

PRESS RELEASE

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Wives of war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder suffer from secondary traumatization

ZAGREB – A majority of wives of war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have at least some of the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, shows a study published in the new thematic issue of the *Croatian Medical Journal*.

In the study conducted in the Center for psychotrauma in Rijeka, only three of 56 women did not have any of the symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, which is defined as “natural emotional reaction to the traumatic experience of a significant other”. Twenty-two of 56 (39%) women met the diagnostic criteria for secondary traumatic stress that correspond with the criteria for PTSD (at least two symptoms of reexperiencing the traumatic events, three avoidance symptoms, and two symptoms of increased arousal). Women who were married for longer time and those unemployed were especially vulnerable to the secondary traumatic stress.

In this study, two-thirds of women thought they needed professional psychological help, but only 4 of them had actively sought help. It is possible that the wives of the veterans undergoing treatment expected their husbands to be cured, which would consequently alleviate their difficulties, or they believed they had no right to complain given what their

husbands had gone through in the war. Feeling guilty for not being a “good enough” wife could also be a possible reason, as well as the fear of being stigmatized for seeking psychological help.

As the limitations of the study, authors state the small sample and the fact that 31 of 87 women invited to participate in the study refused to do so. Nevertheless, the results clearly indicate that any treatment offered to men with PTSD must work on supporting and empowering the wives and focus on assisting the family in learning how to cope with the stress and trauma.

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