

Social support buffers adolescent depression after terrorist attacks

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Researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) have conducted a "before and after" study of depression and terrorist attacks in adolescents, demonstrating that strong social support from friends is a buffer from depression in terrorism-related stress.

The study, believed to be the first of its type, was published in the July issue of *Pediatrics*, the journal of The American Academy of Pediatrics.

"Terrorism often leads to adolescent depression, but little is known about protective factors," said Prof. Golan Shahar from the Department of Psychology at BGU, who conducted the study with Dr. Christopher Henrich from Georgia State University.

The team examined [adolescents](#) (grades 7-9) who were indirectly exposed to a suicide bombing in Dimona, Israel who prior to the bombing there had already completed a questionnaire as a control group in a study of youth risk/resilience under stress for another study. When the suicide bombing occurred, the researchers decided to focus on the factors that might have a protective effect against developing depression as a result of a traumatic effect, such as the bombing.

Pre-bombing depression and social support from friends, which were measured during initial data collection were used to predict post-bombing depression measured by a perceived social support scale.

Participants were interviewed by telephone 30 days after the bombing

about their bombing-related stress and depression. None of the Dimona teenagers had directly witnessed the bombing, but some had heard the explosion, while others knew people who had suffered physical or emotional damage, or saw media reports of the attack.

"The results showed that bombing-related perceived stress was associated with an increase in continuous levels of [depression](#) from before to after the bombing. Pre-bombing [social support](#) from friends buffered against this effect," said Shahrar. "We found that the more socially happy adolescents were, the easier it was for them to protect against the depressogenic effect of terrorism-related perceived [stress](#)."

Shahrar states that the "findings should serve as a basis for the development of innovative preventive interventions for adolescents exposed to terror attacks."

Source: American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev ([news](#) : [web](#))

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