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Fathers' authoritative and authoritarian attitudes and paternal involvement in a climate of political violence

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing attention to fathers, in both research and practice, fatherhood in the context of political violence has been understudied. As a result, knowledge regarding practical intervention is also lacking. The current study examined whether fathers' parenting styles were related to their levels of exposure to political violence and whether exposure to political violence moderated the association between the father's parenting style and his parental involvement. The study included 293 Israeli fathers who were divided into three groups according to their levels of exposure to political violence: chronic ($n = 88$); acute ($n = 106$); and non-exposed ($n = 99$). Participants filled out questionnaires about their authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles and their paternal involvement. The group exposed to chronic threats reported higher levels of the authoritative parenting style than did the group exposed to acute threats. The authoritative parenting style contributed positively to paternal involvement. Acute exposure moderated the association between an authoritative parenting style and paternal involvement. These findings may indicate that the ability to be authoritative is somewhat jeopardized when the father is exposed to an acute security threat. The characteristics of acute exposure contributed to a weaker relationship between an authoritative parenting style and paternal involvement. Implications for family researchers and practitioners are discussed.

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KEYWORDS

Fatherhood; authoritative parenting; authoritarian parenting; paternal involvement; political violence

Introduction

Despite the increasing attention paid to fathers in both research and practice, there is still insufficient knowledge about paternal characteristics in externally stressful situations (Baum, 2015). In particular, fatherhood under conditions of political violence has been understudied and, therefore, knowledge regarding practical intervention is also lacking.

The father-child relationship provides a unique framework of interaction for child development, different from that offered by the mother-child relationship (Rodríguez Ruíz, Carrasco, & Holgado-Tello, 2016; Ryan, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006; Torres, Veríssimo, Monteiro, Ribeiro, & Santos, 2014). The father is considered by some scholars as

the ‘other parent.’ For the child, he represents reality and the possibility of differentiation-individuation, as opposed to the mother towards whom the child feels a regressive attraction (Trowell, 2002). The father’s role may be of crucial importance in the context of threatened security, as the dire and oftentimes life-threatening circumstances they are exposed to require ongoing protectiveness of children by parents, potentially compromising children’s sense of autonomy (Gil-Rivas, Holman, & Silver, 2004). However, only a few studies have addressed parental attitudes and parental functioning in this context. Additionally, most studies have focused on mothers (e.g. Cwikel, Segal-Engelchin, & Mendlinger, 2010; Dekel, 2004; Shamai, 2001, 2002), not on fathers.

This study examined whether fathers’ parenting styles were related to their levels of exposure to political violence and whether exposure to political violence moderated the association between the father’s parenting style and his parental involvement.

The association between parenting attitudes and parental involvement

Parental child-rearing beliefs and attitudes and their association with parental involvement have received substantial theoretical and research attention. Baumrind’s framework of parenting styles refers to cognitions, emotions, and behaviours that affect parental functioning and influence children’s life outcomes (Baumrind, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). According to Baumrind (1991, 2012), authoritative parenting reflects a balance between demandingness and responsiveness, which manifest in affectionate and low power parental techniques. Conversely, authoritarian parenting attitudes reflect high expectations of the child and a low tolerance for mistakes or inappropriate behaviour (Steinberg, 2011).

Most studies on parenting styles have focused on mothers (e.g. Chen et al., 2000; Mohanty, Pradhan, & Jena, 2015). Although it has been previously found that the father’s parenting style contributes to the degree and quality of paternal involvement in childcare (Gaertner, Spinrad, Eisenberg, & Greving, 2007; Lamb, 2010), supporting empirical evidence is still evolving. The few studies that do exist have focused on comparing fathers’ and mothers’ parenting styles, and have shown that fathers adopt more authoritarian attitudes than do mothers. Authoritarian fathers therefore report less involvement in child-rearing (e.g. Hoeve, Dubas, Gerris, van der Laan, & Smeenk, 2011). Fathers’ authoritative attitudes, however, have been found to promote paternal involvement (Mezulis, Hyde, & Clarke, 2004), as manifested in the concrete care, supervision and discipline, time spent with, and emotional care of their children (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987).

Nevertheless, when exploring the relationship between parenting style and involvement, it is important to recognize the father’s social context, which may contribute to this relationship (Greenfield, Suzuki, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2006). Several studies have shown that parenting styles should be examined in accordance with the family context and that the association between parental attitudes, parental involvement, and child outcomes are not absolute (see Selin, 2014). For example, it has been found that in stressful life conditions, such as those involving financial hardship, fathers tend to adopt an authoritarian parenting style and report a high level of paternal involvement only when imposing discipline; at the same time, they report low levels of involvement in emotional care (Paquette, Bolté, Turcotte, Dubeau, & Bouchard, 2000). Seemingly, stressful circumstances

may weaken fathers' ability to be responsive towards their children, which limits paternal involvement to supervisory dimensions. This could be significant in relation to fathers living in stressful conditions, such as political violence. To the best of our knowledge only a few studies have examined parenting attitudes in the context of political violence (Lavi & Slone, 2012). Therefore, to shed light on this issue the current study examined the relationship between levels of exposure to political violence and fathers' authoritative and authoritarian parenting attitudes. Furthermore, the study examined whether this relationship contributed to paternal involvement.

Parenting styles and paternal involvement in the context of political violence

Political violence – such as war, torture, forced disappearances, and terror attacks – has risen rapidly worldwide. Whether the events are acute or chronic, they affect daily routine and safety and can have long-term negative effects on individual and parental adjustment (Tangir, Dekel, Lavi, Gewirtz, & Zamir, 2017). A threatened security situation can evoke a wide range of emotions and reactions among parents, which could then be related to their parenting styles and levels of parental involvement. For example, in a study of parents after 9/11 in the United States, one of the most common feelings expressed by parents was the need to protect their children (Beauchesne, Kelley, Patsdaughter, & Pickard, 2002). This feeling may be particularly typical of fathers, as they tend to perceive themselves as the protectors of the family (Lamb, 2010). A previous study showed that the environment of children who grew up under conditions of political violence was characterized by strict rules and little flexibility, with the goal of protecting the children's lives, such as bans on spending time in public places and limiting their autonomy (Speisky, 2006).

Moreover, authoritarian parenting – which is characterized by high levels of parental demandingness and low levels of parental responsiveness – could also be associated with exposure to threat, given the parents' feelings of stress caused by the situation. This stress may then be reflected in their levels of parental involvement (Paquette et al., 2000). For example, during the Gulf War, children reported that their parents tried to calm them, but at the same time they also perceived their parents as being angrier and stricter (Bat-Zion & Levy-Shiff, 1993). A study among Palestinian children found that children who reported a high level of exposure to political violence perceived their parents as more authoritarian, more rejecting, and less affectionate, compared to children who reported low levels of exposure (Punamäki, Qouta, & El Sarraj, 1997).

Recent studies on political violence have emphasized the protective role played by warm and affectionate parenting (Lavi & Slone, 2012; Punamäki et al., 1997) as well as the risk factors posed by over-protective and controlling parenting, for children's adjustment (Lavi & Slone, 2012). For example, Lavi and Slone (2012) found that children with loving, affectionate, and caring parents were less likely to be psychologically affected by political violence than were children who had cold and distant parents. During war, high maternal control has been associated with children's greater distress (Dekel & Solomon, 2014). Additionally, among children who were highly exposed to war, those who perceived their mothers as less responsive exhibited greater distress than equally traumatized children who perceived their mothers as more responsive (Dekel & Solomon, 2014; Slone, Shechner, & Farah, 2012).

Though the aforementioned studies shed light on the possible relationship between parenting style and parental involvement in times of threatened security, most have focused on measuring maternal parenting styles from the child's perspective (Tangir et al., 2017). However, fathers, who represent the possibility of separation-individuation, may serve as a critical coping resource for their children in the context of political violence (Slone et al., 2012). Indeed, clinical experience with families in this context has shown that fathers who hold authoritative attitudes and are positively involved in their children's lives could promote their children's sense of safety while still encouraging their autonomy (Finklestein, 2016).

Questions remain regarding the role played by the level of threat exposure, relative to these paternal aspects. Chronic exposure to political violence is considered to be more pathogenic than an acute or short-term exposure (Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009). Thus, parents chronically exposed to political violence may tend to be more authoritarian, either to protect their child or as a result of the depletion of parents' mental resources (Punamäki et al., 1997).

Yet some studies suggest that despite the chronic exposure to threat, parents are able to develop effective coping strategies to help their children deal with the ongoing stressful events (Litvak-Hirsch & Lazar, 2012). It is, therefore, possible that parents habituate to the situation (e.g. Bleich, Gelkopf, & Solomon, 2003), learning to maintain an authoritative parenting style and engaging effectively with their children. The current study examined the possible contribution of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles to paternal involvement, comparing fathers who had been exposed to chronic or acute political violence with fathers who had not been exposed.

The present study

Israel is a small, developed, industrialized Western nation. Some of its individualistic values are relevant to Baumrind's framework of parenting styles (i.e. self-reliance, exploration, independence; Scharf, 2014). However, defining characteristics of Israeli society also include an emphasis on communal values and the importance of family (Lavee & Katz, 2003; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010). Such values might be explained by themes of trauma and persecution, which are a large part of Jewish history, and by the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict, which is a central facet of life in Israel (Canetti, Hall, Greene, Kane, & Hobfoll, 2014). Some of the security events related to this conflict are of a chronic nature, such as the repeated firing of Qassam rockets – dating from the year 2001 – towards the town of Sderot and the surrounding Gaza communities. During this time, more than 6000 rockets and 2500 mortar shells have been fired into the area, causing property damage, injury, and death, and undermining the residents' sense of safety (Besser & Neria, 2009). Other events have been more acute, such as the 2008 'Operation Cast Lead' in the Gaza Strip, which lasted for three weeks. During that operation, more than 660 Qassam rockets were fired towards Israel – some at the town of Sderot and the surrounding communities – and others in areas that had not previously been exposed to security threats (IICC, 2009).

The literature has indicated that fathers' authoritative attitudes contribute to positive paternal involvement with their children (Mezulis et al., 2004). However, the ability to balance between demandingness and responsiveness could be challenged by exposure to

security threats (Cohen, 2009). When exposure to such threats is of a chronic nature, emotional distress might be even deeper and longer-lasting (Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009), and it is reasonable to suggest that consequences related to parenting might follow suit.

Given the fact that to date there have not been sufficient attempts to study the unique characteristics of fatherhood in the context of political violence, the present study set out to examine the association between different levels of exposure to security threats (chronic/acute/non-exposed) and fathers' parenting styles. Based on the few existing studies that have examined the association between parenting styles and exposure to political violence (e.g. Speisky, 2006), we hypothesized that fathers who were exposed to security threats would report higher levels of the authoritarian parenting style and lower levels of the authoritative parenting style than fathers who were not exposed. Furthermore, given that chronic exposure to security threats is considered to be more pathogenic than acute exposure (Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009), we hypothesized that fathers chronically exposed to security threats would report higher levels of the authoritarian parenting style and lower levels of the authoritative parenting style than fathers in the acute and non-exposed groups.

We also hypothesized that an association would be found between parenting style and paternal involvement. In other words, an authoritative parenting style would be associated with high paternal involvement, and an authoritarian parenting style would be associated with low paternal involvement, except in terms of supervision and discipline.

Finally, based on the literature indicating that chronic exposure to security threats may cause a deeper depletion of parental resources, we hypothesized that the exposure level to security threats would constitute a moderating variable in the association between parenting style and paternal involvement. Specifically, in cases of chronic exposure the association between authoritarian parenting and paternal involvement would be negative and stronger than in cases of acute exposure.

Methods

Participants

The study included 293 married fathers, ranging in age from 20 to 56 ($M = 35.8$, $SD = 5$). The average number of participants' children was two ($SD = .81$), and years of fatherhood (according to the age of the oldest child) ranged from 1 to 12 years ($M = 5.83$ years, $SD = 3.18$). Most of the fathers who participated in the study were native Israelis (82.3%). Their education ranged from 10 to 20 years of schooling ($M = 14.8$ years, $SD = 2.46$) and their economic status was generally average or above average, with more than half (55.6%) describing themselves as well-off. Most of the fathers (59.6%) described themselves as secular, while 29.3% described themselves as traditional Jews.

We used the fathers' place of residence as a proxy for exposure to security threats. The fathers were divided into three groups. The chronic exposure group ($n = 88$) included fathers from the town of Sderot and several surrounding rural communities (moshavim and kibbutzim) close to the Gaza border that had been exposed to Qassam rockets for a prolonged period of time (approximately eight years at the time of data collection). The acute exposure group ($n = 106$) included fathers from Ashdod, Beersheva, and the

surrounding environs: areas that had been exposed to rocket fire for approximately three weeks during Operation Cast Lead. The non-exposed group ($n = 99$) included fathers from central Israel who had not been exposed to security threats in their places of residence in recent years.

The groups were similar to each other in socio-demographic variables such as age, country of birth, education, occupation, years of marriage, number of children, children's ages, and economic status. Fathers' reports on their exposure to security incidents (such as rocket attacks) validated our decision to divide the participants into the three study groups. Indeed, in the chronic and acute exposure groups there were more reports of personal exposure to a security incident or personal injury, $\chi^2(2) = 51.74$, as well as exposure or injury of family members, $\chi^2(2) = 22.12$, than in the non-exposed group. A significant difference was also found between the non-exposed group and the exposed groups regarding the level of exposure. Whereas only about half of the fathers from the non-exposed group (54.5%) had been exposed to security incidents, most of the fathers in the other two groups had been exposed to security incidents – that is, 80.7% in the chronic group, and 80.2% in the acute group; $\chi^2(6) = 32.3$.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire

The questionnaire included 15 items. Fathers reported information such as age, education, employment status (employed/unemployed, type of occupation, part-time/full-time), degree of religiosity (secular, traditional, Orthodox, or Ultraorthodox), years of marriage, number of children, children's ages and gender, etc.

Exposure to security threats

This questionnaire examined direct and indirect exposure to security incidents (e.g. rocket attacks, shootings) via eight questions. The questions were drawn and modified from reliable and valid exposure questionnaires used in previous studies, (Itzhaky & Dekel, 2005; Solomon & Lavi, 2005). The participants reported whether they had been personally exposed, whether family members or friends had been exposed, and whether the event had caused injury or death to someone they knew or were related to. We calculated Guttman severity scales for direct personal exposure (0 = *no exposure*; 1 = *heard or saw the event*; 2 = *injured*) and indirect exposure through family or friend (0 = *no exposure*; 1 = *heard or saw the event*; 2 = *injured or killed*) (Gelkopf, Berger, Bleich, & Silver, 2012). As mentioned, this questionnaire validated our decision to divide the participants into the three study groups.

Exposure to additional stressful life events

To examine whether the fathers had also been exposed to stressful life events other than security threats, participants were given a list of 12 stressful life events (e.g. illness, traffic accident, divorce; Solomon, 1995) and asked to indicate if and when they had experienced an event. No significant differences were found between the groups. Based on the fact that exposure to stressful life events was examined as a control variable and was not found to contribute to the explanation of the variance between the groups in the dependent variable, it was not included in the regression analysis.

Parental authority questionnaire (PAQ)

This questionnaire (Buri, 1991) is widely used to measure Baumrind's (1971; cited in Baumrind, 1991) typology of parenting styles. The permissive sub-scale was not included in the current study due to its low Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha = .57$). Thus, only the 20 relevant items relating to authoritarian vs. authoritative parenting style were included in the study. Sample items are: 'If my child does not understand the need for a certain house rule, he can discuss it with me' (authoritative); 'I do not allow my child to question my decisions' (authoritarian). Participants assessed their parenting style on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Sum scores were used for each parenting style. Cronbach's alpha was found to be medium (.70 for the authoritative style and .76 for the authoritarian style).

Paternal involvement questionnaire

This questionnaire (Geper-Dor, 2004) contains 33 items, divided into four dimensions of paternal involvement: care ("To what extent do you feed your child or prepare food for him/her?"); imposing discipline ("To what extent do you take away privileges in response to inappropriate behavior?"); emotional care ("To what extent do you make time to help your child with a problem even if you are tired or not in the mood?"); and spending time together ("To what extent do you engage in joint activities with your child?"). For each item, the father was asked to rate the frequency of performance on a 1-7 Likert-type scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). The total score was calculated by the average assessment of items in each dimension. The higher the score, the higher the paternal involvement in each domain. Cronbach's alpha was found to be medium to high and ranged between .75 and .85.

Procedure

Convenience sampling was used to recruit fathers who were approached mainly through research assistants. Each participant provided his written consent to participate in the study. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed, and 293 were returned (42%). To maintain participants' anonymity, names were not registered on the questionnaires, and reasons for not returning questionnaires were not followed-up. Data collection began in February 2009, approximately two weeks after the end of Operation Cast Lead, and concluded at the end of March 2009. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association and was approved by the ethics committee of Bar-Ilan University.

Results

The association between exposure to security threats and fathers' parenting styles

First, the study examined whether there was a correlation between exposure to security threats and fathers' parenting styles. We hypothesized that fathers exposed to security threats – especially fathers who were chronically exposed – would report higher levels of an authoritarian parenting style and lower levels of an authoritative parenting style than fathers who were not exposed. Table 1 presents the averaged index and standard deviations

Table 1. Averages and standard deviations of parenting style and involvement and findings of variance analyses regarding differences between groups of exposure.

	Chronic		Acute		Non-exposed		<i>F</i> (2, 290)	Eta ²
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
PS								
Authoritarian	2.51	.68	2.65	.63	2.40	.58	2.28	.03
Authoritative	3.83	.35	3.65	.53	3.76	.46	3.57*	.02
Involvement								
Direct care	5.24	1.02	5.00	1.10	5.22	.85	1.81	.01
Discipline	2.74	.80	2.86	.91	2.68	.83	1.16	.01
Time	4.92	.92	4.87	.95	4.90	.81	.09	.00
Emotion	5.96	.73	5.78	.77	5.86	.77	1.28	.01

Note: PS = parenting style; direct care = direct caretaking; discipline = imposing discipline; time = spending time together with child; emotion = emotional care.

* $p < .05$.

of the parenting style and involvement variables in the three research groups, and the findings of the MANOVA variance analysis which examined differences between the groups.

A difference in parenting style was found between the groups (Table 1). A Dunnett post hoc test showed that, contrary to our hypothesis, fathers exposed to chronic security threats reported higher levels of authoritative parenting than did fathers exposed to acute threats. No differences were found between the exposed and non-exposed groups. In other words, fathers exposed to chronic security threats reported attitudes towards child-rearing that reflected a balance between having demands and controlling the child while acknowledging the need for expressing warmth and support. No differences were found between the groups in regard to the authoritarian parenting style or in regard to any of the paternal involvement variables.

The association between parenting style and paternal involvement

Next, we examined the association between parenting style and fathers' involvement in their children's lives. We hypothesized that an authoritative parenting style would be associated with high paternal involvement, and an authoritarian parenting style would be associated with low paternal involvement, except in terms of supervision and discipline. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlations found between parenting style variables and aspects of paternal involvement.

A significant positive correlation was found between authoritarian parenting and paternal involvement in regard to imposing discipline (Table 2). A significant negative correlation was found between authoritarian parenting and spending time with the children. No correlation was found between the authoritarian parenting style and involvement in emotional care. A significant positive correlation was found between authoritative parenting and involvement in direct caretaking, spending time together, and emotional care. No correlation was found between an authoritative parenting style and imposing discipline. Overall, our hypotheses in regard to the association between parenting styles and paternal involvement were confirmed.

Exposure to security threats as a moderating variable

In an attempt to examine whether exposure to a security threat moderated the association between the father's parenting style and his parental involvement, hierarchical regression

Table 2. Pearson correlations between parenting style variables and involvement variables.

	Involvement			
	Direct caretaking	Imposing discipline	Spending time together	Emotional care
PS				
Authoritarian	-.09	.41**	-.16**	-.10
Authoritative	.28**	-.01	.31**	.49**

Note: PS = Parenting style.

** $p < .01$.

analyses were performed. We hypothesized that in cases of chronic exposure, the association between authoritarian parenting and paternal involvement would be negative and stronger than in cases of acute exposure.

In the first step of the regression, key background variables (i.e. education, years of marriage, economic status, religion) were entered using the Stepwise method. In the second step, using the Enter method, the standardized scores of the parenting style variables were entered. In the third step, the moderator variable of exposure was added, as a dummy variable, with the comparison group being the non-exposed group. In the fourth step, using the Stepwise method, the interactions between parenting style and exposure level variables were added. The model of Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006) was used to explain the direction of the interactions found to be significant.

Given that the analyses did not find significant interactions referring to paternal involvement in regard to imposing discipline, $\Delta F(2, 268) = 1.57, p = .21$, or direct caretaking, $\Delta F(2, 267) = 1.24, p = .29$, we present the regression analyses and significant interactions found in reference to involvement in spending time together and emotional care. Tables 3 and 4 show the hierarchical regression results.

The background variables did not enter the regression model (Tables 3 and 4). Regarding involvement in spending time together, it appears that in the first step the authoritative parenting style explained 9% of the variance in paternal involvement, $\Delta F(2, 273) = 10.72, p = .00$, whereas the authoritarian parenting style was not found to contribute. The exposure to a security threat in one's place of residence did not contribute to explaining the variance in spending time together $\Delta F(2, 269) = 1.9, p = .15$ (Table 3). An examination of the interaction between the father's parenting style and exposure to security threats indicated that exposure to a security threat was a moderating variable of the association

Table 3. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables explaining paternal involvement in spending time together.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Authoritarian PS	-.03	.05	-.04	-.05	.09	-.06	-.07	.13	-.08
Authoritative PS	.17	.05	.17**	.17	.09	.17**	.16	.10	.16**
Chronic exposure				-.03	.10	-.01	-.01	.10	-.01
Acute exposure				.05	.10	.03	-.07	.10	-.04
Authoritative \times Acute							-.19	.09	-.17**
R^2	.09***			.00			.02**		

Note: PS = parenting style; Total $R^2 = .11$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables explaining paternal involvement in emotional care.

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Authoritarian PS	-.02	.04	-.03	-.05	.09	-.05	-.06	.10	-.07
Authoritative PS	.29	.04	.35***	.27	.10	.29***	.26	.10	.29***
Chronic exposure				-.00	.12	-.00	-.01	.12	-.01
Acute exposure				.07	.12	.07	-.07	.12	-.07
Authoritative \times Acute							-.19	.09	-.21**
R^2	.18***			.00			.03**		

Note: PS = parenting style; Total $R^2 = .22$.

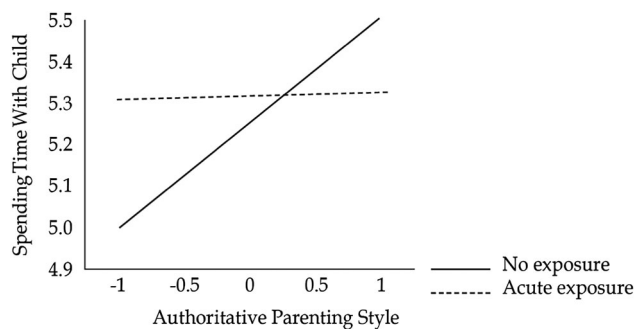
** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

between authoritative parenting and spending time together, with the interactions explaining 2% of the variance in spending time together $\Delta F(1, 264) = 5.92, p = .01$.

According to the model of Preacher et al. (2006), and contrary to our hypothesis, the Beta coefficients between an authoritative parenting style and spending time together was positive and significant only when there was no exposure to security threats, $B = .26$ (Figure 1). In the acute exposure group, the association between these variables was not significant, $B = .01$.

Regarding emotional care (Table 4), the regression model as a whole explained 22% of the variance in the level of paternal involvement. It appears that an authoritative parenting style explained 18% of the variance in emotional care. In the second step, exposure to a security threat in one's place of residence did not contribute directly to explaining the variance in emotional care, $\Delta F(2, 269) = .80, p = .45$. However, an examination of the interaction found that, contrary to our hypothesis, acute exposure to a security threat was a moderating variable in the association between an authoritative parenting style and involvement in emotional care. This interaction explained 3% of the variance in emotional care, $\Delta F(1, 266) = 8.46, p = .00$. According to the model of Preacher et al. (2006), the Beta coefficients between an authoritative parenting style and fathers' emotional care for the child were more positive and significant in the non-exposed group, $B = .40$, compared to the acute group, $B = .15$ (Figure 2).

**Figure 1.** Level of exposure as a moderating factor between authoritative parenting style and spending time with the child.

Discussion and conclusions

Despite increasing attention concerning fathers, both in research and practice, there is still insufficient awareness regarding fathers as parental resources in externally stressful family situations (Baum, 2015; Dominelli, Strega, Walmsley, Callahan, & Brown, 2011; Featherstone, 2003).

In particular, fatherhood under conditions of political violence has received scant attention and, therefore, knowledge regarding practical intervention is also lacking. In order to bridge this gap, the present study examined the association between different levels of exposure to political violence and fathers' parenting styles. Furthermore, the study examined whether exposure to security threats served as a moderating factor between parenting style and fathers' involvement with their children.

Although the hypotheses emerged from an assumption of fathers' vulnerability, and predicted that fathers who were exposed to political violence would demonstrate a more authoritarian parenting style and a lesser degree of paternal involvement, the study's findings showed a picture of parental resilience among fathers who were exposed to *chronic* security threats. These fathers were able to balance between responsiveness and demandingness, despite the stressful climate in which they were living, and adopt an authoritative parenting style. These findings are in line with Breznitz's (1983) model of immunization. According to this model, people habituate to extreme conditions of stress. Similar to what happens in the biological system, people who deal with stressful situations develop 'antibodies' to cope with the condition and may therefore emerge from the difficult experience immune and sometimes even with greater emotional strength. It seems that the fathers in the study also developed such 'antibodies' as parents, allowing them to maintain a balance between demandingness and responsiveness in their parenting style over time, and their involvement in their children's lives. Our findings also reinforce previous studies, showing that despite exposure to security threats, parents manage to develop effective coping strategies (Litvak-Hirsch & Lazar, 2012; Robertson & Duckett, 2007).

Alternatively, it seems that *acute* exposure may slightly decrease the use of an authoritative parenting style. Perhaps in the acute phase of exposure, fathers and their families are still in a state of imbalance created by the nature of the situation – characterized by tension, confusion, and uncertainty (Ayalon & Lahad, 2001) – and this imbalance may

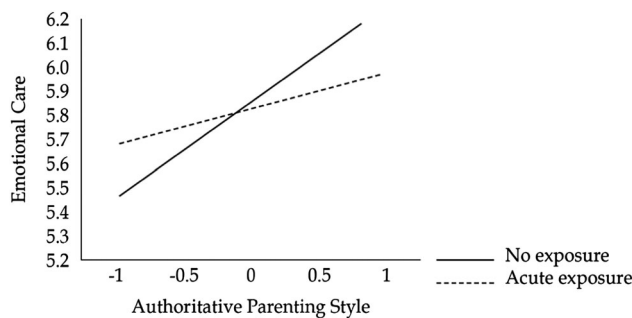


Figure 2. Level of exposure as a moderating factor between authoritative parenting style and child's emotional care.

also be reflected in the fathers' parenting styles. Fathers who are exposed to a chronic threat, on the other hand, may acclimatize to the situation, as can be seen in the findings from previous studies on prolonged exposure to security threats (e.g. Bleich et al., 2003).

The present study's findings reinforce previous studies that have shown a positive correlation between fathers' authoritative parenting styles and paternal involvement in the dimensions of caring and spending time with their children; a positive correlation between the authoritarian parenting style and paternal involvement was, however, limited only to the aspect of reinforcing discipline (Gaertner et al., 2007; Mezulis et al., 2004). It could, therefore, be argued that paternal involvement is the behavioural representation of the attitudes encompassed in a specific parenting style (Pleck, 2010). In previous studies, it was revealed that fathers who held attitudes that were consistent with an authoritative parenting style showed more sensitivity when playing with their child (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000). This finding demonstrated that the parenting style might be related not only to involvement in a certain aspect of childcare but also to the quality of that specific involvement.

An examination of exposure to security threats as a moderating variable showed that the positive association between an authoritative parenting style and spending time with the child, found among non-exposed fathers, became non-significant in cases of acute exposure. Similarly, the association between an authoritative parenting style and involvement in emotional care was more positive and strong among non-exposed fathers than among acutely exposed fathers. It may be inferred that the characteristics of the acute situation contributed to a weaker relationship between an authoritative parenting style and paternal involvement. Yet the figures show high paternal involvement in both emotional care and time spent with the child, despite the acute situation.

It could be argued that when there is an acute threat to one's security, caring for one's child may not necessarily be a conscious choice but rather an automatic or instinctive parental response (e.g. Beauchesne et al., 2002; Dekel, 2004). Additionally, spending time with the child in acute situations regardless of one's parenting style is not surprising given the fact that in these situations parents are likely to stay home with their children, sometimes spending hours together in a shelter. This 'forced intimacy' may serve as an opportunity to strengthen the parent-child relationship, but can also cause frustration and aggression, perhaps intensifying existing conflicts (Bergman, 1991). These potential consequences should be taken into account in evaluations and interventions with families exposed to acute security threats, in order for the time spent together with the child to serve as a resource for constructively coping with the situation.

The current study makes a contribution to the literature regarding fatherhood in the context of security threats, but it also has some limitations. Although the research groups were matched and found to be similar in sociodemographic variables, the 'snowball' sample and cross-sectional design limits the ability to deduce causality between the research variables and the generalizability of the study. This type of sampling created a rather homogenous sample which limited us in exploring fathers from different socio-cultural and religious backgrounds. 'Snowball' sampling is typical of studies of fathers, particularly because of the difficulty in recruiting them as research subjects (Easterbrooks, Barrett, Brady, & Davis, 2007).

Furthermore, although the interaction results of the study were significant, political violence is only one factor in the fathers' lives. Future studies should explore the contribution of other factors typifying the socio-cultural contexts (e.g. Chaudhuri, Easterbrooks, & Davis, 2009). In addition, fathers from the other side of the Israeli border, where families are exposed to political violence and other severe life stressors (e.g. Palosaari, Punamäki, Qouta, & Diab, 2013), should also be studied. It would also be important to study fathers in a variety of family configurations and at different stages of the family life cycle (Finklestein, 2016). Finally, the fact that parenting style and paternal involvement were measured via fathers' self-reports limited our ability to examine whether other family members perceived the father's characteristics in the same manner as the fathers themselves did. Future studies should look at the family system as a whole. We would also recommend expanding the examination of other parenting styles and their relationship to parental involvement in the context of political violence.

Despite these limitations, a wide sample ($n = 293$) was gathered within a brief time period and shortly after Operation Cast Lead. These factors allowed for a study of the immediate effects of war and a comparison between acute and chronic exposure to political violence. The lack of such studies (Lahad & Leykin, 2010) further highlights the importance of the current study.

This study indicates that fathers exposed to acute security threats may benefit from preventive family interventions. A psychoeducational approach – with explanations of typical reactions in acute situations and their relation to the father's parenting style – could be applied. Preventative interventions should focus on helping fathers balance more effectively between demandingness and responsiveness in acute situations, and strengthen positive paternal involvement through providing information on its importance as a coping resource (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009). Moreover, the practice of specific techniques, such as supportive communication and maintenance of routines, can contribute to children's adjustment under these unfortunate circumstances (Berkowitz, Stover, & Marans, 2011).

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