

Parental Self-Efficacy and Paternal Involvement in the Context of Political Violence

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Abstract Fathers may serve as critical coping resources for their children in the context of political violence. Nevertheless, their parental characteristics in this context have received scant attention in the literature. The present study examined the relationship between exposure to political violence and parental self-efficacy (PSE). Furthermore, the study examined whether this relationship contributed to paternal involvement. The study included 293 Israeli fathers who were divided into three groups according to their level of exposure to political violence: chronic exposure ($n = 88$); acute exposure ($n = 106$); and non-exposure ($n = 99$). Participants filled out questionnaires about their paternal involvement (Geper-Dor, Sleeping arrangements in the kibbutz and fathers' involvement, 2004), their general sense of PSE (Johnston and Mash, *J Clin Child Psychol* 18:167–175, 1989), and their PSE specifically in times of threatened security. The findings indicate that fathers exposed to political violence reported higher levels of PSE in times of threatened security than non-exposed fathers did. PSE contributed to paternal involvement in aspects of concrete and emotional care. The study suggests that PSE is a complex cognitive construct which may vary in accordance with the specific

situation the father is confronted with and that PSE has the ability to promote paternal involvement. PSE could therefore be enhanced in preventive intervention programs in the context of political violence.

Keywords Fatherhood · Parental self-efficacy · Paternal involvement · Political violence

Introduction

The rate of political violence in the world has risen rapidly over the past few decades (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2009). Whether the violent events are of an acute or chronic nature, most existing studies have examined only the mental health and personal adjustment of the individuals involved, and only a few have addressed these individuals' parental roles or parental functioning. Additionally, among these studies, most have focused mainly on mothers (e.g., Cwikel et al. 2010; Dekel 2004; Itzhaky and Dekel 2008; Shamai 2001, 2002), and not on fathers.

The father–child relationship provides a unique interactional framework for child development: different from the one offered by the mother–child relationship (Ryan et al. 2006; Stoltz et al. 2005). The father is 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). Given the distinct role fathers play, there has been growing interest in their involvement in their children's lives, and in the variables that contribute to the emergence and maintenance of this involvement, such as the father's sense of parental self-efficacy (PSE) (Lamb 2010).

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Despite the understanding that their involvement offers a unique contribution to their children (Doherty et al. 1998; Lamb 2010; Marsiglio et al. 2000), fathers have received very little research attention in the context of political violence. Therefore, the current study focused on fathers' involvement as specifically manifested in the concrete care, supervision and discipline, time spent with, and emotional care of their children (Lamb et al. 1987). The study examined the possible contribution of PSE to paternal involvement in the context of political violence, comparing fathers who had been exposed to chronic or acute political violence with fathers who had not been exposed.

Parental Self-Efficacy

Parental self-efficacy is a specific manifestation of the broader concept of "self-efficacy" coined by Bandura (1977) as part of his theory of social learning. PSE refers to parents' beliefs regarding their ability to successfully perform their parental functions and provide for their children's physical and emotional needs (Jacobs and Kelley 2006). In order for parents to perceive their PSE as high, they must be knowledgeable about parental behaviors concerning childrearing tasks and believe in their capacity to actualize that knowledge successfully (Bandura 1989). If parents lack faith in their parenting abilities, they will have difficulty putting their knowledge into action, and their ability to cope with the challenging situations presented by their children will be impaired (King and Elder 1998). The main source for the development of a high sense of self-efficacy is recurring attempts to achieve positive outcomes and the attainment of success via those attempts (Bandura 1982). Since the sense of self-efficacy is influenced by the demands of the specific situation (Sevigny and Loutzenhiser 2010), the present study explored fathers' PSE in general and their PSE specifically in the context of political violence.

There has been very little attention given to the subject of fathers' sense of PSE. The existing studies have focused mainly on a comparison between fathers' and mothers' sense of PSE (Hudson et al. 2001; Leerkes and Burney 2007). Unsurprisingly, when fathers perceive themselves as more capable and effective as parents they, like mothers, report greater involvement with and responsibility for their children (Jacobs and Kelley 2006; Sanderson and Thompson 2002).

The Association Between Parental Self-Efficacy and Fathers' Involvement

PSE has been found to make a significant contribution to explaining the variance in parental involvement as manifested by demonstrations of warmth and appropriate

supervision of the child (Izzo et al. 2000), as well as parental satisfaction (Coleman and Karraker 1998; Jones and Prinz 2005). Parents with a high sense of PSE demonstrate higher levels of adaptive parental behaviors and parental involvement (Jones and Prinz 2005) than do parents with a low sense of PSE; as a result, their contributions are more likely to benefit their children's development (Ardelt and Eccles 2001; Coleman and Karraker 2003). Conversely, parents with a low sense of PSE demonstrate negative parental behaviors (Hill and Bush 2001) and experience higher levels of helplessness and parental stress (Jones and Prinz 2005). Their children as well have been shown to suffer from more behavioral, social and academic difficulties (Coleman and Karraker 1998; Dumka et al. 2010) than do children of parents with a high sense of PSE.

It can be hypothesized that parents with a higher sense of PSE perceive child raising difficulties as challenges that require creativity and effort, which they enjoy employing their parental skills to meet. Conversely, parents with a low sense of PSE might perceive childrearing difficulties as exceeding their abilities, and might therefore respond to these difficulties with avoidance and passivity (Donovan et al. 1990).

PSE was found to be a significant variable contributing to parental involvement in different contexts such as postnatal depression (Leahy-Warren et al. 2012) and parenting children with special needs (Meirsschaut et al. 2010). These findings might indicate that in complex circumstances, such as exposure to political violence, parents with low PSE might find it difficult to be actively involved in their children's lives. Exposure to political violence may be assumed to present unique challenges for parents and children and would most likely relate to a parent's sense of PSE. Yet to the best of our knowledge PSE in this context has not yet been studied.

Parental Self-Efficacy and Its Contribution to Fathers' Involvement in the Context of Political Violence

Exposure to political violence can evoke a wide range of reactions among children, some of which could well be unfamiliar to their parents. As a result, these parents might experience uncertainty regarding how best to help their children; they might even be afraid of causing them damage by employing inappropriate parental strategies (Cohen 2009). These feelings might reflect the undermining of the parents' sense of PSE, i.e., parents' beliefs regarding their ability to successfully perform their parental functions and provide for their children's needs in the context of threatened security. A low sense of PSE might be associated with parents' inability to grant their children appropriate care. For example, in a study of parents following 9/11 in the United States (Beauchesne et al. 2002), the most

common feeling expressed by parents was helplessness and an inability to protect their children. Their children's questions and reactions to the events created new and unknown territory for them. A similar picture emerged from a study after the Southeast Asian tsunami (Hafstad et al. 2012), in which some parents reported a reduction in their sense of capability to help their children cope with the situation. These studies showed that exposure to a traumatic event, such as political violence, can undermine parents' sense of competence and their belief in their ability to provide for their children's needs in such situations.

The aforementioned studies dealt with exposure to acute trauma; it also seems important, however, to examine how PSE is affected by chronic exposure to political violence and whether differences will be found in the sense of PSE relative to the different levels of exposure. In a state of chronic exposure—considered to be a more pathogenic factor (Sagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2009)—parents might feel unable to fulfill their parental roles since the security threat continues to exist in an ongoing manner and the anxiety that emerges may deplete these parents of their parenting resources. However, there are other studies suggesting that despite the difficulties, some parents manage to develop effective coping strategies to help their children deal with chronic exposure (Robertson and Duckett 2007; Hirsch and Lazar 2012). The question raised by the current study was, therefore, how would different levels of exposure to political violence be reflected in fathers' sense of PSE and, as a result, in their paternal involvement.

The Present Study

The ongoing security threat due to political violence is a central feature of life in Israel (Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1998). Some of the security events that have taken place in Israel in recent years are of a chronic nature, such as the repeated firing of Qassam rockets at the town of Sderot and the surrounding Gaza communities, events which have been going on continuously since the year 2001. During these years, more than 6,000 rockets and 2,500 mortar shells have been fired into the area, causing property damage, injury and death, and undermining the residents' sense of safety (Besser and Neria 2009). Other events have been more acute, such as "Operation Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip, which lasted 3 weeks in 2008. During that operation, more than 660 Qassam rockets were fired at Israel—some at the town of Sderot and the surrounding Gaza communities—and others at areas that had not previously been exposed to security threats (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center 2009).

The literature review indicates that a high level of PSE is a key element in the promotion of paternal involvement (Lamb 2010) and that PSE can be impaired by exposure to security threats (Cohen 2009). When the exposure to such threats is chronic, emotional distress might be deeper and longer-lasting (Sagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2009), and the consequences for parenting might follow suit.

Since there have not yet been sufficient attempts to study the unique characteristics of fatherhood in the context of security threats, the present study examined the association between different levels of exposure to security threats (chronic/acute/non-exposed) and the fathers' sense of PSE. We hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between exposure to security threats and PSE, and that fathers exposed to chronic security threats would report a lower sense of PSE when compared to fathers exposed to acute security threats. Likewise, we hypothesized that fathers exposed to acute security threats would report a lower sense of PSE when compared to fathers from the non-exposed group.

Furthermore, based on the literature showing that chronic exposure to security threats may cause a deeper depletion of parental resources, we hypothesized that the level of exposure to security threats would constitute a moderating variable in the association between PSE and paternal involvement: i.e., the lower the exposure, the stronger the positive correlation between PSE and paternal involvement.

Method

Sample

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 father's oldest child) ranged from one to 12 years (M 5.83 years, SD 318). 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 who participated in the study (59.6 %) described themselves as secular, while a third of them (29.3 %) described themselves as traditional Jews.

The fathers were divided into three research groups, according to the potential exposure to security threats in their places of residence: The chronic exposure group (n = 88) included fathers from the town of Sderot and the surrounding Gaza communities, an area that was exposed to Qassam rockets for a prolonged period of time (around

8 years at the time of data collection). The acute exposure group ($n = 106$) included fathers from Ashdod, Beersheva and the surrounding environs, areas which were exposed to rocket fire for approximately 3 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 terms of most socio-demographic variables such as age, country of birth, education, occupation, years of marriage, number of children, children’s ages and economic status. There was, however, a difference between the groups in the variable of religiousness, with the non-exposed group consisting of 71.1 % secular individuals compared to 58.6 % in the chronic group and 49.5 % in the acute group [$\chi^2(2) = 22.12$]. This variable was therefore controlled for in the data analysis.

As for exposure to security threats, 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 both of the research groups (chronic and acute exposure), 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 level of exposure: Whereas only about half of the fathers from the non-exposed group (54.5 %) had been exposed either directly or indirectly to security incidents, most of the fathers in the two exposed groups had been exposed to security incidents (80.7 % in the chronic group and 80.2 % in the acute group) [$\chi^2(6) = 32.3$]. However, nearly 72 % of the fathers in the overall sample reported exposure to security incidents.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

On this questionnaire, participants recorded information such as age, education, years of marriage, etc.

Exposure to Security Threats

This questionnaire examined direct and indirect exposure to security incidents (rocket attacks, shooting attacks, etc.). The participants reported whether they were personally exposed to a security event, whether family members or acquaintances were exposed, and whether the event caused injury or death to someone they knew or were related to (Itzhaky and Dekel 2008; Laufer and Solomon 2006).

Exposure to Additional Stressful Life Events

The study examined whether, in addition to exposure to security threats, the fathers had also been exposed to other stressful life events. Participants were given a list of 12 stressful life events such as illness, traffic accident, and divorce (Solomon 1995) and were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of these events and when. No significant differences were found between the groups in terms of their exposure to additional stressful life events. Since 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 Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC)

This questionnaire, which includes 17 items, was developed by Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman (in Johnston and Mash 1989) and examines the sense of PSE in regard to two aspects of the parental role: (1) Self-perception as a parent: degree of satisfaction, frustration, anxiety and motivation concerning the parental role (all of the negative items were reverse scored); and, (2) Parental perceived competence: problem-solving abilities and resourcefulness in the parental role. Participants responded as to their agreement with each item on a 1–6 Likert scale (1 = I strongly disagree; 6 = I strongly agree). High scores on each aspect indicated a high sense of PSE. Cronbach’s Alpha for both aspects was found to be good and ranged between .72 for self-perception and .75 for perceived competence.

PSE in the Context of Security Threats

This questionnaire, consisting of 12 statements, was developed for the present study and is based on the PSOC, with a focus on the security threat situation (e.g., “I can tell when my children are distressed due to the security situation and I can respond effectively”). Internal consistency was found to be good for parental competence ($\alpha = .81$) and acceptable for self-perception ($\alpha = .63$).

Paternal Involvement Questionnaire

This questionnaire was developed by Geper-Dor (2004). It contains 33 items and was 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? i.e., going to the movies, taking a trip and so on”). For each item the father was asked to rate frequency of performance on a 1–7 Likert scale (1 = never, 7 = always). The 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 good and ranged between .75 and .85.

Procedure

Convenience sampling was used to recruit fathers, who were approached mainly through research assistants, i.e., students who were residents of the area. Each participant provided his written consent to participate in the study. A total of 700 questionnaires were distributed, and ultimately 293 were returned (42 %). To maintain participants’ anonymity, names were not registered on the questionnaires, and reasons for non-return of questionnaires were not checked. The consent forms were kept in a locked folder, separate and apart from the questionnaires. The data collection process began in February 2009, approximately 2 weeks after the end of “Operation Cast Lead” and concluded at the end of March 2009.

Results

The Association Between Exposure to Security Threats and Fathers’ PSE

The study aimed to examine whether there was a correlation between exposure to security threats and fathers’ PSE (in general and in security threat situations). Table 1 presents the averages and standard deviations of the PSE variables in the three research groups and the findings of the MANOVA variance analysis which examined differences between the groups.

As can be seen in Table 1, a difference in PSE in security threat situations was found between the research groups. A Dunnett Post Hoc test showed that fathers who

were exposed to security threats (from the chronic and acute groups) perceived their parental competence in security threat situations as higher than fathers from the non-exposed group. Hence, fathers exposed to security threats felt greater satisfaction from their roles as fathers in this context, felt that they managed to defend their children against the situation and its effects, and felt that they were able to tell when their children were distressed due to the situation and to respond effectively. As for parental self-perception—i.e., the degree to which the fathers felt stress and anxiety in their parental role during a time of threatened security—no difference was found between the groups. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between the groups regarding general PSE.

The Association Between PSE and Paternal Involvement

We next examined the association between PSE and fathers’ involvement in their children’s lives. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlations found between PSE variables and aspects of paternal involvement.

As can be seen in Table 2, a positive correlation was found between PSE and paternal involvement variables, except for the aspect of imposing discipline. A medium significant positive correlation was found between PSE—both in general and in security situations—and involvement variables: direct caretaking, spending time together and emotional care. The table shows a low to medium significant negative correlation between general PSE and paternal involvement in regard to imposing discipline. No correlation seems to have been found between PSE in security situations and imposing discipline.

Exposure to Security Threat as a Moderating Variable

In an attempt to examine whether exposure to a security threat moderated the association between the father’s sense of PSE and his parental involvement, hierarchical regression analyses were performed.

In the first step of the regression, key background variables were entered using the Stepwise method:

Table 1 Averages and standard deviations of sense of PSE and findings of variance analyses regarding differences between groups

	Chronic		Acute		Non		F (2,290)	Eta ²
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
<i>General PSE</i>								
Competence	4.55	.63	4.44	.69	4.46	.70	.714	.00
Self-perception	4.70	.70	4.61	.73	4.65	.64	.351	.00
<i>PSE in security situations</i>								
Competence	3.04	.55	3.10	.63	2.73	.65	10.87*	.07
Self-perception	3.14	.58	3.16	.65	3.04	.61	1.20	.01

* *p* < .05

Table 2 Pearson correlations between PSE variables and involvement variables

	Involvement			
	Direct caretaking	Imposing discipline	Spending time together	Emotional care
<i>General PSE</i>				
Competence	.27**	-.13**	.34**	.42**
Self-perception	.13*	-.16**	.30**	.22**
<i>Parental PSE in security situations</i>				
Competence	.25**	-.07	.32**	.39**
Self-perception	.15**	-.07	.17**	.17**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

education, years of marriage, economic status and religion. Since there were no differences between the groups in these variables, they were not entered into the regression. In the second step, using the Enter method, the standardized scores of the PSE variables were entered, and in the third step the moderator variable of exposure level 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 PSE and exposure level variables were added. In order to explain the direction of the interactions found to be significant, the model of Preacher et al. (2006) was used.

Since the tests run did not find significant interactions referring to paternal involvement in regard to the aspect of imposing discipline ($\Delta F(2, 268) = 1.57, p = .21$) or spending time together ($\Delta F(2, 267) = 1.24, p = .29$), we presented the regression analyses and the significant interactions found in reference to involvement in direct caretaking and emotional care. Table 3 shows the results of the hierarchical regression.

Table 3 indicates that the background variables did not enter the regression model. As for involvement in direct caretaking, it appears that in the first step, parental competence explained 9 % of the variance in paternal involvement ($\Delta F(2, 273) = 10.72, p = .00$) whereas the rest of the PSE variables did not contribute. The table indicates that exposure to a security threat in one's place of residence did not contribute to explaining the variance in direct caretaking ($\Delta F(2, 269) = 1.9, p = .15$). An examination of the interaction between the father's sense of PSE and exposure indicates that exposure to a security threat is a moderating variable of the association between parental security competence and involvement in direct caretaking, with the interactions explaining 2 % of the variance in paternal involvement in direct caretaking ($\Delta F(1, 264) = 5.08, p = .02$).

According to the model of Preacher et al. (2006), the Beta coefficients between parental security competence and involvement in direct caretaking was positive and significant only when there was exposure to a security threat, either chronic ($B = .45$) or acute ($B = .32$). In the

non-exposed group, the association between these variables was not significant ($B = .01$).

Regarding the aspect of emotional care, the regression model as a whole explains 22 % of the variance in the level of paternal involvement. It appears that both general parental competence ($\Delta F(2, 273) = 25.03, p = .00$), and parental competence in security situations ($\Delta F(2, 271) = 4.66, p = .01$), 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 chronic exposure to a security threat was a moderating variable in the association between parental self-perception in security situations and involvement in emotional care. This interaction explains 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 parental self-perception in security situations and fathers' emotional care was positive and significant ($B = .26$) only when there was chronic exposure to a security threat. In the non-exposed group, the association between these variables was not significant ($B = .01$).

Discussion

The present study examined the association between different levels of exposure to security threats and fathers' sense of PSE. Furthermore, the study attempted to examine whether exposure to security threats served as a moderating factor between PSE and fathers' involvement with their children. The rationale for the study arose from the scant knowledge about parenting under conditions of security threats, and especially about fathers' parenting in this unique context.

While the research hypotheses emerged from an assumption of fathers' vulnerability, the study findings showed a picture of resilience and a sense of efficacy among fathers. These findings are reflected in the high

Table 3 Hierarchical regression coefficients that explain the variance in paternal involvement in direct caretaking and emotional care

Step	Explanatory variables	Direct caretaking		Emotional care	
		β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
1	PSE		.09***		.18***
	Competence	.26***		.35***	
	Self-perception	.03		.11	
	Competence in security Situations	.13		.20**	
	Self-perception in security situations	.03		-.00	
2	Exposure to threat by place of residence		.00		.00
	Chronic	-.05		-.00	
	Acute	-.13		-.07	
3	Interactions		.02*		.03**
	Parental competence in chronic security situations	.22**			
	Parental competence in acute security situations	.18*			
	Self-perception in chronic security situations			.19**	
	Overall R ²		.11**		.22***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$,
*** $p < .001$

sense of parental competence found among fathers who were exposed to security threats as compared to fathers in the non-exposed group. These findings are consistent with those that have emerged from studies showing that despite exposure to security threats, parents usually manage to develop effective coping strategies to help their children deal with stressful security situations (Robertson and Duckett 2007; Hirsch and Lazar 2012).

The fact that a higher sense of parental competence in threatened security situations was found among the exposed study groups than among the non-exposed group is also consistent with Bandura's theory (Bandura 1982) of the development of self-efficacy. The main source for the development of a high sense of self-efficacy is recurring attempts to achieve positive outcomes and the attainment of success as a result of those attempts. Accordingly, it can be argued that fathers exposed to security threats had more experience coping with their children in such situations than fathers in the non-exposed group did. It is possible that these attempts yielded positive outcomes from the fathers' point of view and thereby contributed, by a process of feedback, to strengthening the fathers' sense of PSE in security situations.

It is interesting that a high sense of parental competence in security situations was found both among fathers exposed to chronic threat and fathers exposed to acute threat. Apparently, even brief exposure to a security threat is sufficient to be associated with a high sense of parental competence in threatened security situations.

The fact that no differences were found between the groups in terms of the fathers' general sense of PSE may reinforce the assumption that PSE is particularly influenced by the demands of the specific situation (Sevigny and Loutzenhiser 2010).

However, no differences were found between the groups concerning parental self-perception in threatened security situations. It can be assumed that an examination of parental self-esteem and anxiety under conditions of exposure to a security threat highlights the need to emphasize positive aspects of the self and to de-emphasize negative aspects, so as not to lose the defense mechanisms vital for coping with the situation. This might be even more the case for men, who experience delegitimization when reporting difficulty or weakness (Solomom et al. 2005) and for whom exposure to a security threat is an opportunity to demonstrate virile qualities (Bar-Yosef and Padan-Eisenstark 1977).

The findings of the present study reinforce previous studies that found a positive correlation between fathers' PSE and their paternal involvement (Ehrenberg et al. 2001). It appears that the more fathers perceive themselves as capable and skilled in their parental roles, the more involvement and responsibility they will report having had in the raising of their children (Sanderson and Thompson 2002). This involvement in turn apparently improves their parental skills and thereby reinforces their sense of PSE (Jones and Prinz 2005). When fathers experience themselves as effective, they are more likely to become more involved in a greater number of parental tasks, and the repeated performance of those tasks increases the fathers' sense of PSE (Ilser 2011).

An examination of exposure to security threats as a moderating variable showed that parental competence in a state of security threat explained involvement in direct caretaking and emotional care. It is evident that whether the exposure was acute or chronic, the correlation between parental competence in security situations and involvement in direct caretaking was positive and significant, whereas in

the non-exposed group the correlation between the variables was not significant. It appears that the sense of parental responsibility in caring for the child's needs was heightened by the security threat. When there is a 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. Indeed, previous studies of parenting in situations of threatened security (Beauchesne et al. 2002; Dekel 2004) or during natural disasters (Hafstad et al. 2012) found that caring for the child is a basic, internal dictate of survival in the parental experience.

Furthermore, in a state of chronic exposure to a security threat, it appears that the correlation between parental self perception and fathers' involvement in emotional care was positive and significant, whereas in the non-exposed group the correlation between the variables was not significant. It seems that the more tension and anxiety provoked in the father by the chronic security threat, the more emotional care he gives to his child. There may be a compensation mechanism at play: the father compensates for his low parental self-esteem in security situations by increasing his emotional involvement thereby increasing his sense of control which might have been undermined by the chronic security threat (Hobfoll et al. 2007). A compensation mechanism could also be triggered by the father's feeling of guilt for choosing to continue living in a high-risk area (Hirsch and Lazar 2012).

While this study makes a contribution to the knowledge base about fathering in the context of a security threat, it also has a number of limitations in light of which the findings should be viewed. First, the fact that the study used a "snowball" sample rather than a probabilistic sample limits the study's generalizability to broader contexts. This type of sampling is typical of studies of fathers, particularly because of the difficulty in recruiting them as research subjects (Easterbrooks et al. 2007). Second, due to the difficulty in recruiting fathers as research subjects, the actual sample obtained was a selective sample of relatively highly educated fathers with good economic statuses. This fact may have influenced the findings as both higher education and a good economic status promote adaptive behavior in traumatic situations in general and during times of threatened security in particular (Hobfoll et al. 2009). Also, the fairly low coefficient for self-perception in the context of security threats may indicate that more studies are needed in order to explore fathers' self-perception in this context. Despite these limitations, however, the research groups were matched for characteristics and found to be similar to each other in most sociodemographic variables. Furthermore, a wide sample ($n = 293$) was gathered within a short time, and done so shortly after "Operation Cast Lead:" both factors allowing for the study of the immediate effects of the war and the comparison

between acute exposure and chronic exposure. As previously mentioned, studies regarding the differences between the two kinds of exposure are lacking: an additional reason for the importance of the current study.

Another limitation of the study is that it is impossible to deduce causality between the research variables due to the nature of the cross-sectional study design, which characterizes studies of trauma in general (Schönenberg et al. 2011; Galea et al. 2008). Therefore, only correlational relationships can be deduced.

Finally, though the interaction results of the study were significant, other variables may make a greater contribution to explaining the relationship between PSE and paternal involvement. As the research on paternal involvement is still developing, future studies should further explore this issue among fathers in a variety of different life contexts (i.e., Meirsschaut et al. 2010). In the context of threatened security, while the current study focused on married fathers of young children—due to homogeneity considerations—it would be important as well to look at fathers of adolescents, divorced fathers, fathers who lost a child due to the situation, etc.

The study indicates that PSE is a complex cognitive construct that may change according to the demands of the specific situation, such as exposure to a security threat, and that it may also promote paternal involvement. Therefore, preventive intervention programs applied during states of exposure to security threats should focus on promoting PSE. A number of studies have shown that PSE rose as a result of therapeutic intervention (Evans et al. 2003; Miller-Heyl et al. 1998) and that PSE may also predict intervention outcomes (Hoza et al. 2000). In order for fathers to perceive their PSE as high, they must be knowledgeable about parenting behaviors appropriate to threatened security situations and believe in their capacity to put that knowledge into practice (Bandura 1989). Since the current study suggests that the main source for developing a high sense of PSE is recurring attempts to achieve positive outcomes, psychoeducation intervention programs should include information regarding parenting of young children in the context of threatened security situations as well as the provision of practical exercises (e.g., role playing) in order to increase positive experiences. Such programs might enhance a process of feedback between active involvement and PSE.

As this study suggests, fathers with a high sense of efficacy in their parental roles may make a significant contribution to their families during times of threatened security, due to their active involvement in different aspects of their children's lives. Such involvement has been shown to play a significant role in promoting children's well-being (Hawkins et al. 2008).

Conflict of interest None for any author.

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