

WG 3 (Psychological Health)

Soldiers with Acute Stress Disorder: Trajectory of Recovery and Return to Readiness After Frontline Treatment

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Background and Rationale:

The literature on the course, treatment, and return to readiness of soldiers with Acute Stress Reactions (ASR) and Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) is limited. This study aims to describe the disease trajectory of Israeli soldiers with ASR who were treated at frontline treatment centers using the Proximity-Immediacy-Expectation (PIE) approach.

Methods:

A retrospective chart review was conducted on 1,450 soldiers who received treatment at frontline treatment centers between October 2023 and January 2024. The primary outcome measure included a one-year follow-up to assess the diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its severity, along with the return to operational readiness in original units or transfer to different units. Additionally, the need for referral to rear treatment centers for more intensive care was evaluated. Data were collected from soldiers' medical records, and statistical analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between treatment outcomes and various factors.

Results:

Of the 1,450 soldiers, 81% were not diagnosed with PTSD and remained in their original units. 12% were diagnosed with moderate PTSD and transferred to different units, while 7% were discharged due to severe PTSD. Among conscripted soldiers, 65% were not diagnosed with PTSD and stayed in their original units, while 13% were discharged due to severe PTSD.

Conclusions:

These results highlight the importance of early intervention in maintaining operational readiness. The majority of soldiers remained in their original units, indicating that effective frontline treatment can preserve readiness. The 19% who were transferred or discharged due to severe PTSD emphasize the need for ongoing mental health support. Integrating comprehensive psychological care into military readiness strategies is essential for maintaining the effectiveness of combat units.

WG 3 (Psychological Health)

Iron Swords Psychological Support Hotline: A Novel Approach to Military Mental Health Care During Wartime

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Background and Rationale:

On October 7, 2023, following Hamas' attack on Israel, the IDF Medical Corps recognized the urgent need for accessible psychological support for soldiers. Traditionally, military mental health care adheres to Salmon's principles of proximity, immediacy, and expectation of return to function. While mental health officers (MHOs) are deployed in combat zones to provide face-to-face intervention, the unprecedented scale of the attack required an immediate, professional, and accessible response for soldiers exposed to trauma.

Intervention Description:

In response, a Psychological Support Hotline was launched on October 8, 2023, this hotline enabled soldiers from any location to connect with an MHO within minutes. Available 24/7, the hotline filled a critical gap until field-based mental health teams could fully mobilize.

Findings:

In the first four months, the hotline handled 3,326 calls. Usage was highest in the initial phase, averaging 72 calls per day in the first month, dropping to 24 daily thereafter. Approximately 40% of calls were urgent, from soldiers directly exposed to combat, while others involved severe distress, such as grief and anxiety. 48% of cases were resolved within the call, while others required referrals for further treatment.

Conclusions:

The hotline introduced a new model of remote psychological intervention in the military, providing immediate and structured support. It also served as a resource for families, commanders, and civilian professionals. This approach highlights the importance of rapid-access psychological care and underscores the need for further research on long-term effects and potential integration into standard military mental health protocols.