

The Effect of Terror-Related Events on Psychiatric Emergency Department Visits in Israel

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Introduction

- On October 7th, 2023, Israel experienced a massive and brutal terror attack
- While there have unfortunately been many terrorist attacks in world history, some quite large, it is not easy to identify events that had such a large impact on the place where they occurred
- Previous studies have suggested that terror events do not meaningfully impact visits to the psychiatric emergency department (ED), but it is not known if larger events would have a different effect

Results

- The number of people arriving to the psychiatric ED for evaluation and treatment during a one-month period increased from 177 in 2022 to 259 in 2023, a 46% increase (Fig. 1)
- The sex, age, marital status, ethnic group of patients arriving did not clearly change between the two years
- In 2023, 256 patients arrived in the ED for psychiatric evaluation and/or treatment, 46% more than in 2022. Of these, 64% were examined due to symptoms related to the terror attack

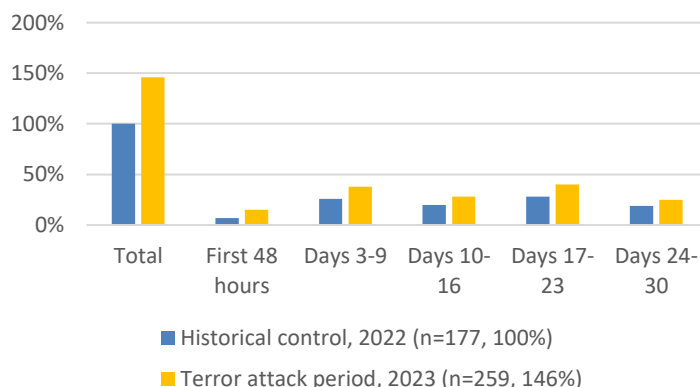
Aim

- To examine the utilization of the psychiatric ED following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, compared to the analogous period the year prior

Methods

- Study type: Cohort study
- Setting: Tel-Aviv Sourasky Medical Center
- Study design: Comparison of patients arriving to the ED due to psychiatric symptoms during the month post-attack with the previous year
- Outcome measures: Number of patients arriving, sociodemographic profile of patients, arrival and discharge diagnoses, clinical course, and disposition
- Data collection: Retrieved from the medical records
- Data analysis: Descriptive statistics, T-tests and chi-square exams

Fig. 1: Distribution of arrivals to the psychiatric ED by week for the terror attack period and the analogous period the previous year



- ED length of stay was 1.3 hours shorter in 2023 than the previous year ($p<0.001$)
- In 2023, significantly fewer patients had a prior psychiatric diagnosis (68% vs. 89%, $p<0.001$). Many patients were diagnosed with acute stress reaction or acute stress disorder in the ED, compared to almost no such diagnoses in 2022 (14% and 43% vs. 0% and 1%, $p<0.001$)

Conclusions:

- Large terror events profoundly influence psychiatric ED visits
- Planning efforts for major emergencies should be adapted accordingly. One example would be to create a designated team to address the most common complaints