



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The Role of Ex-POW's PTSD Symptoms and Trajectories in Wives' Secondary Traumatization

Greene, T., Lahav, Y., Bronstein, I., & Solomon, Z. (2014). The role of ex-POW's PTSD symptoms and trajectories in wives' secondary traumatization. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28, 666-674. DOI: 10.1037.a0037848.



In this self-report study, researchers evaluated secondary trauma and distress in wives of Israeli former prisoners of war (POWs) from the 1973 Yom Kippur War and in a matched control group of wives of non-POW combat Veterans. Wives of POWs with PTSD exhibit significantly more negative psychological outcomes than their counterparts.

Key Findings:

- Wives of ex-POWs with PTSD reported significantly greater secondary traumatization and general distress than wives of either ex-POWs or non-POW combat Veterans without PTSD.
- Wives of former POWs endorsed more psychiatric symptoms and poorer health than wives of non-POW combat Veterans.
- When considering their husbands' PTSD symptom trajectories, wives of ex-POWs with chronic PTSD reported significantly greater secondary traumatization than wives of ex-POWs with delayed onset PTSD or wives of resilient combat Veterans.
- The husbands' PTSD symptoms fully accounted for the relationships between the husbands' captivity and their wives' secondary traumatization and psychiatric symptom scores.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could provide education on secondary trauma to military partners/spouses, teaching them strategies for understanding and coping with distressing symptoms of PTSD in their Service members.
- Programs may wish to offer specialized classes for former POWs and their family members, affording them opportunities for peer support and informational resources.

Implications for Policies:

- Policies could support funding of outreach and educational services for family members of military personnel with PTSD.
- Policies could recommend funding for focused services for former POWs and their families.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could seek to more fully examine the experience of living with a partner with PTSD, possibly including qualitative inquiry.
- Future research could identify specific factors related to husbands' captivity or PTSD in general that confer risk for spousal secondary traumatization and distress.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- Data were derived from a larger study evaluating the longitudinal effects of war captivity on Veterans and their wives.
- Wives of Israeli Veterans completed self-report questionnaires assessing functional disability, psychiatric symptoms, physical health, and secondary traumatization.
- The Veteran husbands completed a self-report measure of PTSD at three time points; these scores were used to determine their PTSD trajectory.
- Analyses aimed at evaluating the effect of ex-POWs' PTSD status, symptoms, and trajectories on their wives' health, disability, psychiatric symptoms, and secondary traumatization.

Participants:

- The sample consisted of three groups: 66 wives of Israeli ex-POWs with PTSD, 36 wives of Israeli ex-POWs without PTSD, and 46 wives of Israeli non-POW combat Veterans without PTSD.
- The groups of women were similar in terms of age (mean = 58), years of marriage (mean = 34), number of children (mean = 3), and employment status (two-thirds employed).
- Wives of ex-POWs reported fewer years of education than wives of non-POW combat Veterans.

Limitations:

- The effect of wives' secondary trauma on husbands' symptoms may be bidirectional; however, that was not evaluated in the present study.
- The wives' mental health status prior to marriage was not evaluated; this may have impacted the findings.
- Resilience was defined as not having met criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD but did not preclude other maladaptive outcomes.
- The results may not generalize to husbands of traumatized wives and other demographic groups (e.g., Veterans of the U.S. military).

Assessing Research that Works

| Research Design and Sample | | | | | Quality Rating: | ★ ★ ★ |
|--|---|--|---|---|-----------------|-------|
| | Excellent (★★★★) | Appropriate (★★★) | Limited (★★) | Questionable (★) | | |
| The design of the study (e.g., research plan, sample, recruitment) used to address the research question was.... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Research Methods | | | | | Quality Rating: | ★ ★ ★ |
| | Excellent (★★★★) | Appropriate (★★★) | Limited (★★) | Questionable (★) | | |
| The research methods (e.g., measurement, analysis) used to answer the research question were... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Limitations | | | | | Quality Rating: | ★ ★ ★ |
| | Excellent Minor Limitations (★★★★) | Appropriate Few Limitations (★★★) | Limited Several Limitations (★★) | Questionable Many/Severe Limitations (★) | | |
| The limitations of this study are... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| Implications | | | | | Quality Rating: | ★ ★ ★ |
| | Excellent (★★★★) | Appropriate (★★★) | Limited (★★) | Questionable (★) | | |
| The implications of this research to programs, policies and the field, stated by the authors, are... | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable because authors do not discuss implications | | | | | | |
| Overall Quality Rating | | | | | | ★ ★ ★ |