

Watching TV coverage of terror makes viewers feel threatened

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Viewing TV coverage of terrorist events causes deterioration of psychological resources, such as commitment and a sense of success, and to feeling threatened, which in turn can also lead to loss of resources and other negative affects. This has been found in a new study at the University of Haifa. "Mass media plays a central role in reporting on terrorism and political violence. The present study shows that watching this type of coverage on television has negative effects, even for someone who was not at all involved in an event being viewed," said Prof. Moshe Zeidner, who headed the study.

The current research, which Prof. Zeidner conducted with Prof. Hasida Ben-Zur and Shlomit Reshef, set out to examine whether exposure to [television](#) reportage of terror events or political violence toward Israelis could pose some form of "indirect threat" on the viewer, even if he or she had no involvement in the event, and whether such an indirect threat might weaken the viewer's psychological resources – much like a direct threat would do.

78 students took part in the study, representing the diverse cultural sectors of Israeli society. Of these students, 39 watched video clips of terror attacks or political attacks on Israelis, as broadcast in the news over the past decade. The control group watched same-length videos showing non-violent everyday events as they appeared in the news.

The results showed that the students who had viewed terror events felt more personally threatened and reported a significantly lower level of

psychological resources (such as their sense of success, importance and commitment) after watching, compared to the control group. The first group also reported higher levels of negative feelings and mood.

The researchers noted that earlier studies that examined first-hand exposure to threats showed that compromised psychological resources and heightened levels of negative feelings can trigger secondary trauma and post-trauma symptoms. This could also be the case for individuals who feel threatened from indirect exposure to [terrorism](#) and political violence.

An interesting finding in the current study was a difference between the responses of its Jewish and Arab participants. The level of threat that the Arabs felt after watching a violent clip was significantly higher than for the Jewish participants.

"It is early yet to relate to the long-term effects of viewing terror events in the [mass media](#), but the current study does show that there are definite short-term effects. In an age when many violent events around the world are immediately broadcast in everyone's living room and office, we ought to be aware of the negative effects that this sort of exposure could have," the researchers noted.

Provided by University of Haifa

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