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Anxiety-Inducing Media: The Effect of Constant News Broadcasting on the Well-Being of Israeli Television Viewers

Moran Bodas, Maya Siman-Tov, Kobi Peleg, and Zahava Solomon

Objective: The effects of televised trauma on the emotional well-being of television viewers has received some scientific attention in recent years, suggesting that the general public is placed at risk of developing distress and possibly posttraumatic psychopathology as a result of secondary exposure via mass media. At the break of a recent war in Gaza, we assessed the psychological effects of the extensive news broadcasting. *Method:* An omnibus survey was performed two weeks into Operation Protective Edge with a sample of 500 participants representing the adult (> 18) Jewish population of Israel. *Results:* The results suggest that a vast majority (87.2%) of the population tuned in to the newscasts and the majority (76.7%) of viewers increased their news consumption compared to normal. Increased frequency of viewing newscasts was associated with reported anxiety reflected in uncontrolled fear, physiological hyperarousal, sleeping difficulties, and fearful thoughts. A regression model revealed that viewers watching the constant newscasts more than usual are 1.6 times more likely to report at least one anxiety symptom compared to those watching at the same frequency or less, standardized to gender and age. *Conclusions:* Increased viewing patterns of televised traumatic content, as well as negative perception of such broadcasts, are associated with the report of anxiety symptoms or psychopathology. The public health implications of the findings are discussed.

The effects of televised trauma on the emotional well-being of television viewers were first widely discussed following the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 (e.g., Morland, 2000) and peaked following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States (Collimore et al., 2008; Galea & Resnick, 2005; Jarolmen & Sisco, 2005;

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Schlenger et al., 2002; Schuster et al., 2001; Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin, & Gil-Rivas, 2002). Some of the research on this issue suggests that the link between exposure to televised coverage of disasters and the development of psychopathology is not well established. For example, Galea and colleagues (2003) reported that while posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among rescue workers at the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York climbed over a period of six years, the PTSD rates among the general population that was exposed to the traumatic images only through the mass media were lower to begin with and declined over a period of six months. In addition, Ahern and colleagues (2002) reported that while repeated viewing of images from the 9/11 attacks was associated with PTSD among people who witnessed the attacks firsthand, no such association existed for people not personally affected. These findings suggest that distress and PTSD among the general population experiencing secondary exposure to stress via the media is minimal (Neria & Sullivan, 2001).

However, there is a growing body of work to suggest otherwise. For instance, several studies have found an association between exposure to televised trauma and anxiety among children and adolescents (Busso, McLaughlin, & Sheridan, 2014; Otto et al., 2007; Pfefferbaum et al., 2001; Pfefferbaum et al., 2003), students (Deroma et al., 2008), war veterans (Long, Chamberlain, & Vincent, 1994; Moyers, 1996; Hilton, 1997), and even the journalists providing the news coverage themselves (Feinstein, Audet, & Waknine, 2014; Weidmann & Papsdorf, 2010). In addition, a wide spectrum of traumatic images is now known to be associated with anxiety through television viewing, including conventional terrorism (e.g., Slone, 2000), bioterrorism (Dougall, Hayward, & Baum, 2005), war (e.g., Kira et al., 2008), and natural disasters (e.g., Niitsu, Watanabe-Galloway, Sayles, Houfek, & Rice, 2014). These and other publications are making it more and more

apparent that the general public is indeed placed at risk of developing posttraumatic psychopathology as a result of secondary exposure to traumatic content via the mass media.

It is worth mentioning that not only are there reports of a possible association between viewing televised trauma and the risk of developing posttraumatic psychopathology, but the data also suggest a correlation between the extent (or frequency) of exposure and the likelihood of developing those symptoms. In a 2005 publication, Ahern, Galea, Resnick, and Vlahov reported that increased viewing of the 9/11 attacks media coverage was associated with increased risk for the development of PTSD. More specifically, they argue that people in the highest third of viewing had 1.66 times greater odds of probable PTSD compared with people in the lowest third of viewing, after adjustment for explanatory variables. Bernstein and colleagues (2007) even reported a dose-response relation between hours of 9/11 attack anniversary footage seen and new onset of probable PTSD; in particular, 12 or more hours of viewing was associated with a 3.4-fold increase of that risk. Both Ahern and colleagues (2004) and Bernstein and colleagues (2007) concluded that television might merit consideration as a potential exposure to a traumatic event: “[T]elevision viewing may in and of itself represent an ‘exposure’ that may influence risk of psychopathology in the general population” (Bernstein et al., 2007, p. 44).

Despite Ahern and colleagues’ (2004) and Bernstein and colleagues’ (2007) conclusions, it should be noted that media exposure no longer meets stressor criterion A for a traumatic event according to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013): “Criterion A: stressor . . . The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury . . . as follows: . . . Repeated or extreme indirect exposure to aversive details of the event(s) . . . This does not include indirect

non-professional exposure through electronic media, television, movies, or pictures.”

The present study assessed the effects of the constant, around-the-clock news broadcasting on the emotional and mental well-being of the Jewish Israeli audience in terms of anxiety symptoms.

Since its establishment, the state of Israel and the Israeli public have been under constant threat as a result of an unresolved regional conflict. In particular, for the past 14 years, the residents of the Gaza vicinity, in the southern region of Israel, have been subjected to rocket fire in fluctuating intensity. This present study examines one of the most intense periods in rocket shelling in this and other regions. On July 7, 2014, following a growing influx of rocket fire from Gaza into southern Israel, Operation Protective Edge was initiated. The operation lasted for 29 days (a ceasefire was declared on August 5). On July 17 a ground invasion into Gaza was initiated. This stage in the conflict posed a much greater risk to the 80,000 Israeli troops, during which time friends and family back home could not communicate with them. In all, during this conflict 64 soldiers and three civilians died on the Israeli side, and a total of 3,356 rockets (an average of more than 115 per day) were fired into Israel, covering 70% of the country's population from Haifa in the north to the Negev desert in the south. In addition, occasional, albeit very limited, rocket fire from Southern Lebanon to the north of Israel and from the Sinai desert to the southern city of Eilat was also observed. Therefore, effectively, the entire population of Israel was under rocket threat at some point of time during this conflict (Ynet, 2014).

In an effort to provide the public with up-to-date information, all three national channels (10, 11, and 22) drastically rearranged their broadcasting schedule from the usual few hours of news reports per day, mostly during prime time, to concentrated and intense news reporting. This broadcasting format is well known in Israel and is very common during times of crisis. It includes,

among others, live coverage of events, breaking news on rocket launches and interceptions by the missile defense array, graphical images of hit sites (i.e., images of destruction, blood stains, personal belongings left on scene, closed-circuit television videos of moment of impact), daily recap of fallen troops, funerals, and interviews with their family and loved ones, and video clips provided by a military spokesperson illustrating the fighting on the ground. These broadcasts started at 6 a.m. and ran into the middle of the night.

The increase in news reporting was met by a growing demand in public consumption, demonstrated by the steep rise in viewing ratings of the prime-time evening news on channel 22 (the most popular in Israel). For instance, during the week of July 1–7, the average ratings of the evening news slot measured 35% of the Jewish Israeli households, whereas during the next week (July 8–14) 43% were tuned in for the broadcast on average (“Israeli Television Ratings,” 2014).

This study aims to assess the psychological effects of watching televised traumatic content of this conflict. To this end, we performed an online survey of Jewish Israeli households. Specifically, we wanted to examine whether watching the newscasts, altogether and at different frequencies, and whether negative perception of those newscasts, for example, as being stressful, burdensome, or addictive, was associated with reporting anxiety symptoms.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A randomized, Internet-based survey was performed on July 21, 2014, about two weeks into Operation Protective Edge. The survey was conducted on the fourteenth day of the operation, four days into the ground invasion in Gaza. The survey was administered via iPanel, an

Internet panel, with a 33% response rate. The sample included 500 participants representing the adult Jewish population of the entire state of Israel. The average age of participants was 41 (range: 18–71). The full demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1.

The choice of online survey was made in light of the need to perform the survey promptly, while the operation was still ongoing, as opposed to in retrospect, in order to measure real-time responses to news broadcasts and avoid recall bias. iPanel provided the best solution for this purpose given its pool of more than 130,000 people and its ability to deliver a representative sample of the adult Jewish population of Israel in a short period of time. In addition, iPanel was evaluated by the Applied Statistical Laboratory of Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was found to be highly accurate in assessing Internet-based samples of the adult Jewish population in Israel (Nirel, 2011).

Tools

A questionnaire examining the viewing patterns and attitudes toward news broadcasts was compiled. In addition, the questionnaire included dichotomous (yes/no) items aimed at measuring reported anxiety symptoms: (a) a sense of uncontrollable fear; (b) physiological hyperarousal (e.g., accelerated heartbeat, sweating, or irregular breathing); (c) fearful thoughts; and (d) sleeping difficulties. An additional contrast item of “heightened sense of safety” was also assessed. Cronbach’s alpha for these items was calculated as 0.798, which indicates good reliability. Item-level analysis performed to deduce correlation between items indicates that the items weakly correlate and therefore exclusively measure different aspects of anxiety.

The following variables were measured: viewing patterns, attitudes toward newscasts, and anxiety symptoms. In addition, demographic and socioeconomic variables were examined. Marital status was assessed in a manner to accommodate responses given

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic Distribution of Studied Sample ($N = 500$)

Variable	<i>n</i> (%)
Gender	
Female	251 (50.2)
Male	249 (49.8)
Age	
18–30	162 (32.4)
31–50	186 (37.2)
51–71	152 (30.4)
Marital status	
Coupled with children	253 (50.6)
Coupled without children	96 (19.2)
Not coupled with children	34 (6.8)
Not coupled without children	117 (23.4)
Birth place and immigration	
Israel	421 (84.2)
Veteran immigrant (prior to 1991)	53 (10.6)
New immigrant (1991 onward)	26 (5.2)
Place of residence ^a	
Center (03)	161 (32.2)
North (04)	132 (26.4)
South and Coastline Plain (08)	104 (20.8)
Greater Jerusalem (02)	56 (11.2)
HaSharon Region (09)	47 (9.4)
Affiliation to religion	
Secular	291 (58.2)
Religious	91 (18.2)
Traditional	87 (17.4)
Ultraorthodox	31 (6.2)
Number of children under 18 years old	
0 (None)	278 (55.6)
1–3	188 (37.6)
≥4	34 (6.8)
Education	
< K–12	17 (3.4)
High school diploma	192 (38.4)
Vocational education	77 (15.4)
Academic diploma	214 (42.8)
Income	
Less than average ^b	148 (29.6)
Average	98 (19.6)
More than average	196 (39.2)
Missing	58 (11.6)

^a According to phone-dialing zones (indicated in brackets).

^b Average income for an employee in Israel at the time the survey was conducted was about 9,000 NIS per month.

that included familial structures found in modern society, such as cohabiting, same-sex, and single-parent structures. Income was

assessed in comparison with the average income for a salaried employee in Israel according to the Bureau of Statistics.

Participants were asked to indicate whether they had experienced any of a list of anxiety symptoms as a result of viewing news broadcasts. The dependent variable was computed as the chance of reporting at least one of the anxiety symptoms by a viewer.

It is important to note that on July 17, 2014, a ground invasion into Gaza was initiated. Because this situation posed a much greater risk to the 80,000 Israeli troops, whose friends and family back home could not communicate with them during that time, we have made special adjustment to the relevant questions to allow participants to express their views with regard to the broadcasts both prior to and following the ground invasion. Specifically, we separated the items pertaining to perception of the news schedule as appropriate or inappropriate and the items dealing with the participant's preference of restoring normal broadcasting schedule, so that these items addressed the time frame of both before and after the ground invasion. For example, the item pertaining to attitudes toward the rearranged news schedule reads: "During Operation Protective Edge, the main news channels have switched to an ongoing, special report dealing entirely with security issues and news updates from early morning to late at night. (a) Now that the military has invaded Gaza, what is your opinion on this? (b) What was your opinion on this prior to the ground invasion by the military?" Response choices for both questions were as follows: (1) *It is good the schedule is like that*; (2) *It is bad the schedule is like that*; (3) *It is neither good nor bad*; (4) *Do not know*.

Statistical Analysis

About 7% (6.6%, $n = 33$) of the total sample reported that they do not watch television at all. These participants were not asked to provide any additional information apart from demographics and were

subsequently excluded from statistical analysis. They are included in the sample characteristics provided in Table 1.

Statistical analysis of the results was performed using SPSS version 21 and included both descriptive and analytic statistics to explore the research hypotheses. The statistical tests were chosen according to the variable distributions. Correlations between categorical variables were examined using chi-square tests. Correlations between categorical and continuous variables were examined with nonparametric Mann-Whitney test. Spearman correlation test was used to examine correlations between continuous variables. In addition, a binary logistic regression analysis was used to predict the chances of reporting at least one of the anxiety symptoms. The regression was performed in Enter mode and included variables that were found to be associated with the report of anxiety symptoms: viewing frequency (two categories), gender, and age (three categories). In all statistical analyses performed, a p value of 0.05 or less was determined as statistically significant.

RESULTS

Viewing Patterns

The results of this study indicate that a vast majority (87.2%) of the sample reported viewing the news broadcasts (Figure 1-A). Demographic analysis of viewers indicated that the likelihood of viewing increased with age, such that participants age 18 to 30 reported a lower likelihood of viewing compared to the age 31 to 50 and age 51 to 71 groups (86.4%, 94.8%, and 98.6%, respectively, chi-square (2) = 18.696, $p < .001$); religious participants reported a lower likelihood of viewing than secular participants (89.8% and 95.7%, respectively, chi-square (1) = 6.244, $p = .012$); and low-income-earning participants reported a lower likelihood of viewing than participants earning average to high incomes (88.2% and 95.0%,

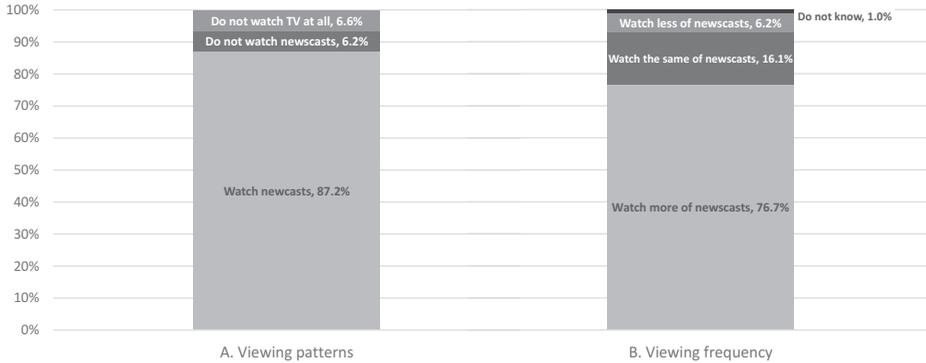


FIGURE 1. Viewing patterns of newscasts during operation Protective Edge: (A) newscasts viewing rates in total sample ($N = 500$); (B) newscasts viewing frequency rates among viewers ($N = 467$).

respectively, chi-square (1) = 6.369, $p = .015$). No difference in viewing was measured between men and women, participants of different marital status, or academic background.

The assessment of viewing frequency among newscasts viewers, in other words, whether participants were watching less than, the same as, or more than usual, revealed that most participants increased their news consumption (Figure 1-B). Demographic analysis of viewing frequency patterns indicated that women reported watching the news more than usual compared to men (83.3% and 71.8%, respectively, chi-square (3) = 8.845, $p = .012$), participants with academic education reported watching more than nonacademic participants (83.6% and 73.0%, respectively, chi-square (1) = 7.199, $p = .009$), and average- to high-income-earning participants reported watching more than participants with lower incomes (81.1% and 68.4%, respectively, chi-square (1) = 8.147, $p = .006$).

Attitudes Toward Newscasts

A majority (> 70%) of the viewers found the newscasts stressful and yet indicated they would not try to avoid watching them. Greater numbers of viewers also reported that while the newscasts are

burdensome they are also highly addictive, and some are watching constantly in fear of missing out on information. Most viewers agree that the newscasts do not relax them, although some did find them relaxing (Table 2).

Given the increased level of threat to Israeli troops following the ground invasion, we were interested in assessing viewers' attitudes toward the change in the news broadcasting from its normal schedule to around-the-clock format. The results suggest that the

TABLE 2. Viewers Perception of Newscasts During Operation Protective Edge ($N = 467$)

Item	% of Responses in Total Disagreement With Item ^a
Viewing the newscasts is addictive	12.4
Viewing the newscasts is burdensome	20.6
I am afraid to miss out on information by not watching	25.3
Viewing the newscasts relaxes me	26.3
Viewing the newscasts stresses me	29.8
I try to avoid watching the newscasts	48.8

Note. 6.6% ($N = 33$) of responders who do not watch TV at all were removed from the analyses.

^a Results indicate percentage of viewers who chose the lowest option on the scale (*Totally disagree*).

ground invasion increased viewers' tolerance toward extensive news reporting. Following the ground invasion, 46.3% of opinionated viewers found the newscast schedule appropriate, as opposed to 38.0% prior to the ground invasion. In addition, following the ground invasion, 69.5% of opinionated viewers expressed their preference of restoring normal schedule (i.e., reducing the extent of news reporting) as opposed to 74.5% prior to the ground invasion.

Viewers' attitudes were consistent with their viewing frequency patterns. The more viewers reported watching the news, the more they agreed that newscasts are relaxing ($r = .16, p < .01$), that they are afraid of missing out on information ($r = .19, p < .01$), that they find them addictive ($r = .16, p < .01$), and that they tried less to avoid watching them ($r = -.15, p < .01$).

In addition, both prior to and following the ground invasion of Gaza, participants who reported viewing at the same frequency as normal or less were more likely than participants viewing at a higher frequency to report that they perceived the constant newscasts as inappropriate and would prefer the broadcasting schedule be restored to normal (Table 3).

Effects of Viewing

While most viewers (57.2%) did not report any of the four anxiety symptoms, 17.1% reported one, 11.8% reported two, 6.2% reported three, and 7.7% of viewers reported experiencing all four anxiety symptoms (Table 4). In contrast, 28.9% of viewers reported that the newscasts gave them a sense of increased security.

TABLE 4. Anxiety-Related Symptoms Prevalence Among Viewers of Newscasts During Operation Protective Edge

Anxiety Component	Prevalence in Sample (N = 467)
Physiological hyperstimulation, e.g., accelerated heartbeat, sweating, or irregular breathing	12.8%
A sense of uncontrolled fear or anxiety	18.4%
Sleeping difficulties	22.3%
Fearful thoughts	36.6%

Statistically significant correlation was found between the report of negative attitudes toward the newscasts and the report of at least one anxiety symptom. In particular, viewers' reports of the newscasts as burdensome and stressful, as well as being afraid of missing out on information or trying to avoid watching, were positively correlated with reporting at least one anxiety symptom (Table 5). On the other hand, no statistically significant correlation was found between perceiving the news schedule as inappropriate or preferring it restored to normal and the report of at least one anxiety symptom (data not shown).

In addition, statistically significant correlation was found between viewing frequency and the report of anxiety symptoms so that increased viewing frequency was associated with reporting at least one anxiety symptom. In particular, 46.1% of viewers who reported watching more than usual also reported at least one anxiety symptom, as opposed to 32.7% among those who reported watching at the same frequency or less (chi-square (1) = 5.899, $p = .018$). With respect to demographic variables, a higher

TABLE 3. Attitudes Toward Newscasts According to Viewing Frequency During Operation Protective Edge

Attitude	Ground Invasion	% of Viewers Watching at the Same Frequency or Less	% of Viewers Watching at Higher Frequency	χ^2	p Value
Perceive constant newscasts as inappropriate	Prior	64.4	41.7	9.854	.002
	Following	59.4	31.0	17.760	.000
Prefer to restore newscasts schedule to normal	Prior	86.6	70.9	9.441	.002
	Following	80.9	66.2	7.025	.008

TABLE 5. Percentage of Responses in Agreement With Attitudes Regarding Newscasts During Operation Protective Edge Allocated to Anxiety Components ($N = 467$)

Attitude Variable	Sense of Uncontrolled Fear			Physiological Hyperstimulation			Fearful Thoughts			Sleeping Difficulties			At Least One Anxiety Component		
	Yes	No	Sig.	Yes	No	Sig.	Yes	No	Sig.	Yes	No	Sig.	Yes	No	Sig.
Viewing the newscasts is burdensome	54.6	31.1	.000	43.3	34.8	.015	46.8	29.2	.000	45.2	31.8	.001	45.5	28.1	.000
Viewing the newscasts relaxes me	13.9	15.6	.108	16.7	15.1	.185	11.7	17.5	.028	18.3	14.6	.732	13.5	16.8	.196
I am afraid to miss out on information by not watching	31.4	30.5	.480	36.7	30.2	.127	39.2	26.7	.001	45.2	27.1	.001	39.0	25.2	.000
Viewing the newscasts stresses me	54.6	15.0	.000	51.6	18.6	.000	43.9	9.6	.000	44.2	16.7	.000	41.0	9.0	.000
I try to avoid watching the newscasts	19.8	8.9	.000	10.0	11.2	.526	11.7	10.3	.114	13.5	10.5	.073	13.5	9.0	.014
Viewing the newscasts is addictive	59.3	53.6	.529	65.0	53.5	.191	69.0	46.6	.000	64.4	52.2	.106	65.5	46.1	.000

Note. Statistical significance determined with Mann-Whitney U test.

percentage of women (56.5%), as opposed to men (29.4%), reported at least one anxiety symptom (chi-square (1) = 35.026, $p < .001$), and people aged 18 to 30 reported at least one anxiety symptom in a higher rate than people aged 31 to 50 or 51 to 71 (51.0% as opposed to 44.5% and 32.7%, respectively, chi-square (2) = 10.444, $p = .005$). No statistically significant difference was observed in any of the other demographic variables.

To predict the chances of a viewer reporting at least one anxiety symptom, we generated a regression model that included variables found to be correlated with such report: viewing frequency (two categories: more and same/less), gender and age (three categories: 18–30, 31–50, 51–71). The results of this regression analysis suggest that viewers watching newscasts more than usual are 1.622 times more likely to report at least one anxiety symptom compared to those watching at the same rate or less, standardized to gender and age. However, this was not statistically significant (95% CI: 0.997–2.639, $p = .052$).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study illustrate a twofold problem. First, it is evident that the adult Jewish population in Israeli has

difficulties in moderating its news consumption during a crisis. Second, excessive consumption of televised traumatic images can result in adverse effects to emotional and mental well-being.

The data provided in this study rendered it impossible to evaluate whether viewing in general is associated with reported anxiety symptoms. The overwhelming Yes responses to the question of whether participants had partaken in the consumption of news reports resulted in a variable distribution that did not allow for appropriate statistical analysis. Nevertheless, these results illustrate the excessive demand of the adult Jewish Israeli audience for news reports during a crisis and further emphasize the magnitude of the previously mentioned problem.

Nonetheless, much can be learned from the confirmation of association between viewing frequency and reported anxiety symptoms. Given that 42.8% of the sample reported experiencing at least one of the anxiety symptoms examined in this study, it can be concluded that viewing televised traumatic images in itself possesses stress-inducing qualities, as suggested by Ahern and colleagues (2004) and Bernstein and colleagues (2007). The fact that increased consumption of such content is positively associated with the report of anxiety

symptoms, and specifically the finding that high-frequency viewers are 1.6 times more likely to report at least one anxiety-related symptom (although this was not statistically significant), is further evidence of the possible adverse effects of mass media on the well-being of viewers during a crisis. This finding is in line with previous research indicating that exposure to televised traumatic images can serve to influence risk of psychopathology in the general population (Ahern et al., 2004; Bernstein et al., 2007).

The association between the negative perception of extensive newscast viewing and reporting of anxiety symptoms was confirmed in part. The results suggest that perceiving the newscasts to be burdensome and stressful, as well as being afraid of missing out on information or trying to avoid watching, are all positively correlated with reports of at least one anxiety symptom. This means that viewers are basically trapped. Whether they try to avoid newscasts or try to maintain constant contact with the information provided, the effect on their well-being is the same. Unless viewers reduce their news consumption with a genuine disinterest in the reports, it is counterproductive for them to try either to avoid the newscasts or constantly attend to them. In other words, merely trying to avoid the news reports is not enough, and trying to obsessively gather information is equally bad. We report only partial confirmation because no statistically significant correlation was found between perceiving the news schedule as inappropriate or preferring it be restored to normal and the report of at least one anxiety symptom.

Nevertheless, these findings suggest that perception of the newscasts as being appropriate or inappropriate is somewhat irrelevant. When the ground invasion of Gaza commenced, the overall attitude of the adult Jewish Israeli audience toward the newscasts improved in favor of them, meaning that escalation of a situation works to enhance news demand and consumption; subsequently, it is expected that there will also be an increase in adverse effects.

Moreover, approximately 40% of viewers who reported watching the newscasts more than usual perceived them as inappropriate, and nearly 70% of them indicated that they would prefer the news schedule be restored to normal. Despite holding such negative perceptions of the broadcasting schedule, more than three-quarters of participants increased their news consumption during the military operation. These results, together with overarching agreement with the statement that newscasts are addictive, suggest that viewers are essentially a captive audience. Even if they perceive the newscasts as nonbeneficial, they cannot avoid them. This, in turn, leads to an increased prevalence of anxiety symptoms among viewers. Deroma and colleagues (2008) noticed this phenomenon as well, and described it in the following way: "While easy access to information through heavy media exposure of events may have eased the burden of information gathering in the early primary appraisal stage, it may also have placed individuals at risk for PTSD symptoms following this indirect exposure" (p. 59).

It is interesting to note that on August 8, 2014, the results of a poll of 500 adult participants representing the general population of Israel was published in the weekend edition of one of the leading newspapers in Israel, *Yedioth Ahronoth*. The poll examined public opinions with regard to the news broadcasts during the crisis. Their results indicated that 62.5% of the sample found the excessive reporting inappropriate, similar to our survey. In addition, when asked to report the primary emotion caused by viewing the newscasts, 24% of this poll indicated fear and anxiety, which closely resembles the 18.4% prevalence rate of uncontrolled fear and anxiety symptoms in our survey. Another interesting find in this poll, which reiterates our take on the captive nature of the Israeli audience during a crisis, was that most of the participants did not seek much escapism. For instance, almost half of the sample (49%) thought it was wrong to continue airing the reality television series *Big*

Brother and 57% approved of the decision to take *The Voice*, a singing contest, off the air during the conflict (Yedioth Ahronoth, 2014). These results serve to further support our findings and their implications as presented in this article.

CONCLUSIONS

We have demonstrated that during Operation Protective Edge an increased viewing pattern of televised traumatic content among adult Jewish Israelis was associated with anxiety symptoms. Negative perception of such television broadcasts is also associated with the report of anxiety symptoms. During a crisis, the adult Jewish Israeli public consumption of news reports increases dramatically, even more so when events take a turn for the worse. The combination of these factors means that the adult Jewish Israeli public is a captive audience to a gruesome show that has adverse effects on individual emotional and mental well-being. Given that prior studies have indicated this phenomenon is sufficient to generate posttraumatic psychopathology, the potential of such an occurrence among members of the Jewish Israeli public in the near future should be considered.

Study Strengths and Limitations

We were able to administer, in a relatively short period of time, a unique survey to assess in real time, as opposed to retrospectively, the anxiety symptomology among television viewers in Israel during a recent conflict in Gaza affecting most of the Israeli population. This study demonstrates the potential harm of exposure to televised traumatic content to the emotional and mental well-being of viewers.

This study has some limitations. First, due to the constraints of conducting a real-

time survey during a military operation, the study utilizes a nonvalidated set of measurements. Second, the use of iPanel, an Internet-based platform that allowed rapid access to the adult Jewish population, makes it difficult to further generalize the result to the Arab population of Israel or other populations. Third, given the nature of the research, it did not allow for a control group other than the one not watching television at all, which is relatively small and difficult to compare with. In addition, we did not control for past trauma among participants. Fourth, we examined the anxiety-inducing features of television only. Other news sources, such as radio, Internet, and mail, exist but were not assessed in this study. Last, about 7% of our sample reported watching no television at all. Subsequently, they were not assessed for anxiety symptomology, and therefore we cannot account for the prevalence of anxiety symptoms in this group.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future studies, consideration might be given to conducting a longitudinal study of those in a trauma-exposed population who access media to ascertain longer-term outcomes similar to a cohort methodology. Studies including populations in other trauma-exposed countries, as well as comparisons between media and nonmedia viewers, a breakdown of social media addicts, and inclusion of a more diverse age range, can also be considered.

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