

# ‘How Can I Feel for Others When I Myself Am Beaten?’ The Impact of the Armed Conflict on Women in Israel

Dalia Sachs · Amalia Sa’ar · Sarai Aharoni

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**Abstract** This research presents an initial documentation of Israeli women’s sense of insecurity during the Second Intifada (2001–2005). Drawing on feminist security theory and the intersectional approach to gender, we hypothesized that women’s familiar tendency to develop high levels of stress following political violence would be related to previous sexual and domestic victimization, to economic distress and ethnic discrimination among minority women, and to the cultural role of care workers among women of all socio-economic backgrounds. A sample of 552 women self-completed a cluster of questionnaires addressing a broad array of topics, and results confirmed most of the research hypotheses. The discussion highlights the multiple articulations of gender, militarism, and security and their possible implications for policies of conflict resolution.

**Keywords** Feminist security theory · Israel · Militarism · Women’s stress and wellbeing

## Introduction

The importance of protecting women’s rights as part of sustainable peace is recognized in UN Security Council

Resolution 1325, which likewise calls for gender mainstreaming of the discourse on national and international security. In many cases this resolution, which was passed unanimously in October 2000 and subsequently ratified by the member states, is not implemented. This is largely because local discourses on conflict resolution are bogged down in long-standing logics of aggression and militarism that are gender-blind, and at the same time buttress male domination. In order to show the relevance to national politics of life aspects that are traditionally deemed personal and apolitical, the hidden tolls that ongoing national hostilities have had on women’s safety and wellbeing must be named, and their bearing on issues of national security articulated. The present research on the experiences of women in Israel aims to contribute to this emerging vocabulary. To produce a measurement of women’s injuries that acknowledges the embedded nature of security in actual life situations, we sought to correlate, using a questionnaire, a wide range of susceptibilities to economic, sexual, gender-based, and political aggressions among women from a wide range of class, ethno-national, and geographical backgrounds.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which called for the incorporation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, the gender perspective of armed conflicts and peace processes has gained increasing visibility (Sikoska and 2004). Reports on the victimization of women and girls caught in the midst of war zones have emphasized extreme forms of sexual violence and related horrors that befall them *as females* (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Conversely, the present paper concentrates on the case of women on the home front of a society where the gendered aspects of civilian involvement tend to be particularly invisible, because armed conflict concentrates mostly on the borders.

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D. Sachs · A. Sa’ar (✉)  
University of Haifa, Mt. Carmel,  
Haifa, Israel 39105  
e-mail: saaram@soc.haifa.ac.il

D. Sachs  
e-mail: dsachs@research.haifa.ac.il

S. Aharoni  
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel  
e-mail: sarai5@zahav.net.il

## Sociopolitical Context

The Israeli–Palestinian armed encounter is perceived as an ‘intractable conflict’ (Bar-Tal 1998). It has remained unresolved for a long period and consequently became lodged at a high level of intensity and destructiveness. Since October 2000 the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has seen a new peak of violence with the outbreak of the Second *Intifada* (uprising). This wave of violence sealed the longest attempt to reach a final peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, known as the “Oslo Peace Process” (1993–2001). During this *Intifada*, the Israeli army undertook extensive military operations in Gaza and the West Bank, reoccupying areas which have been formerly passed to Palestinian rule. Simultaneously, Palestinians launched armed attacks against Israeli citizens living in the occupied territories and within the Green Line (Israel’s pre-1967 borders). These acts included suicide bombings, shoot-outs, stabbings, and *Kassam* rocket attacks. The beginning of 2002 (January–April) was considered to be the most violent period of the Second *Intifada*, as more than 15 suicide attacks were launched inside Israel, and a massive military assault was conducted in the West Bank. In June 2002 Israel began to construct a separation wall along its contested border with the Palestinian Authority, designed officially to keep Palestinian suicide bombers out of Israel. Though the Second *Intifada* had never ended officially, since the beginning of 2005 there has been a decrease in the number of suicide attacks inside of Israel’s borders.

Between October 2000 and September 2005 (the period covered by our research) 973 Israelis were killed as a result of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The majority (668) of them were civilians. Of the sum total, 272 were women and girls, and 221 were soldiers killed on active duty in the occupied territories, including four women. Noting that a similar documentation was done in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2004b), the present research on the impact of the armed conflict on the female population focuses solely on citizens of the state of Israel, Jews and Palestinians, including Israeli citizens living in the occupied Palestinian territories. It was devised to produce an initial documentation of citizens’ experiences during the Second *Intifada*, from the subjective perspective of women, whose voice is consistently silenced in matters of war and peace in this region (Klein 2002). Notably, the research does not cover the Second Israeli–Lebanese war in the summer of 2006. Yet our direct experiences, along with testimonies collected by women’s NGOs during the war, suggest that this war reinforced and extenuated women’s insecurities along the multiple lines that we delineate below.

Generally, the armed conflict has affected the Israeli civil population on a daily basis in four major ways: (a) A large

proportion of Jewish households have at least one member on active military service, including the reserve army, which turns homes into regular bases of emotional and other support for those directly participating in the occupation. (b) Civilians all over the country, of all ethnic/national and class groups, have been under impending threat of attack by armed Palestinians, mainly suicide bombers. (c) The Palestinian citizens of Israel (hereafter Palestinian Israelis), who comprise roughly 20% of the country’s population and who suffer from a long term policy of social, institutional and legal discrimination based on their national identity, have experienced unique insecurities. Besides their exposure to attacks by Palestinians from the PA along with other Israelis, they have come under increasingly violent state policing and public Jewish hostility, manifested in the riots at the beginning of the Second *Intifada* when 13 Palestinian Israelis were killed by Israeli security forces. (d) For over a decade, and more intensely after 2000, the Israeli economy has undergone a neo-liberal shift. This entailed radical cut-downs in welfare and job benefits, growing levels of job insecurity, import of migrant labor and outsourcing of labor-intensive industries. The ongoing economic crisis has had differential effects on the civil population, with Palestinian citizens among those most severely affected and women in general being over-represented in poverty. Women, particularly those from marginalized groups, such as new immigrants and Mizrahi Jews have also carried the brunt of such developments (Israel 2004; Swirski et al. 2003).

Living in a war zone and facing a globalized economy creates differential realities for women. For the purpose of this introduction it is important to clarify the divisions within Israeli society, especially those affecting women’s lives. The most salient division exists between the privileged Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority, as described above. Another relevant social division is among Ashkenazi and Mizrahi Jews. The pioneering Jews who started arriving to Palestine at the end of the nineteenth century were mainly of Ashkenazi origin, namely from Eastern Europe or from Western countries. Their offspring by and large still comprise the ruling elites of Israel, and the hegemonic culture remains Ashkenazi. The other large group in Israel is of Mizrahi Jews, who migrated to Israel from Arab and Muslim countries mainly after 1948 when the State of Israel was created. The close association of these migrants with Arab language and culture worked to their detriment, as the veteran Ashkenazim patronized them and considered them a liability to the Zionist westernization project. Despite significant entrance of second- and third-generation Mizrahim into local elites, they are still over-represented among the underprivileged groups and among the population living in the periphery. Palestinian Israelis too

are divided by ethnicity (notably Fellahin and Bedouins) and religion (Muslims, Christians and Druzes), but united in their national identification.

In addition, for the purpose of the present gender analysis it is significant to mention the wide propagation of firearms and other weapons that circulate among the civilian male population, through compulsory or reserve military or police service, employment as security guards, and criminal activities (Mazali 2005). The presence of security forces and security guards might paradoxically increase the sense of threat for those who are perceived as threatening the national security, namely, Palestinian Israelis. Another paradox occurs when guards turn their weapon against their own female relatives, as happened several times when domestically violent men, sometimes even convicted criminals, were hired as security officers.

### Theoretical Framework

Studies of the impact of the armed conflict on the civilian Israeli population typically focus on the collective sense of safety and national strength (Arian 1995; Bar-Tal and Jacobson 1996; Elran 2005; Solomon and Dekel 2004; Somer and Bleich 2005), or on attitudes to democracy and peace negotiations (Arian et al. 2006; Canetti-Nisim 2004; Herman and Yuchtman-Yaar 2002; Moor 2000). While gender has been quite marginal in much of this literature, recent studies do pay increasing attention to differences in the reactions of women and men to what is commonly dubbed ‘national trauma.’ In Israel as in other post-industrial states such as the USA, women are systematically found to exhibit higher levels of distress in reaction to stressful situations, including terrorist attacks (Landau et al. 1998; Solomon et al. 2004; Tuval-Mashiach and Shalev 2005; Zeidner 2006; and see also Stein et al. 2000). These studies indicate that gender is a significant mediator among civilians living under armed conflicts. Yet although these initial findings are of utmost importance, such studies neither capture the full scope of women’s gender-specific insecurities, nor offer satisfactory explanations.

As we discuss at length in a separate publication (Authors, n.d.), in a somewhat ironic turn of events, the increasing numbers of quantitative studies that break statistical data down by gender produce a contradictory outcome. While raising the visibility of women, they all too often miss the critical edge that has initially accompanied ‘gender’ as an analytical concept (Scott 1988). According to feminist security theory (Blanchard 2003; Enloe 2000; Goldstein 2001; Tickner 2001), civilians’ coping with organized political violence is mediated by their locations within webs of power relations, predominantly gender, class, and ethno-nationality. The process of responding to

the political situation is intertwined with overall complexes of resources and responsibilities, and these differ significantly in women and men, rich and poor, or members of the majority and members of marginalized minorities.

Notably, there has been a growing body of studies on Israel, primarily qualitative, that does look at the mutual influence of gender, militarism, and democratic culture (e.g., Adelman 2004; Chazan 1989; Emmett 1996; Golan 1997; Helman 1999; Herzog 2004; Klein 2002; Robbins and Ben-Eliezer 2000; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2004a; Sharoni 1999). Yet in quantitative studies the constructionist approach, namely the understanding of gender as embedded in broad mechanisms of power, has not yet been internalized. In glaring unawareness of the rich and sophisticated feminist security theory, most quantitative studies continue to treat women and men as fixed attributes that supposedly pre-exist power dynamics. When they are not gender-blind altogether, studies on the impact of terrorism, military service, or the state of war on the Israeli population usually conflate ‘gender with ‘women,’ and treat it as a descriptive variable, similar to age, ethnic origin, or level of religiosity. Like these, gender/women is taken to be an objective attribute of individual subjects that is external to the phenomenon of political violence. Accordingly, research hypotheses are set to compare, in quantifiable values, who suffers *more*—women or men, Jews or Arabs, Israelis or Palestinians, etc. We take issue with this approach and argue that it is limited in its ability to unmask the ways in which militarism is woven into the very terms of the discussion. As Hanna Herzog put it, “in Israel security... serves as a major mechanism for reproducing the gendered division of labor, and, consequently, gender inequality.” (1998, p. 61). Adopting the intersectional approach (McCall 2005) that sees gender as constructed in the intersections of ethnicity, class, and nationality, we explore the complex effects of these intersections on the experiences of women in times of armed conflict.

The intersectional approach to gender implies that “women” should be perceived as a heterogeneous category. In Israel, while women are discriminated against on several social indicators (Halperin-Kaddari 2004), the general impact of gender discrimination is mediated by ethnicity, nationality, and social class. For example, in the work force, where women suffer consistent discrimination in wages, job stability, and occupational mobility (Kraus 2002), Palestinian women’s low-levels of employment or the weak work positioning of Jewish women from non-hegemonic groups imply that their families are at a higher risk of poverty (Stier and Lewin 2002). The vulnerability of women from the latter groups, moreover, is accentuated due to a combination of high divorce rates and a norm of low alimony payment (Sa’ar 2007a).

Since in the period covered in this research the escalation of national hostilities coincided with an economic recession that included cut-downs on welfare, increased job instability, and large-scale redundancies, we expected to find variations in the practical meanings of insecurity among women from different class groups. We therefore compare levels of wellbeing and stress among women from lower-middle and lower-class on the one hand, and from middle/upper-middle class on the other. Similarly, because Palestinian-Israeli women suffer multiple forms of discrimination and oppression, as second-rate citizens, as over-represented in poverty (Israel 2006), and as women in patriarchal kinship arrangements (Working Group on the Status of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel 2005; Sa'ar 2007b), we also compare levels of stress and wellbeing between Jewish and Palestinian women.

A second major corollary of the intersectional approach is that we consider militaristic aggressions to be part of a broader range of gendered types of violence that affect women's lives. The traditional distinction that identifies gendered violence with women/domesticity and political violence with men/collectivity conceals the actual multifaceted experiences of women in times of war. Accordingly, we look for commonalities and differences in the effects of these types of violence, and for possible connections between a history of sexual and domestic abuse, and stress that results from the armed conflict.

Concomitantly, following findings from other countries (e.g., Albanese 2001; Korac 1998; Women's Feature Service 2004) we anticipate that the active participation of men in military activities may affect higher rates of domestic violence, as in the case of men who turn weapons obtained through their employment in security forces against their womenfolk. Last but not least, considering that women across class and ethno-national lines are assigned the primary caretaking responsibility in their families, we expect that in times of political tensions they would take it upon them to be strong for their loved ones, which in turn might affect their own level of distress.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present research is to examine the impact of the armed conflict on the female population in Israel, during the Second *Intifada*, from a broad perspective of women's personal and political sense of security and wellbeing. Our initial goal was to produce a comprehensive, gender-sensitive profile of women's direct and indirect injuries as a result of life under an ongoing armed conflict. Following the theoretical framework presented above, we set to explore multiple aspects of women's insecurities, namely injuries caused not only at the hands of Palestinians

from the PA, but also ones indirectly affected by the armed conflict. These include a broad range of gender-based and sexual assaults that are legitimated and exacerbated in a militaristic culture (Mazali 2005; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2004a), intensification of domestic care work in response to stress experienced by family members, and coping with a deteriorating domestic economy.

We raised one research question and four hypotheses. Our question was whether women's sense of insecurity during the time of the conflict is affected by stress that is related to their domestic experiences. More specifically, considering women's economic vulnerability and their direct responsibility for the daily managing of households, we expected that the simultaneity of the economic crisis on the one hand, and the rise in national aggressions on the other, will have intensified the levels of women's distress and impair their overall wellbeing. We likewise expected to find that the women's normative responsibility to contain the distress of their loved ones will affect their health and wellbeing. For this initial depiction of women's insecurities we used descriptive statistics.

We then formulated two sets of hypotheses. Taking into account disparities among Israelis, we expected personal and state conflicts to affect women from various ethnicity, class, and nationality backgrounds in differential ways. More specifically, we expected to find that Palestinian women (inside Israel) and Jewish women of all ethnic groups, including Mizrahi Jews who are living in poverty and suffer from a long term policy of social, institutional and legal discrimination, are particularly affected by the conflict. Our first two hypotheses therefore focused on ethno-national and class distinctions among women:

1. Palestinian-Israeli women's wellbeing is lower than Jewish-Israeli women and their level of stress is higher.
2. The wellbeing of women from low economic background is lower than that of women from higher economic backgrounds, and their level of stress is higher.

The second set of hypotheses focused on gender-related vulnerabilities. Considering the large scope of sexual and gender-based assaults (Gross and Brammli-Greenberg 2000), which incidentally in Israel do not serve as weapons of war since they are perpetrated by men from the same ethno-national group as their victims, we assumed that women's high levels of post traumatic stress disorders may be attributed to at least two types of incidents - exposure to political violence and sexual or gendered victimization. We therefore hypothesized that victims of either of the two classes of offenses would evince higher levels of distress and lower satisfaction with their wellbeing, compared with women who were not exposed to either political or gendered/sexual violence. We did not attempt to compare

the level of stress *between* these two groups of victims. Yet we did expect double victims of both types of offenses to suffer from particularly high levels of distress. Our next two hypotheses therefore focused on distinctions by proximity to violence among women:

3. Victims of either political or sexual/gendered aggressions will evince higher levels of distress and lower satisfaction with their wellbeing, compared to women who were not exposed to either class of offenses.
4. Double victims of both political *and* sexual/gendered aggressions will evince higher levels of distress and lower satisfaction with their wellbeing compared to all others.

## Method

### Participants

The research was conducted at the last period of the Second *Intifada*, between June 2004 and February 2005 and focused solely on Israeli citizens, namely Jews and Palestinians inside the Green Line, including a small sample of Jewish settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Based on the theoretical framework sketched above, we aimed at including Jewish and Palestinian women, and for each of these two main national groups to include women of diverse socio-economic background, marital status, educational level, geographical distribution, and ethnic diversity to include Ashkenazi and Mizrahi women.

The main method of reaching participants was to contact women in women's groups and community centers (CC). The CCs were selected from various geographical areas (peripheral and central, rural and urban, and by their proximity to war zones) and from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Most contact women were leaders within their community. Special attention was paid to areas that were directly affected by Palestinian attacks against civilians, although we did not concentrate on these areas alone. The research coordinator called the selected CCs and asked the local coordinator of women's groups permission to distribute the questionnaire to the women. Questionnaires were distributed in two methods: By research assistant or by local coordinators, who were trained to explain the purpose of the research, administer the questionnaires to those who consented to participate, and then collect and mail them back to us. The questionnaires were anonymous and included a stated commitment to use the material strictly for purposes of the research. The decision to select women affiliated with CCs rather than using a randomized method of selecting individual women was meant to ensure that we create a diverse and context sensitive sample, which would reflect

our understanding of gender as constructed in the intersection of ethnicity, class, and nationality, and as embedded in concrete life situations.

Inclusion criteria were women who are Israeli citizens or residents, older than 18 years that consented to participate. There was a slightly larger representation of groups facilitated by women's organizations. The distribution of CCs among Jewish women covered three in the north, three in the center, three in the south, four in Haifa, three in Tel-Aviv, three in West Jerusalem, one in Sderot, and two in Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Among Palestinian women the distribution of CCs included three in the north, two in the center, one in the south, four in Haifa, one in Tel-Aviv, and one in West Jerusalem.

The second method was to send trained research assistants to shopping malls in large population areas, in Tel-Aviv, Jerusalem, Netanya, and Afula. After explaining the purpose of the research, they invited women who consented to fill out questionnaires. This method was used in order to assure diversity of the sample and to complement participants that were not represented in the chosen CCs, such as younger, city dwellers, and religious women. The representativity of the sample was evaluated and adjusted several times during data collection, and accordingly new CCs or shopping malls were approached. The final sample consisted of 494 women who were located in CCs, and 59 women who were located in shopping malls. All the women from the shopping malls were Jewish. The two groups of Jewish women, from both sampling method, were compared on their background characteristics and on the research main variables. The only significant differences found were that the women in the CCs were older (average 40.35 vs. 36.16), and that more individuals among them had children (71.7 vs. 50.9%). On all other variables such as economic situation, proximity to violence, stress or wellbeing, there were no differences between the groups.

The final sample included 552 women from a diverse range of class, ethnic, and national subgroups. It included Jewish and Palestinian citizens (78.4 and 21% respectively), the Palestinians including Muslims and Christians, and the Jews including a sample of new immigrants, as well as veteran immigrants and women who were born in Israel (see Table 1 for more details). The representation of women on the variables of ethnicity, nationality, and socio-economic level matched their distribution in Israeli society.

### Instrument and Procedure

Each participant self-completed a cluster of questionnaires addressing a broad array of topics. The first part covered the participants' socially significant attributes such as personal and marital information, religion and religiosity, socio-economic status, and daily experiences in the shadow

**Table 1** Description of main socio-economic characteristics of the sample.

Religious identity	Religiosity (self-definition)	Place of Birth	Marital status	Employment	Class (self-definition)	Breadwinners	Geographical distribution	Age	Education
Jewish 78.4%	Very religious & religious 20.9%	Israel 78%	Married/living with partner 58.9%	Employed 74%	Low 9.2%	Sole 23.7%	Periphery (North and South) 36%	Average 38.45 years	Average 14 years
Muslim 15.1%	Traditional 30.5%	Middle East 7.2%	Single 25.4%	Retired/unemployed 26%	Middle-low 17.2%	One of two 41.9%	Cities and suburbs 43.9%	SD 13.5	SD 3.8
Christian 3.8%	Secular 42%	Europe/the USA 6.2%	Divorced 12.6%	Middle 49.3%	Middle 49.3%	Secondary 10%	Jerusalem 9.8%	Range 18–91 years	Range 0–26 years
Druze 1.8%	Atheist 6.6%	ex-USSR 5.1%	Widowed 3.1%	Middle-upper 20.1%	Middle-upper 20.1%	Not supporting 24.4%	Occupied Palestinian Territories 5.9%		
Arab 0.2%		Ethiopia 1.7%		Upper 1.8%	Upper 1.8%		Sderot 4.4%		

of the armed conflict. Daily experiences were probed by several questions on proximity to various kinds of political violence deriving from the Second *Intifada*. This part was juxtaposed to questions on gender-based violence, including sexual assaults. The following part included several scales that measured satisfaction with wellbeing and level of stress. A third set of questions addressed women’s experiences in supporting children as a result of the conflict and in managing households in a period of economic recession. These questions reflected our incorporation of existing knowledge on women’s multiple domestic responsibilities. The next part consisted of a set of questions that concentrated on changes in women’s economic situation and health (physical and mental) status in the preceding four years alongside questions on patterns of reaching out for support. Another set contained questions on women’s political and civil participation. The analysis of this set of question was not presented in the paper. All questions referred to the years 2000–2004, which were characterized by worsening military violence and stress on civilians in Israel.

The questionnaire was developed by the researchers, based on similar studies. Most answers were closed and used yes/no or a 1–4-point Likert scale. Additionally, there were a few open-ended questions in which the women could write in their own words how they felt about their personal and political life experiences. This latter part was not used in the present research.

The scales were selected from research on wellbeing and stress as follows: Wellbeing was measured by the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, which measures subjective feeling of personal and national wellbeing (Cummins 1997), and comprises two scales. The Personal Wellbeing Index is the average level of satisfaction across six aspects of personal life: health, personal relationships, safety, standard of living, achievements, and community connectedness. The National Wellbeing Index is the average satisfaction score across six aspects of national life: economy, environment, social conditions, governance, business, and national security. In the present research the item ‘business’ was dropped and governance was divided into government, police, army, and court, so the index score was the average of eight items.

The original scale is 0–10. However, due to participants’ difficulties using this detailed scale, we replaced it with a 0–7 scale, from ‘not satisfied’ to ‘very satisfied.’ Like in the original scale, each scale was transformed to two scores. One referred to the percentage of satisfaction, thus adjusting to the 0–10 scores of the original scale. The second referred to the average score of the six and eight items respectively.

The original index was tested for reliability, validity, and sensitivity. A considerable body of research has demonstrated that the scales are very stable. People in Australia

and in other post-industrial countries are satisfied with their personal life on average about 75% (range 70–80%), while satisfaction with national life is lower, and falls in the range 55–65% (Cummins 1997; Cummins et al. 2003). In the present study, Cronbach's Alpha of the two indexes was .84, reflecting good internal reliability of the scales.

For the purpose of the present study we developed an additional scale of wellbeing as a woman, based on the above index, which represents the average level of satisfaction across 11 aspects of women's lives, among them personal safety on the streets and at home, satisfaction with authorities' dealing with physical and sexual violence against women or with discrimination against women, and satisfaction with the representation of women in politics and peace negotiations, or with women's economic situation. Computations of the scores on this scale were similar to those calculated for the Personal and National indexes. Cronbach's Alpha was .88.

Stress was measured based on the Stress Profile developed to evaluate traumatization of women in Bosnia-Herzegovina following the war there (Cullberg Weston 2002). The original Profile includes stress symptoms related to post trauma such as anxiety, nightmares, depression, intrusive return of memories (flashbacks), irritability, and anger, difficulties in concentration and sleeping, and more. The symptoms were related to four main clusters of emotional response to trauma: re-experiencing, withdrawal/numbing, arousal/lack of control, and self persecution. Based on the assumption that in wartime the stress reactions are normal and part of a broader set of emotional reactions, a number of questions were added, not traditionally associated with classical post-traumatic stress syndrome, such as feeling vulnerable and feeling emotionally exhausted. In addition, in this research we included a question evaluating stress related to women's traditional role in time of tension, namely 'the need to be strong for others.' Women were asked to rate their feeling with respect to stress symptoms on a scale from 0–1 not at all, to 6–7 very much. The score for the stress scale was the mean of the 20 items and ranged from 1–4. In the present research internal reliability of the scale was high: Cronbach's Alpha=.95.

The wellbeing and Stress scales were translated from English to Hebrew and back to English by experts in both languages and in the content area. The questionnaires were written in Hebrew and later translated to Arabic, and back to Hebrew. The translation was evaluated by experts in both languages. Few adjustments were made, especially in the Arabic translation, as a result of the expert opinion and a pilot study. In the pilot study we included Jewish and Arab women and also a number of women that Hebrew is not their mother tongue.

Women were asked to fill the questionnaires in the community center or in the shopping mall, and to hand it

back to the CC local coordinator or to the research assistance. The questionnaires were anonymous and included a stated commitment to use the material strictly for purposes of the research.

## Results

In relation to the research question, this section starts with description (frequencies, mean, and percentages) of the women's sense of national and personal security, and a gender-sensitive description of their living conditions, including economic situation, health, and various aspects of their wellbeing. Related to the four research hypotheses, we present figures regarding exposure to national violence and to sexual/gendered violence, and then present comparisons between the major subgroups, Palestinian and Jewish women, and women from various socio-economic classes. We end with data on the intensified effects of double, namely gender-based and nationally-based, victimization. The four research variables that were used for descriptions and comparisons within and between groups were level of stress, and personal, national and gender sense of satisfaction with wellbeing.

### National Security and Personal Security

By 'political violence' we refer to all injuries resulting directly from the Israeli–Palestinian armed conflict. These acts of violence include suicide bombings, shootings, knifings, rocket attacks, military service (active combat), and injuries caused by the military.

One third of the women (33%) in our sample reported that they or people close to them were exposed to some kind of political violence during the preceding four years. For comparison, Bleich et al. (2003), who used a sample similar to ours in structure and size, only gender-mixed, found that 16.4% had been directly exposed to a terrorist attack and 37.3% had a family member or friend who had been exposed. Of the 33% affected in our research, 24.54% were exposed to violent attack by armed Palestinians, 6.9% were injured during military service, and 5.2% were victims of army or police activities. The number of the women's acquaintances who had been hurt directly by the armed conflict ranged between 1–5 persons.

Among Israeli Palestinians who were affected, 15.2% of the women reported some injury on a racist basis like a verbal or physical offense related to their national affiliation. Some Palestinian women referred to the imminent threat of ethnic cleansing, and described hearing racist comments and a generally hostile atmosphere in public places such as buses, universities, or the work place. Our finding regarding high levels of racism against Israeli Palestinians based on their

national affiliation is supported also by Meir Elran's (2005) study of the influence of the Second *Intifada* on the national resilience of Israelis.

#### Proximity to Personal Violence

A different pattern of responses was observed in the section dealing with the women's personal security during those 4 years. Among those who answered the question, 9.8% reported some exposure to sexual abuse, domestic violence, or criminal offense. Of these, 7.7% reported domestic violence and 3.8% reported sexual offense. A few (5.6%) indicated crime. Most women (72.6%) stated that they had not suffered from any proximity to injury. However, interestingly, 15.2% percent of the women chose not to answer the questions about their proximity to sexual abuse and domestic violence, despite the 'no offense' option. The high number of missing values in this section might suggest that women were more reluctant to answer questions about sexual abuse and domestic violence than questions about their proximity to political violence (only 5.3% did not answer the political violence question). Additionally, more of those who reported being close to personal violence admitted that they themselves were the victims (21.3%), while only a few (6.3%) were direct victims in the case of political violence. In addition, 20.5% of all the women reported that they shared a household with a person who was a regular army conscript, policeman, security guard, or reserve soldier. A very important lateral effect is that nearly a fifth of the women in our sample in fact lived with people who had access to licensed weapons.

#### A Gender-Sensitive Description of Women's Conditions

We found that during the period of the Second *Intifada*, women in Israel fared poorly in respect of their economic situation, health, and the levels of their emotional strain, as well as in their personal, national, and gender wellbeing.

#### Economic Situation

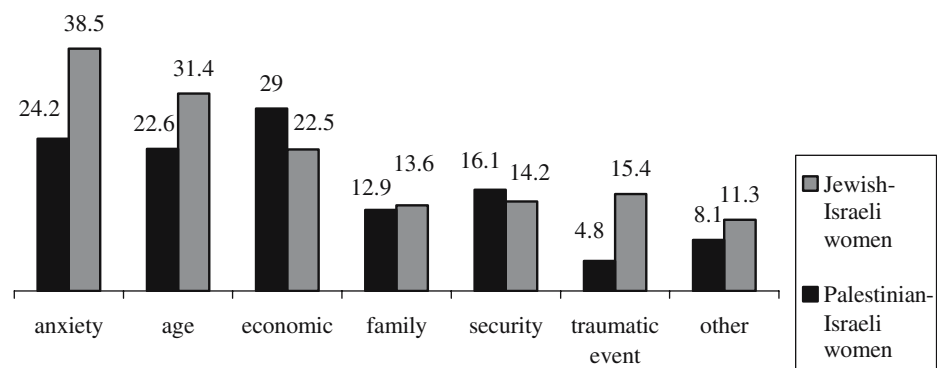
More than a third (39.8%) of the women reported that their economic situation had worsened over the previous 4 years, with 17% being afraid of losing their homes because of debts or loss of the source of income. Only 8.6% reported that their economic situation had improved. One of the causes of women's economic susceptibility is their being responsible for maintaining the household, especially in single-headed households (about 15.7% of the women in our sample were divorced or widows and 25.4% were single). However, many of the women who live with a husband or a partner carry the multiple burdens of paid work, caretaking for children and the elderly, and providing emotional support for the family and the community. Almost half (44.9%) of all the women reported being the primary caretakers of children; 7.2% were primary caretakers also of elderly or sick family members, and 67.2% did the majority of the housework. Notwithstanding this intense level of domestic work, 65.6% of the women were also breadwinners, and 31.4% of them were the persons mainly responsible for the family income.

#### Health and Emotional State

More than a quarter (26.4%) of the women reported that their health had deteriorated in the previous 4 years, and only 2.2% report that it had improved. The three most frequent reasons given for the worsening health situation were anxiety 34.5%, age 29.8%, and economic situation 24.3%. Jewish and Palestinian women differed in their reasons (see Fig. 1). Whereas many more Jewish women (38.56%) than Palestinian women (24.2%) reported anxiety as the source of their deteriorating health, the latter gave the economic situation as the most frequent cause (29% vs. 22.52%, respectively).

Nearly half the participants (46.6%) reported that their emotional state had deteriorated and only 5.3% stated that it had improved. The most frequent causes of emotional

**Fig. 1** Reasons for deterioration in health (percentages).



distress among Jewish and Palestinian women alike were national security (45.3%), anxiety generally (34.3%), and economic hardship (30.4%). On the stress questionnaire the women generally scored not very high (overall mean 2.22 on a scale of 0–7). Certain issues in particular stood out as contributing to their level of stress, namely feelings of anger/rage (mean=3.03), emotional exhaustion (mean=2.84), sense of helplessness (mean=2.8), despair (mean=2.77), and anxiety and nervousness (mean=2.71).

The most glaring finding on the stress questionnaire was that the women's sense of need to be strong in order to support others was the item that rated highest (mean=3.42). This finding is supported by the women's report that the burden of dealing with children and talking to them about the political violence was primarily their responsibility. More than one third (35.2%) of the respondents reported that they talked to the children about the political situation on their own, and a further 53% shared the responsibility with their husbands. Likewise, a majority of the women (59%) reported that being mothers affected their coping with the political violence in a major way.

### Wellbeing

The women's overall sense of wellbeing was poor. Their satisfaction with personal wellbeing was 58.3% (as against a stable range of 70–76% reported in other post industrial countries), while satisfaction with national wellbeing was 34.8% (55–61% in other post industrial countries). Their satisfaction with their wellbeing as women was again low, only 38.4%. This scale was constructed for the present study so no world statistics exist for comparison as of yet.

### Comparisons between Subgroups

Based on the assumption that national, social, and personal background shapes women's experience, we conducted further analyses related to the research hypotheses, com-

paring four measures: level of stress, and sense of satisfaction with personal, national and gender wellbeing between groups of women.

### Hypothesis 1: Comparing Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Women

Using Multivariate Analysis of Variance a comparison between national subgroups showed a significant difference between Palestinian and Jewish women ( $F(7,460) = 33.76, p < .001, \eta^2 = .34$ ). Analysis of Variance identified that Palestinian women's level of stress was significantly higher than that of Jewish women. They expressed a lower sense of satisfaction with their national wellbeing, and at the same time a higher sense of satisfaction with their personal wellbeing. There was no significant difference between the two groups on gender wellbeing (see Table 2). Thus, the first hypothesis was mostly accepted. There was a significant difference between Palestinian and Jewish women on most to the research measures.

### Hypothesis 2: Comparing Women from Different Socio-Economic Backgrounds

Using Multivariate Analysis of Variance a comparison between socio-economic subgroups showed a significant difference between women from low and middle-high class ( $F(7,458) = 10.74, p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ ). Analysis of Variance in women grouped according to socio-economic differences identified that the stress level of those living in poverty was significantly higher than that of middle or upper-middle class women, and that they expressed a lower sense of satisfaction with their personal, national, and gender wellbeing (see Table 2). Thus, the second hypothesis was accepted. There was a significant difference between women from low and upper-middle class on all of the research measures. However, the differences in satisfaction with national and gender wellbeing were more moderate

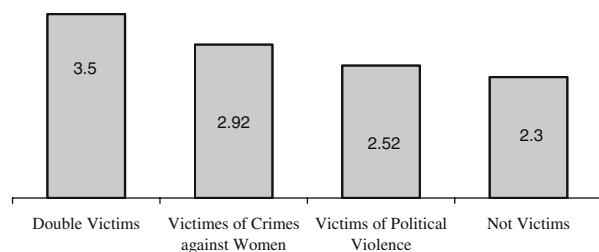
**Table 2** Differences in stress level and satisfaction with wellbeing between Palestinian and Jewish women living in Israel and between women from different socio-economic classes, by ANOVA.

	Nationality		<i>F</i>	Socio-economic Class		<i>F</i>
	Palestinians <i>n</i> =97 <i>x</i> (sd)	Jews <i>n</i> =371 <i>x</i> (sd)		Low to middle low <i>n</i> =127 <i>x</i> (sd)	Middle to high <i>n</i> =337 <i>x</i> (sd)	
Stress level (scale 1–4)	2.97 (1.48)	2.00 (1.34)	38.25 <sup>c</sup>	2.63 (1.48)	2.09 (1.38)	13.57 <sup>c</sup>
Satisfaction with personal wellbeing (scale 1–7)	4.03 (1.29)	3.56 (1.45)	8.52 <sup>c</sup>	2.84 (1.27)	3.95 (1.36)	62.95 <sup>c</sup>
Satisfaction with national wellbeing (scale 1–7)	1.37 (1.29)	1.87 (1.03)	16.83 <sup>c</sup>	1.59 (1.0)	1.82 (1.11)	3.97 <sup>a</sup>
Satisfaction with wellbeing – women (scale 1–7)	2.18 (1.18)	2.03 (1.15)	1.44	1.85 (1.14)	2.11 (1.16)	4.92 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>  $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>b</sup>  $p < 0.01$ .

<sup>c</sup>  $p < 0.001$ .



**Fig. 2** Level of stress of women with varying degrees of proximity to violence (scale 1–4). Significant differences were between Not Victims and all other groups and between Double Victims and the two groups of Victims of Political Violence and Not Victims.

than those in stress level and satisfaction with personal wellbeing.

#### *Hypotheses 3 and 4: Comparing Women with Various Degrees of Proximity to Violence*

Multivariate Analysis of Variance followed with an Analysis of Variance in women with various degrees of proximity to violence (see Fig. 2) showed that the stress level of women who were (double) victims or close to victims of both gender-based *and* political violence ( $x=3.5$ ), of women who were victims or close to victims of the political situation ( $x=2.52$ ), or of women who were victims of gender based violence ( $x=2.92$ ), was significantly higher than that of women who were not ( $x=1.90$ ). In addition, the stress level of women who were (double) victims or close to victims of both gender-based *and* political violence was significantly higher than that of women who have been victims or have been close to victims of political violence alone, or of women who were not victims or close to victims. As we can see in Fig. 2, the highest level of stress was manifested by women who had been double victims of gender-based and political violence. Next were women who had been victims or close to victims of violence against women, followed by women who had been victims or close to victims of the armed conflict. The least stressed were women who had not been in proximity to violence.

The salience of proximity to violence became more evident when a multiple variable regression for level of stress as a dependent variable was computed. Five variables, namely national identity (being Palestinian), proximity to political violence, proximity to personal violence as women, and deterioration in physical and mental health, contributed 32% of the explained variance to the level of stress of the women.

#### *Women with Double Victimization*

Expecting an intensified effect of multiple proximities to violence on women's lives, we identified a group of 33 women

who reported being victims or close to victims of both armed violence and violence against women. Observing the characteristics of this group might help us determine whether there are women in Israeli society who might be more vulnerable to violence, and also to comprehend better the effect of repeated victimization on their lives (note that the following remarks are tentative, considering the limited tools used in the present research). Thus we are presenting descriptive statistics related to the group of women with double victimization.

First, women from minority national and ethnic backgrounds were over-represented in this group. Half of the women (51.5%) were Palestinians, and 15% of them were new immigrants from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia. In comparison, the representation of Palestinians and new immigrants among the larger sample was 20.9 and 6.8% respectively. The women in this group were relatively young (mean age 31 years), and the percentage of unmarried women was high (42.4%). Almost half of them (48.5%) were from low and middle-low socio-economic backgrounds. More than a half of the women reported that their economic situation had worsened over the preceding four years, with 31% (vs. 17% of all the women) being afraid of losing their homes because of debts or loss of the source of income. Many of the women in this group reported that their health had deteriorated in the previous 4 years (45.5% physical health, 64.5% mental health). Not surprisingly, their level of stress was the highest in the entire sample (see Diagram 2), and their satisfaction with their wellbeing was very low (personal 55%, national 31.5%, and wellbeing as women 35.9%).

#### **Discussion**

This research was based on a representative sample that covered a wide range of ethnic, national, class and age groups and was similar in structure and size to parallel studies on the impact of political violence on the civilian population in Israel (e.g. Bleich et al. 2003), with one main distinction that it included only women. Following our initial research question, we found that women's vulnerability in the ongoing state of national hostilities is exacerbated by economic disempowerment and their caretaking responsibilities. Likewise, our hypotheses were mostly confirmed. Our results confirm that poverty, minority status, and gender/sexual injuries exacerbate trauma that results from assaults perpetrated on national backgrounds. At the same time, contrary to our expectations, women did not report increased levels of domestic violence, in comparison to existing statistics. Yet bearing in mind the overwhelming tendency of women who are victims of domestic and sexual violence to under-report such offenses (see, e.g., Gross and Brammli-Greenberg 2000), it is plausible that although the

present results do not support our assumption that domestic and sexual violence rose during the 4 years that were tested, they do not rule out this possibility either.

Beside explicit emotional distress that was not particularly high, women's satisfaction with their personal wellbeing was generally low compared with that of women in other post-industrialized countries, and their satisfaction with their national and gender wellbeing was even lower. The women's own interpretation—that the national security situation affected their wellbeing as women more powerfully than their personal and national wellbeing—again reinforces our initial assumption that women are affected by national tensions in specific ways that concern their gendered and sexual sense of security. This is further supported by data obtained from The National Hotline for Battered Women on the dramatic increase in the use of firearms by men who murdered their female life-partners and family members. Between October 2000 and September 2005, 44 Israeli women out of total 117 who had been murdered by male relatives or boyfriends were killed by firearms (see also <http://www.no2violence.co.il/index.html>). These weapons were obtained through compulsory or reserve service in the armed forces, through employment as security guards, and also through proximity to criminal activities (Mazali 2005).

The close interconnections between the personal and public aspects of women's lives produce also other ways in which they are affected by the armed conflict. One important factor is the economic situation. As mentioned in the introduction, Israeli national economy suffered an acute crisis after the outbreak of the Second *Intifada* that was intensified by the Neo-Liberal economic policy and the cut-down in welfare subsidies. Israeli women's overrepresentation in poverty makes them structurally vulnerable to the economic recession. Our results indicate that the damage of the economic recession to women has gone far beyond the poorest and most marginalized. The implications of the economic recession for women have been mediated through the dual paid and unpaid character of their work. The earning power of women *across the classlines* is significantly lower than that of men (Swirski et al. 2003), which implies a disadvantage at the outset when employment becomes scarce. An additional cause of women's economic susceptibility is their being held most directly responsible for keeping the household functioning, with or without the assistance of men. Many of the women who live with a husband or a partner still carry the multiple burdens of paid work, caretaking for children and the elderly, and providing emotional support for the family and the community.

In times of diminishing income women therefore stretch and strain their resources to meet the household's social obligations and economic needs. To reiterate, almost half of

all women reported being the primary caretakers of children; some are also primary caretakers of elderly or sick family members, and many do the majority of housework. Beside the well-known consequence of devaluing women's domestic work through its classification as extended motherly care, the expectation that they offer emotional support exacerbated the women's own distress. As shown, unlike men, women can hardly avoid facing their children and helping them cope with political violence. Beside the fact that the vast majority of women reported talking to their children about the situation, the women's sense that they needed to be strong in order to support others was the item that scored highest on the stress questionnaire. Note, however, that these and related responsibilities highlight, at one and the same time, the susceptibility of women but also their agency and their critical importance for familial and civic institutions.

As hypothesized, ethnicity and social class, in particular, emerged as relevant mediators of the impact of the armed conflict on women. Women from poor or lower-class background were generally more anxious and less satisfied with their personal, national and gender wellbeing than middle and upper-middle class women. Palestinian and Jewish women reported economic distress and anxiety, respectively, as the most frequent reasons for their deteriorating health. However, the differences between Palestinian and Jewish Israeli women were more complex. As hypothesized, the Palestinian women were more anxious and less satisfied with their national wellbeing than the Jewish women. Yet, contrary to the hypothesis, they were more satisfied than Jewish women with their personal wellbeing, and there was no difference in terms of gender wellbeing. Beside the direct implication that the primary source of Palestinian women's stress is national rather than personal (although note that the unexpected result may also emanate from a different social understanding of concepts such as personal, social, or gender wellbeing) this complexity supports the intersectional approach to gender that questions simple comparisons between groups and holds that women from different backgrounds can be discriminated against in differential ways.

One of the most conspicuous findings of this research is the stress caused by multiple forms of violence that women are exposed to. Women who were exposed directly to political or gender based violence were more stressed than women who were not exposed directly to violence. Although media researchers have asserted that the entire population of Israel is intensely exposed to political violence and its psychological impact through media depictions of international terrorism (Weimann 2004; Lemish 2005), the present research has focused on immediate experiences of political violence. More specifically, it focused on the combined effects of exposure to various forms of violence, either by

direct victimization or through being close to a victim. As demonstrated in the research results, direct exposure to violence is by far a different experience, with much deeper emotional repercussion, than exposure through media representations.

The highest level of stress was reported by women who were double victims, of gender-based and of national violence. Moreover, women who were victims of sexual or domestic violence evinced consistently higher levels of stress than victims of armed-political violence who had not been exposed to gender-based assaults. This is hardly surprising, considering that sexual abuse in childhood is shown to account for increased rates of depression (Cutler and Nolen-Hoeksema 1991) or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptomatology (Griffing et al. 2005) in adult women. Taking into account that our results do not account for the experiences of young girls, among whom sexual abuse is most prevalent, and that we asked only about the preceding 4 years, it is likely that gender vulnerability is an even stronger factor in women's high levels of stress. This finding brings forth forcefully the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into any assessment of the impact of armed conflict on women. It can also explain why women tend to report higher rates of stress due to political insecurity than men.

Remarkably, women from national and ethnic minorities, many of whom are economically disempowered, were over-represented in the group of double victims, which suggests that women's vulnerability to political violence increases among the poor and marginalized, who are already susceptible to other forms of victimization (Adelman 2004; Benson et al. 2000).

#### A Note on the Gender Composition of the Sample

Before concluding, a note is in place on the all-women composition of our sample. A normative expectation among quantitative researchers is that any statements regarding gender must rest on a comparison between women and men, a position that we take issue with. The constructionist and intersectional approach to gender shifts the analysis away from an essentialist focus on difference and centers it instead on the interconnections among the various aspects of people's lives (Anthias 1998). We contend that while comparisons between women and men are important and illuminating, they do not comprise a necessary condition to study the impact of the conflict on women. Our focus on correlations between insecurities on sexual, gendered, economic and ethno-national backgrounds led us to spread our sample broadly in terms of class, ethnicity, and nationality, at the expense of including men, which would have resulted in excessive segmentation of the sample.

#### Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the impact of the armed conflict on women in Israel using gender theory, as part of an attempt to advocate the incorporation of women's rights into the discourse on security and peace. Seeking to apply an intersectional approach, we measured women's well-being, levels of stress, health, and welfare, and cross-checked them with their exposure to various types of violence. Our methodology, moreover, was devised to take into account the systematic structural inequalities that shape women's lives (Caprioli 2004), as well as their active contribution to the endurance of civil society in times of political tensions. The results revealed clear connections between deteriorating health and emotional distress on the one hand, and proximity to sexual and political violence, on the other. Furthermore, women who were double victims evinced the highest levels of distress, which suggests that gender-based aggression aggravates women's vulnerability to the effects of political violence.

Other factors beside gendered and sexual abuse were likewise noticed to affect women's coping with the armed conflict. These were women's domestic responsibilities, especially their roles as care workers who need to contain the anxieties of their loved ones (Kittay 1999). Another salient connection lay in women's economic vulnerability, as mediated by class, nationality, and ethnicity, which appeared to affect their susceptibility to employment instability, unemployment, or welfare cutbacks. This research therefore also demonstrates that gender is mediated by ethnicity, nationality, and class, in that women who are members of minority or marginalized groups tend to be more vulnerable to the impact of armed conflict. Last but not least, the multiple aspects of women's vulnerabilities simultaneously highlight their critical importance for the capacity of families and of society at large to cope with national and social insecurities.

The first main contribution of this study, then, lies in lending empirical support to the theoretical argument that any evaluation of the impact of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict on the civil population inside Israel must consider the specific life experiences of women. Note that we do not argue that gender prevails automatically over other components of social identity or that women's experiences are homogeneous. Rather, gender is embedded in a web of multiple power mechanisms, and consequently its relevance must always be considered in specific contexts of class and ethnicity/nationality (which in the Israeli case differ greatly from each other).

A second contribution lies in the possible implications of this research for policies of national security and conflict resolution. Here we refer to the prevalent tendency, outlined in UNSCR Resolution 1325, to neglect the actual range of women's insecurities and to exclude women from peace negotiations. Creating a precise understanding of women's

everyday concerns underscores the importance of devising projects and allocating funds for gender mainstreaming of existing conflict resolution schemes. In addition, acknowledging women's critical role in civil society highlights their potential contribution to the achievement of sustainable peace. This research has aimed, at one and the same time, to bring class and ethnicity/nationality into the analysis of women, and to assert the relevance of women's experiences to the issue of national security. By presenting a complex picture of women's lives under the impact of the conflict, we heed Azza Karam's (2001) call to regard women in war zones as agents, rather than merely passive victims.

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