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CLINICAL RESEARCH ARTICLE



International study of the perceived stress and psychological impact of the 7 October attacks on Holocaust survivors

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023 in southern Israel had a significant impact on the mental health of Holocaust Survivors (HS), who are considered to be particularly vulnerable to traumatic events. The aim of the study was to assess the severity of perceived stress and the psychological impact of the 7 October attacks on HS.

Methods: The study was conducted from 30 October to 15 December 2023 among HS who were contacted through HS support organisations (OSE, Aloumim). They completed a questionnaire consisting of four sections: socio-demographic data and experiences during the Holocaust, assessment of psychological stress using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), feelings of isolation, health consequences, and reactions to the 7 October attacks.

Results: 171 HS completed the questionnaire with 61 males (35.7%) with a mean age of 86.6 $\pm$ 4.4 years (min 79–max 97). 59.6%, lived outside Israel, mainly in France. The mean score on the PSS-10 was 17.7 $\pm$ 6.0 on a scale of 5 to 40. The average PSS 10 score is not significantly higher in cases of age $\leq$ 90 years (18.0 $\pm$ 6.0 vs 15.7 $\pm$ 6.4, NS), or for those living in Israel (17.2 $\pm$ 5.3 vs 18.1 $\pm$ 6.6, NS). About a quarter reported feelings of isolation or loneliness following the attacks. The impact of the 7 October attacks was particularly significant among those living outside Israel. Approximately two-thirds felt that the events had rekindled memories of their Holocaust experiences, and nearly one-third observed a decline in their health since the attacks. Among survivors living outside Israel, 86.6% expressed concern about the future safety and identity of their children and grandchildren as Jews.

Conclusion: Identifying Holocaust survivors (HS) who are experiencing psychological distress is crucial to providing them with appropriate therapy.

Estudio internacional del estrés percibido y el impacto psicológico de los ataques del 7 de Octubre en sobrevivientes del holocausto

Objetivo: Los ataques terroristas del 7 de Octubre de 2023 en el sur de Israel tuvieron un impacto significativo en la salud mental de sobrevivientes al holocausto (HS por sus siglas en inglés), los cuales son considerados particularmente vulnerables a eventos traumáticos. El objetivo de este estudio fue examinar la severidad del estrés percibido y el impacto psicológico de los ataques del 7 de Octubre en HS.

Método: El estudio fue realizado entre el 30 de Octubre y el 15 de Diciembre de 2023 en HS contactados a través de organizaciones de apoyo (OSE, Aloumim). Ellos completaron un cuestionario de cuatro secciones: datos sociodemográficos y experiencias durante el holocausto, evaluación de estrés psicológico mediante la Perceived Stress Scale (Escala de Estrés Percibido, PSS-10 por sus siglas en inglés), sentimientos de aislamiento, consecuencias de salud y reacciones a los ataques del 7 de octubre.

Resultados: 171 HS completaron el cuestionario, con 61 varones (35.7%) de edad media 86.6 $\pm$ 4.4 años (min 79–max 97). El 59.6% vivía fuera de Israel, principalmente en Francia. El puntaje promedio del PSS-10 fue 17.7 $\pm$ 6.0 en una escala de 5 a 40. El promedio PSS-10 no es significativamente más alto en casos con edad menor o igual a 90 años (18.0 $\pm$ 6.0 vs 15.7 $\pm$ 6.4, ns), o en aquellos viviendo en Israel (17.2 $\pm$ 5.3 vs 18.1 $\pm$ 6.6, ns). Cerca de un cuarto de los participantes reportaron sentimientos de aislamiento o soledad luego de los ataques. El impacto de los ataques del 7 de Octubre fue particularmente significativo en aquellos viviendo fuera de Israel. Alrededor de dos tercios sintió que los eventos reavivaron memorias de sus experiencias de holocausto, y cerca de un tercio observó un declive en su salud desde los ataques. De los sobrevivientes que vivían fuera de Israel, el 86.6% expresó preocupación sobre la seguridad futura y la identidad de judíos de sus hijos y nietos.

Conclusión: Identificar a los HS que están experimentando estrés psicológico es crucial para entregarles terapia apropiada.

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psychological distress

PALABRAS CLAVE

Ataques del 7 de Octubre;
trauma; sobrevivientes al
holocausto

HIGHLIGHTS

- 75.3% of Holocaust Survivors experienced moderate to severe distress in the two months following the 7 October terrorist attacks, as measured by the PSS-10 questionnaire
- Non-Israeli HS tend to think more frequently about the Holocaust period (87% vs 62.7%, $p \leq .05$) and more often make a spontaneous link between the images broadcasted of the October 7 massacre and what happened during the Holocaust (83.7% vs 66.7%, $p \leq .05$).
- Compared to non-Israeli HS, those living in France and Canada are more anxious about the future of their children and grandchildren as Jews (86.6% vs 58.8%, $p \leq .05$).

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1. Introduction

The unprecedented brutal attacks of 7 October 2023 in southern Israel, in which over 1,200 civilians were killed and 252 taken hostage, accompanied by a parade of atrocities including mutilation, torture and rape, constituted a massive national trauma for Israel (Detailed findings on attacks carried out ... 2024). A recent study has highlighted the significance of the impact of these terrorist attacks on the mental health of both the Jewish and Arab populations in Israel (Levi-Belz et al., 2024). Israeli psychiatric teams have spoken of a real 'shock wave' with a clear 'before and after' of 7 October (Kolirin, 2023). This largest massacre of Jews since World War II has had a profound impact on Jews worldwide, especially on Holocaust Survivors (HS) (Danan, 2024; Grabriellov, 2023), a group known for its vulnerability (Yehuda et al., 1997). The number of HS, the youngest of whom is 79 years old, is now estimated at 245,000, with 20% over the age of 90, according to the Claims Conference (Claims Conference, 2024). Almost half (48.7%) live in Israel, 17.5% in Western Europe and 18.1% in North America. They are considered particularly vulnerable to both accumulated and/or new traumatic events that may trigger or amplify reactions to an early traumatic experience (Christenson et al., 1981; Kimron & Cohen, 2012). Several studies have highlighted the importance of the impact of traumatic events on HS, notably during the Scud missile attacks of the 1991 Gulf War (Solomon & Prager, 1992), during the wave of bombings in Israel (Zloof et al., 2005), after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 in the United States (Lamet et al., 2008), or during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sarfati et al., 2022).

1.1. Objective

The primary aim of our work was to assess the importance of perceived stress and psychological effects on HS living in Israel, France and Canada in the two months following the attacks on 7 October 2023. The secondary aim was to compare perceived stress and psychological impact among HS living outside of Israel with those living in Israel.

2. Methods

Participants: The study was conducted between 30 October and 15 December 2023 among Jewish people born in Europe, aged 79 or over, and currently living in France, in Israel, in Canada and in Switzerland. These were HS who had been victims of persecution by Nazi Germany, i.e. those who had been in France, Germany or another European country under Nazi occupation or influence between March 1933 and

May 1945. Individuals who experienced the Holocaust in North Africa were not included in this study. A questionnaire was sent by post or internet to HS who were recruited through HS support organisations (OSE, Aloumim). These associative networks provide home care support, accompaniment services, food aid, psychological and medical or dental care, as well as logistical support with transport. Participants received no financial compensation. The questionnaires were administered in France and Switzerland in French. The Canadian and Israeli HS received a questionnaire in English adapted to the cultural context, lifestyle habits and idioms of the target population.

2.1. Procedure

The data were anonymous.

2.2. Questionnaire

HS were invited to complete a questionnaire consisting of four parts. The first part collected socio-demographic data (age, gender, place of residence, level of education) and experiences during the Holocaust. The second part included an assessment of perceived psychological stress, measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) developed by Cohen et al. (1983). It is the most widely used tool for assessing stressful life events and their management (Cao et al., 2021). The French version of the scale has previously been shown to have good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.83 and good reliability (Lesage et al., 2012). The PSS-10 includes 10 questions that measure feelings and thoughts over the past month, focusing on how unpredictable, uncontrollable and overwhelming respondents find their lives. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). It has two subscales: Perceived helplessness and lack of self-efficacy, which measure an individual's feelings of lack of control and perceived inability to deal with problems, respectively. Scores are obtained by reversing responses to positively endorsed items and summing across all items, with total scores ranging from 0 to 40 (Cohen & Williamson, 1988). Scores of 0–13 would be considered low self-perceived stress. Scores between 14 and 26 would be considered as moderate self-perceived stress. Finally, scores of 27–40 would be considered high self-perceived stress (NH Department of Administrative Services. Perceived Stress Scale. NH Department of Administrative Services, 2020). The third part includes questions to determine feelings of isolation and loneliness, health outcomes, suffering due to the attitudes of social circles, media and political parties regarding the 7 October attacks,

and whether they frequently compare these events to those experienced during the Holocaust. Responses from HS living in Israel were compared with those living in France, in Canada and in Switzerland.

2.3. Data analyses

All statistical analyses were performed with SPSS version 21.0. Continuous variables were expressed as mean $\pm$ standard deviation and compared using the Mann–Whitney U test to examine differences between the groups of HS living in Israel and outside Israel (France, Canada, Switzerland). Quantitative variables were expressed as means and standard deviations, and qualitative variables as frequencies and percentages. Bivariate analyses involving categorical or qualitative variables were performed using chi-squared statistics. Percentages of categorical variables were analysed using Student's t-test. A p -value of .05 was considered to indicate a statistically significant difference.

2.4. Results

2.4.1. Socio-demographic characteristics of HS

Out of the 450 contacted Holocaust Survivors (HS), 171 (38%) individuals, including 61 (35.7%) men and 107 (62.6%) women, responded to the questionnaire. The average age of the population was 86.6 ± 4.4 years (min 79–max 97 years). Sixty-two (36.3%) HS live in Israel, and 102 (59.6%) live outside Israel, mainly in France ($n = 95$, 55.2%), but also in Canada ($n = 6$, 3.5%) and Switzerland ($n = 1$, 0.6%). The majority of French HS originated from the Paris region (85.4%). They are primarily child survivors of the Holocaust born after 1928 ($n = 156$, 91.2%). During the Holocaust period, 79 (46.2%) lived in France, and 13 (7.6%) in other European countries including Belgium (5, 2.9%), Hungary (3, 1.8%), and Poland (2, 1.2%). Five (2.0%) were interned in concentration camps, three (1.8%) in labour camps, and three (1.8%) in a ghetto. Fifty-four (31.6%) are war orphans. Among the 150 (87.7%) HS living in their own homes, 45 (30%) live with their spouse. Five (2.9%) live with a family member, and 10 (5.8%) in a retirement home or senior residence. Forty-nine per cent of HS not living in Israel have relatives in Israel: children ($n = 9$, 5.3%), siblings ($n = 6$, 3.5%), grandchildren ($n = 14$, 8.7%), nieces and nephews ($n = 20$, 11.7%), cousins ($n = 34$, 19.9%), and friends ($n = 34$, 19.9%) (Table 1).

2.4.2. Perceived stress following the October 7 attacks among HS

93 HS completed the PSS 10 questionnaire, assessing the intensity of perceived stress based on events in

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of HS $n = 171$.

		Total $N = 171$	HS living outside Israel $n = 102$	HS living in Israel $n = 62$
Sex	Men	61 (35.7%)	33 (32.4%)	25 (40.3%)
	Women	107 (62.6%)	68 (66.7%)	37 (59.7%)
	NP	3 (1.8%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Age groups	79–84 years old	60 (35.1%)	28 (27.5%)	32 (51.6%)
	85–89 years old	57 (33.3%)	32 (31.4%)	22 (35.5%)
	90–94 years old	36 (21.1%)	26 (25.9%)	8 (12.8%)
	>95 years old	8 (4.7%)	8 (7.8%)	0 (0%)
	NP	10 (5.8%)	8 (7.8%)	0 (0%)
Level of study	Primary	25 (14.6%)	25 (24.5%)	0 (0%)
	College	32 (18.7%)	18 (17.6%)	13 (21%)
	High school	29 (17.0%)	20 (19.6%)	8 (12.9%)
	University	73 (42.7%)	32 (31.4%)	38 (62.9%)
	NP	12 (7.0%)	7 (6.9%)	2 (3.2%)
Lifestyle	Residence	150 (87.7%)	89 (87.3%)	58 (93.6%)
	Member of the family	5 (2.9%)	5 (4.9%)	0 (0%)
	Retirement home	10 (5.8%)	4 (3.9%)	4 (6.5%)
Family life	With spouse	47 (27.5%)	19 (18.6%)	26 (41.9%)
	Alone	97 (56.7%)	64 (62.7%)	32 (51.6%)

the preceding month. The average PSS 10 score is 17.72 ± 6.046 (min 5–35) ($n = 93$). The majority of HS can be considered as moderately (71%) and severely stressed (4.3%) according to the PSS 10 scores (Table 2 and Figure 1). The average PSS 10 score is not significantly higher in cases of age ≤ 90 years (18.0 ± 6.0 vs 15.7 ± 6.4 , NS), or for those living in Israel (17.2 ± 5.3 vs 18.1 ± 6.6 , NS).

2.4.3. Feeling of loneliness and isolation among HS

41 (27.5%) reported feeling isolated or alone following the period after the October 7 massacre. This feeling was not reported more frequently among Israeli HS (19.6% vs 31.6%, NS). 26.6% of HS reported not finding enough support around them, with no significant difference between Israeli HS and those living outside Israel (23.5% vs 28.4%, NS). HS who suffer from loneliness more often feel unsupported (71.4% vs 12.0%, $p < .05$) (Table 3).

2.4.4. Perception of the October 7 attacks by HS

120 (80.0%) HS report feeling directly concerned and affected by the October 7 attacks. This sentiment is significantly more common among HS living outside

Table 2. Distribution of PSS10 scores among HS living or not in Israel.

	Total n (%) $N = 93$	HS living outside Israel $N = 52$	HS living in Israel $N = 41$
PSS score 10			
Low stress 0–13	23 (24.7%)	12 (23.1%)	11 (26.8%)
Moderately stressed 14–26	66 (71%)	36 (69.2%)	30 (73.2%)
Highly stressed 27–40	4 (4.3%)	4 (7.7%)	0 (0%)

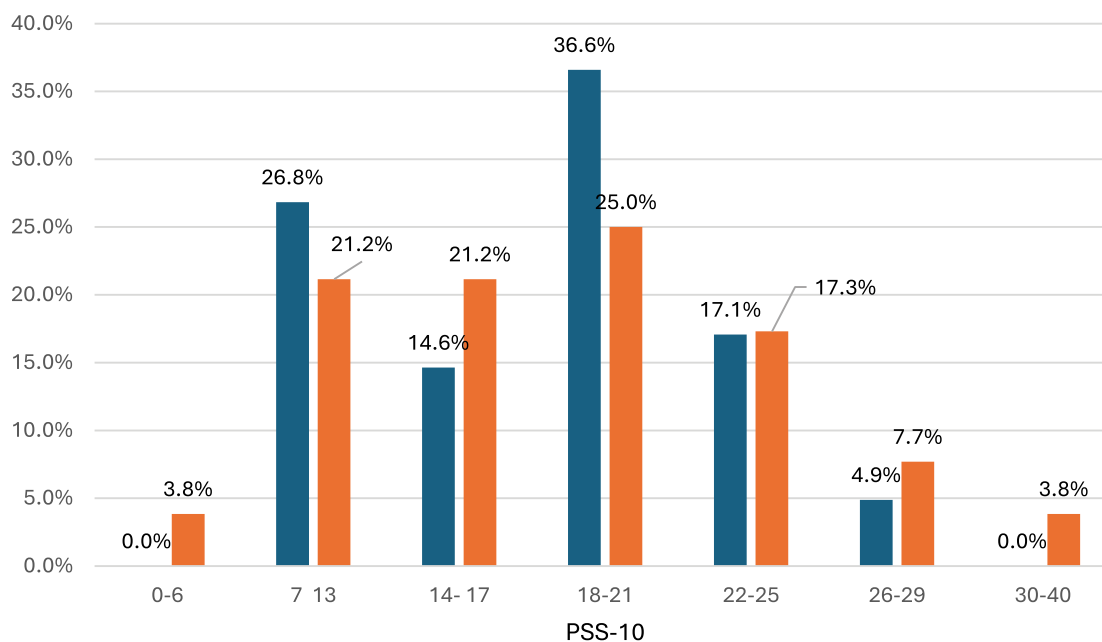


Figure 1. Frequency distribution of PSS 10 Scores among HS in Israel and outside Israel.

of Israel (91.9% vs 56.9%, $p \leq .05$). However, Israeli HS more frequently reported being affected by previous Middle Eastern conflicts, particularly the Intifada uprising (90.2% vs 66.7%, $p \leq .05$). 93.7% of HS believe the October 7 attacks had a greater impact than the various Middle Eastern conflicts that have occurred.

2.4.5. Suffering due to the attitude of social circles, media, and political parties regarding the October 7 attacks

HS frequently express distress over the lack of empathy from their social circles, the media, and political parties, especially those living outside Israel, who report suffering from the silence or indifference of

Table 3. Comparison of the suffering of HS living or not in Israel.

		Total <i>n</i> (%) <i>N</i> = 171	HS living outside Israel <i>N</i> = 102	HS living in Israel <i>N</i> = 62	<i>p</i>
Feelings of isolation and loneliness following 7 October	Faced with these events, do you feel isolated or alone?	41 (27.5%)	31 (31.6%)	10 (19.6%)	NS
	Do you find enough listening around you?	102 (73.4%)	63 (71.6%)	39 (76.5%)	NS
Feelings of the events of 7 October	Do you feel directly concerned and touched by these events?	120 (80.0%)	91 (91.9%)	29 (56.9%)	$\leq .05$
	Did you also feel directly concerned during previous events (Intifada etc.)?	108 (75.0%)	62 (66.7%)	46 (90.2%)	$\leq .05$
	Is the impact stronger today?	133 (93.7%)	88 (91.7%)	45 (97.8%)	NS
Impact on health of the events of 7 October	Does your experience of war awaken any weaknesses in you?	101 (67.8%)	76 (77.6%)	25 (49.0%)	$\leq .05$
	Do you have health problems that have worsened since the events in Israel began?	44 (29.3%)	34 (34.3%)	10 (19.6%)	NS
	Do you suffer from the silence or indifference of people around you?	49 (34.0%)	38 (40.9%)	11 (21.6%)	$\leq .05$
Suffering from the attitude of those around you, the media and political parties	Do you suffer from the positions taken by certain media or political parties?	132 (88.0%)	88 (88.9%)	44 (86.3%)	NS
	Faced with events in Israel, are you worried about the future of your children and your grandchildren as Jews?	114 (77.0%)	84 (86.6%)	30 (58.8%)	$\leq .05$
Relationship with the Shoah	Have you made a spontaneous link between the images broadcast on current events and what took place during the Shoah?	116 (77.9%)	82 (83.7%)	34 (66.7%)	$\leq .05$
	Do you tend to think back to the Holocaust period more frequently?	119 (78.8%)	87 (87.0%)	32 (62.7%)	$\leq .05$
	Does your experience of war allow you to put current events into perspective?	76 (52.4%)	44 (46.8%)	32 (62.7%)	NS
	Does the comparison between the assassinations by Hamas and the pogroms and massacres during the Shoah seem fair to you in relation to your experience?	100 (68.5%)	73 (76.8%)	27 (52.9%)	$\leq .05$
	Does this comparison seem useful to you in making outsiders understand the current danger for Israel?	118 (81.4%)	83 (88.3%)	35 (68.6%)	$\leq .05$
	Does the comparison between the indifference of some people today and the indifference to the fate of the Jews during the Shoah seem fair to you, in relation to your experience?	102 (72.3%)	68 (75.6%)	34 (66.7%)	NS

people around them in 40.9% of cases, and from the stance of some media or political parties in 88.9%.

2.4.6. Health consequences of the 7 October attacks

Following the 7 October massacre, 67.8% of HS consider that their experience of the Holocaust period has reawakened their vulnerability (81.4% of non-Israeli HS and 66.7% of Israeli HS). 29.3% of HS (34.3% of non-Israeli HS and 19.6% of Israeli HS) reported that their health problems have worsened since the start of the events in Israel. 20 (11.7%) report anxiety-depressive disorders, 8 (4.7%) sleep disorders, and 5 (2.9%) cardiac issues.

2.4.7. Establishing a connection between the 7 October attacks and the Holocaust

Compared to non-Israeli HS, those living in France and Canada are more anxious about the future of their children and grandchildren as Jews (86.6% vs 58.8%, $p \leq .05$). 52.4% of HS consider that their Holocaust experience allows them to put the 7 October attacks into perspective.

Non-Israeli HS tend to think more frequently about the Holocaust period (87% vs 62.7%, $p \leq .05$) and more often make a spontaneous link between the images broadcasted of the 7 October massacre and what happened during the Holocaust (83.7% vs 66.7%, $p \leq .05$).

72.3% of them consider the comparison between the indifference to the 7 October massacres and the indifference towards the Jews during the Holocaust to be apt. This comparison is deemed accurate and useful for highlighting the current danger to Israel more frequently among non-Israeli HS (88.3% vs 68.6%, $p \leq .05$).

2.5. Discussion

This is the first study to assess the perceived stress of HS in the face of the massive terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. They are all child survivors of the Holocaust, literally the Jewish children who were under the age of 16 at the end of the war in 1945. Ranging in age from 79 to 97, these men and women share a common past of suffering during the Holocaust (Krell, 1985). Forced to live under false identities and in most cases separated from their parents, they were often hidden in private homes, hospitals, orphanages or convents, where they suffered from hunger and violence (Yehuda et al., 1997). They had to adopt extraordinary survival strategies during the Holocaust, which were radically different from those of adults, as they did not have the same coping resources (Kellerman, 2001; Yehuda et al., 1997). This explains the higher frequency of post-traumatic symptoms in child HS

than in adult HS (Yehuda et al., 1997). We found that 75.3% of HS experienced moderate to severe distress in the two months following the 7 October terrorist attacks, as measured by the PSS-10 questionnaire. The novelty of our study was to compare two populations of HS, those living in Israel and experiencing a war situation, and those living outside Israel and experiencing a resurgence of anti-Semitic acts. We found that the intensity of perceived stress was not significantly higher among Israeli HS who were indirectly confronted with the war situation engulfing their country. They witnessed the mobilisation of their children and grandchildren as soldiers to take part in the retaliatory war in Gaza. Some learned that relatives were among those taken hostage by Hamas, others lost family members in the 7 October massacres. 2000 HS were forced to evacuate their homes and move to safer areas due to the war (Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services. Press Releases Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, 2024). HS people living in Israel appear to have developed resilience in the face of repeated war situations. Their experience of various conflicts and attacks may have conditioned them to deal with stress more effectively. This resilience can be seen as a psychological adaptation, where individuals develop robust coping strategies after being exposed to multiple traumas. On the other hand, HS living in France and Canada were particularly affected psychologically by the announcement of the crimes and rapes that took place on 7 October 2023, which received significant media coverage, and by the resurgence of anti-Semitic acts directly related to the conflict in Gaza. The stress of HS living outside Israel can be explained by the geographical distance, which can create a feeling of powerlessness and exacerbate anxiety about the safety of their loved ones in Israel. In France, a 1000% increase in anti-Semitic acts was recorded in the three months following the 7 October attacks and the Israeli military offensive (Ruau, 2024). In Canada, calls to boycott Jewish-owned restaurants and other businesses circulated on social media, while acts of vandalism against Jewish businesses were reported (Derfel, 2023). The significance and brutal nature of the resurgence of anti-Semitism is a highly anxiety-provoking situation, which explains why HS living outside Israel felt more concerned and affected by the 7 October attacks than those living in Israel. Beyond the anxiety caused by the resurgence of anti-Semitism, the 7 October attacks made HS living outside Israel aware of the vulnerability of the State of Israel, which they have long viewed as a bulwark and refuge against anti-Jewish persecution. They also reported feeling less directly affected by the events that have marked the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This exceptional situation

explains the greater concern of HS living outside Israel about the future of their children and grandchildren as Jews compared to Israeli HS. This lower level of fear among Israeli HS about the future of their children and grandchildren is largely explained by their greater resilience in the face of a war situation that they have become accustomed to living with in the past, including various wars, terrorist attacks and rocket bombardments from Gaza and southern Lebanon. They have developed greater resilience, which is explained by the development of coping strategies following multiple traumatic events, allowing them to face a new trauma with less stress (Norris & Kaniasty, 1996). Israeli HS were less likely to report that the 7 October attacks reawakened their vulnerability after what they experienced during the Holocaust. It's possible that HS are more fatalistic or even hardened to the threat because they 'have been through the worst' (Dekel & Hobfoll, 2007). This is probably explained by the resurgence of unpleasant memories of the Holocaust during the 7 October massacre and the resurgence of anti-Semitism. Greater similarity between two traumatic events may increase the risk of reactivating the initial stress response after the second event (Solomon et al., 1987). 29.3% of HS report a worsening of their health problems, mainly anxiety-depressive disorders and sleep disturbances. This highlights the need for greater psychological support for this vulnerable population. Specialised interventions could be put in place to offer psychological support tailored to the needs of HS. 52.4% of HS feel that their Holocaust experience allows them to put the 7 October attacks into perspective. This indicates a certain capacity for resilience and a long-term vision of their survival and adaptation in the face of trauma. It's important to highlight the importance of the feeling of loneliness and isolation since 7 October for 27.5% of HS. Our study provides important data on social support, which is considered to be a key factor in protecting victims from a second traumatic event, as well as helping individuals to readjust and maintain their social adjustment. 80.0% of HS say they feel directly affected by the 7 October attacks. HS express suffering due to the attitude of their social circles, the media and political parties towards the 7 October attacks. 40.9% of HS living outside Israel report suffering from the silence or indifference of people around them. 88.9% of non-Israeli HS suffer from the attitude of some media or political parties. Responsible media coverage and a firm political stance against anti-Semitism are essential to reduce the suffering of HS. It's important to note that 72.3% compare the indifference to the suffering of the Israeli victims of the 7 October attacks with the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust. 88.3% of HS living outside Israel consider

this comparison accurate and useful in highlighting the current danger to Israel, which is a refuge from anti-Semitic persecution. The fear and anxiety about the resurgence of anti-Semitism outside Israel explains the high percentage (87%) of non-Israeli HS who say they think about the Holocaust period more often. Compared to Israeli HS, French and Canadian HS made a more frequent spontaneous connection between the images broadcast of the 7 October massacre and the events of the Holocaust. The complexity of HS reactions to contemporary traumatic events and the importance of a multi-dimensional response to support this vulnerable population. The study has several limitations. Firstly, we were unable to obtain information about the medical or psychiatric history of the participants. Secondly, the sampling procedure was voluntary and conducted online or by mail, excluding HS who did not have access to email, the internet, or those unable to read and properly understand a questionnaire. Thirdly, this study was conducted with the help of HS support organisations. Fourthly, the ages of the participants at the end of the war varied considerably, ranging from 0 to 18 years. The advanced age of some participants may affect their ability to complete questionnaires or participate fully in the study. Fifthly, there was no control group consisting of non-HS participants.

3. Conclusion

The Holocaust survivors (HS) who participated in our study represent some of the last living witnesses of the Holocaust era. To our knowledge, this study is the most extensive and comprehensive examination of the psychological impact on HS following the 7 October attacks and subsequent conflicts. We found that the 7 October attacks rekindled memories of the Holocaust for almost 78% of the participating HS. The atmosphere of terror during these attacks, coupled with a resurgence of anti-Semitic acts – a reality they hoped never to encounter again – significantly affected three-quarters of the HS. This group in particular drew parallels between the 7 October massacre and their Holocaust experiences, especially those living outside of Israel, where 86.6% reported fears for the future safety and identity of their descendants. This study highlights the urgent need to identify HS experiencing psychological distress following the 7 October attacks in France, Israel and Canada, in order to provide them with tailored therapeutic interventions. It's also vital for the field of trauma research to continue studying HS in order to deepen our understanding of the long-term effects of trauma on the human psyche and its impact on the ageing process. In addition, our findings provide valuable insights that could improve our understanding of the effects of re-experiencing

trauma in older people who have survived terrorist attacks, wars, natural disasters or genocides, such as those in Cambodia, Biafra, Sudan, the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. This includes de-identified participant data and associated questionnaires, with restrictions to ensure that the privacy of the individuals who participated in the study is maintained. Interested researchers can contact the corresponding author to gain access subject to an approval process that ensures compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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