

# Torture Treatment Literature Selection, Q4 2018

The Partners in Trauma Healing (PATH) bibliography is a resource for current literature on the topic of the mental health status of and treatments for torture survivors, war trauma survivors, refugees, and asylum seekers. This also includes research in the areas of social work that relate directly to the psychological well-being of these populations. The bibliography includes peer reviewed journal article citations in these areas; select original summaries of those articles; and links to the publicly available abstracts and full text versions of these articles. This bibliography is updated and distributed on a quarterly basis. The bibliography does not currently include articles on policy and advocacy.

## Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) Volunteer Contributions to this Bibliography

- **Carolyn Easton** conducted the literature search and compiled the citations for this bibliography.
- **Ellie Lewis** organized, formatted, and edited the content of this bibliography.
- **Melissa Sheridan and Eden Almasude** wrote summaries of selected articles for this bibliography.
- **Jared Del Rosso** reviewed the selected article summaries for this bibliography.

## Contents

Selected Article Summaries:

<a href="#">Could gender differences in war trauma types, symptom clusters and risk factors predict gender differences in PTSD prevalence?</a> .....	2
<a href="#">The effects of armed conflict on children</a> .....	3

Selected Article Citations By Topic:

<a href="#">Children/Youth</a> .....	4
<a href="#">Health/Well-being</a> .....	5
<a href="#">Refugees</a> .....	7
<a href="#">Women</a> .....	8
<a href="#">Additional Relevant Resources</a> .....	9



## Selected Article Summaries

### Could gender differences in war trauma types, symptom clusters and risk factors predict gender differences in PTSD prevalence?

Farhood, L., Fares, S., Hamady, C.

Summary by Melissa Sheridan, volunteer with Center for Victims of Torture

#### Study Details

Civilians in South Lebanon have lived with armed conflict and/or occupation for over 20 years. The most recent conflict, in July of 2016, resulted in 1,100 Lebanese casualties, 4,400 injuries, and approximately 1,000,000 internally displaced civilians. Among civilians in South Lebanon, the prevalence rates for psychiatric morbidity, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), range from 17.6 to 33.3 percent across different samples. The female-male ratio in prevalence of PTSD is about 2:1.

This study sought to assess the gender gap in the prevalence of PTSD. It also sought to understand gender differences in experiences of different trauma types, PTSD symptom clusters, and PTSD risk factors. The authors aimed to establish profiles of PTSD symptoms, trauma-vulnerability, and risk factors for both men and women.

#### Study Methods

The study involved secondary data analysis from a 2007 cross-sectional survey designed to assess war-related trauma types, clusters of trauma symptoms, and risk factor profiles among male and female civilians from South Lebanon. The sample included 991 civilians selected from ten diverse South Lebanon villages. The participants were interviewed in their homes and workplaces by trained graduate students.

#### Study Findings

*Gender differences in PTSD prevalence.* A large proportion of participants (17.8%) scored above the diagnostic threshold for PTSD, with a significantly higher prevalence among females (24.3%) than males (10.4%).

*Gender differences in experienced trauma types.* Total scores on three trauma types – (1) detention and abuse, (2) traumatic loss and (3) exposure to conflict and social upheaval – were not statistically different between genders. Prior studies consistently found gender differences in specific trauma types. The study authors explain this finding by reference to the nature of the July 2006 war, which was primarily conducted through aerial bombings. This resulted in indiscriminate injuries and death to which both men and women were equally vulnerable.

*Gender differences in PTSD symptom clusters.* Women reported greater trauma symptoms across four symptom clusters: (1) intrusion, (2) avoidance, (3) negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and (4) alterations in arousal and reactivity. Some evidence suggests men exhibit more physiological arousal and anger than women, who report more somatization and dissociation symptoms. But the study authors caution against taking these differences at face value; they may not, in fact, reflect true differences. Specifically, the authors speculate that cultural norms in Lebanon could reduce reporting of symptoms of distress among men.

*Gender differences in risk factors associated with PTSD.* Among both men and women, social support, number of stressful life events, and domestic violence were associated with meeting the diagnostic threshold for PTSD. These factors and health problems were even more strongly associated among women. Among men, tranquilizer and cigarette use were significantly associated with meeting the diagnostic threshold for PTSD.

#### Conclusions

The three examined components – clusters of trauma symptoms, trauma types, and risk factors – could intervene in the relationship between gender and PTSD prevalence. The higher prevalence of PTSD among women could stem from individual or combined influences of these three components. Examining which clusters of trauma symptoms or which trauma types are more characteristic of men and women could yield more promising long term outcomes.

for the treatment of PTSD. And, by looking at the risk and protective factors from a gender perspective, PTSD could be both treated and prevented.

## **The effects of armed conflict on children**

Kadir, A., Shenoda, S., Goldhagen, J., & Pitterman, S.

Summary by Eden Almasude, volunteer with Center for Victims of Torture

### **Study Background**

This publication is a technical report issued by the American Academy of Pediatrics. It reviews the literature and evidence-base for policy recommendations on armed conflict and children. The authors defined armed conflict as “any organized dispute that involves the use of weapons, violence, or force, whether within national borders or beyond them, and whether involving state actors or nongovernment entities” (p. 2). Importantly, there are various United Nations (UN) conventions that outline protections for children during armed conflict, including the legally binding UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Armed conflict affects an estimated 246 million children across the world, leading to a wide range of psychological and other health-related impacts. The harms of armed conflicts are often direct and can include displacement, injury, or death. Contemporary armed conflicts can involve chemical warfare and rape as a tool of war; children are particularly vulnerable to these.

There are also indirect effects of armed conflicts. Even long after a conflict has ended, landmines and other explosives, which may be located in areas where children play, cause extensive injuries. Healthcare facilities are often targeted during armed conflict, leading to increases of preventable or infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and leishmaniasis. Similarly, food systems are often attacked during war, leading to high rates of acute malnutrition. For instance, there was a prevalence of acute malnutrition in 25-30% of refugee children from South Sudan. The number of unaccompanied minors has dramatically increased in recent years, and they are at high risk of discrimination, lengthy detention, and trafficking.

### **Study Findings**

The effects of armed conflict on children are clearly far-reaching. This report offers a set of policy recommendations which emphasize trauma-informed practices, collaboration with local communities and educational systems, and training to address common mental and physical health conditions in conflict areas. Specifically, the authors argue that healthcare for children is more effective with disaster training, context-specific approaches, and trauma-informed care. Adapting environments to be more child-friendly can be beneficial. Specifically, the authors argue that environments should encourage play among children; they should also foster a sense of control, rather than helplessness, among children.

In regards to public policy, children associated with armed groups, including gangs, should be treated as victims and provided the according protections and treatment. Children should also be involved in efforts to address the effects of armed conflict, and the authors argue that it is especially important for policy-makers to listen to children’s contributions to policy decisions.

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## Women

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## Additional Relevant Resources

- Dignity (The Danish Institute Against Torture) provides a database that allows you to search for a wider range of articles, books, and other publications on the topic of torture (<https://dignity.reindex.net/RCT/main/Landing.php?Lang=eng>).
- IRCT (International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims) provides free access to their journal, TORTURE Journal (<https://tidsskrift.dk/index.php/torture-journal/index>).

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