



Supporting
Military Families
Through Research
and Outreach

PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The Contribution of Personal and Exposure Characteristics to the Adjustment of Adolescents Following War

Lavi, T., Green, O., & Dekel, R. (2013). *Journal of Adolescence*, 36, 21-30.



Civilian-
Focused
Article



This study examined the contributions of gender, prior trauma exposure, and traumatic event characteristics (proximity, level of exposure) to PTSD symptoms, distress, and life satisfaction in a large sample (n=2314) of northern Israeli 7th and 8th graders exposed to missile attacks in the 2006 Lebanon war. Fifteen percent reported moderate or severe PTSD symptoms 8-10 months after the war. Girls and those exposed to trauma prior to the war had more PTSD symptoms and distress and lower life satisfaction ratings.

Key Findings:

- Three percent of participants reported PTSD symptoms in the severe, 12% in the moderate, 31% in mild ranges.
- Both female participants and those who experienced pre-war traumatic events reported more PTSD symptoms, distress, and poorer life satisfaction compared to boys and those who did not report prior trauma.
- Exposure to multiple rocket attacks and knowing someone who was wounded or killed were associated with more PTSD symptoms and distress (although distress for multiple exposures was not significant).
- The variables studied explained 21% of the variance in PTSD symptoms, 15% of the variance in distress, and 5% of the variance in life satisfaction.
- A sense of shortage of basic necessities contributed significantly to PTSD, distress, and life satisfaction.

Implications for Programs:

- Programs could minimize fears and empower families by incorporating information in their programming that youth are largely resilient after exposure to missile shelling.
- Programs could replicate the extensive interventions in schools in the months following the wars.

Implications for Policies:

- Funding for preventive interventions following violence exposure might be helpful in preventing long-term mental health difficulties for adolescents.
- Continued support for mental health interventions for military youth may be beneficial.

Avenues for Future Research:

- Future studies could examine the influence of personality factors and psychological adjustment to shelling exposure.
- Prospective and longitudinal research could help illuminate how this adjustment is related to pre-exposure functioning, and to track trajectories of adjustment over time.
- Research could examine the impact of the preventative interventions conducted in the schools if another conflict arises.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu

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Background Information

Methodology:

- 8-10 months after the 2006 Lebanon war, questionnaires were distributed to youth at 14 schools along Israel's northern border.
- 3,241 students filled out the questionnaire, but some were eliminated from analyses because they did not fill out the questionnaire on their own (48), only partly completed it (660) or were physically wounded (219).
- Demographics, measures of earlier traumatic events, PTSD, distress, life satisfaction, exposure to war, sense of fear, shortage of basic necessities, level of exposure to missile attacks, whether they knew anyone wounded or killed, and media exposure were assessed in the questionnaire.
- Distress and life satisfaction levels were compared to previous norms with t-tests; PTSD symptoms, distress and life satisfaction were compared by gender, whether or not they had prior trauma and between grades via t-tests.

Participants:

- 2,314 Israeli seventh and eighth graders.
- Mean age=13.5, SD=.67, range=12-15.
- 51% female.

Limitations:

- The study was conducted 8-10 months after the conflict, and retrospective reports of functioning are often unreliable.
- The questionnaires were distributed in the classroom which could have influenced their responses.
- There were a large number of partially completed questionnaires. These participants may have varied from completers in important ways (distress, personality, etc.).
- Self-report questionnaires precluded a careful examination of personality factors.

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					★★★★★