

GENERAL FINDINGS ON THE EFFECTS THAT WAR, VIOLENCE, AND TRAUMA HAVE ON CHILDREN

Conclusions from Worldwide Studies

- War and other community-wide disasters can have devastating effects on children because of effects on parents, unmet survival needs, and interference with developmental tasks.
- However, when danger and devastation end and basic needs are met, children show remarkable resilience and recovery from disaster.
- FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN, the quality of care and competence of parents is the single most important factor in how children cope with war and trauma.
- FOR OLDER CHILDREN, the degree of exposure to trauma is also a crucial factor.
- Severely traumatized children may appear stunned, numb, unresponsive, mute, or hyperaroused, hyperactive, and frantic.
- The greatest effects on children occur when parents are killed, harmed, or terrified, when the child is violated by rape, mutilation or threats of harm to self or parents, when other family members or friends are harmed, and when children are involved in harming others.
- It is normal for children to react to trauma. Reactions vary by age and developmental level.
- Trauma reactions vary by degree of exposure. Exposure to trauma depends on cognitive understanding and the degree of physical and emotional harm and threat of harm.
- It is important for children to be with or near their parents or other familiar adults if at all possible.
- Children report more symptoms than their parents or teachers report; adults may underestimate the effects of disaster and war on children.

RECOVERY IS FACILITATED BY: *restoration of good parenting*
 establishing safety
 re-establishing family and child routines

EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON CHILDREN BY AGE

INFANTS AND TODDLERS

VULNERABILITIES AND COPING RESOURCES:	COMMON SYMPTOMS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Very sensitive to quality of care ▪ Very sensitive to emotions of caregivers ▪ Very sensitive to separations ▪ Limited resources for coping but likely to engage adults ▪ Immaturity can be protective for long term recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Severe Separation Distress ▪ Crying and clinging ▪ Sleeping problems ▪ Eating problems

KEY TO INTERVENTION: *Good care by consistent caregivers in homelike environment*

YOUNG CHILDREN (PRESCHOOL)

VULNERABILITIES AND COPING RESOURCES:	COMMON SYMPTOMS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sensitive to quality of care, separations, caregiver reactions ▪ Sensitive to changes in and near home ▪ Possess more resources than babies but still very dependent on adults ▪ May believe they are responsible for bad things that happen ▪ Limited understanding may help long term recovery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regression: bedwetting, acting like they are younger, losing new skills ▪ Separation anxiety, clinging ▪ Eating and sleeping problems ▪ Whining and tantrums ▪ Fearfulness, watchfulness and vigilance, nightmares ▪ Play shows trauma themes

KEYS TO INTERVENTION: *Good care by consistent caregivers
Stability in the environment and restoration of routines
Opportunities to play*

EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON CHILDREN BY AGE

SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

VULNERABILITIES AND COPING RESOURCES:	COMMON SYMPTOMS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sensitive to death and injury of peers, teachers, neighbors as well as family▪ Greater capacity for worrying and thinking about what might happen▪ Able to understand more of what is happening and gather information▪ Able to help others, ask questions and tell stories▪ Hero and rescue fantasies▪ Wider network of social relationships, friends	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Sleeping problems and nightmares▪ More realistic fears (bodily harm and mutilations)▪ Irritable, aggressive, disobedient▪ Anger and thoughts of revenge▪ Worries about what will happen to self, family, friends▪ Withdrawal, depression and anxiety▪ Disturbing thoughts and images▪ Concentration and school problems▪ Somatic complaints (headaches, stomach aches)▪ Engage in trauma and war games with peers

KEYS TO INTERVENTION: *Safety*

Monitoring by adults

Stable care and routines

Opportunities to feel competent and in control

Opportunities for pro-social activities, especially with peers

EFFECTS OF TRAUMA ON CHILDREN BY AGE

ADOLESCENTS

VULNERABILITIES AND COPING RESOURCES:	COMMON SYMPTOMS:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Often have greater exposure to trauma: directly and through information▪ Much greater understanding of situation and implications for future▪ Realistic fears of present and future▪ Very sensitive to death and damage to friends▪ More capacity for despair and hopelessness▪ Sensitivity to identity confusion and identity foreclosure▪ Sensitive to long-lasting disillusionment and existential problems▪ Have more problem-solving skills, work skills and physical strength▪ Mobility▪ Close friendships and romantic relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Aggression and anger▪ Risky behaviors: illegal drug use, reckless driving, risky sexual behaviors, etc.▪ Disturbing thoughts and images▪ Depression▪ Concentration and school problems▪ From the outside look like they are coping the best during the war but the effects tend to linger the longest for this age group

KEYS TO INTERVENTION:

Get involved in helping with important tasks for family and community

Pro-social peer group activities

Validation of experiences