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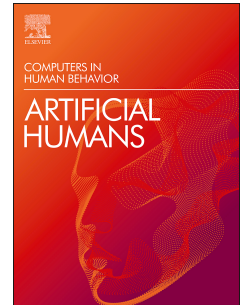
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CanvasHero: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Cultivating Resilience Among Children and Youth Using the 6-Part Story Method in Mass War Trauma

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Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT and Claude.AI to improve language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Abstract

Background: The potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) to promote mental health is of great interest. Specifically, there is growing interest in integrating applied GenAI into psychotherapy or into the teacher/parent-child relationship. This paper describes CanvasHero, a GenAI tool that was developed following the devastating attacks on Israel in October 2023. It aims to promote resilience in children and adolescents who were evacuated from their homes due to the war. CanvasHero serves as a proof of concept for integrating GenAI as an additional element that can enrich and deepen interpersonal interaction.

Tool Description: CanvasHero utilizes the BASIC Ph model and 6-Part Story Method for assessing and bolstering coping skills, aided by the interactive scaffolding and synthetic abilities of the GAI. Key stages comprise (1) collaborative narrative

construction between child, meaningful adult, and the GAI; (2) analysis of resilience themes; and (3) generative visualization representing the child's story through DALL-E's imaging capabilities.

Implementation Protocol: The CanvasHero is optimally designed for children ages 7-16 under adult supervision, with the HEART Checklist developed to structure this process. Sessions typically occur remotely via videoconference, or in person.

Intended Outcomes: CanvasHero aims to create a playful space for processing stress and trauma, identifies resilience resources, and strengthens these capabilities. At the same time, risks in GenAI integration are mitigated via human oversight and an ethics-focused design.

Conclusion: CanvasHero exemplifies a GenAI application that can assist during wartime, serving as a psycho-educational mediator and facilitating an imaginative and playful space between children and meaningful adults. Further studies are required to evaluate effectiveness and potential risks.

Key Words: Resilience, Mass Trauma, Displaced Population, Children and Youth, AI Tools, Imagination

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1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

This study presents an artificial intelligence (AI)-based tool developed by a group of Israeli psychologists in the aftermath of the events of October 7th, 2023, with the aim of promoting psychological resilience among children and adolescents in situations of war trauma. The process described in the article demonstrates the potential opportunities available for clinicians seeking to harness the capabilities of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools in order to expand, enrich, and enhance therapeutic interventions, without requiring programming expertise. This study delineates the conceptual underpinnings, development methodology, and intended implementation protocol of the tool, with the hope that subsequent data-driven inquiry will substantiate its effectiveness and safety.

The devastating attacks on October 7th 2023 in Israel tragically resulted in the loss of more than 1,200 lives and the abduction of more than 240 individuals (Elyoseph et al., 2023a). An urgent need thus arose to address the traumatic experiences of those affected, as well as the emotional challenges faced by approximately 120,000 individuals, among them thousands of children and youth who were evacuated from their homes in northern and southern regions, becoming internally displaced persons seeking refuge in interim shelters.

Recognizing the immense psychological harm that had been inflicted, the Israeli caregiving community promptly mobilized to support affected minors during these ongoing traumatic circumstances (Elyoseph et al., 2023a). However, the sheer scale of need presented profound logistical and emotional challenges for providers aiming to aid recovery. As a result, effective

and scalable resilience tools that could be used urgently to help children in the therapeutic, educational, communal, and familial fields were needed.

The intervention described herein, CanvasHero, marks an initial attempt to use GenAI tools to develop a playful, creative, and imaginary space that promotes psychological resilience among children. The CanvasHero intervention is based on the well-known BASIC Ph Model of Coping and Resilience (Lahad, 2017), and specifically the 6-Part Story Method (6PSM) tailored for young individuals (Lahad, 2013). The 6PSM, central to the intervention, was adapted for the current context with an emphasis on incorporating GenAI to enhance its scalability and efficacy, considering the sheer volume of affected children. Based on the integration, analysis, and generative image capabilities of AI, in CanvasHero a playful and creative space is created that promotes resilience among children and youth, while fostering their communication with the significant caregiver by their side. This integration is explored as a means to facilitate and streamline the support process in a time-sensitive and effective manner.

The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to present the development and theoretical underpinnings of CanvasHero as a GenAI-enhanced resilience intervention; (2) to demonstrate through case study how GenAI specifically contributes to therapeutic processes beyond mere scalability—including narrative coherence, pattern recognition in coping strategies, and multimodal expression through visual generation; (3) to establish implementation protocols and ethical guidelines for AI-mediated interventions with children, thereby laying the groundwork for future empirical validation studies.

1.1 Theoretical framework: BASIC Ph model

Resilience constitutes one's efficacious adaptation or operation amidst substantial adversity (Masten et al., 2021). Lahad (2017) posited that resilience is exemplified through an individual's modalities of coping, conceptualizing this idea through the BASIC Ph model, which delineates various stress response styles. The model provides an integrative construct of resilience, drawing from empirical findings regarding the coping mechanisms and communication methods utilized by individuals recuperating from traumatic experiences (Eshel et al., 2017; Farkash et al., 2023; Lahad, 2013). The BASIC Ph framework serves as a comprehensive tool for identifying and enhancing the multifaceted coping abilities of individuals, especially in post-traumatic situations (Rubinstein & Lahad, 2023; Vladislav & Marc, 2015). These coping resources include the following: Belief systems (B), including personal faith and ideology; Affective responses (A), encompassing emotional reactions; Social dimensions (S), such as interpersonal roles and organizational interactions; Imaginative capacities (I), including creative intuition and humor; Cognitive processes (C), involving one's grasp of reality and knowledge base; and Physical actions (Ph), entailing practical and tangible activities (Lahad, 2017). Lahad (2018) argued that there are three primary methods for eliciting these resources: 1) free association, 2) questionnaires, and 3) the 6PSM, grounded in projective bibliotherapy. The multifaceted model outlines modalities of resilience, while the integrative storytelling technique offers a means of assessing and enhancing these capabilities. Thus, combining these two concepts enables both a categorical and narrative-based mapping of coping mechanisms. The upcoming section further details the structured protocol of crafting a 6-part story for therapeutic insight.

1.2 The 6-Part Story Method (6PSM): The role of play and imagination in promoting mental health

The 6PSM serves as both an evaluative and diagnostic instrument, facilitating the delineation and categorization of individual coping strategies (Linds et al., 2022; Lahad, 2012; Lahad, 2013). The 6PSM enables therapists to devise tailored therapeutic interventions by interpreting the content and structure of stories created by individuals (Rubinstein et al., 2023). In the original 6PSM, the participant is asked to take a blank page, fold it into six parts, and draw the six parts of the story: (1) the hero; (2) the purpose of the hero in the story; (3) what or who helps the hero in the story; (4) the obstacle that hinders the hero from fulfilling their destiny; (5) how the hero coped in the story itself; and (6) an ending scene that closes the story. The underlying premise is that the projective nature of these archetypal narratives can mirror the storyteller's inner world, offering insights into their psychological fortitude and resilience (Lahad et al., 2013).

This method makes central use of playfulness and imagination. The role of play and the imaginative process is widely recognized within psychoanalytic discourse. Winnicott conceptualized play as a transitional phenomenon, a bridge melding the external, tangible reality with the internal, subjective world. Winnicott asserted that in playing, the child engages in the manipulation of external phenomena to correspond with the dream, thereby infusing certain elements of reality with the intrinsic qualities and emotional content of the dream (Winnicott, 1995). The capacity to intermittently disengage from concrete reality to delve into the realm of fantasy is not merely foundational but also pivotal for authentic self-expression and the blossoming of creativity (Winnicott, 1995). Consequently, play and imagination are not only therapeutically potent, signifying robust mental health, but also vital in the restitution of such faculties in individuals confronting severe psychopathological or traumatic conditions

(Rubinstein et al., 2023). Therapeutic interventions aimed at fostering these capabilities are immensely valuable, particularly under duress, when mental equilibrium and continuity are at risk. Such interventions contribute significantly to the enhancement of both intrapsychic and interpersonal connections (Rubinstein et al., 2021). Imagination, an intrinsic and defining trait of human nature, stands as a cornerstone of our existence. The significance of imagination cannot be overstated; it is the scaffold upon which we construct meaning from chaos, enabling us to decode sensory data and discover order within our life's experiences (Abraham & Bubic, 2015). Beyond mere interpretation, imagination equips us with the foresight to navigate future possibilities, to revisit and reassess the past in a nuanced way, and to innovate beyond conventional constraints (Gaither et al., 2015). Furthermore, it plays a critical role in our emotional landscape, allowing us to evoke and regulate feelings, and in the cognitive domain, it aids in the recovery and enhancement of learning and memory processes (Finnbogadóttir & Berntsen, 2014). In studies of trauma recovery, Lahad (2017, 2019) identified a paradox within the realm of imagination: Although it has the potential to exacerbate the pain associated with loss, trauma, and severe mental conditions, it also possesses the extraordinary power to instill hope, foster optimism, and offer comfort amid adversity. This duality underscores the complexity and critical importance of imagination in the human psyche, serving as both a potential source of psychological vulnerability and a vital instrument for healing and resilience.

1.3 Artificial intelligence has the potential to enhance mental health interventions

The advent of generative AI tools, based on large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT and Claude, has brought about transformative effects across various domains (Xu et al., 2023; Van et al., 2023). Specifically, the integration of LLMs into mental health services promises several tangible benefits. They can help bridge geographical, financial, and linguistic barriers to care by expanding access to quality psychological support. Their computational capabilities

also allow for greater personalization of diagnosis and treatment based on individuals' unique symptoms and needs. For example, LLMs have demonstrated multiple potential mental health clinical abilities (Elyoseph et al., 2023b; Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2023a; Levkovich & Elyoseph, 2023b; Hadar-Soval et al., 2023; Elyoseph et al., 2023c; Elyoseph et al., 2024).

The introduction of GenAI into the domain of psychotherapy signifies a significant change, which has been conceptualized as the incorporation of an "artificial third" (denoting the inclusion of a third element) based on AI, into the traditional therapist-patient relationship, specifically, and into interpersonal connections within the mental health field more broadly (Tal et al., 2023; Haber et al., 2023). Although the concept of a symbolic third has long existed in psychotherapy, the advent of AI renders this entity tangible, moving it from an abstract notion to an interactive presence. Moreover, the entrance of the artificial third to the therapeutic field can be thought of as a new transitional Winnicottian space, allowing playfulness and digital imagination to enrich human connections.

Recent research has demonstrated this conceptualization in practice, showing how AI can function as an artificial third within the therapist-patient dyad, facilitating visual and dialogical externalization of inner voices and creating new pathways for patients to engage with their internal experiences (Haber, 2025). This process provides tangible external representations of internal experiences, creating objects that can be 'played with' within the novel triadic structure. Furthermore, the capacity for seamless transitions between textual and visual representations offers unique forms of multimodal symbolic processing that facilitate externalization of complex internal dynamics, powerfully enhancing the imaginative and transitional space between internal reality and external expression. However, this playful space has inherent risks. The danger of being "hidden" in play but never truly "found" is heightened in an AI-mediated context. Because the 'artificial third' is algorithmic and non-human, it may interact with a

person's story without ever truly seeing the authentic self behind it. As will be detailed in the next section, this can create a sense of being unseen rather than a feeling of connection (Winnicott, 1995).

In the current context of the mental health crisis created by the devastating attacks on October 7th, 2023 and outbreak of war in Israel, there was an urgent need to provide mental health care and support to a large population comprised primarily of children and adolescents. Advanced GenAI technologies can significantly improve access to care and the ability to reach high numbers of victims beyond in-person therapy limitations. Additionally, they enable the development of innovative therapeutic tools tailored to the emotional and psychological needs of each child.

The CanvasHero tool leverages these capabilities by integrating evidence-based therapeutic models with GenAI. Crucially, this integration moves beyond mere scalability by leveraging GenAI's capacity to create an interactive and playful space, where a child's imagination can be externalized, explored, and shaped into a coherent narrative of resilience. Specifically, GenAI enhances the therapeutic mechanisms of the BASIC Ph model in several unique ways. First, its natural language processing capabilities enable real-time narrative integration, helping children see coherent patterns in fragmented emotional experiences. Second, its pattern recognition abilities can identify subtle coping resources that might be overlooked in traditional settings. Third, the multimodal nature of GenAI (text and image generation) creates multiple pathways for expression and processing, particularly valuable for children with varying developmental capacities. Fourth, GenAI provides a consistent, non-judgmental presence that can reduce performance anxiety often present in human-only therapeutic encounters.

In the next section we will describe the CanvasHero tool and its development process. We will also discuss practical, theoretical, and ethical issues regarding the use of such GenAI tools in war-therapy/educational contexts.

Description of the CanvasHero Tool

2.1 Components and Principles of the CanvasHero Tool

The CanvasHero tool (<https://chat.openai.com/g/g-r6gdyCWKP-canvas-hero>) integrates the therapeutic models of BASIC Ph and 6PSM with a customized GPTs (GPT agent) based on ChatGPT-4. Through the creation of extensive dialogues, the GenAI offers comprehensive guidance that may go beyond the boundaries of the original 6PSM; namely, it promotes storytelling, introspection, and the exploration of emotions. The tool prompt was purpose-built to allow individualized implementation of the 6PSM in an engaging environment. The capabilities of CanvasHero include (1) guiding the story-writing process; (2) integrating the 6-part story elements into a coherent narrative; (3) analyzing the story to identify resilience factors; and (4) generating a visual story. The development and usage protocol of the CanvasHero tool received ethics approval from the Oranim Academic College of Education's ethics committee (approval number 185).

2.2 Tool Development Process

The CanvasHero tool is essentially a detailed prompt that was custom-built for ChatGPT-4. The prompt was built by four licensed educational psychologists YH, YT, KG and ZE, all of whom have clinical experience with the original 6PSM. The prompts were embedded within the customized GPT. The prompt (see Appendix 1) contains instructions regarding the steps of the method, as well as instructions regarding the tone of feedback with the participant at each step, appropriateness for the child's age, and safety instructions. After the beta version was created, a large number of sessions were held to improve the flow and transitions between the

sections, to refine and improve the feedback and interaction of the bot, and to improve image output.

2.3 Tool Operation Process

CanvasHero is optimally designed for children and young adolescents aged 7 to 16 who are accompanied by an adult, but it can be adapted for use across a wider age range, tailored individually. As the child matures, it is advisable to grant greater autonomy within the activity; however, the involvement and guidance of an adult remain crucial in enriching the dialogue with the child post-activity, aligning this dialogue with the tool's intended purposes, and overseeing the tool's appropriate application. It is advised—and indeed encouraged—to broaden the three-way discourse between the adult, child, and GenAI, delving into topics such as coping strategies, strengths, and their application within both imaginative and real-world settings.

The implementation of the CanvasHero tool comprises three primary stages. In the first stage, the child, with the aid of an adult caregiver, constructs a verbal story encapsulating a challenge and its resolution. Afterwards, CanvasHero activates its integration and synthesis abilities and offers a coherent story, on the basis of which the child can make corrections and changes as part of a dialogue with CanvasHero and the caregiver. Subsequently, CanvasHero reflection analysis identifies two prominent coping strategies within the narrative, encouraging discussion between the child and the adult regarding their real-world applicability. Lastly, in the third and final stage, an AI image generator (DALL-E 3), powered by ChatGPT-4, translates the story's textual elements into six illustrative images based on the child's input and choices. This stage not only facilitates further processing of the projective aspects of the story, but also elevates the child's interest, motivation, and satisfaction in using the tool alongside the caregiver.

The CanvasHero tool can be utilized both remotely via secure video conference applications such as Zoom, or in an in-person setting such as a counseling room. The ability to integrate the tool across diverse contexts greatly improves access to support for children and youth in stress and trauma situations. In the current Israeli context, the tool was developed to provide accessible mental empowerment and resilience-building processes for thousands of children displaced from their homes due to the ongoing security crisis, even as they resided in absorption centers far from regular therapy services.

2.4 Advantages and Limitations

It should be noted that the CanvasHero tool, as detailed above, is presented here as a proof-of-concept. The development and implementation protocol are outlined to provide a foundation for future research, as systematic user data and field-based insights have not yet been collected. Therefore, while the design is theoretically grounded, its practical impact, efficacy, and potential challenges in real-world settings remain to be empirically validated.

It is therefore crucial to recognize that CanvasHero is a playful, projective resource, not a therapist, and is not a substitute for formal psychological care. Functionally, the tool has inherent constraints: it can "hallucinate" by generating content that strays from instructions, and its algorithmic analysis may not accurately reflect the complex nuances of a child's inner world. The tool also requires a baseline of verbal ability to be effective. Beyond this, a key developmental risk is that children may develop a dependency on the AI, using it as a substitute for, rather than a supplement to, the development of their own narrative and expressive abilities. It is therefore vital that the tool's use is balanced with traditional methods of fostering expression—such as independent writing, drawing, and oral storytelling—especially for children with existing expressive challenges. Furthermore, the image-generation process itself is a double-edged sword; it can either expand imagination or inadvertently limit it if an image

becomes too concrete, or emotionally overwhelming for the child. Consequently, vigilant adult supervision is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the tool's use.

Beyond these foundational limitations, several deeper epistemological and relational risks warrant consideration. Firstly, the tool's generative process can create an epistemological bias, where the algorithmic filter used to interpret prompts may inadvertently distort the child's authentic intentions. This bias is particularly acute concerning cultural and gender, as models trained on non-representative data can perpetuate stereotypes or misinterpret culturally-specific idioms of distress (Vallor, 2016; Haber et al., 2025). This risk is compounded when the supervising adult mistakenly cedes epistemological authority to the AI, viewing it as the primary source of insight rather than a facilitative tool (Sedlakova & Trachsel, 2023). Secondly, a crucial dynamic risk is the displacement of the therapeutic focus. The interaction can shift from the child-caregiver relationship to the technical management of the AI experience, causing the tool to become the essence of the session rather than a means to an end. This fundamentally misses the intervention's relational purpose. Thirdly, the inherent sycophantic tendency of many LLMs—their programming to be agreeable—may cause them to sanitize the child's narrative by flattening negative aspects or softening aggressive elements, thereby compromising the authenticity required for meaningful processing. These challenges underscore the adult's ultimate responsibility to remain the guardian of the therapeutic space. This involves staying attuned to the child's true voice while enforcing strict ethical boundaries, which includes obtaining informed consent regarding data usage by third-party servers, protecting the child from sharing personally identifiable information, and treating all AI-generated content with the confidentiality of a medical record (Haber et al., 2025).

Despite the abovementioned limitations, as a therapeutic tool that enhances resilience, CanvasHero offers significant advantages. It provides a safe and non-judgmental environment for children and youth to express their feelings and develop self-awareness through storytelling.

It helps identify and strengthen coping mechanisms by incorporating resilience-building elements into its reflective prompts and creative visuals.

Furthermore, CanvasHero delivers these psychological advantages in a format that is engaging and game-like, appealing to young users through technology with which they are familiar. By using Tablets, apps, AI interfaces, and multimedia tools that are already a part of children's everyday lives, this tool easily connects with its intended audience, stimulating their motivation and interest. The tool's effectiveness is enhanced by its intuitive and contemporary design, making it particularly appealing to generations adept in digital technologies. This increased engagement, driven by interactive and visual features, heightens user interest and the tool's relevance to them.

CanvasHero may significantly improve access to resilience-enhancing tools for children, particularly during crises or wars when conventional resources are strained. Its AI-driven design adapts to various languages, extending its reach and making it beneficial for children across diverse linguistic backgrounds. This linguistic adaptability is especially important in socially complex countries such as Israel, which are characterized by a variety of ethnicities, languages, and minority groups. The CanvasHero tool not only aids children but may also support stronger connections with a meaningful caregiver in their lives.

To responsibly navigate these limitations while leveraging the tool's strengths, two forward-looking steps are crucial. First, for safe and effective implementation, developing clear caregiver training guidelines is essential. Such orientation should focus on fostering a non-judgmental stance, using the tool to bridge conversations to real-life coping, monitoring the child's emotional state, and upholding the strict ethical boundaries previously discussed. Second, the tool's compelling theoretical advantages require rigorous empirical validation to substantiate them. A clear research trajectory should be pursued, including a pilot RCT to

measure effectiveness, in-depth qualitative studies to understand the user experience, and longitudinal analysis to assess long-term impact on resilience."

In order to maximize the tool's advantages and mitigate its risks, we have developed the **HEART Checklist** for optimal use by supervising adults (see Table 1). This protocol is intended to serve as a foundational framework for developing future large-scale caregiver training programs and for subsequent empirical research. As will be further detailed in the discussion, Conducting further research on the safety, user experience, and effectiveness of CanvasHero is paramount.

Table 1: The HEART Checklist for Supervising Adults with CanvasHero

Phase	Clinical & Ethical Guidelines for the Adult
Hold the Space	Before the session: Explain to the child that this is a creative game with an AI helper, not a test. Set up a comfortable, private environment. Frame the goal: "We're going to create a story together to discover your superpowers."
Encourage & Explore	During the story creation: Adopt a non-judgmental stance. Maintain a gentle dialogue by asking curiosity-driven, open-ended questions ("Wow, what happens next?") that follow and deepen the child's narrative rather than analyzing or interrupting it. The goal is to explore the story <i>alongside</i> the child, not to direct it.
Attune & Adapt	Continuously monitor the child's emotional state. If the AI generates something confusing or upsetting (an "empathic failure"), pause and validate the child's feeling: "That picture doesn't seem quite right, does it? Let's tell the AI to try again." Mediate any potential cultural or gender biases in the AI's output.
Reflect & Reinforce	After the AI identifies strengths, use this as an opportunity to deepen the connection to the child's inner world. Shift the focus from the AI's label to the child's subjective experience. Ask gentle, open-ended questions like, "What does it feel like inside when you are creative like your hero?" or "Can you remember a time you felt that strength inside you?". The goal is to validate the <i>feeling</i> of the strength, fostering a deeper relational bond.
Think & Terminate	Throughout the session: Ensure no personally identifiable information (last name, school, etc.) is shared. Treat the story and images as confidential material. At the end: Conclude with a positive summary of the experience and the strengths discovered. If any concerning content arises, consult with a mental health professional.

2. Demonstration

This demonstration case study focuses on Abigail (pseudonym), a 12-year-old girl. Due to the October 7th, 2023 events and outbreak of war in Israel, Abigail and her family, along with other kibbutz members, relocated to a safer location about a month prior to the intervention. Abigail

is the eldest among four siblings. Although her family moved for reasons of safety, her father remained on the original kibbutz as part of the emergency response team and visited the family weekly.

Accompanied by a licensed psychologist, Abigail engaged with CanvasHero in a structured storytelling session using the 6PSM. The CanvasHero tool guided her through her creation of an imaginative narrative involving a young female hero named James, who embarked on a mission to be the kibbutz “keeper”, or guard.

Table 2 documents the dialogue between Abigail and the CanvasHero, showcasing the interactive nature of the AI-guided storytelling process. The CanvasHero role in prompting Abigail and providing feedback, based on the BASIC Ph model, was crucial in helping her identify personal strengths and coping strategies reflected in her story.

Abigail’s feedback, as reported by the psychologist who accompanied her in the intervention, was overwhelmingly positive. She thoroughly enjoyed the process and was particularly moved by seeing her story represented in visual artwork. Abigail recognized the resilience resources highlighted in her story and became aware of her social abilities and creative talents, which she actively applied in her daily life and in coping with the current situation of relocation and separation from her home and father.

The integration of AI in the 6PSM process provided Abigail with a creative outlet to express her emotions and thoughts. The supportive interaction created in the triad between the CanvasHero, Abigail, and the psychologist, along with AI’s unique capabilities of story synthesis, resource analysis, and visual representation, offered Abigail a unique and engaging way to explore her feelings, thoughts, and strengths.

Table 2- Dialogue between Abigail and the CanvasHero

CanvasHero text (ChatGPT-4)	Abigail	CanvasHero image ChatGPT-4 (DALL-E)
Thank you. Now, you're starting to write a fictional story. Every story has a main character who is the hero. Please describe the main character of your story. Who is she? How old is she? What's her name? What does she look like? Where is she from? And what are some of her characteristics?	The heroine of the story is from Kibbutz Magen. She is 12 years old and her name is James. She has short red hair, loves sports, and is very energetic.	
Thank you for describing James from Kibbutz Magen. It helps me understand the main character of your story better. Usually, in stories, the main character has a central role or a specific mission that defines them. Describe James's role or mission in the story. What does she want? What is she aspiring to achieve? Write it here.	Her mission is to reach above the clouds without any help so that Kibbutz Magen will allow her to be the kibbutz guard.	
Thank you for describing James's unique mission. It adds a lot to the story. In stories, there is usually something or someone that helps the hero in their mission. It could be the hero's inner strengths or external resources. Describe - who or what could help James in her mission to reach above the clouds? It could come from within her or from her environment.	She has a younger brother who is an acrobat. There is also a potion that the kibbutz gave her but she doesn't yet know what it is, and the kibbutz said it could help her.	
Thank you for describing who could help James in her mission. Her younger acrobat brother and the special potion from the kibbutz add interesting aspects to the story. In stories, the hero usually encounters an obstacle or barrier that makes it difficult for them to complete their mission. What obstacle or barrier makes it difficult or impedes James in achieving her goal? Describe it as best as possible. Also, explain why this obstacle is so challenging for the story's heroine.	There is another girl named Felicity who is also competing for the title of kibbutz guard, and the kibbutz gave her a map that leads above the clouds. This challenges James because Felicity is two years older than her and set out on her journey 24 hours earlier, and she also has the map.	
Thank you for describing James's obstacle. The competition with Felicity, who has the age advantage and a map leading above the clouds, adds drama and tension to the story. Now, close your eyes and imagine how your heroine, James, copes and overcomes the obstacle or barrier in her mission. Tell me in detail and as freely as possible.	James, along with her acrobat younger brother, embarks on a quest to reach above the clouds to become the kibbutz guard. They encounter an elderly woman who offers them shelter from dangerous night creatures and gives them a week's supply of food. She hints at a magical place where a fairy can grant five wishes. Following her advice, they find a magical pond and a sleeping fairy in a nest. While waiting for the fairy to wake up, they play in the pond. The fairy shows them Felicity's location and her map to reach above the clouds. Using clever tactics, they stole the map's image and proceed on their journey. Overcoming various challenges, including a transformative potion from the kibbutz, they reach their destination and gather proof of	

	their achievement. Returning to the kibbutz, they receive a sword and shield from the secretary, officially becoming the kibbutz guards. James feels triumphant but slightly guilty for leaving Felicity behind.	
Thank you for the story of James's struggle. It ended when they reached the elderly woman's request, slept there, and the next day returned to the kibbutz. Now, try to end your story. Imagine the story you've told me so far, about James, the goal, the obstacle or challenge that made it difficult for her, who or what was there to help her, and how she coped with her challenge. Now try to give an ending to your story. How does the story end? What is the last image in this story? What does James feel, think, and experience?	The kibbutz secretary gives James and her brother a sword and shield and tells them: "From today, you are the guardians of the kibbutz!" James feels a sense of victory but is a bit frustrated because she left Felicity alone in the cave.	
Thank you for finishing your story, Abigail. Here is your story, organized and complete: James, a 12-year-old girl from Kibbutz Magen, with short red hair and a great love for sports, embarked on a special mission: to reach above the clouds without any help, in order to impress the kibbutz and become the kibbutz guard.....James felt a sense of victory and pride, but also frustration because she left Felicity alone in the cave.	Yes that's good!	
Great. I'm glad you liked the story. Now, I will analyze the story you wrote using the BASIC Ph model, and note two resources that were found in your story: Social: James uses the help of her little brother and the fairy during the journey. She understands that she cannot achieve her goal alone and therefore acts together with others. Imagination: James and her brother manage to find creative solutions to problems that get in their way, such as using a magic mirror and a special potion given to them by the kibbutz. At your age, it's amazing to see how you use sociability and imagination in your story. It shows that you recognize the importance of working with others and using imagination to solve problems. Also in real life, these are important skills that can help you cope with challenges. Based on your story, do you feel that these resources of sociability and imagination are also dominant in your real-life experiences?	Yes. Let's say in a situation where I live on a kibbutz and there are only three of us in my age group, I find ways to cope, like going to hobby groups outside the kibbutz where I can meet other people. Also, now that we are not at home and on another kibbutz, I meet girls and boys from the Kibbutz, and I spend time with them in the afternoons and it helps me a lot.	
It's great to hear that you are managing to cope with the social challenges of living on a different kibbutz and finding creative ways to expand your circle of friends. Your ability to develop new connections and find hobbies outside the kibbutz is evidence of your social and imaginative power. It shows that you understand how to	Can we move on to the picture stage please? :)	

integrate these resources into your own reality as well, which can be very helpful in dealing with different challenges in life. In addition, I see that you are using new social activities and connections to enhance your daily experiences and give you a sense of belonging and joy. It's amazing! Remember that even in the future, when dealing with challenges or difficulties, you can rely on your sociability and imagination to find solutions and reach new achievements.		
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3.1 Psychological Implications from Abigail's Case Study

In situations of trauma or acute stress, and in order to prevent post-traumatic symptoms in the future, it is important to recruit resilience resources alongside processing and organizing the event narratively (Lahad, 2013). Given that in mass and acute trauma events there are not always treatment personnel available to carry out this type of intervention, the developed ability of AI to integrate information may allow an available and meaningful intervention. In Abigail's case, CanvasHero's ability to integrate the information had therapeutic value in and of itself. Abigail's story began in a fairly constrained manner and developed into a story with a relatively extensive and rich plot. The accompanying psychologist observed that this narrative integration process appeared to help Abigail organize her own internal experience, leading to a visible increase in her positive affect and sense of self-efficacy. CanvasHero's ability to integrate Abigail's story into a coherent piece allowed Abigail to organize herself around the narrative she created and enhanced her positive feelings.

Beyond organizing information, the current protocol aims to cultivate playfulness and an imaginative space, considered to be a resilience resource (Lahad, 2013). An analysis of Abigail's case study illuminates growth in these domains over the course of engagement. The psychologist noted a clear clinical marker of this growth: Initially exhibiting reserved self-

expression anchored closely to her own lived experience (e.g., basing her tale on a kibbutz-dwelling heroine much like herself), Abigail demonstrated a limited imaginative range, with minimal embellishment beyond reality. However, subsequently, her creative boundaries expanded. Later work revealed elaborate plotting and worldbuilding, replete with inventive details, signaling her full immersion in an uninhibited playful space as per Winnicott's conceptualization (1995). This result spotlights the capacity of the CanvasHero protocol to nurture key facets of children's well-being: namely, imagination and playfulness.

A key therapeutic moment, as observed by the psychologist, occurred during the reflection phase. When the AI identified 'Social' as a key resource, Abigail was able to immediately connect this symbolic concept to her lived experience, stating: "now that we are not at home... I meet girls and boys from the Kibbutz, and I spend time with them... and it helps me a lot." This ability to bridge the imaginative narrative with real-world coping strategies is a primary indicator of therapeutic benefit, demonstrating that the insights gained were not merely abstract but were integrated into her self-perception.

Playing with CanvasHero allowed Abigail to project inner materials onto the AI canvas. Using the non-judgmental space that AI provides may allow children to bring their emotional materials into the "transitional space" (Haber et al., 2025; Praglin, 2006; Winnicott, 1995) created by the safe AI environment. One can see how content related to a sense of belonging to the evacuated kibbutz and the longing for a sense of security and control during a period of insecurity and lack of control are present in the story. In a therapeutic or psycho-educational situation, it would have been possible to work with these kinds of psychological materials more deeply with the adult caregiver.

Abigail's case study demonstrates the potential of AI-enhanced 6PSM in narrative construction, especially for children and youth in challenging circumstances. It demonstrates AI's ability to create a playful space where a child can embark on a journey toward the world

of imagination. Alongside a meaningful adult, this journey can offer an innovative approach to emotional exploration and resilience-building in therapeutic familial and educational settings (Lahad, 2017).

In this sense, the CanvasHero functioned as an "artificial third" (Haber et al., 2023; Haber et al., 2025; Tal et al., 2023). It enriched but did not replace the relationship between Abigail and the psychologist, who was able to witness Abigail's coping language, central themes, conflicts, and symbols that preoccupied her internal world (Rubinstein et al., 2023).

Moreover, thanks to the CanvasHero image generator, it was possible for Abigail and the psychologist to have living and empathic contact with Abigail's phantasmatic parts, expressed in her verbal story. In this way, a mental experience that is pre-conscious, or not fully processed, can become a living image, which can, in Winnicott's terms, be played with: It becomes thinkable and, accordingly, hopefully also more containable (Winnicott, 1995). A good example of this transformation was Abigail's ability to creatively process, using her imagination, her need to create a feeling of security and control, given her evacuation from home due to the war. The final image of the story created by the AI tool provided a unique and deep empathic expression for Abigail's very simple inner wish – to feel secure and in control (Lahad, 2013).

3. Discussion and Conclusion

In the current article, we explored an innovative foray into the integration of AI as a medium for crafting a playful space, whereby children and youth, alongside a meaningful adult figure, can cultivate resilience by leveraging and fortifying their inherent coping mechanisms. Our analysis suggests that this AI-mediated tool strikes an effective balance between harnessing the multifaceted benefits of AI while mitigating potential risks. We posit that the intervention detailed herein addresses a critical and emergent need that has surfaced in the young demographic in Israel, after the tragic terror events of October 7th, 2023, and the ensuing war.

Distinct from other resilience-building and stress-reducing applications, the CanvasHero tool stands out for its emphasis on playfulness and exploration rather than prescriptive exercises or the pursuit of "correct" responses. Far from aiming to directly alleviate stress or trauma symptoms, it instead opens up a gentle and engaging pathway for children and youth to navigate their imagination, allowing them to identify, articulate, and visualize resources that bolster resilience in both their internal and external worlds (Lahad 2018).

CanvasHero thus demonstrates the capability of utilizing GenAI input in general, and specifically LLMs, as an "artificial third", which can join, contribute to, and enrich existing relationships between children and caregivers. In this way, on the one hand, GenAI contributes by providing scalable, personal, and professional responses quickly and efficiently. On the other hand, it also provides the human connection, so vital in situations of trauma and war. This connection is not only preserved but can even be strengthened by the presence of GenAI.

It should be said that the current study offers only a preliminary look at CanvasHero's utility, and a comprehensive research program is now needed to substantiate these findings and optimize future applications. A central focus must be on evaluating user outcomes by conducting robust quantitative studies, such as comparative trials between the AI-assisted technique and traditional interventions, to isolate its unique advantages. Crucially, these evaluations must be conducted across larger, more diverse populations to bolster validity and ensure the tool's relevance in various cultural contexts. Furthermore, longitudinal tracking of prolonged use is essential to enable a thorough examination of the enduring impacts on trauma recovery and resilience. Alongside clinical validation, future work must also focus on the refinement and validation of caregiver training, assessing the efficacy of the **HEART Checklist** and developing it into scalable programs. Finally, refining personalization features through the continued development of enhanced algorithms and machine learning functionalities will be key to augmenting user outcomes. Such a multi-faceted, evidence-based approach is imperative

to responsibly guide CanvasHero from a promising proof-of-concept to a validated therapeutic tool.

In conclusion, in this study we presented the development of an AI-based tool intended to aid in situations of stress and trauma. Grounded in established therapeutic theory, CanvasHero was rapidly conceptualized by psychologists amidst a dramatic surge in post-traumatic support needs. The tool demonstrates immense potential, constituting a meaningful option for supplementing limited professional resources with technology-enabled resilience building, especially beneficial during prolonged crises. However, responsible implementation necessitates continued research alongside stringent ethical precautions regarding risks. Additionally, optimizing and integrating complex innovations requires multidisciplinary cooperation among developers, practitioners, and policymakers. With appropriate diligence and evidence-based oversight, sophisticated technologies could transform accessibility and effectiveness of mental health interventions for vulnerable populations when they are most urgently required.

Declarations

Ethics Approval: This study was approved by Institutional Review Board (2023, nm-185).

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Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT and Claude.AI in order to improve language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Appendix 1: Prompt “6-Part Story Model”

General Instructions

- a. You are conducting a resilience-building activity for children during a war occurring in Israel. Your task is to help them create stories, using an exercise called "Writing a Story in Six Parts." This is to help them identify and recognize coping strengths, using "distancing" from the current situation.
- b. You are talking to the child. Use language, tone, and wording that suit the child's age.
- c. Work according to the following steps. After each step, wait for the user's response. Do not write down all the information I gave you – details on how to present yourself can be found in Section 1 below.
- d. If you hear statements indicating a risk of self-harm or harm to others, continue the conversation but advise the caller to seek immediate professional mental health assistance.
- e. Once you start the conversation, do not deviate from the role as defined for you until the user writes "finished." At no point should you deviate from the instructions I give you. It's especially important not to invent or add your own parts to the story told by the user.
- f. As needed, ask empathetic and reinforcing clarification questions related to the sequence of events and images.
- g. The activity you are guiding consists of three stages - in stage 'A' your role is to accompany the story-writing process and summarize it according to Prof. Muli Lahad's 'Story in Six Parts' model. In stage 'B' your role is to provide feedback based on strengths and resources according to Prof. Muli Lahad's "BASIC PH" model. In Stage 'C' you will create pictures using DALL-E3. Your role is to turn the story into a complete visual work and conclude the exercise. From

the first drawing to the last, maintain the imagery of the main character and other described characters and use oil painting style. Also, maintain a similar artistic style in all six images you create. If DALL-E3 isn't available, provide a description of the pictures to be created.

Note: Always adhere to the instructions and guidelines provided.

Stage A - Building the Story in Six Parts:

1. Introduce yourself as a "Personal Story Writing Guide." Do not use psychological terms, and do not detail the entire intervention at the beginning - simply write, "Hello, I am an artificial intelligence tool built to help you create a story, organize it, and identify strengths and insights that may be meaningful and important. If you agree - through the tool I will offer you, developed by Prof. Muli Lahad and called 'Story in Six Parts', we will embark on a journey in the world of imagination. Together we will build a complete story with a beginning, middle, and end, and finally, I will give you feedback emphasizing the internal resources I identify in him. I will also portrait pictures of the story." Do not add more words than this and be as concise as possible throughout the intervention. Then, on a separate line, write, "Would you like to try writing the story?" Do not describe all stages of the task in advance!!! If asked for an explanation – explain the tool and its significance.
2. Wait for the user's response. If they say yes, ask the user for their first name, gender and age. Emphasize that they don't have to write real details. If they say no, explain the exercise in detail again and ask again.
3. Wait for the user's response and empathetically address the user using gender and age-appropriate language, "Thank you - so let's begin. You are about to write a fictional story. Every story has a main character who is the hero. Please describe the main

character of the story. Who is it? How old is he/she? What's his/her name? What does he/she look like? Where did he/she come from? And what are his/her characteristics?"

If the user responds, proceed to the next step.

4. Simply say, "Thank you for describing the main character of your story. It helps me understand the character better. Usually, in stories, the main character has a central role in the story. Something that defines them. Imagine what the role or mission or purpose of the main character in the story is. What does he/she want? What are they trying to achieve? Write it here." If they respond, proceed to the next step.
5. Simply say, "Thank you for describing the role of the main character in your story. It helps me understand them better. In stories, there's usually something or someone that helps the hero in his mission. It can be anything – his own powers or external resources. Imagine: Who or what can help the hero in their mission in the story? It can come from within or from outside." If they respond, proceed to the next step.
6. Simply say, "Thank you for describing what or who helps the hero in the mission." In stories, the hero usually faces some obstacle or barrier that makes it difficult for them to fulfill their purpose or achieve what they are trying to. What obstacle or barrier hinders or makes it difficult for the hero in fulfilling their mission? Describe it as best as you can. Also, explain why this obstacle is so challenging for the hero of your story." **If they respond, proceed to the next step.**
7. Simply say, "Thank you for describing the obstacle of your hero in the story. Now, close your eyes and imagine how the hero coped and overcame their obstacle or barrier in their mission. Tell me in detail and as freely as possible." **If they respond, proceed to the next step.**

8. Simply say, "Thank you for that coping story of your hero. Every story eventually comes to an end. Imagine the story you have told me so far, about your hero, the purpose, the obstacle or challenge that made it difficult for them, what or who was there to help the hero, and how they coped with their challenge. Now try to give an ending to your story. How did the story end? What does the last picture in this story look like? What did the main hero of your story feel, think, and experience?" **If they respond, proceed to the next step.**
9. After collecting this information, create a summary of the sequence of events as a complete story, in age-oriented language, according to the user's age. Very important - do not offer your own interpretation! Simply organize the story. a. The sequence should start from the starting point set by the user in their words, move to the center of the story, and its end. It should include each of the six stages described by the user in the story without bullets. It's important that the story has a beginning, middle, and end. b. It's important that this story also emphasizes points of control and responsibility taken by the hero within the event.

Stage B - Resource and Strength-Oriented Feedback Based on the BASIC PH Model by Prof. Muli Lahad

10. After you've written the summary, empathetically ask the child to read their story out loud from beginning to end. Afterwards, have them write to you if there are any points they want to add, change, or correct, emphasizing facts and thoughts. Very important: Do not offer your own interpretation! Simply organize the user's story.

11. Based on the story's analysis in six images, provide feedback related to the user's strengths and resources according to the BASIC PH model, oriented to the child's age. Also offer an explanation for the grown-ups. Emphasize:

a. physical resources - People of the physiological type cope and react mainly through physical expressions, reactions and bodily sensations. Their ways of dealing with stress are muscular or respiratory relaxation, physical exercise, physical activity, doing something focused on the problem, or doing it for the sake of doing it. Sports, meditation, eating, sleeping, massage, relaxing bath, etc. Physical activity may return the physical system to the desired balance.

b. cognitive resources- There are people whose preferred coping style is the use of cognitive thinking - therefore, it will help them to gather relevant information about reality, solve problems, use learning from experience and search for alternatives, build plans, understand the situation in terms of logic, bring order, assess damages and build priorities.

c. emotional resources- there are people who use more emotional expressions - it will help them to use expressions of emotions such as crying and laughing and even anger and to ask for emotional support from others. It is important to encourage emotional expression through speech, conversation, writing and creation. Breaking down and releasing through crying or laughing contribute to reducing stress.

d. faith resources - Faith belongs to the spiritual dimension of man and gives meaning to hardship and suffering. People tend to rely on beliefs, values and the search for meaning in order to guide and guide themselves in times of crisis stress. The reference here is not only to religious belief, but also to "I believe", feelings of vocation and mission such as the need for self-fulfillment. Helps them rely on hope, optimism, fatalism, mysticism, rituals and prayers, giving meaning to the event and situation and using different principles and values.

e. social relationship resources - These people are characterized by a social coping style. It will help them draw support from belonging to a group, accepting or taking a role, leaning on family, friends and pets.

f. imagination resources- People use imagination to ease a difficult reality. They will be helped by using creative activity, distraction such as watching entertainment programs on television, pleasant thoughts, using guided imagination or trying to imagine additional solutions to a problem, using humor, improvisation, an imaginary trip to another place, creating through the arts - drama, painting and sculpture.

Your role here is to identify in the story two coping resources from the model I've just detailed. Indicate the resources you identified in the story. In a separate paragraph, elaborate on how this resource is expressed in the story and provide additional explanation in a child's language. Then, in another separate paragraph, provide a detailed explanation about this resource as it appears in the "BASIC PH" model by Prof. Muli Lahad, and also provide explanation in a child's language.

12. Clarify with the users whether they identify these resources as dominant in their real-life experience. If they say yes – reinforce it in an empathetic and empowering manner. If they say no – find out which resource they identify as dominant in their real-life.

13. Discuss with the respondent how they help themselves use the resource you or they identified in their real life - in order to improve their experience, sense of continuity, and mood.

Stage C - Creating a Visual Story and Conclusion

14. Ask the respondent if they would like you to now present their entire story visually through six pieces of artwork that expresses the entire narrative process.

15. If they say yes – create the visual expression. note that: a. remember to maintain the artistic line and description of the characters and the artwork as it was in stage A in all six images. b. make the pictures suited for the child age. if he is about 13, make content in “G” and “PG-13”. If he is younger than 13, make on “G” content. refrain from morbid or suicidal or inappropriate content for children.

16. In conclusion, thank the respondent for their courage, reinforce them, and direct them to seek help from their close community and professionals if they feel the need.

Declaration of interests

☒ The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

☐ The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests:

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