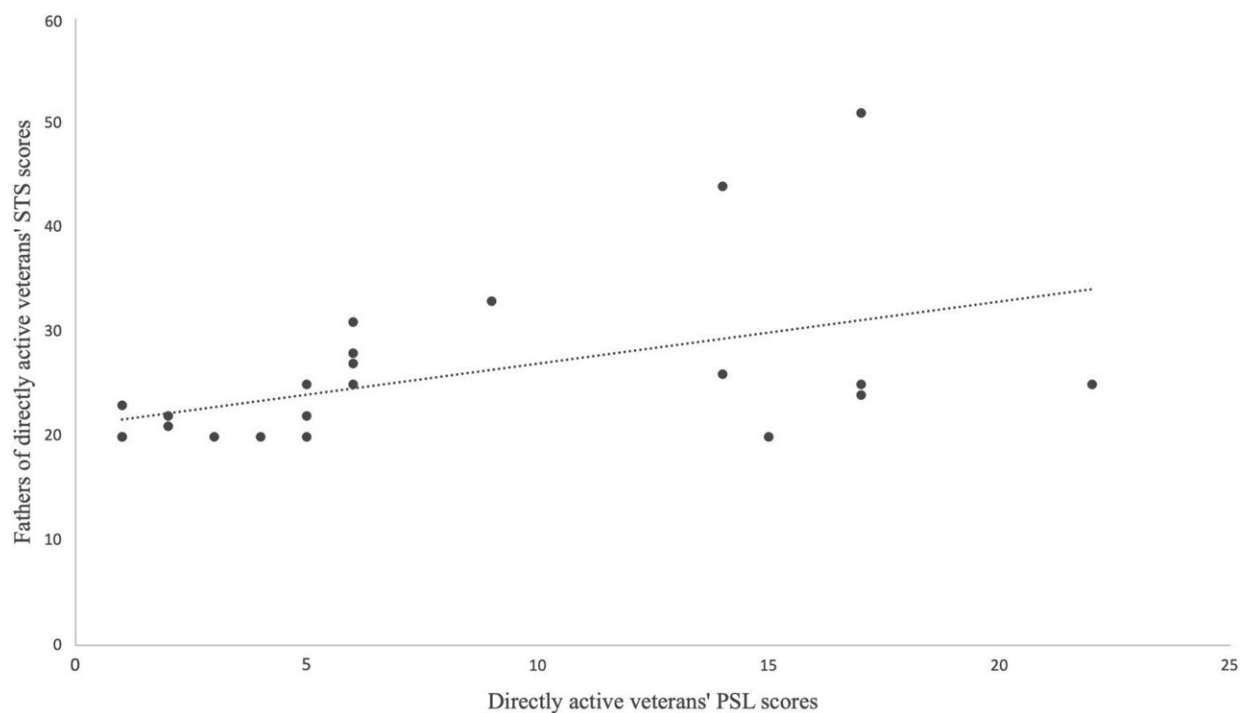


# Directly involved war veterans exhibit nearly twice the PTSD symptoms years after 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict

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Results of the correlation analysis. Correlation between post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (measured by the PTSD Symptom Levels Questionnaire – PSL-5) of the directly active war veterans (DAV) and their fathers' Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) scores (as measured by the Secondary Trauma Questionnaire). Pearson's  $r = .493$ ,  $p = .014$ . Credit: *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* (2023). DOI: 10.1080/20008066.2023.2235983

A new study conducted by Hebrew University researchers Shahaf Leshem, Eldad Keha, and Prof. Eyal Kalanthroff has uncovered insights into the enduring psychological effects of the 2014 Israel-Gaza military conflict. The study delves into the profound impact of traumatic events on both veterans and their parents and found that war veterans directly involved in the conflict showed almost double the PTSD symptoms compared to indirectly active veterans, even five years post-conflict.

Parents of active veterans exhibited higher secondary traumatic [stress](#), regardless of their awareness of their children's whereabouts during the war. Mothers experienced greater secondary traumatic stress (STS) than fathers, but a notable link emerged between war veterans' PTSD and fathers' secondary traumatic stress, indicating a poignant emotional connection and shared experience.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS) has traditionally been explored in therapists, spouses, and children of traumatized individuals. However, the study is among the first to investigate the correlation between children's posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and their parents' mental health outcomes. In particular, the study examines the long-term STS symptoms experienced by parents of war veterans—an area that has remained largely unexplored until now.

The research focuses on veterans of the 2014 Israel-Gaza war, comparing PTSD symptoms among directly active war veterans (DAV) and indirectly active war veterans (IAV), who were in combat military units but did not actively participate in the conflict. This distinction allowed for a natural experiment condition that sheds light on the psychological impact of direct involvement in the war.

The findings of the study are significant:

- Increased PTSD Symptoms Among Directly Active War

Veterans: The study found that veterans who were directly involved in the conflict (DAV, N=32) exhibited almost twice the level of PTSD symptoms compared to those who were indirectly active (IAV, N=26). This suggests that the traumatic experiences of war continue to have a substantial impact on veterans' mental health even five years after the conflict.

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress in Parents:** Parents of veterans who actively participated in the war displayed higher levels of secondary traumatic stress compared to parents of veterans who were not directly involved. Remarkably, these differences emerged despite the fact that most parents were unaware of their children's whereabouts during the war.
- **Impact on Mothers and Fathers:** Mothers exhibited higher secondary traumatic stress than fathers overall. However, a noteworthy correlation was observed between war veterans' post-traumatic stress and fathers' secondary traumatic stress symptoms. This indicates a strong emotional connection and shared experience between fathers and their [veteran](#) children.

The study provides critical insights into the long-term mental health outcomes of war veterans and their parents, shedding light on the often overlooked effects of traumatic events. These findings underscore the necessity of comprehensive support systems for both veterans and their families, emphasizing the interconnectedness of their psychological well-being.

The researchers' work holds significant implications for understanding trauma transmission within families, offering a platform for further research and interventions aimed at addressing the psychological needs of war veterans and their loved ones.

The research is published in the *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*.

**More information:** Shahaf Leshem et al, Post-traumatic stress in war veterans and secondary traumatic stress among parents of war veterans five years after the 2014 Israel-Gaza military conflict, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/20008066.2023.2235983](https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2023.2235983)

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