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Risk Factors for DSM 5 PTSD Symptoms in Israeli Civilians During the Gaza War

S. Gil¹, M. Weinberg¹

¹School of Social Work, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

Introduction: PTSD follows and is a result of exposure to a traumatic event. However, the exposure by itself is not a sufficient precondition for the onset of PTSD, leading investigators to examine risk factors for the development of PTSD following such exposure.

Objective: The current study examined the association between levels of DSM 5 PTSD symptoms with pre- and peri-traumatic PTSD risk factors.

Aim: Specifically, the study focused on gender, peri-traumatic dissociation, and social support, levels of objective and subjective threat, and trait tendency for forgiveness as PTSD risk factors.

Method: 501 Israeli civilians were assessed during real-time exposure to missile and rocket fire at the eruption of the Gaza war. Assessments took place two weeks after the beginning of this military operation. The study utilized a revised self-assessment PTSD symptoms questionnaire adhering to DSM 5 diagnostic criteria, formulated and validated by the authors.

Results: A structural equation model (SEM) design revealed that higher levels of forgiveness toward situations but not for self or for others were associated with fewer PTSD symptoms, while peri-traumatic dissociation and high levels of objective and subjective threat were positively associated with PTSD symptoms. Additionally, females were at higher risk for PTSD symptoms than males.

Conclusions: The findings of the study are of significance in applying the revised version of the PTSD DSM 5 diagnostic criteria in a unique real-time combat situation, thereby directing preventive attention to those vulnerable to the development of elevated levels of PTSD symptoms in the short and long run.