

WG 3 (Psychological Health)

Building Resilience as Primary and Secondary Prevention in Times of War Mental Resilience Branch Work at War Days

Neta Li Zelichover.

Medical Corps, IDF.

Background and Rationale:

The opening events of the Iron Swords War on October 7, 2023, posed immense challenges for the IDF's mental health system. Necessitating action on two fronts. On one hand, there was an urgent need for intensive treatment of combat stress reactions in multiple battle zones within Israel, affecting entire units exposed to intense combat, casualties, and injuries—both among IDF soldiers and civilians. On the other hand, the rapid recruitment of thousands of reservists and the preparation of forces for maneuvering in enemy territory to the north and the south, required immediate preparation and preventative interventions. The sheer scale of those exposed and affected called for broad, immediate measures—both for primary prevention to strengthen the resilience of IDF soldiers and for secondary prevention to mitigate the risk of long-term mental health consequences.

Mental resilience Branch:

The IDF Mental Health Center has long been dedicated to strengthening soldiers' psychological resilience. However, the current Mental Resilience Division was established during the war to enhance resilience among active-duty and reserve soldiers and to reduce mental health disorders among service members. Throughout the war, numerous intervention protocols were developed and launched, based on research available and trauma literature. Simultaneously, programs were designed to integrate these approaches from enlistment onward, preparing soldiers for military service. Given the war's uncertain duration and the limited global literature on such a conflict, addressing these challenges remains complex. The Mental Resilience Division positions itself as a leading professional body in Israel, setting directives for resilience-building efforts. It collaborates with Mental Health professionals in academia and civilian Resilience Centers in Israel. Protocols have been developed for transitions between mental states and combat zones, post-battle trauma processing, coping with mass casualties, physical and emotional regulation, mind-body workshops, crisis communication skills, and more. Additionally, informational videos were produced to guide soldiers' families on supporting their loved ones returning from war. The Research Department of the Mental Resilience Branch focuses on evaluating the protocols developed during the war, including the effectiveness of the "Resources Protocol," "iCOVER," and post-combat processing methods. Additionally, we explore mind-body intervention practices that enhance resilience, such as yoga, Pilates, biofeedback, and improving communication patterns and their impact on psychological resilience measures.

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Mental Health Intervention Following UAV Crash at Golani Brigade Training Camp

Avia Gaon, Reut Cohen.

Medical Corps, IDF.

Background and Rationale:

The tragic UAV crash on January 13, 2024, at the Golani Brigade training camp injured 62 soldiers and claimed the lives of four, posing an unexpected psychological challenge outside the combat zone. The primary question addressed is how to efficiently manage psychological crises in non-combat environments. The findings of this intervention offer valuable insights into reducing psychological morbidity, ensuring rapid recovery and resilience within military units.

Methodes:

This qualitative intervention focused on the entire affected unit, emphasizing soldiers directly exposed to the event. The intervention was structured around stress response treatment principles, centering on proximity, immediacy, and expectancy. Data collection occurred through 84 group discussions and 167 individual sessions over the first two weeks, alongside continuous clinical support within the unit.

Results:

The intervention's effectiveness was highlighted by an exceptionally low dropout rate, with only a few soldiers experiencing unresolved emotional crises despite intensive care. This underscores the program's success in mitigating psychological attrition and facilitating a swift return to routine. The approach focused on immediate, tailored interventions demonstrated significant resilience enhancement among soldiers.

Conclusions:

The intervention emphasizes the crucial role of rapid, differentiated responses, continuous clinical support, and commander presence during crises. These elements were instrumental in reducing emotional distress and ensuring a smooth transition back to normalcy. The study's implications suggest that maintaining these principles in future interventions will bolster resilience and psychological well-being in military contexts, providing a model for addressing similar challenges in the future.