Module 6: Psychological Responses to War
Child Victims of War

- War-related deaths: 2 million children
- Disabled: 4 million children
- Orphaned: 1 million children
- Displaced: 12 million children

UNICEF
80-90% of all victims of war are innocent civilians

Macedonians returning home from Kosovo

©UNHCR/B.Betzelt
Psychological Responses to War
COMBAT STRESS

I AM VUNERABLE TO INJURY AND DEATH

TRAUMATIC MOMENT
(FEELINGS OF HELPLESSNESS)

FAILURE OF DEFENSES

(CONTRIBUTING FACTORS)
Death of Comrade
Unmasking of denial
Little commitment
Little concurrence
Lack of group cohesion
Competing fidelities
Self-absorption
Character structure

(feelings of helplessness)
Loss of confidence
Battle fatigue
Insomnia
Anorexia
Startle reaction
Psychic numbness
Exhaustion
Fearfulness
Intrusive images
Impaired cognition
Impaired perception

COMBAT STRESS REACTIONS
ACUTE
DELAYED
COMBAT STRESS

I AM VULNERABLE TO INJURY AND DEATH

TRAUMATIC MOMENT
  (feelings of helplessness)

REMOBILIZATION OF DEFENSES

REINTEGRATION
  Superego
  Duty
  Character structure
  Capacity for fidelity
  Group identification
  Commitment
  Value concurrence
  Family support
  Group support
  Religious Faith

COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS
I am vulnerable to injury and death

Traumatic moment
(Feeling of helplessness)

Remobilization of defenses

• Character structure
• Group identification
• Commitment
• Value concurrence
• Family support
• Religious beliefs

Failure of defenses

• Feelings of helplessness
• Loss of confidence
• Fearfulness
• Physical exhaustion
• Psychophysiological rxn.
• PTSS
“IT WAS AN ACT OF LOVE. THOSE MEN ON THE LINE WERE MY FAMILY, MY HOME. THEY WERE CLOSER TO ME THAN I CAN SAY, CLOSER THAN ANY FRIENDS HAD BEEN OR EVER WOULD BE. THEY HAD NEVER LET ME DOWN, AND I WOULDN’T DO IT TO THEM. I HAD TO BE WITH THEM, RATHER THAN LET THEM DIE, AND ME LIVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE THAT I MIGHT HAVE SAVED THEM. MEN, I NOW KNOW, DO NOT FIGHT FOR FLAG OR COUNTRY, FOR THE MARINE CORPS OR THE GLORY OR ANY OTHER ABSTRACTION. THEY FOUGHT FOR ONE ANOTHER.”

WILLIAM MANCHESTER
Spectrum of Psychological Responses to War in Children
War-related Trauma

- War-related traumas vary in intensity (e.g. exposure to brutal death, displacement)

- **Psychological response**: not specific to type of trauma

- **Commonality of psychological responses** across wide range of war-related traumas
War-related Stressors

- Exposure to death and destruction
- Injury to self or loved ones
- Social disruption
- Emotional contagion
- Loss of peer related experiences
- Loss of routinized family, school and community life
War-related Stressors

- Shelling, bombing and destruction of homes and villages
- Rape
- Torture
- Malnutrition
- Starvation
- Disease
- Media exposure
Protective Factors

- Capacity to recognize and avoid dangers
- Ability to use adults for caretaking activities
- Capacity to manage anxiety
- Ability to find meaning in the experience
- Degree of social, community and family cohesiveness
- Family and social support systems
- Shared values and beliefs systems
- Temperamental and biological factors
Little or No Reaction

- Characterized by child’s acceptance of war-related stressors as part of their daily world
- Low-moderate war-related trauma
Acute Emotional and Behavioral Effects

The majority of children exposed to the ongoing stressors of war will experience significant psychological morbidity.
Child Victims of War

- The prevalence of posttraumatic stress symptomatology in children exposed to war-related stressors: 10-90%
- 61% of those children in a hospital hit by a bomb showed psychological symptoms several weeks after the bombing (Bodman, 1941).
Long Term Effects

Child’s initial exposure to war-related trauma: Circumscribed in time and space.

Spectrum of secondary stressors continue to impact children in the aftermath.
Specific Situations Associated with War

Children in Georgia undergo psychosocial rehabilitation. Credit: UNHCR/A.Hollmann
Child Soldiers
Child Soldiers

Estimate:

300,000 child soldiers worldwide

Every year the number grows as more children are recruited for active combat.
Child Soldiers

- Victims and perpetrators of violence
- Often the most feared of all the soldiers
- Acculturated to violence
- Have few scruples about killing

A child soldier in Sierra Leone
http://www.unhcr.org/
Refugees and IDPs
Who is a Refugee?

A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

A 12-year-old girl who fled her native Afghanistan in 1983 for a refugee camp in Pakistan.
Who is an Internally Displaced Person?

An individual who has been forced to flee his/her home to escape armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights abuses or natural or man-made disasters
How do IDPs differ from Refugees?

- Both groups leave their homes for similar reasons.
- Civilians become *internationally recognized* as ‘refugees’ when they cross a national frontier to seek sanctuary in another country.
- IDPs remain in their own states.
Refugees and IDPs

- 22 million refugees worldwide
- 20-25 million internally displaced persons
- 50% are children
- 12 million children have been displaced due to war
Refugees

Refugee status is frequently associated with:

- Separation from loved ones
- Loss of language and customs
- Xenophobia
- Poverty
- Downward social and professional mobility
Children of Parents Deployed to War Zones
Children of Parents Deployed to War Zones

Mediators of psychological response:

- Age
- Gender
- Maternal response to father absence
- Extended family support systems
- Child specific factors
- Length of absence

Jensen & Shaw, 1993