

Emotional Reactivity During Conflict

An experience sampling study of exposure and mental health status

Liron Lapid Pickman, Marc Gelkopf and Talya Greene

Department of Community Mental Health, University of Haifa,
NATAL - Israel Trauma & Resiliency Center



Introduction

How do we feel day-to-day during conflict?

Can we experience positive emotions?

How do war stressors affect our emotions?

These questions have hardly been studied, especially among vulnerable populations, such as people with mental illness, who are more emotionally reactive to daily stressors.

We assessed emotional reactivity to rocket warning sirens during conflict, in people with and without mental illness.

Methods

Procedure and participants: The study was conducted during the Israel-Gaza conflict during July – August 2014. We used experience sampling methodology (ESM).

Assessments were conducted twice a day for 30 days in 182 participants with mental illness (n=86) and from the general population (n=96), exposed to rocket fire.

Measures: Negative and positive emotions were assessed by PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1994). Participants also reported whether they experienced a siren since their last assessment.

Analysis: A multilevel fixed and random intercept model for categorical outcomes was used.

Results

1. For both groups, **exposure to rocket sirens** was associated with a decrease in all positive emotions and an increase in all negative emotions other than guilt and shame.
2. People with mental illness experienced more **helplessness, loneliness, shame, and guilt** overall.
3. Following rocket sirens, people with mental illness experienced **more sadness and calm and less energy** compared with the general population, however no such interaction effect was found for other emotions.

Conclusion

- Rocket sirens are associated with an increase in negative emotions and a decrease in positive emotions.
- **People with mental illness do not appear to be more emotionally reactive to sirens compared with the general population.**
- Further research is needed to understand the mechanisms of emotional reactivity to both war-related and daily stressors during conflict.

Figure 1: Probabilities of **negative emotions** for siren and mental illness (MI)

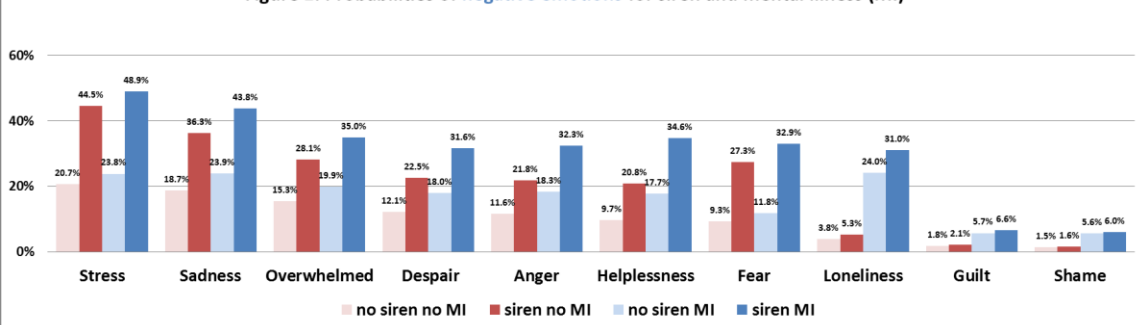
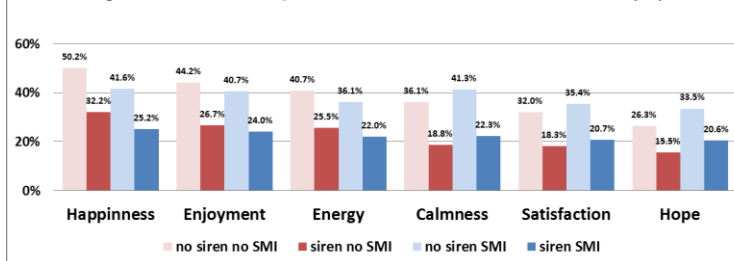


Figure 2: Probabilities of **positive emotions** for siren and mental illness (MI)



About NATAL

NATAL: Israel Trauma and Resiliency Center provides multidisciplinary psychological treatment and support for victims of terror and war.

Contact: www.natal.org.il

References

Watson, D., & Clark, L. A. (1994). *The PANAS-X: Manual for the positive and negative affect schedule - expanded form*. University of Iowa. Retrieved from http://iir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=psychology_pubs

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Contact: lapid.liron@gmail.com