Couples in the Line of Fire

Prof. Michal Shamai Ph.D
School of Social Work
University of Haifa

Paper Presented in the International Conference: Trauma through the Life Cycle from Strength-Base Perspective.
Jerusalem, Hebrew University, January 8-10, 2012

  **The role of social systems on personal reaction to threat of war and terror.** *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 24*(5), 747-764.

• Shamai, M., Tapiro, S., Machmali, R. (work in process).

• **Couples in the line of fire:** The impact of on-going exposure to threat of Kassam rockets attacks on couple dynamic- Couplehood along the Israeli border with Gaza.
Social system variables (marital quality, community resilience, and significant others’ stress) mediating between the level of threat and the impact of stress

Level of threat

Social systems

Impact of stress

Marital quality

Psychological symptoms

Level of concern

Life satisfaction

Level of threat: North - Center

Community resilience

Sig. others’ stress

-11***

-0.16***

-0.30***

-0.09***
Independent Variable

- **Level of Exposure**: refers to two groups: one living close to the Lebanese border (the North group) and the comparative group living in distance from the border but is demographically similar to the north group (the Center group).
Mediating Variable

- **Marital Quality**: was measured by the Hebrew version translated and validated by Lavee (1995) of the short Enrich scale developed by Fowers and Olson (1993).
Dependent Variables - Impact of Stress

- **Psychological Symptoms**: were measured by three scales (anxiety, depression and somatization) from the short version of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) developed by Derogatis and Spencer (1982).

- **Level of concern**: was measured by six items that were developed for this study and focused on the concern regarding future security, such as, ability to continue routine life, family safety, condition of community shelters etc.

- **Life Satisfaction**: was measured by 5 point scale of single item referring to two points of time.
## Raw differences: North vs. Center

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>North</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Center</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>5.96</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.94**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Symptoms</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.97**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Concern</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-5.27***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.75**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*P**<0.01, **p***<0.001
Level of threat

Social systems

Marital quality

Psychological symptoms

Impact of stress

Level of concern

Life satisfaction

Level of threat: North - Center

Community resilience

Sig. others’ stress

Level of concern

Psychological symptoms

Life satisfaction
Positive Impact on Marital Quality

- “We learn how to cope with the situation together; we learn about each other during difficult and stressful situations, and this is something very special, something that makes us very close to each other.”

- “The past situation forced us to be close and to help each other.... The stressful situations have made us even closer and – it’s funny – but in some way it even contributed to the strength of our relationships.”
No Impact on Marital Quality

- “I don’t think that our relationships would be different if we lived in another place.”
- “We don’t see any influence of the situation on our family atmosphere or on our marital relationship or on the way we raised and related to our children.”
Negative Impact on Marital Quality

• “Do you think that it is possible to have regular sex when every minute it could be stopped by Katyusha attacks?”
• “If we lived in another place, our lives would be much more peaceful and it would affect not only our children but also our marital relationship.”
• “... I don’t believe all these stories regarding closeness. The situation creates tension and anxiety and affects everyone...”
Conclusion

- In spite of the large number of participants that did not report on any impact of the security threat on their marital quality, there is still significant difference in the level of marital quality between the groups.
- Exploring couple dynamic in situations of security threat may raise some resistance –WHY?
- Shamai, M., Tapiro, S., Machmali, R. (work in process).

- Couples in the line of fire: The impact of ongoing exposure to threat of Kassam rockets on couple dynamic - Couplehood along the Israeli border with Gaza.
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Is there an impact of on-going exposure to rocket and missiles attacks on marital quality?
- Do couple resilience, couple cohesiveness and flexibility and loss and gain of psychological and social resources mediate/ moderate between the level of exposure and marital quality?
- How do couples construct their experience of living under on-going exposure to rocket and attacks?
Independent Variable

Level of Exposure:
There were two groups:
1) High level of exposure- this group include participants living in Sderot and other communities along the border with Gaza and experience high exposure to attacks of Kassam rockets.
2) Low level of exposure- this group include people who experience either focused exposure (one or two attacks) or indirect exposure through the media.
Dependent Variables

- **Marital quality** was measured by a Hebrew version translated and validated by Lavee (1995) of the short Enrich scale developed by Fowers and Olson (1993).
Perceived Influence on marital quality:

- Reporting on each item of the marital quality questionnaire whether there was:
  - No impact- yes/no Number of areas (items) that were not impacted
  - Negative impact- yes/no Number of areas (items) that were negatively impacted
  - Positive impact- yes/no Number of areas (items) that were positively impacted
Mediating/ Moderating Variables

- **Couple Resilience** was measured by modification of the *Sense of Family Coherence Scale* (Sagy, 1998) to a couple sense of coherence. Thus, in each items we related to the couple rather than to the family.

- **Couple Cohesiveness and Flexibility**: Two scales based on the Face III questionnaire and on the circumplex model which were developed by Olson and colleagues for assessing family functioning, but the items refer mainly to the spouses.

- **Loss/Gain of Psychological and Social Resources** – a scale based on *Conservation of Resources (COR-E)* Theory: We used the part of the scale that was already used in Israel by (Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim and Johnson, 2006).
Results

- No significant differences between the two groups (high exposure vs. low exposure) in level of marital quality.
- Significant differences between the two group on level of influence of the security threat on marital quality:
  The high exposure group reported significantly higher negative and positive influences on marital quality.
  The low exposure group reported significantly higher no-influence on marital quality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>High Level of Stress n=61</th>
<th>Low Level of Stress n=112</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.85NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Influence on Marital Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.94***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Influence on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td>-4.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Influence on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.66**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05*, *p < .01**, *p < .001***
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Negative Influence</th>
<th>Positive Influence</th>
<th>Total Influence</th>
<th>Percentage of Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Communicate and to Share</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Agreements</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint Recreation</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56.66%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Life</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes Towards Child Raising</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with Extended Family</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Influence on Marital Quality</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mediation 1: Between Level of Exposure and Marital Quality

- Level of Exposure
  - Couple Resilience
    - Cohesiveness
  - Flexibility
    - Loss of Psych./Social Resources
    - Gain of Psych./Social Resources
  - Marital Quality
    - .17***
    - .36***
    - 55***
Mediation 2: Between Level of Exposure and No Influence on Marital Quality

Level of Exposure

-0.29***

Cohesiveness

Flexibility

Loss of Psych./Social Resources

Gain of Psych./Social Resources

Couple Resilience

-0.21**

No Influence on Marital Quality

-0.28***

(-0.41***)

-0.28***
Mediation 3: Between Level of Exposure and Negative influence on Marital Quality

Level of Exposure

Couple Resilience

Cohesiveness

Flexibility

Loss of Psych./Social Resources

Gain of Psych./Social Resources

Negative Influence on Marital Quality

.27*** (.34***)
Mediation 4: Between Level of Exposure and Positive Influence on Marital Quality

- Level of Exposure
  - Couple Resilience
  - Cohesiveness
  - Flexibility
  - Loss of Psych./Social Resources
  - Gain of Psych./Social Resources

- Positive Influence on Marital Quality

Correlation:
- \(-29^{***}\)
- \(.31^{***}\)
- \(.20^{**}\)
FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE STUDY

- Overall perception of the impact of the security situation on couple relations
- Couple intimacy
- Parental role as a major concern in the couple duality
- Role division and decision making
- Couple's coping: Between partnership and separateness
Lack of Impact

- Creative ways to preserve intimacy
- Creative ways of coping
- Sense of togetherness "healthy oneness"
- Equality, Flexibility, Reciprocity

Negative Impact

- Distance in Intimate Relationships
- Different ways of coping
- Dichotomy and Rigidity
- Conflicts

Change in couples dynamic as a result of couple therapy

Deterioration in couple relations