

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
International  
Military

## Secondary Traumatization Among Former Prisoners of Wars' Adult Children: The Mediating Role of Parental Bonding

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**SUMMARY:** An examination of secondary traumatization symptoms and parental bonding among adult children of former prisoners of war (ex-POWs' children) that were compared to adult children of comparable Veterans (controls' children). In addition, the mediating role of parental bonding and exposure to stress in the association between group and secondary traumatization symptoms was analyzed. Overall, forty years after the war ended, the experience of living with ex-POWs is associated with ex-POWs' children psychological outcome.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Ex-POWs' children reported a higher number of secondary traumatization symptoms and lower levels of fathers' care, when compared to controls' children.
- Parental care and exposure to stress stemming from fathers' behaviors and fathers' care was found to mediate the association between the ex-POWs' children and secondary traumatization symptoms.
- Ex-POWs' children show positive relations between secondary traumatization symptoms and father overprotection and negative relations with father care.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide safe spaces for ex POWs and their families to interact with others who have had similar experiences
- Develop training for professionals who work with military families around secondary trauma and its effects on military spouses and children
- Provide a screening and support for military children that might be effected negatively by secondary trauma

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Extend and support policies that clearly focus on the needs of military members who have undergone traumatic experiences, their children, and spouses
- Support professional development for education professionals who work with military families (e.g., teachers, counselors, social workers) around issues associated with secondary trauma
- Develop an awareness campaign around the importance of Service members' parental bonding

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## METHODS

- Both the adult children of former POWs and adult children of a matched group of Veterans were recruited through their fathers who had participated in a related previous study.
- Each participants completed a battery of self-reported questionnaires such as the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) inventory, exposure to stress questionnaire, and the life events questionnaire.
- Initially a preliminary analysis of the group differences was run, then a series of analyses that looked at any associations between exposure to stress and secondary traumatization symptoms were conducted.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were Israeli ex-POWs' children (N = 98) and controls' children (N = 90), whose fathers fought in the 1973 Yom Kippur War.
- Children of POWs comprised of 48 (49%) men and 50 (51%) women, whose ages ranged from 20 to 58 years and children of a matched group of Veterans comprised of 40 (44%) men and 50 (56%) women, in an age range of 24 to 46 years.
- Twenty-five children of POWs (25%) were born before the war and captivity, the rest after the war; whereas, 12 children of Veterans (13%) were born before the war, and the rest after war.

## LIMITATIONS

- Generalizability was limited due to the inclusion of only one set of POWs and their children.
- The lack of pre-captivity assessment of children's characteristics limits our ability to explain what was associated with their secondary traumatization symptoms.
- The parental bonding measure was based upon the participant's recollection of parental care and overprotection during his or her first 16 years of life; which for all was at least 30 years ago.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Engage different groups of prisoners of war to see if their experiences or levels of trauma influenced their children's secondary traumatization symptoms or parental bonding any differently
- Focus on prisoners of war spouses' secondary traumatization symptoms and marital relationship
- Conduct a longitudinal study of returned POW and bonding with their children

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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