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# Motherhood in a Time of Terror: Subjective Experiences and Responses of Israeli Mothers

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*The aim of the study was to explore the subjective experience of being a mother in an extreme period of terror and uncertainty. Eleven Israeli mothers who had one to three children, ranging in age from 8 months to 12 years, participated in a focus group. A content analysis revealed five main concerns: physical protection, emotional protection, transmission of ideology, creation of normalcy and routine, and the question of what will happen to the children if the mothers are killed in a terror attack. The discussion examines the uniqueness and similarities of the findings to other theoretical and empirical works on motherhood.*

**Keywords:** *motherhood; political violence; terror*

In recent years, terror, defined as the use of indiscriminate destruction, injury, and murder against civilians to generate massive fear for the purpose of realizing political aims (Cooper, 2001; Wilkinson, 1982) has become an increasing frequent and bloody phenomenon throughout much of the world. Along with the increase in terror, there has been more research on its psychological impact. Studies of adults in Bosnia and Croatia (Grgic, Mandic, Koic, & Knezevic, 2002), the Palestinian areas (Baker & Kevorkian, 1995), and the United States (Galea et al., 2002; Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin, & Gil-Rivas, 2002; Wunsch-Hitzig, Plapinger, Draper, & del Campo, 2002) have found a similar scenario of heightened anxiety, depression, and phobias; a reduced sense of safety; a variety of posttraumatic symptoms; and the greater use of tobacco, alcohol, and drugs for self-medication among various percentages of the population (Vlahov et al., 2002). Studies

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conducted in Ireland indicate that much of the adult population suffers from mild stress symptoms and somatization (Cairns & Wilson, 1991). Studies of children have revealed similar outcomes, along with heightened fears, antisocial behaviors, and increased problems with peers (Barber, 2001; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2002).

Although the stress and, in some cases, pathology created by terror have been extensively documented, little has been written about the subjective experience of living with terror: of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of ordinary people as they go about their daily lives with the threat of terror hanging over them. The current study looked at how a group of mothers in Israel experienced and coped with the terror that has afflicted their country in recent years. More precisely, it explored how the terror affected the concerns and behaviors of these women as mothers. The focus of the study was on mothers' responses to terror because in spite of women's advancement in the world of work and the professions, motherhood remains a core role for many women—a role that entails enormous responsibility and involves every aspect of the self (Arendell, 2000).

A literature review revealed that only a small number of studies have explored mothers' responses to traumatic events. These studies have been of two types: studies that have examined the association between the responses of mothers and their children to traumatic events and studies that have explored the mothers' responses in and of themselves. Studies of the first type have shown high distress among the mothers and a reciprocal association between their distress and their children's. For example, in a series of studies on Israeli mothers and their children in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, Wolmer, Laor, Gershon, Mayes, and Cohen (2000) found the same posttraumatic and distress symptoms and impaired functioning as have been found in other populations that have been exposed to traumatic events. Furthermore, a clear and robust association was revealed between increased symptoms in children and poor psychological functioning in their mothers (Laor, Wolmer, & Cohen, 2001). Along similar lines, Shamai (2001) found, in a quantitative and qualitative study of Israeli families who were living in the West Bank, a preponderance of negative emotions—namely, fear, anger, hate, avoidance, and a desire for revenge—among both parents and children and a close association between the emotions reported by the parents and their children. Koplewicz et al. (2002), studied children who had been on a class trip to the World Trade Center in New York City and their mothers when it was bombed in 1993 and found that some of the mothers developed posttraumatic stress disorder, even though they themselves had not physically been there.

Studies that have been conducted with only mothers have reported similar levels of distress. Adams et al. (2002) found that 11 years after their evacuation from Chernobyl, women who were mothers of young children at the time reported significantly poorer psychological and physical health than did mothers who had never lived in a radiation-contaminated area. Kushnir

(1993) noted that Israeli mothers reported greater somatic complaints and emotional exhaustion during the 1991 Gulf War, and Baker and Kevorkian (1995) discovered that mothers in West Bank Palestinian households who were subjected to various degrees of traumatic events manifested depression and anxiety levels that were twice as high as those of fathers.

Although these studies are informative, they have been few in number, and most have focused on symptomatology. With the exception of Shamai's (2001), none of the studies examined the ways in which the mothers experienced the traumatic events or the impact of their experiences on their concerns and behaviors as mothers.

### THE TERROR OF THE SECOND INTIFADA

Since the beginning of the second intifada in late September 2000, Israeli society has been confronted by a continuous wave of murderous terrorism. Civilians of all ages, ethnicities, and walks of life have been killed or injured in knife or gun attacks; drive-by shootings; intrusions into their homes; and, what is most salient, suicide bombings of human beings. By April 30, 2002, when the current study was conducted, 318 Israelis civilians had been killed in terrorist attacks and 2,708 had been injured, many of them severely disabled for life. The attacks were perpetrated throughout the country. Most occurred in the large cities, however there were also attacks in smaller communities, as well as on the roads. Most attacks were against Jewish targets, however mixed Arab-Jewish enterprises and areas were not spared. Attacks were perpetrated virtually everywhere people congregated—on buses and at bus stops, in shops and markets, in places of entertainment and celebration, and elsewhere. They were perpetrated at all times, from the morning and evening rush hours when people go to work or school through the wee hours of the night and all hours in between. There was little pattern to the attacks, and neither their time nor place could be anticipated. The outcome was that almost no one felt safe; daily life was disrupted as people tried to avoid what seemed to be the more dangerous places, and a pervasive sense of anxiety hung over virtually the entire country. As the months passed, the attacks picked up pace, so that by the time the current study was undertaken, the terrorism had come to feel like a war; however, in contrast to Israel's previous wars, this one was waged inside the country, rather than beyond its borders, and civilians, not soldiers, were the main targets.

The current study was conducted in April 2002 after an intensive period of terrorist attacks. In the month or so prior to the study, there were 51 terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens in which approximately 100 persons were killed and more than 700 were injured. The aim of the study was to explore the subjective experience of being a mother in such an extreme period of terror and uncertainty.

## METHOD

### Participants and Data Collection

The participants were recruited using a snowball method and a purposeful criterion sampling procedure (Patton, 1990). Participation was restricted to mothers who had young children and who were believed to be "information rich" and able to verbalize their feelings and experiences. I approached 15 mothers and asked them whether they would be willing to participate in a one-time focus group to talk about how they experienced their motherhood in the time of terror. Six women agreed to participate. The rest refused because of previous obligations or a reluctance to expose their feelings. Those who agreed brought another five women friends. Thus, 11 women participated in the focus group. These women ranged in age from 27 to 40 years, and all had college degrees. They had between one and three children who ranged in age from 8 months to 12 years; the 12-year-old was the only child older than age 8 in the study. Only one of the 11 women had been exposed to a terror attack, and this exposure was from the relative safety of her apartment. A terrorist had run down the street where she lived with her family shooting randomly.

The focus group was held in April 2002 at a private home. The session opened after a warming-up period of about half an hour, during which the participants chatted informally. The women were then seated in a circle in comfortable chairs and were told that their conversation would be recorded and later analyzed. Confidentiality was ensured.

Each participant was asked to introduce herself and to relate how her children reacted during this time of terror. It was assumed that it would be easier for the women to start a conversation about their children. Then the participants were asked, "How do you feel as mothers these days? What's happening to you as mothers these days?" The discussion generated by these questions lasted for 2 hours.

### Data Analysis

The data analysis was based on a verbatim transcript of the focus-group session. A professional colleague and I read the transcript and divided its contents into statements that referred to the children's coping with terror (this topic was the first subject that was raised and constituted 25% of the transcription) and those that referred to the mothers' coping with terror. For the purpose of the current study, only the contents referring to the mothers or to mothers and their children (in relation to the mothers' perspective) were further analyzed. The material was then reread by each of the readers, followed by a discussion, which resulted in the construction of five main categories for further separate analyses by each reader. Next, each reader

separately reviewed the data segments (sentence, paragraph, event, emotion) and determined the appropriate category. No formal reliability measures were taken. Nevertheless, the readers agreed about 75% of the segments. In cases in which there was a question, the segment was discussed until an agreement was reached.

## FINDINGS

The findings presented here all pertain specifically to the participants' motherhood. The considerable tension, anxiety, low mood, and fear that all the women reported are presented only in connection with their concerns and behaviors as mothers. Five main (and interrelated) concerns were identified: (a) protecting their children from physical harm, (b) shielding their children from knowledge of the terror, (c) conveying messages that would best enable their children to cope with the terror, (d) creating a sense of normalcy and pleasure, and (e) the question of what will happen to their children if they (the mothers) are killed in a terror attack. The first and last concerns stemmed from and focused most directly on the life threat posed by the terror. The other three concerns focused on protecting their children from the full emotional impact of the terror.

### Providing Physical Protection

All the mothers spoke about their heightened concern for their children's physical safety and expressed a strong need to protect their children. Most told of restricting activities with their children so as to avoid what they regarded as the more dangerous places. Some told of avoiding specific streets, others spoke about keeping their children within the immediate neighborhood, and still others said that they did not take their children with them to supermarkets or shopping malls. The mothers' level of anxiety and the degree to which they felt the need to circumscribe their movements varied. At one extreme was a mother who said that she had changed her entire routine and confined herself and her 8-month-old son within her neighborhood: "I changed my routine. I don't go anywhere where there is even the slightest chance. . . . I stay within the boundaries of my home, neighborhood, and friends." At the other end of the spectrum, another mother told of taking her 4-year-old and 7-year-old to the movies, despite what she described as the general "house arrest" and the censure of her neighbors:

Passover was sort of a house arrest. Every mother who I came across asked, "What are you doing?" or "What did you do?" Everyone was afraid to go out. I told people I took the kids to the movies, and many of them looked at me as though I was crazy or something.

Most of the mothers sought a middle course between paralysis and foolhardiness. For instance, one mother reported taking her 2-year-old, 4-year-old, and 7-year-old to a museum to take advantage of the fact that so few people were frequenting museums at the time. Her rationale was that they could enjoy the exhibits better, but also that there were no crowds to attract terrorists.

For most of the mothers, guarding their children's safety was a constant preoccupation with which they grappled in their conversations and thoughts. Much of their thoughts centered on what one mother described as "constantly calculating what would happen if." This mother told of talking with her husband about safety issues in surrealistic conversations about what to do with the children when they had to go shopping:

My husband and I talk about the terror. The conversations are surrealistic. . . . He is very afraid of going to the mall. When he goes, he tells me to stay close to home with the kids. When I go, he tells me to leave the kids with the baby-sitter—in case something should happen to me.

Another mother told of discussions with other mothers at her place of work about "whether to use the seat belts with the kids in back or not to, whether to lock the [car] doors or not [and] . . . what would be the best way to make it easier to rescue the children, if necessary, if someone began shooting at us or something." Yet another mother, who said that she avoided walking with her children along certain streets but was willing to drive along those streets, described her mental calculations as she sat in the car with her children:

The thoughts I have when I'm in the car with the kids, thinking to myself, "Big deal, so you don't walk everywhere any more, but you have no problem getting in the car with the kids and driving through all those places in the city." The older kid, I can at least tell to duck if necessary, but what can I do with the little one who's still in a car seat?

These various calculations may be seen as a kind of advanced planning and mental preparation for avoiding being caught in a terror attack or for protecting their children in case they were. They are also evidence, however, of how all consuming and troubling the issue of their children's safety was to the mothers.

The mothers' preoccupation stemmed from their awareness that, short of highly impractical "house arrest," there was little they could do to ensure their children's safety, given the randomness and ubiquity of the terror. As one mother put it, "I don't feel that I have any real control over what happens." The mothers' lack of control made their efforts to protect their children feel inadequate, if not futile, and prevented a satisfactory resolution of the questions that arose. "It looks like there are no right answers," stated the mother who told of her surrealistic conversations with her husband.

Without the possibility of a satisfactory resolution, the problem of their children's safety also occupied the mothers on a subliminal level. One mother told of lying in bed and suddenly, "In a flash I felt . . . if terrorists actually come into the house, what will I do with Y [her son] and how will T [her husband] use his gun, and what will happen downstairs?" Another mother said that her children's safety spilled over to her dreams, in which brief relief attained through the fantasy of heroic rescue was quickly undermined by the same dilemmas that occupied her waking moments: "I dreamed all sorts of dreams this Passover—that all sorts of events occur, and then I jump and save the situation and everything ends well. . . . It was a very heroic rescue, but it was accompanied by all sorts of conflicts."

Two mothers spoke of newly formed thoughts of leaving Israel for safer places. One said that she had always accepted that living in Israel meant living with a certain amount of fear, however she had recently begun entertaining thoughts of moving to Canada. The other, who, along with her son, had witnessed a terror attack from the window of her home, said that she was beginning to think about leaving because "something in my personal sense of responsibility makes me wonder how well I'm protecting them [my kids] and how able I am to protect them here." These mothers had grown up in Israel; had their lives, friends, and extended families in Israel; and were emotionally attached to the country. At the time of the focus group, the terror had reached such a peak that emigration seemed to them the only way they could ensure their children's physical safety and properly fulfill their responsibilities as mothers.

### Shielding Children From Knowledge of the Terror

The mothers also reported a strong need to shield their children from knowledge of the terror that came through the ubiquitous reports by the mass media. Some mothers told of blocking the information:

I try not to let them [ages 5 and 1½] see the pictures in the paper. . . . We don't talk about it at home.

We [children aged 4½ and 1] do not watch TV after terror attacks, we do not explain, and we do not buy newspapers.

Others told of trying to distance the information and, with it, the reality and relevance of the terror to their children's lives:

When H [aged 6] asks what this picture in the newspaper is [a picture of a dead girl], I tell her: "It's a girl" and quickly turn the page.

Sometimes there are some questions, but I don't think that she really feels it's part of her life. That's something that we pass on to her.

In all these instances, emotional protection—making the children feel safe and secure—was the dominant motive. The mothers felt that their children were too young to understand the events or to cope with them emotionally. “What can I say?” asked the mother who turned the page in the newspaper, “that this is a girl that was killed yesterday during a terror attack, and the other girl is a girl who lost her mother?” “Why do they have to see these photos?” queried another.

At the same time, the mothers were aware that their efforts were bound to failure. Those with children in nursery school and kindergarten said that the children learned of the terror in school. Some were angry and upset about what they saw as undesirable exposure. Only 2 of the 11 women did not try to screen out information about the terror. One, the only one who told of intensively watching television news of the terror with her children, was the mother of the 12-year-old; it was clear to her that her daughter already knew too much for effective maternal censorship. The other told of trying to respond with a measure of candor to her 7-year-old son’s questions: “When he asks what will happen if the terrorists come, I say that the chances of being in a car accident are much greater—so what? Will we stop driving? Of course it can happen, but the likelihood is very small.” Here, too, however, the mother’s response was driven by her desire to calm her child and make him feel safe. And here, too, the mother was stymied by the inability she felt to offer her child the emotional security that she would have wanted. Having come to feel that the violence would never end, she feared that she conveyed her despair to her son.

### **Relaying Useful and Reinforcing Messages**

Some mothers grappled with the dilemma of what message they should convey to their children about the context and implications of the terror. They told of having grown up with a clear and simple patriotism: Israel was strong and righteous, the Arabs wanted to destroy it, and the proper response was to fight back hard until victory was attained. Throughout the years, this dichotomy had become increasingly blurred for many Israelis. The erosion of the old certainties left some of the mothers wondering what they should tell their children about the current events.

Several mothers thought that the same simple, patriotic message on which they were raised would best provide their children (and the nation) with the moral and psychological strength to withstand the reality of the terror. Yet only one of them was certain that this was the type of message she would relay to her own children. She said that when she was a child during a terror attack in 1978, her father’s unequivocal message was that “we have to be heroes . . . gave me strength” and then said that she would offer her children the same type of message: “When my daughter grows up, if something like this [terror] happens, I certainly won’t feed her the ambivalence

that we [in this forum] feel. I want to relay more patriotism—the message that we’re strong, that this is our country and our people.”

Other mothers were considerably less certain. Two agreed that simple messages were better for their children but were wracked by the sense that they would not be able to convey one-dimensional messages that they no longer believed:

I don’t feel that I can convey messages that I don’t totally believe in. . . . I’m sure that N’s clear-cut messages can help and make the reality easier for children. But I can’t do it.

I feel that we can no longer raise our children as we were raised, with the knowledge that we’ll go into the army and fight and be heroes and that we have the most powerful army [in the region]. This inability is something that weakens us. Complex messages about who is good and who is bad weaken us. But I don’t see any solution.

Two mothers spoke of their efforts to convey the complexities of the situation. One seems to have felt comfortable with this course: “When there are photos of blood, I try to make them [her 7½-year-old and 12-year-old] see the complexity of life, with a broader message—that when one side “wins,” both actually lose. . . . It’s important for me to convey the complexity.” The other mother said that the carnage wreaked by the terror attacks had made it increasingly difficult for her to present her daughter with the complex, not a stereotypical view of the world that she had previously tried to convey:

The truth is that it is very difficult for me. I used to tell my daughter that not all Arabs are bad and not all Jews are good, that there are also good Arabs and Jews who are bad. And then it all became very complicated, and I don’t know what to tell her any more.

### **Creating Pleasure and Preserving the Joy of Life**

One of the main effects of the concentrated terror, as the mothers noted, was to upset the normal routine of life for them and their children and to deprive their children of some of the pleasures of childhood. The mothers told of school trips that were canceled for fear of the security situation; of keeping their children at home and away from places of entertainment; and, above all, of the generally depressing effect of the terror.

Some mothers said that they felt it was part of their responsibility as parents to maintain a sense of normalcy for their children. One told of avoiding television and newspaper accounts of the terror so as to be able to “go on with my daily routine, which I feel is necessary both for myself and for my daughters, who are little and unprotected.” Several mothers linked their attempts to maintain normalcy to enabling their children to “have fun” despite the terror. One mother, who complained that the school did not

compensate the children for a canceled outing, stated, "As part of my responsibility as a parent, I feel the need to emphasize having fun in life. . . . It's important now not to have only school and studies but something else: fun."

Another mother told of making concerted efforts to make her home a fun place that her children would enjoy. Inundated by the daily news of terror attacks, she switched the television to the "music station for children, and we just dance and sing. This is the way we deal with it." She described the circumscription of their lives by the terror as a loss: "We've given up on a lot of things and canceled a lot of activities on account of the terror. . . . You lose a bit of life that way." And she reported making conscious efforts to compensate for this loss: "So I try . . . to step gingerly between the rain drops and to stay optimistic, . . . and I try as much as possible, whenever the situation allows, to go out with them and take them to the movies, and when it doesn't, to have more fun at home." The behavior this mother described was not simply avoidance aimed at preserving her emotional equilibrium, although it had such elements; it was also a conscious effort to select behaviors that would allow her to function as a mother, to take care of her children, and to meet what she saw as her children's needs for normalcy and enjoyment in a situation.

### **What Will Happen If I'm Killed?**

Finally, the mothers expressed concern with what would happen to their children if they themselves were killed in a terror attack. Most of their concerns pertained to who would take care of their children or how their children would fare without them:

I think to myself if something happens and my son is left alone, who will raise him?

I was afraid to leave the house because I have children.

What will happen to my children [if I'm killed]?

They came up with the terror—thoughts that I have to make arrangements for the kids in case something happens.

One mother, whose first and only child was 8 months old, spoke emotionally of her concern that he would not remember her if she were killed:

I felt enormous anxiety [when I left the house], and I would hug him all the time and kiss him—maybe this is the last time I'll see him. I went to buy some baby food, and just then there was a suicide bombing in another supermarket. [So I thought] I don't know what can happen. Maybe I should write him a letter in case something happens to me. Maybe he won't remember me as his mother. . . . It's a terrible feeling.

For the most part, these concerns remained on the emotional level and resulted in few practical steps. One mother told of taking precautions to avoid harm to herself: "Because I have children, I will not sit in a restaurant where the windows are exposed and not sit at a table where someone can shoot at me." However none of the mothers took serious measures to deal with the consequences of their possible injury or death. One told of drafting a detailed will with her husband, stipulating which of the grandparents should get custody of their children, "In case, God forbid, something happens to both of us," but of never getting around to finalizing it. The mother who feared that her baby would not remember her contemplated writing him a letter but had not done so. Others spoke vaguely of not having up-to-date photographs of themselves to leave behind but did nothing to correct the situation.

## DISCUSSION

The study identified five chief areas of concern for the Israeli mothers in the wake of the unrelenting terror attacks confronting their country. These areas were protecting their children physically, shielding them from knowledge of the terror, relaying useful and reinforcing messages, creating pleasure and preserving the joy of life, and the question of what will happen to their children in the event of their own death in a terror attack. Broadly, these concerns reflect the recognized parental functions of providing physical protection, emotional protection, socialization and values, order and routine, and a secure future for their children that have been ascribed to parents and especially to mothers as the primary caretakers (Mrazek, Mrazek, & Klinnert, 1995; Pardess, Finzi, & Sever, 1993). It may thus be said that the concerns that emerged in the time of terror were fundamentally the same as those that occupy mothers under ordinary circumstances. Indeed, a study of British mothers' perceptions of parenting similarly identified the mothers' concerns with their children's safety, emotional development, and future (Sidebotham & the ALSPAC Study Team, 2001). As that study pointed out, however, the specific content of these concerns is highly context dependent. In that study, the mothers' concerns with their children's safety focused on such problems as crime and street accidents; their concern about their children's emotional development was associated with the issue of quality time; and their concern about their children's future had to do with the children's achievements. The Israeli mothers in the focus group were probably also concerned with these matters. However, at the time that the focus group was held, the normal motherly concerns with their children's safety, emotional well-being, and future focused on the prevailing terror.

What this article shows is how enormously difficult the mothers found it to fulfill their normal functions in the reality of the terror and how much

energy and effort they put into doing so. For virtually all the mothers, ensuring their children's physical safety became a huge concern that caused them to constrict their movements, dominated their thoughts and conversations, and permeated their unconscious minds. In addition, most of the mothers agonized over how to protect their young children from what they evidently perceived as premature and emotionally harmful knowledge of the terror. They struggled with themselves over what messages and values to convey that would best enable their children to cope with the world of terror in which they lived. They worked hard to preserve or create for their children a sense of joy, routine, and normalcy that were stripped from the surrounding world.

Along with these energetic and active efforts to fulfill their maternal functions, the mothers also revealed considerable worry, confusion, and helplessness stemming from the ubiquity, unpredictability, and persistence of the terror and the constant and palpable life threat it posed. Similar emotions were noted by Shamai (2001) among Israeli parents who were living in the West Bank during the period of political uncertainty following the Oslo Accords. In the current study, the mothers' various efforts to protect their children physically and their constant calculations and decisions about where and where not to take them were based on the idea that if they did this and avoided that, they could provide their children with some measure of protection from physical harm. Yet virtually all the mothers were painfully aware of how little control they really had in the matter. The intensity of their preoccupation with providing safety reflects not only their efforts to cope but also their intense anxiety and helplessness.

The mothers' efforts to protect their children emotionally by manipulating the information their children received conflicted with reality. Mothers who tried to block information were embarrassed by their children's questions and frustrated that all but the youngest soon learned about the terror in school and the neighborhood. Mothers who tried to mediate the information in a way that would minimize the damage to their children's sense of safety did not seem to have felt that they succeeded. Similarly, few of the mothers resolved their dilemmas about what messages to relay to their children. Most of them remained caught between their belief that simple, patriotic messages are the most fortifying and their reluctance to paint a picture of a dichotomous world of good and evil in which they did not believe.

Moreover, even as they were determined to preserve or create joy, normalcy, and routine for their children, the mothers labored under a heavy burden of fear, anxiety, depression, and, in some cases, despair provoked by the terror. They also seem to have been stymied by the contemplation of their own possible death in a terror attack. A major concern they expressed was that their children could be left orphans, without mothers to care for them, and, when the children were very young, without any memory of their mothers. This scenario apparently provoked considerable pain. Some of the mothers cried as they spoke of it; one said that it was so painful that

she could not share it with her husband. Yet although they spoke of the need to make wills and leave mementos, none of them did so, although one—only one—had started to do so. All in all, the terror seems to have left these mothers struggling hard to fulfill the normal functions of motherhood; troubled that they could not do so properly under the circumstances; and heavily burdened by a mix of fear, anxiety, worry, and responsibility.

Some of the concerns, attitudes, and feelings that the participants expressed can also be seen as reflecting their personal needs, apart from their roles and responsibilities as mothers. Mothers who tried to shield their children from disturbing information may also have been trying to shield themselves. For some mothers, agonizing over what messages to relay to their children reflected a crisis in their own values and worldviews. One mother, quoted earlier, stated explicitly that her determination to create joy in her home and to keep news of the terror beyond its threshold functioned to preserve her own emotional equilibrium. Among the mothers who expressed fear that their young children would not remember them if they were killed in a terror attack, personal concerns about the eradication of their own role and identity as mothers seem to have intermingled with their concern about their children's need for mothers. The personal aspects of the concerns, however, do not detract from the women's motherhood but, rather, add to it.

The major limitation of the current study was the homogeneity of its participants. All the members of the focus group were college educated; two held higher degrees and university positions. All were in the middle- to upper-middle socioeconomic strata. Most of the mothers held left-of-center political views. The similarity of their concerns to those of the English mothers observed by Sidebotham and the ALSPAC Study Team (2001) suggests that their experiences of and responses to the terror would not have been substantially different from those of other Israeli mothers. Nonetheless, the generalizability of the findings to other socioeconomic groups remains an open question. In particular, there is reason to believe that the political orientation of most of these women may have played a role in the difficulties they expressed in deciding what messages to relay to their children. Shamai (2001) found that the settler parents she interviewed reported numerous discussions with their children during which they explained their beliefs about the right and necessity of settling in Judea and Samaria. To gain a better understanding of mothers' experiences of and responses to terror, research is needed on mothers of other socioeconomic strata and with different political affiliations.

Another limitation stems from the decision to focus on mothers of young children. Because the tasks of motherhood vary with children's ages, I thought that I would get a clearer picture by focusing on one age group. Nonetheless, this choice means that at least some of the mothers' concerns were probably affected by the children's ages. For example, the concern that the child would not remember the mother if she were killed in an attack

would probably not have arisen among mothers of older children. Safety concerns would also probably have been different for children who were old enough to function independently of their parents, and there would be little question of shielding them from information. Further research on mothers of children of different ages is thus recommended.

Its limitations notwithstanding, the current study contributes to two areas of knowledge. One is the area of mothers' responses to terror. Here, it provides qualitative information on the mothers' active efforts to fulfill the normal functions of motherhood, along with the tensions and irresolvable dilemmas that arise from the ubiquity and pervasiveness of the threat to their lives. The other area is the area of motherhood as such. Although motherhood has been the subject of a great deal of study, most of the studies have focused on mothers' behavior in relation to their children, rather than on the mothers themselves (Oberman & Josselson, 1996). In contrast, the current study focused on the mothers' own subjective experiences.

The findings have implications for policy and practice. They suggest the need for community support to help mothers cope with continuous terror. Such support may include groups for mothers who want to share their concerns with other mothers, as well as enjoyable activities for children, alone and/or with their parents, at community centers and such places as museums, theaters, and concert halls. Such support is of particular importance because of increasing evidence that parents pass on to their children the distress they experience in the wake of violence and other forms of political uncertainty (Laor et al., 2001; Shamai, 2001).

Further study, qualitative and quantitative, is recommended to explore more fully the experiences of mothers in other situations of political violence. Unfortunately, political violence is becoming an increasingly widespread phenomenon that affects many countries and population groups. In the last two decades, the world has witnessed political violence, surpassing borders of culture, ethnicity, language, and continent. Mothers and their children all over the world tend to be the major victims of civil wars and terrorist attacks. Yet their voices are hardly heard or influential. In conducting the current study, I set out to understand more deeply and, as a result, emphasize and voice the difficult task that women must take on in these times of political violence. I can only hope that the current study will serve to further the attention and understanding of the phenomenon and its implications, for in succeeding to do so, women, children, and humankind, in general, will greatly benefit.

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