

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
International
Military

Secondary Growth Among Former Prisoners of War's Adult Children: The Result of Exposure to Stress, Secondary Traumatization, or Personality Traits?

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SUMMARY: A comparison of secondary posttraumatic growth among adult children of former prisoners of war (POWs) with adult children of comparable Veterans (controls' children) were examined. In addition, the role of fivefactor personality traits and the associations between exposure to stress stemming from fathers' behaviors, secondary traumatization symptoms, and secondary posttraumatic growth were analyzed.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Former POWs' children reported higher levels of secondary posttraumatic growth compared with the controls' children.
- Secondary traumatization symptoms were found to mediate the association between research group and secondary posttraumatic growth.
- Among former POWs' children, extroversion and openness to the experience personality traits, as well as exposure to stress, were found to predict secondary posttraumatic growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Incorporate into program curriculum, resources that build on the positive aspects of the trauma experience
- Connect former POWs and their families with others having similar experiences
- Develop training for professionals who work with military families to support children around the topic of secondary posttraumatic growth

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support collaboration between military branches and community organizations that are building awareness and developing programming around military children and spouses who suffer from secondary trauma
- Extend and support policies that focus on the needs of military members, their children, and spouses after traumatic events
- Support professional development for education professionals who work with military families (e.g., teachers, counselors, social workers) about the positive developmental outcomes for children and spouses exposed to secondary trauma

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METHODS

- Adult children of former POWs and adult children of a matched group of Veterans were recruited through their fathers who had participated in a previous related study.
- Each participant filled out a posttraumatic stress disorder inventory, posttraumatic growth inventory, big five inventory, exposure to stress questionnaire, and the life events checklist.
- A series of analyses were conducted to ascertain any differences between groups, and any associations between exposure to stress, secondary traumatization symptoms, secondary posttraumatic growth dimensions and personality traits.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants consisted of 98 Israeli children of POWs, and 90 children of a matched group of Veterans of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.
- Children of POWs comprised of 48 men and 50 women, whose ages ranged from 20 to 58 years, and children of a matched group of Veterans comprised of 40 men and 50 women, in an age range of 24 to 46 years.
- Twenty-five children of POWs were born before the war and captivity, the rest after the war; whereas, 12 children of Veterans were born before the war, and the rest after war.

LIMITATIONS

- There was no pre-captivity assessment of children's characteristics which limited the studies ability to explain what was associated with their secondary traumatization symptoms.
- Generalizability was limited due to the inclusion of only one set of prisoners of war from the 1973 Yom Kippur War and their children.
- The exposure to stress and life events checklist was based upon the participant's recollection of events during his or her life; which for some of the events was over 30 years ago.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Conduct a longitudinal study from the time the POWs returned through their children's developmental stages
- Engage different groups of POWs to see if different experiences or levels of trauma influenced their children's secondary posttraumatic growth in different ways
- Focus on POWs spouses' secondary traumatization symptoms and marital relationship

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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