



The Intergenerational Effect of War

The exposure of children to violence is widespread. More than 1 billion children and adolescents today live in regions affected by armed conflict.¹ Even in more developed areas, young people are increasingly exposed to violent actions, images, and settings.

To what extent does exposure to violence scar children? There are 2 common perspectives. The first is the idea that “violence begets violence” and that children exposed to violence at a young age will grow up to be more violent adults.² The second is the “resilience hypothesis,” which asserts that coping in the face of violence is possible with the right support, thus mitigating its effect on quality-of-life outcomes.³ A deeper understanding of these perspectives on the intergenerational effect of war is central to the work of health care professionals around the world.

There is a growing body of evidence for how and when violence is propagated across generations that has an immediate relevance to our understanding of modern warfare. Until recently, most of our knowl-

Table. Research on the Intergenerational Effect of War

Mechanisms Studied	Population	Findings
Effect of severe parental traumatization on child rearing; hopelessness, temperament, personality, attitudes, interpersonal expectations ⁴	Holocaust survivors	Parental behavior correlated with severity of parental Holocaust traumatization. Perceived parental burden was a significant mechanism by which trauma has effects across generations by abrading generational boundaries and leading to parent-child role reversal.
PTSD; family and marital adjustment; parenting problems; violence; mental health, drug, and alcohol problems and behavioral problems of children ⁵	US military veterans	Compared with families of male veterans without current PTSD, families of male veterans with current PTSD showed highly elevated levels of severe and wide-ranging problems in marital and family adjustment, as well as deficits in parenting skills and higher levels of violent behavior.
PTSD and depressive disorders; stress of war trauma, resettlement, and recent life events ⁶	Refugees	Relationships were observed between war trauma, resettlement stressors, and symptoms of PTSD in refugees and their children. Depressive symptoms were more linked to recent stressors, whereas PTSD was linked to past trauma.

Abbreviation: PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder.

programs that help violence-affected caregivers learn alternatives to aggression in child rearing, as well as initiatives to ensure that all members of the family are considered in the development of

mental health and social services. It may be true that war is as old as humanity itself; however, the intergenerational transmission of violence does not have to be.

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