.11$; for the 25-item scale, α was also .92).

RESULTS

Preliminary analyses

Given that we intended to treat resilience as a moderator, we tested first whether the manipulation of nostalgia impacted on it. It did not. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that participants in the nostalgia ($M = 5.04$, $SE = 0.08$) and control ($M = 4.87$, $SE = 0.08$) condition did not differ significantly on resilience, $F(1, 408) = 2.46$, $p = .12$, $\eta^2 = .006$, 90% CI = [.000, .024]. We note that six participants did not complete the Resilience Scale. Also, we report 90% confidence intervals for eta squared, because the F distribution is one-sided (Steiger, 2004). This ensures that inferences based on p-values will agree with the lower confidence limit.

Main analyses

Manipulation check

We conducted a moderated analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with the nostalgia manipulation (nostalgia vs. control) as the independent variable, the manipulation check score as the dependent variable, and mean-centred resilience as the covariate. As intended, participants in the nostalgia condition ($M = 4.16$, $SE = 0.11$) reported feeling more nostalgic than those in the control condition ($M = 3.53$, $SE = 0.11$), $F(1, 401) = 17.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .043$, 90% CI = [.016, .079]. The manipulation was effective. Further, the Nostalgia × Resilience interaction was not significant, $F(1, 401) = 1.16$, $p = .28$, $\eta^2 = .003$, 90% CI = [.000, .018]. Thus, the nostalgia manipulation was effective, independently of participants' resilience level. The effectiveness of the manipulation was maintained at the end of the study. Participants in the nostalgia condition ($M = 4.19$, $SE = 0.10$) reported being more nostalgic than those in the control condition ($M = 3.60$, $SE = 0.10$), $F(1, 402) = 16.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .040$, 90% CI = [.014, .075].

Affect

We conducted a series of Nostalgia × Resilience moderated ANCOVAs, with nostalgia (nostalgia vs. control) as the independent variable, affect as the dependent variable, and mean-centred resilience as the covariate. We display predicted means and standard errors in Table 1, and inferential statistics in Table 2.

TABLE 1 Predicted means (standard errors) for affect and psychological benefits as a function of nostalgia and dispositional resilience.

	Low resilience (−1 *SD*)		High resilience (+1 *SD*)	
	Nostalgia	Control	Nostalgia	Control
Affect				
Pleasantness PA	2.78 (0.19)	3.38 (0.16)	3.76 (0.17)	3.31 (0.17)
Activated PA	2.83 (0.17)	3.11 (0.14)	3.69 (0.16)	3.16 (0.16)
Deactivated PA	3.19 (0.16)	3.56 (0.13)	3.98 (0.15)	3.23 (0.14)
Unpleasantness NA	3.10 (0.19)	3.10 (0.16)	3.12 (0.17)	3.13 (0.17)
Activated NA	3.15 (0.17)	2.97 (0.14)	2.88 (0.16)	2.96 (0.16)
Deactivated NA	3.42 (0.18)	3.41 (0.15)	3.25 (0.17)	3.09 (0.17)
Psychological benefits				
Social connectedness	3.83 (0.11)	3.82 (0.10)	4.64 (0.11)	4.19 (0.10)
Meaning in life	3.95 (0.13)	4.41 (0.11)	4.96 (0.12)	4.83 (0.12)
Self-continuity	3.75 (0.11)	3.77 (0.09)	4.47 (0.10)	4.28 (0.10)
Self-esteem	3.99 (0.11)	4.38 (0.10)	5.16 (0.10)	5.00 (0.10)
Optimism	3.65 (0.12)	3.99 (0.10)	5.09 (0.11)	4.96 (0.11)
Inspiration	3.71 (0.12)	3.84 (0.10)	4.94 (0.11)	4.73 (0.11)

The nostalgia main effect on PA (pleasantness, activated, deactivated) was not significant, neither was it on NA (unpleasantness, activated, deactivated). Further, the Nostalgia × Resilience interaction was not significant for NA (pleasantness, activated, deactivated). However, the Nostalgia × Resilience interaction was significant for PA. We followed up with tests of the simple nostalgia (vs. control) effect at conditional values of resilience. We supplemented this analysis with the Johnson–Neyman (J-N) procedure to identify regions of the resilience continuum for which this simple effect was statistically significant. We display these regions of significance in Figure 1.

Nostalgia (vs. control) tended to increase pleasantness PA ('happy') among high-resilience participants (+1 *SD*), $F(1, 406) = 3.41$, $p = .070$, $\eta^2 = .008$, 90% CI = [.000, .034], and decreased it among low-resilience ones (−1 *SD*), $F(1, 406) = 5.82$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .014$, 90% CI = [.0004, .045]. The J–N procedure identified two regions of significance. Nostalgia increased pleasantness PA at resilience values higher than 6.18 (+1.11 *SD*) and decreased it at resilience values lower than 4.26 (−0.63 *SD*).

Nostalgia (vs. control) increased activated PA among high-resilience participants (+1 *SD*), $F(1, 406) = 5.64$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .014$, 90% CI = [.0003, .044], but not among low-resilience ones (−1 *SD*), $F(1, 406) = 1.50$, $p = .22$, $\eta^2 = .004$, 90% CI = [.000, .024]. The J–N regions of significance displayed in Figure 1 show that nostalgia increased activated PA at resilience values higher than 5.58 (+0.57 *SD*) and decreased it at resilience values lower than 2.50 (−2.22 *SD*).

Nostalgia (vs. control) increased deactivated PA among high-resilience participants (+1 *SD*), $F(1, 405) = 13.29$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .032$, 90% CI = [.007, .072], and tended to decrease it among low-resilience ones (−1 *SD*), $F(1, 405) = 3.14$, $p = .080$, $\eta^2 = .008$, 90% CI = [.000, .033]. The J–N procedure revealed that nostalgia increased deactivated PA at resilience values higher than 5.15 (+0.18 *SD*) and decreased it at resilience values lower than 3.72 (−1.12 *SD*).

Finally, resilience was positively associated with pleasantness PA and activated PA, but not with deactivated PA (Table 1). Resilience was unassociated with NA (unpleasantness, activated, deactivated).

Psychological benefits

We conducted a series of Nostalgia × Resilience moderated ANCOVAs, with nostalgia (nostalgia vs. control) as the independent variable, psychological benefits as the dependent variable, and mean-centred

TABLE 2 Nostalgia × Dispositional resilience moderated analysis of covariance results for affect and psychological benefits.

Dependent variable	Nostalgia main effect			Resilience main effect				Nostalgia × resilience		
	F	p	η² [90% CI]	b	F	p	η² [90% CI]	F	p	η² [90% CI]
Affect										
Pleasantness PA	0.18	.67	<.001 [.000, .001]	0.20	6.53	.011	.016 [.002, .041]	8.90	.003	.021 [.004, .045]
Activated PA	0.64	.42	.001 [.000, .014]	0.21	8.05	.005	.019 [.003, .047]	6.32	.012	.015 [.002, .041]
Deactivated PA	1.71	.19	.004 [.000, .020]	0.10	2.37	.12	.006 [.000, .024]	14.32	<.001	.034 [.011, .068]
Unpleasantness NA	0.00	.98	<.001 [.000, .000]	0.01	0.02	.88	<.001 [.000, .004]	0.00	.98	<.001 [.000, .000]
Activated NA	0.12	.73	<.001 [.000, .008]	−0.06	0.74	.39	.002 [.000, .015]	0.66	.42	.002 [.000, .014]
Deactivated NA	0.26	.61	.005 [.000, .011]	−0.11	2.04	.15	.005 [.000, .022]	0.20	.66	<.001 [.000, .010]
Psychological benefits										
Social connectedness	5.06	.025	.012 [.000, .036]	0.27	31.40	<.001	.072 [.036, .114]	4.36	.037	.011 [.000, .033]
Meaning in life	1.90	.17	.005 [.000, .022]	0.33	34.21	<.001	.078 [.041, .121]	5.83	.016	.014 [.001, .039]
Self-continuity	0.76	.38	.002 [.000, .015]	0.28	38.76	<.001	.088 [.048, .132]	1.07	.30	.003 [.000, .017]
Self-esteem	1.19	.28	.003 [.000, .018]	0.41	73.11	<.001	.154 [.102, .204]	6.62	.010	.016 [.002, .042]
Optimism	0.91	.34	.012 [.000, .016]	0.55	121.83	<.001	.233 [.173, .285]	4.49	.035	.011 [.000, .033]
Inspiration	0.15	.70	<.001 [.000, .009]	0.48	92.06	<.001	.186 [.131, .388]	2.38	.12	.006 [.000, .026]

Note: F numerator degrees of freedom = 1. F denominator degrees of freedom vary from 402 to 406 due to missing values. *b* = unstandardized regression coefficient. η² = partial eta squared.

Abbreviations: NA, negative affect; PA, positive affect.
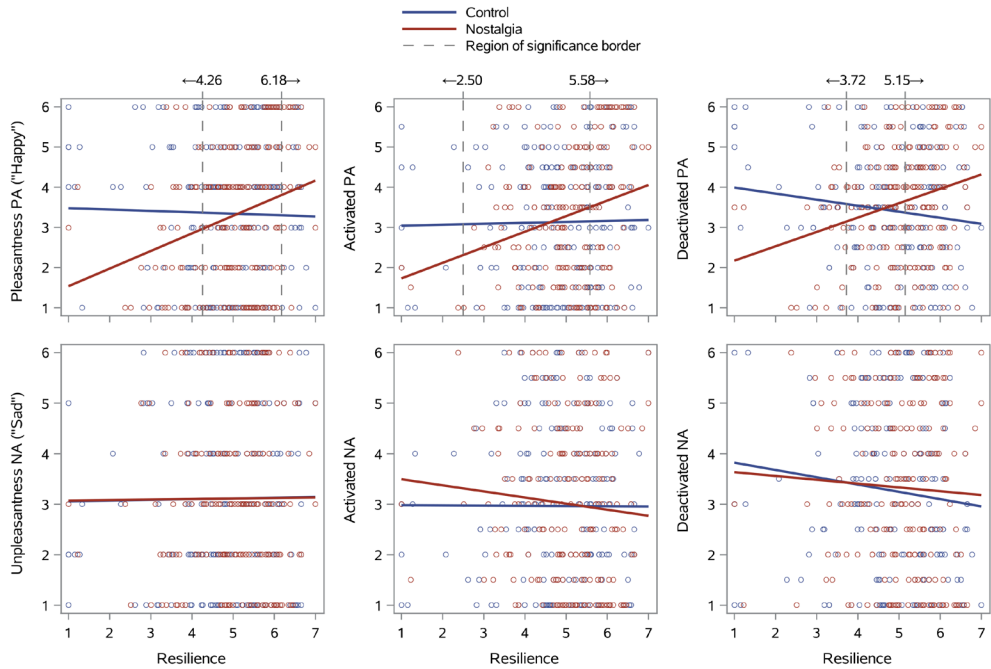
FIGURE 1 Regression of Affect Ratings on Resilience for Nostalgia and Control Conditions. Vertical dashed lines indicate Johnson–Neyman region of significance borders. Scatter shows distribution of participant scores in nostalgia (red) and control (blue) conditions.

resilience as the covariate. Again, we display predicted means and standard errors in Table 1, and inferential statistics in Table 2.

The main effect of nostalgia on social connectedness was significant; social connectedness was higher in the nostalgia ($M = 4.23$, $SE = 0.07$) than control ($M = 4.00$, $SE = 0.07$) condition. This main effect was qualified, however, by the Nostalgia × Resilience interaction. Tests of simple effects showed that nostalgia (vs. control) increased social connectedness among high-resilience participants ($+1\ SD$), $F(1, 403) = 9.53$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .023$, 90% CI = [.005, .052], but not among low-resilience ones ($-1\ SD$), $F(1, 403) = 0.06$, $p = .81$, $\eta^2 < .001$, 90% CI = [.000, .002]. The J-N procedure identified a single region of significance (Figure 2). Nostalgia increased social connectedness at resilience values higher than 4.82 ($-0.12\ SD$).

The nostalgia main effect was not significant for any of the other psychological benefits. However, the Nostalgia × Resilience interaction was significant, and evinced a similar pattern as for social connectedness, for meaning in life, self-esteem, and optimism (but not for self-continuity or inspiration), in partial support of our hypothesis. We display these interactions in Figure 2 and followed up with tests of simple nostalgia (vs. control) effects, supplemented by the J-N procedure.

Nostalgia (vs. control) had no significant influence on meaning in life among high-resilience participants ($+1\ SD$), $F(1, 403) = 0.58$, $p = .45$, $\eta^2 = .001$, 90% CI = [.000, .014], but decreased it among low-resilience ones ($-1\ SD$), $F(1, 403) = 7.15$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .017$, 90% CI = [.003, .044]. Nostalgia decreased meaning at resilience values lower than 4.66 ($-0.27\ SD$).

Similarly, nostalgia (vs. control) had no significant influence on self-esteem among high-resilience participants ($+1\ SD$), $F(1, 402) = 1.16$, $p = .28$, $\eta^2 = .003$, 90% CI = [.000, .018], but diminished it among low-resilience ones ($-1\ SD$), $F(1, 402) = 6.67$, $p = .010$, $\eta^2 = .016$, 90% CI = [.002, .042]. The J-N region of significance covered resilience values lower than 4.52 ($-0.40\ SD$).

Likewise, nostalgia (vs. control) had no influence on optimism among high-resilience participants ($+1\ SD$), $F(1, 402) = 0.72$, $p = .40$, $\eta^2 = .002$, 90% CI = [.000, .015], but reduced it among low-resilience
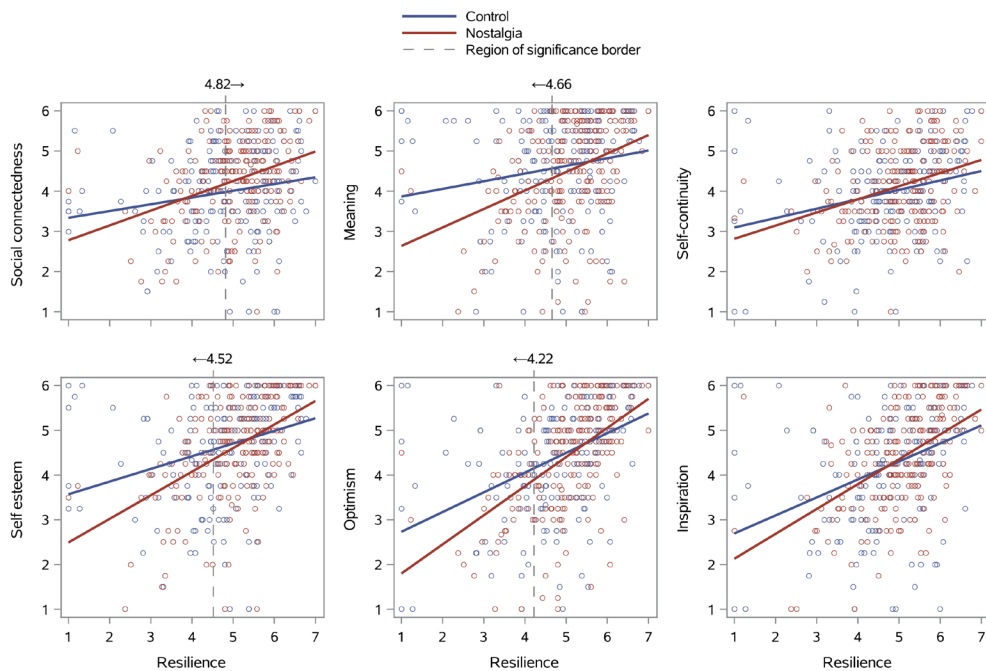
FIGURE 2 Regression of psychological benefit ratings on resilience for nostalgia and control conditions. Vertical dashed lines indicate the Johnson–Neyman region of significance borders. Scatter shows distribution of participant scores in nostalgia (red) and control (blue) conditions.

participants (-1 SD), $F(1, 402) = 4.70$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2 = .012$, 90% CI = [.001, .035]. Nostalgia lowered self-esteem at resilience values lower than 4.22 (-0.66 SD).

Lastly, we present results for the resilience main effect in Table 2. Resilience was positively associated with all psychological benefits.

DISCUSSION

The experimental analysis of nostalgia has documented the emotion's psychological utility. When induced, nostalgia increases social connectedness, meaning in life, self-continuity, self-esteem, optimism, and inspiration. We explored whether these benefits of nostalgia are bounded by rather disadvantageous life circumstances, such as those surrounding the upbringing of Gazan youth. We also hypothesized that, if nostalgia conferred psychological benefits, those would be moderated by resilience.

Summary of findings

In contrast to the bulk of the nostalgia literature (Leunissen, 2023; Leunissen et al., 2021; Sedikides et al., 2015), nostalgia did not increase PA. Yet, consistent with this literature (Frankenbach et al., 2021; Sedikides et al., 2015; Wildschut & Sedikides, 2023a), nostalgia had no influence on NA either. Resilience, though, moderated the impact of nostalgia on PA (but not NA). In particular, nostalgia increased PA among high-resilience participants, and decreased it among low-resilience participants.

In accord with the literature (Juhl & Biskas, 2023; Layous et al., 2022; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019), nostalgia strengthened social connectedness, particularly among high-resilience participants. Yet, contrary to established findings (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018, 2019, 2020), nostalgia did not foster meaning in life, self-continuity, self-esteem, optimism, and inspiration. Specifically, high-resilience participants reported no gains, whereas low-resilience participants reported reductions, in meaning in life, self-esteem, and inspiration due to nostalgia. Further, neither high-nor low-resilience participants reported gains in self-continuity and inspiration due to nostalgia.

Implications and future directions

As noted, the psychological benefits of nostalgia are well established in the literature. Our findings generally differed from those of prior research, which, by and large, has been carried out among members of Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) countries. With the exception of social connectedness, nostalgia's benefits were moderated by the Gaza youth's level of resilience. Our findings are consistent with the possibility that the benefits of nostalgia are limited in populations that have endured a prolonged and harsh upbringing. Moreover, the findings align with a cross-cultural investigation, which demonstrated that experimentally induced nostalgia confers weaker psychological benefits in less affluent than more affluent countries (Hepper et al., 2024). In addition, the finding concur with a recent linguistic analysis of the ERT showing that nostalgic themes embedded in negative emotionality are associated with weaker psychological benefits than nostalgia themes embedded in positive emotionality (Fetterman et al., 2024).

Future research might address why nostalgia, under challenging circumstances, is less beneficial. It is likely, for example, that nostalgia's—otherwise favorable—influence is overshadowed by concurrent negative autobiographical events or by the prospect of a bleak future. The latter possibility would be congruent with findings on the impact of nostalgia among Syrian refugees in Saudi Arabia (Wildschut et al., 2019). In that experiment, nostalgic participants reported higher social connectedness, meaning in life, self-continuity, and self-esteem, yet lower optimism, than controls.

Yet, nostalgia conferred a psychological benefit among Gaza youth, namely, higher social connectedness. Prior research has established the palliative influence of nostalgia-induced social connectedness on loneliness; that is, nostalgia counteracts loneliness by increasing social connectedness (Zhou et al., 2008, Zhou et al., 2022; see also Wildschut & Sedikides, 2023b). It is likely, then, that by raising social connectedness nostalgia alleviates loneliness among Gaza youth. Follow-up research could examine this possibility.

We detected boundaries of nostalgia's psychological benefits among Gazan youth. First, low-resilience participants did not derive affective benefits (i.e., PA) from nostalgia. Second, overall, nostalgic (vs. control) participants did not reap the benefits of meaning in life, self-continuity, self-esteem, optimism, or inspiration. Critically, nostalgizing had several unfavorable consequences for low-resilience participants, who evinced lower PA, meaning in life, self-esteem, and inspiration (compared to controls). Growing up at the Gaza Strip restricted nostalgia's psychological utility, especially among low-resilience youth. The overall picture, however, is nuanced. As a social emotion (Juhl & Biskas, 2023; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2019), nostalgia fostered social connectedness and did so particularly for high-resilience individuals, who also reported increased PA due to nostalgia. High-resilience individuals, then, reaped some of nostalgia's psychological benefits and suffered none of its costs.

In closing

We identified a boundary of nostalgia's benefits: impoverished psychological environment. This boundary, though, depended on level of dispositional resilience. Although our findings are derived from a

relatively large sample of Gazan youth, this sample was convenience rather than representative, posing limits on the generalizability of the findings. Also, the findings are based on a single experiment. Future research will do well to replicate and expand upon these findings in other populations growing up under challenging circumstances.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Hisham M. Abu-Rayya: Conceptualization; methodology; investigation; formal analysis; project administration; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; supervision. **Yasmeen Abumuhaisen:** Investigation; methodology; project administration; writing – review and editing; data curation. **Tim Wildschut:** Conceptualization; methodology; investigation; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; supervision; formal analysis; validation; resources. **Constantine Sedikides:** Conceptualization; methodology; investigation; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; resources; visualization; supervision.

FUNDING INFORMATION

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest with research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF at https://osf.io/kzusc/

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study was reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Board at Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. All participants provided written informed consent.

ORCID

Hisham M. Abu-Rayya https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2352-7414
Yasmeen Abumuhaisen https://orcid.org/0009-0000-1353-6187
Tim Wildschut https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6499-5487
Constantine Sedikides https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7563-306X

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> **How to cite this article:** Abu-Rayya, H. M., Abumuhaisen, Y., Wildschut, T., & Sedikides, C. (2025). Nostalgia in the Gaza Strip: Psychological costs and benefits of nostalgia among Palestinian youth. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *64*, e12859. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12859