

Parents help-seeking behavior after the October 7th terror attack and its association with children's physical health

Presented by: Nili Neuthal

Collaborated with Amit Kramer^{1,2}, Yuval Bloch², Orly Weinstein³, Dana Tzur Bitan^{1,2}

¹Department of Community Mental Health, University of Haifa, ²Shalvata Mental Health Center, ³Clalit Health Service

Introduction

October 7th and the subsequent war led to unprecedented increase in mental health needs (Feingold et al., 2024; Levi-Belz et al., 2024). Previous research has identified parents as a vulnerability group for developing post-traumatic stress symptoms following life-threatening events (Fel et al., 2022), with parents' mental health having a critical role in buffering their children's response to trauma (Bryant et al., 2018; DesRoches et al., 2023).

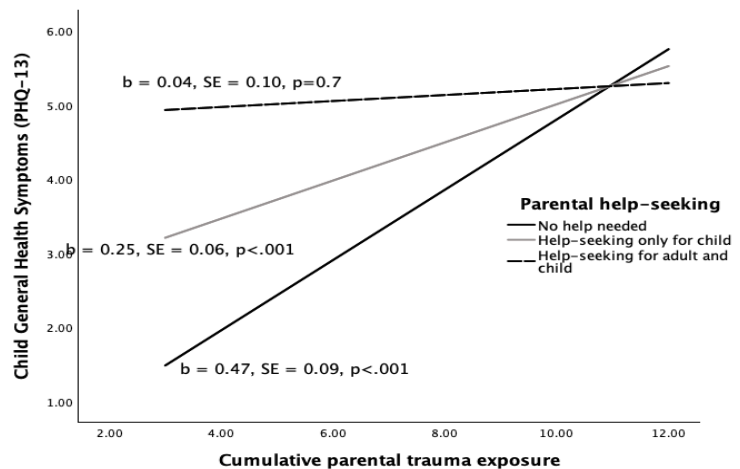
Current Research

This study aimed to examine whether parents help-seeking behavior (through psychological treatment) buffers the effect of parent traumatic exposure on the child's mental and physical health.

Method

Parents (N = 187) of children aged 6-18 completed a set of self-report measures, reporting on their and their children's traumatic exposure level (Feingold et al., 2024), parents distress level (HSCL-11; Lutz et al., 2006), children's distress level (PSC-17; Jellinek et al., 1986), children's general physical health (PHQ-13), and help-seeking behavior. Parents' age was 43 (SD=6.00), most were married (79.14%) and living in central Israel (82.35%). Most parents reported experiencing missile alarm sirens (94.12%), being exposed to videos of the attack via social media (79.14%) and having a close familial involvement in military or civil service (45.98%).

Figure 1. Parental help-seeking behavior moderates the effect of trauma on child's physical health



Results

Parental trauma exposure level was significantly associated with children's distress symptoms ($r=0.231$, $p=0.006$). Parents help-seeking behavior significantly moderated this association ($F = 11.83$, $p < 0.01$), such that when parents reported no need of psychological help ($b=0.47$, $SE=0.09$, $p<.001$), or needed help but did not seek for it for themselves or only for child ($b=0.25$, $SE= 0.06$, $p=0.00$), parental exposure was significantly associated with child's general health symptoms. However, this association was not significant for parents who sought psychological help for themselves and/or for their child ($b=0.04$, $SE= 0.10$, $p=0.70$).

Discussion

Parental trauma exposure might affect children's physical health (Pierce et al., 2020). The results of this study suggests that parental recognition of their own psychological needs may buffer these harmful effects and potentially increase children's resilience in the face of trauma. These findings underscore the importance of improving access to systemic interventions aimed to support parental mental health, strengthen family functioning, and foster protective factors that enhance children's capacity to cope with adversity.



References

- DesRoches D et al., (2023). The Impact of Parental Mental Health Diagnoses, Trauma, and Coping Mechanisms on Their Children's Well-Being. *Child Psychiatry Hum Dev.*
 Feingold D et al., (2024). PTSD, distress and substance use in the aftermath of October 7th, 2023, terror attacks in Southern Israel. *J Psychiatr Res.* 174, 153-158.
 Fel S et al., (2022). Relationship between Socio-Demographic Factors and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Cross Sectional Study among Civilian Participants' Hostilities in Ukraine. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 19(5), 2720.
 Pierce M et al., (2020). Effects of parental mental illness on children's physical health: systematic review and meta-analysis. *Br J Psychiatry.* 217(1), 354-363