

# Parental CPTSD increases transmission of trauma to offspring of Tutsi genocide survivors

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Professor Amit Shrira, of Bar-Ilan University's Interdisciplinary Department of Social Sciences, who co-authored the study with Dr. Ben Mollov, a political scientist at Bar-Ilan University who specializes in conflict resolution, and Ms. Chantal Mudahogora, a therapist who survived the Tutsi genocide and currently resides in Canada. Credit: Bar-Ilan University

Nearly 25 years after the genocide against the Tutsi of Rwanda took the lives of up to one million victims, the offspring of Tutsi survivors, who weren't even born at the time, are among those most affected by trauma, according to a new study published by researchers at Bar-Ilan University, in collaboration with a Rwandan therapist and genocide survivor.

The study assessed complex PTSD (CPTSD) among Tutsi genocide survivors and its impact on their offspring. The researchers found that the intergenerational effects of genocide were most prominent among offspring of survivors who suffer from CPTSD. These offspring suffer from more symptoms, such as thoughts and nightmares about the genocide, and feel less equipped to handle adverse situations. The findings also allude to the possibility that whereas both parental PTSD & CPTSD increase secondary traumatization in offspring, parental CPTSD additionally affects offspring self-perceptions.

Whereas PTSD includes symptoms such as nightmares and overall restlessness, CPTSD includes graver impairments such as affective dysregulation, negative self-concept, and disturbed relationships. Following studies pointing to additional consequences of extreme traumatic events such as genocide, which are not covered by existing diagnosis of PTSD, CPTSD is scheduled to appear in the upcoming 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) as a new diagnostic entity.

The preliminary findings, published in the journal *Psychiatry Research*, highlight CPTSD as a rather frequent debilitating condition among Tutsi genocide survivors. "For the first time, to the best of our knowledge, these findings demonstrate that CPTSD may have grave consequences not only for survivors themselves but also for their offspring who were born after the genocide," said Prof. Amit Shrira, of Bar-Ilan University's (BIU) Interdisciplinary Department of Social Sciences, who co-authored the study with Dr. Ben Mollov, a political scientist at BIU who

specializes in conflict resolution, and Ms. Chantal Mudahogora, a therapist who survived the Tutsi genocide and currently resides in Canada. "The bulk of existing literature focuses on the effects of parental PTSD, but we know of no works that looked at parental complex PTSD," he added. This pattern is also evident among Holocaust survivors and their offspring, whom Shrira has studied extensively.



Dr. Ben Mollov, a political scientist at Bar-Ilan University who specializes in conflict resolution, with Ms. Chantal Mudahogora, a therapist who survived the Tutsi genocide and currently resides in Canada, who co-authored the paper with Prof. Amit Shrira, of Bar-Ilan University's Interdisciplinary Department of Social Sciences. Credit: Chantal Mudahogora

"We need to understand that genocide and massive trauma can leave their mark not only on survivors who were directly exposed, but also on their offspring and probably on other family relatives, as well. We also know from previous studies that the effects of trauma may extend across several generations and linger for decades after the focal trauma took place. These insights should guide policy makers and clinicians when planning interventions aimed at mitigating the plight of traumatized individuals and their families, particularly in terms of increasing resilience. This can also bear relevance for improved intergroup relations," said Mollov.

The opportunity for Shrira and Mollov to study the genocide against Tutsi of Rwanda and cooperate with Mudahogora arose when Mudahogora heard Mollov present a research paper in Bangkok. When she shared with him her concern about the effects of post trauma on survivors of the genocide and their offspring, Mollov brought Shrira, who has studied extensively intergenerational trauma suffered by Holocaust survivors and their offspring, into the research partnership.

As the researchers learned more about survivors of the Tutsi [genocide](#), they were especially surprised to discover that they live among the Hutus who took part in the mass killing, and to learn from Mudahogora that through the Unity and Reconciliation Program spearheaded by the government of Rwanda, together with non-profit organizations and faith-based groups, both ethnic groups are making progress in living together peacefully and in harmony; there are even cases of Tutsi survivors who married Hutu perpetrators and brought them into their families. In the near future the researchers intend to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon among survivors and their [offspring](#).

The researchers hope to present their findings at a seminar in Rwanda and offer assistance in developing applied research and intervention strategies, such as treatment of trauma and seeking to promote unity and

reconciliation, to Rwandan stakeholders.

With the agreement between the Israeli prime minister and the Rwandan president to open embassies in each other's countries and establish closer ties, the researchers hope that their applied research can help strengthen Israeli-Rwandan relations for the social benefit of Rwanda.

**More information:** Amit Shrira, Parental PTSD, health behaviors and successful aging among offspring of Holocaust survivors, *Psychiatry Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.psychres.2018.11.060](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.11.060)

Provided by Bar-Ilan University

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