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Title: Social Relationships Protect and Adolescent Depression in the Aftermath of a Suicide Bombing: Findings from Dimona, Israel

Text: Terrorism leads to adolescent depression, but very little is known about protective factors (Comer & Kendall, 2007). This paper investigates the role of social support on buffering the effects exposure to a suicide bombing on change in adolescents' depression. We investigated 90 adolescents (grades 7th-to-9th) residing in Dimona, Israel, prior, and subsequent to, their exposure to a suicide bombing. The goal of the study is to examine the prospective effect of social support – measured pre-bombing – from friends, parents and school personnel on the link between bombing related stress and adolescent depression.

Seven months prior to the suicide bombing, adolescent students completed a battery of questionnaires in class as part of an ongoing investigation of youth risk/resilience under stress. Adolescents were interviewed by phone as to their bombing related stress and depression a month subsequent to the suicide bombing. Study measures were the children's version of the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Child Depression Scale, an abbreviated version of the Perceived Social Support Scale, and an item assessing bombing-related stress.

Bombing-related stress was associated with an increase in continuous levels of depression during the pre-post bombing period ($B = .29, p = .006$). Pre-bombing social support from friends buffered against this depressogenic effect ($B = -.29, p = .010$): Adolescents reporting high bombing stress evinced an increase in depression if they reported low levels of friends' support ($B = .61, p = .0001$), but not high levels of friends' support ($B = .00, p = .98$). As well, social support from friends predicted an increase in adolescent depression over time when bombing stress was low ($B = .34, p = .026$).

These results indicate that in adolescence, social support from friends might serve as a powerful, naturalistic protective resource during exposure to terrorism, but that in the absence of bombing stress, social support from friends may also be a double edged sword, potentially imbuing risk as well as resilience. This mixed blessing of social support is highly compatible with recently emerging findings as to this complex psychosocial construct (Gleason et al., 2008; Wills et al., 2004). Accordingly, interventions that focus on the peer group must be cautious of potentially iatrogenic effects.

Additional, long-term follow data were collected from the sample over the summer and will be analyzed prior to this symposium to examine the longevity of the effects described above, as well as the effects of bombing-related stress on change in perceived social support.

Theme Groups: 1 Key social relationships

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