



Supporting  
Military Families  
Through Research  
and Outreach

# PUTTING RESEARCH TO WORK FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

## Prevalence and Determinants of PTSD among Palestinian Children Exposed to Military Violence

Quota, S., Punamäki, R., & Sarraj, E. (2003). Prevalence and determinants of PTSD among Palestinian children exposed to military violence. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 12, 264-272.  
doi:10.1007/s0078-003-0328-0.



121 Palestinian children living in an area of bombardment participated in a study to assess the prevalence and determinants of PTSD. Child PTSD symptoms were predicted by child gender, child age, maternal education and maternal PTSD symptoms.

### Key Findings:

- 54% of the children were experiencing a severe level of PTSD symptoms, 36% a moderate level, and 9% a mild level.
- Mothers' own PTSD symptoms and educational level were important determinants of their children's PTSD, together with child gender and exposure to traumatic events.
- 99% of children and mothers reported experiencing shelling of their homes, 95% of children and 98% of mothers reported being tear gassed, and 52% of children saw a stranger being killed.
- Intrusion symptoms were most common among younger girls whose mothers reported a high level of PTSD.
- Avoidance symptoms were common among all children who had personally been the target of violence and whose mothers were better educated and reported a high level of PTSD.

### Implications for Programs:

- Programs could offer classes for parents about effective ways to support children who are dealing with mental health concerns.
- Programs could offer activities for children exposed to traumatic events that allow children to connect with peers who have had similar experiences and provide mutual support.
- Programs could partner with school based personnel to collaborate in supporting youth affected by trauma.

### Implications for Policies:

- Policies could allocate funds for mental health evaluation and services for both parents and children of refugees.
- Policies could recommend that refugee re-settlement programs be offered professional development on how to recognize mental health problems in children
- Policies could recommend the provision of professional development for school based personnel regarding helping students affected by trauma.

### Avenues for Future Research:

- Future research could measure fathers' attributes and include assessment of family resiliency.
- Additional studies could follow these children and mothers longitudinally to see how their PTSD symptoms may change over time.
- Future research could study children and their families affected by other forms of trauma.

Prepared by the Military REACH Team.

For additional information, please visit [reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu](http://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu)

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## Background Information

### Methodology:

- Psychologists approached every third family in their home in January-February 2002 in two badly damaged areas in the Southern Gaza Strip where shelling had occurred in the fall of 2001.
- 100% of those who were approached chose to participate.
- One child (age 6-16) and his/her mother participated in an interview and completed questionnaires.
- Descriptive statistics were calculated, and established thresholds for PTSD were used. Hierarchical multiple regressions examined the determinants of PTSD symptoms among children.

### Participants:

- 121 Palestinian children (55% boys) and their mothers participated.
- 88% were refugees from the 1948 war and 13% of the children were native citizens of the Gaza Strip.
- Average age of child = 8.34 years (SD=3.40 years), average age of mothers = 34.00 years (SD=8.20 years).
- 53% of mothers had completed secondary education, 23% preparatory, 14% only primary school, 10% were university graduates.
- Racial/ethnic composition: 100% Palestinian.

### Limitations:

- The sample is small, and these results may not generalize to other populations.
- Fathers' mental health and related variables were not considered.
- The time period was relatively short and military action was still on-going; these results may change as time passed.

## 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					