

period ( $\beta = 0.016$ ; 95% CI, 0.006-0.026).

**Conclusions and relevance:**

The findings of this cohort study suggest that although short-term emotional distress increased after national trauma, the percentage of suicide-related calls decreased. These results support previous studies suggesting that suicidality is not one of the immediate reactions to such trauma

WG 3 (Psychological Health)

## Mental Health Challenges Among RPA Operators: A Review of Past Research and a Proposed Follow-Up Study

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**Background and Rationale:**

Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) operators play a crucial role in modern warfare, particularly in high-intensity conflicts. During the Iron Swords War, Israeli Air Force RPA operators conducted an unprecedented number of missions, underscoring their strategic significance. However, their role entails unique psychological stressors, including prolonged exposure to combat imagery, moral dilemmas, and cognitive overload. Previous research has linked RPA operations to PTSD, depression, burnout, and moral injury. This study aims to identify risk and protective factors affecting RPA operators' mental health during wartime.

**Methods:**

The study will employ a multi-phase approach using existing data and self-report surveys:

Phase 1: Analyze mental health and medical service referral rates before and during wartime, given prior research linking psychological distress to physical complaints.

Phase 2: Examine demographic factors (e.g., age, experience, marital status) and their association with referral rates.

Phase 3: Compare psychological distress and help-seeking behaviors among RPA operators, Air Force pilots, and elite special forces.

Phase 4: Conduct anonymous surveys assessing PTSD (PCL), depression (BDI), substance use, and moral injury— variable not yet studied among Israeli RPA operators.

**Expected Results:**

Findings will highlight distress patterns, high-risk subgroups, and protective factors to address key research questions:

- The impact of operational intensity on the mental health of RPA operators.
- Differences in mental health outcomes among RPA operators, pilots, and special forces.
- The role of moral injury in the psychological distress of RPA operators.

**Conclusions & Implementation:**

This study will provide critical insights into the mental health challenges of RPA operators. Insights will enhance mental health interventions, resilience training, and support strategies, helping sustain operational effectiveness while safeguarding psychological well-being.