

# Youth from Fundamentalist Societies: What are Their Attitudes Toward War and Peace and Their Relations with Anxiety Reactions?

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**Abstract** The present study was conducted during “Protective Edge,” a long-lasting military operation between the State of Israel and Hamas in Gaza, during which hundreds of rockets were fired from Gaza into various regions across the country. At the same time, Israeli forces bombed Gaza and sent in ground forces. The military operation ended after 50 days of fighting, with a cease-fire between the warring sides. The aim of this study was to compare attitudes and perceptions of youth from different religious fundamentalist societies, toward the war and their readiness for peace during this specific violent struggle, and attitudes toward the Israeli–Palestinian (I–P) conflict in general. Furthermore, we wanted to examine the links between these attitudes, personal sense of coherence and state anxiety. We compared two groups of adolescents who belong to religious minorities in Israel: ultra-Orthodox and national religious. The sample included a total of 107 subjects from both groups. The young people responded to a questionnaire, distributed during the military operation, while they were still under rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. The questionnaire included: socio-demographic characteristics; attitudes toward the military operation; ways to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; sense of coherence and state anxiety. Results indicate that both groups thought that the I–P conflict would not be resolved peacefully and that there were more wars to come. Furthermore, both national religious and ultra-Orthodox adolescents thought that this operation would have limited success for only a limited time. Regarding the differences between the groups, sense of coherence was higher among the ultra-Orthodox and this group also believed more than their counterparts that everything was in God’s hands. Interesting results emerged with

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peaceful resolution being linked to more anxiety among the national religious group, while among the ultra-Orthodox group no relationships were indicated on these two variables. The results of the study underscore the implications of ongoing political conflicts, alongside the growing global power of religion, which minimizes opportunities for world peace.

**Keywords** Attitudes · War · Peace · Sense of coherence · State anxiety · Ultra-Orthodox · National religious · Fundamentalism

## Introduction

The present study was conducted during “Protective Edge,” a lengthy military operation between the State of Israel and Hamas in Gaza, during which hundreds of rockets were fired from Gaza into various regions across Israel. At the same time, Israeli forces bombed Gaza and sent in ground forces.

The aim of this study was to compare attitudes and perceptions among youth from religious fundamentalist societies toward the war, and their readiness for peace, as evaluated during this violent conflict. Furthermore, we wanted to examine the links between these attitudes, personal sense of coherence (SOC) and state anxiety. We compared two groups of adolescents belonging to religious minorities in Israel: ultra-Orthodox and national religious.

By studying these two distinctive groups, we hoped to get a clearer understanding of global perceptions and attitudes toward war and peace in light of the escalation of fundamentalist movements in the last decades.

## Attitudes Toward the Military Operation and the I–P Conflict

In a polarized human culture, there are two likely attitudes toward war. The first is a complete renunciation of any war, claiming that there is no objective that justifies killing people. The second views war as a noble expression of human existence for improving society and the world (Kahanov et al. 2004).

Concepts of war and peace have been tested in various studies which have found that they reflect general perceptions and ideologies (Rohan 2000). General worldviews are systems based on beliefs that are not necessarily related to the specific conflict, but play a part in extending the conflict due to the views and values that are being promoted (Bar Siman Tov 2010). Worldviews include political ideology (Jost 2006), religious beliefs (Kimball 2002), general values (Schwartz 1992) and more. In this article, we have chosen to focus on a religious faith perspective and to examine the attitudes of youth toward war and peace in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is an ongoing conflict which has not yet been peacefully resolved. Bar Tal and Halperin (2009) argue that the absence of a peaceful solution can be largely attributed to socio-psychological barriers such as strong beliefs, outlooks and emotions.

Attitudes and feelings of Jewish adolescents toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have been examined in several studies (Kupermintz et al. 2007, Shasha-Biton 2010). It was found that attitudes of Jewish youth toward peace with the Palestinians were, in principle,

positive, but in practice many of the youth rejected compromise in the peace process and preferred the status quo (Yaar and Alkalay 2010). Some studies have found significant differences between the attitudes of religious and secular youth toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, such as expressing a lack of confidence, the existence of negative stereotypes, social distance, and the like. In addition, it was found that the religious youth, compared to secular young people, were more negative and extreme in their views about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The rationale given for these differences is based on hawkish views prevalent in the religious community, where the belief in the “chosen people” is strongly held (Yanay 1996).

Surveys and studies of attitudes among various streams of Jewish youth over the past decade indicate that the higher the level of religiosity, the more negative the attitude toward the Palestinians and the weaker the belief in peaceful coexistence (Yaar and Alkalay 2010; Arian et al. 2010). Religious Jewish society and particularly the national religious are not ready to give up territory, since they believe that the Land of Israel is holy, guaranteed to the Jewish people, and Israel has no right to give up parts of it (Zertal and Eldar 2004).

In a recent study which examined attitudes of Jewish teenagers toward the Israeli–Palestinian conflict during a politically violent escalation, it was found that most adolescents do not believe that there will be a peaceful solution in the near future. On the contrary, they expect an increase in violence and fighting, although they do not believe that these circles of violence will resolve the conflict (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2015).

Various studies have explored the general obstacles to peace in the Israeli–Palestinian context. Halperin and Bar-Tal (2009) conducted research among a representative sample of Israeli–Jewish society to examine different socio-psychological barriers to solving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In fact, they examined three major obstacles: general worldviews and values, social beliefs that support conflict and negative feelings toward the outsider.

They found that general worldviews involving the tendency to hold traditional-conservative values, led to a reduction in the level of openness and willingness to compromise in resolving the conflict.

According to Kruglanski (2004), the tough obstacles to peace can be explained by the need for closure. That need motivates individuals to perceive the social beliefs supporting the conflict as unfading absolute truths. This view is characteristic of fundamentalist societies which grasp one truth as absolute (Sivan et al. 2004).

## Religious Fundamentalism

The widespread use of the term “fundamentalism,” as it is known today, describes the global political-religious awakening. Fundamentalist movements are characterized by a variety of features: they embrace a comprehensive and uncompromising heritage, one beyond question that spans all walks of life (Eisenstadt 2004; Sivan et al. 2004). Fundamentalist groups divide the world into good and bad, and they believe that they are representatives of the good. They make no separation between religion and state, and therefore all political issues are always defined in a religious context. In addition, they oppose the idea of pluralism and display intolerance of other opinions and truths (Emerson and Hartman 2006; Eisenstadt 2004; Sivan et al. 2004).

Fundamentalist movements hold an uncompromising worldview directed from above, which strives to eradicate the Western democratic order and instead, impose an intolerant, religious one. As part of their struggle to achieve their goals, they do not hesitate to use

violence (Juergensmeyer 2003; Srinivasan 2004). Juergensmeyer (2002) goes even further and argues that fundamentalists do not hesitate to fight and kill in the name of religion. Religious acts of political violence, despite their being so destructive, are seen as virtuous because they serve a sublime religious purpose. Various studies have examined the relationship between religious fundamentalism and violence (Scott 2015; Lloyd 2013; Rogers et al. 2007). Most of them explain this propensity for violence as coming from the fundamentalist groups' militant component (Friedman 1994; Hunter 1993; Appleby 2011; Armstrong 2001).

The term “religious militancy” and the emphasis on radicalism and aggression as inherent qualities of fundamentalist movements, regardless of strategy, is relevant to our research because it may explain the views of young people belonging to fundamentalist streams, regarding war and peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Juergensmeyer (2003) says that violent struggles are rooted in an ideology based on nationalism and religious fundamentalism. One of its ideological features, according to her, is religious nationalism, which is based on ethnicity. Religious rights are related to demands for land, that is, members of fundamentalist groups see a direct connection between religion and the land where they live. In fact, it is religion that gives groups of people a sense of identity and belonging and ties them to a specific place. Consequently, the opinions of religious youth about solving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict are examined, since the struggle for territory is at the center of this dispute (Morris 2008; Tal 2003).

### **Sense of Coherence During Violent Conflict**

Antonovsky's (1987) salutogenic (SOC) model focuses on the ability of individuals to cope with stress in their lives. The underlying concept of the model is a “sense of personal coherence” which includes cognitive, emotional and behavioral elements (Antonovsky 1998). SOC embodies the global orientation that gauges the extent to which the world is perceived as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

According to Antonovsky (1987), SOC has an important influence on the health of the individual. The uniqueness of this concept is that it traverses individual differences, such as culture, gender, age and socioeconomic status. Antonovsky argued that there is a link between exposure to stressful situations, stress reactions and a personal sense of coherence. Indeed, this has been investigated for over thirty years, and studies have confirmed the central salutogenic hypothesis: a person with a strong SOC will be able to cope better with stressful life events than a person with a low SOC (Eriksson and Lindstrom 2005, 2006).

Sense of coherence evolves differently, depending on the individual's environmental characteristics and life experience (Sagy and Antonovsky 1996), and at a young age, is likely to be unstable (Antonovsky 1987). However, adolescence is an important time for shaping coherence and personal identity. Studies among adolescents have shown that during adolescence, a sense of coherence may contribute to reducing stress reactions, similar to what occurs in adulthood (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2015).

The existing security situation in Israel sharpens the conclusion that sense of coherence protects against pressure generated by political violence. Various studies have examined this hypothesis and found that SOC is indeed a contributing factor for reducing the level of stress reactions that people experience and report after a period of tension (Braun-Lewensohn and Sagy 2011; Sagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2009).

## State Anxiety During Violent Conflict

In studies carried out to date among adolescents exposed to specific or ongoing violence, various levels of emotional symptoms such as anxiety, depression and psychological distress, as well as psychosomatic symptoms, post-traumatic stress reactions and more have been found (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2010; Zeidner 2005; Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2009; Pat-Horenczyk 2005). However, many other studies have indicated resilience during these times (Sagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2009; Zeidner 2005).

Religious belief has been found to be a major protective factor against emotional reactions (Laufer and Solomon 2006; Myleme et al. 2001). Religious adolescents have reported better abilities for coping with stressful events, and due to their religious faith and prayers, their levels of anxiety have been found to be lower compared to non-religious adolescents (Ayalon and Lahad 2000).

## The Relationships Between Attitudes Toward War and Peace, Sense of Coherence and Anxiety Reactions

We examined the relationship between state anxiety, attitudes toward war and peace and sense of coherence among religious youth who belong to different sectors of Israeli society and who were exposed to violent conflict during the time of the study.

In a study conducted during a military operation (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2015) with similar variables as in this study, youth expressed mostly belligerent attitudes with regard to the military operation and most of them believed that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict would not be resolved by peaceful means. On the contrary, they expected more circles of violence to come. These attitudes were connected to a higher level of anxiety. On the other hand, the attitude that the operation would open an opportunity for negotiations with the enemy was linked to attitudes toward peaceful resolution of I–P conflict, and this was linked to lower anxiety.

In the present study, we chose these variables (attitudes toward the resolution of the I–P conflict, sense of coherence and state anxiety) because of the desire to examine them using another concept among fundamentalist religious groups, and also due to the assumption that the relationship between the variables would not be identical for the two participating groups.

The study aspires to elaborate and deepen our knowledge about these relationships. We have focused on two special groups in Israeli society—two religious fundamentalist groups.

## Ultra-Orthodox and National Religious Communities in Israel

Ultra-Orthodox Jews constitute about 9% of the general population in Israel (Zicherman and Kahaner 2012). Ultra-Orthodox society is fundamentalist and perceives of its own conduct as the most correct behavior. The ultra-Orthodox adhere to the preservation of the ideal of Torah study and to devoutly keeping the Torah and its commandments.

This community is characterized by cultural separatism and isolationism and refrains from actively involving themselves with other societies living in Israel (Grylak 2002). This isolationism is manifested by maintaining a distance from other cultures as a way of preserving community values and traditions (Heilman and Friedman 1991; Shilhav 1993). The piety and social separatism has its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in

response to the processes of modernization and emancipation (Shalmo 2008; Silver 2006; Katz 1987). Ultra-Orthodox society distinguishes itself from the rest of the Israeli public by its external appearance and by living in separate neighborhoods and cities in order to preserve their traditions (Alfasi et al. 2013). Isolationism is exhibited not only geographically, but also in education, transportation, health care and more.

The second religious community in the current research is the national religious group, which numbers about 10% of the general Israeli population (Gurovich and Cohen-Kastro 2004). This community is usually described as having a dual identity, determined by its structure, moving between “religiousness” and “Zionism.”

The roots of the religious Zionist movement developed in Europe in the late nineteenth century (Cohen 2004). Religious Zionists constituted a significant part of the *aliyot* (immigration) to pre-state Israel, when many religious Zionists came to Israel for Zionist motives. In the early years after the founding of the State of Israel, national religious society inhabited mixed neighborhoods, together with the general population in Israel. Over the years, towns and neighborhoods have been set up for national religious society (Feitelson 2013). Some religious communities arose out of an ideological desire to establish a presence throughout the country and especially in the West Bank and Gaza. National religious ideology is based on the concept of a “Greater Eretz Israel,” a term that refers to Israel within the historical borders, as described in the Bible, and see these as optimal borders for the Jewish state.

### Ultra-Orthodox, National Religious and Fundamentalism

The ultra-Orthodox Jews (UOJ) and the national religious Jews (NRJ) are Jewish religious minorities in Israel belonging to the Jewish majority. There are profound ideological (related to interpretation of the Halakhah), political and lifestyle differences and divergent interpretations and priorities between the two groups. It seems that the major ideological differences between the two societies lie in the way they relate to such values as Israel and military service, the importance of Torah study and their attitude toward the secular population (Freidman 2001; Batnitzky 2011).

Ultra-Orthodox society is characterized by two prominent fundamentalist characteristics: first, an extreme charismatic leadership which receives its “authority” from its members, who abide by its rulings (Sivan et al. 2004; Brown 2011; Kaplan 1992). The other characteristic is strict religious observance that provides the conceptual framework and the social order, a source of myths and moral principles (Caplan 2003). Hence, it is expected that the attitude to various ideologies and ideas such as the peace initiative will be shaped using authoritative rabbinic leadership along with clear religious principles.

Among national religious society, researchers identify most of the characteristics of a fundamentalist movement: a modern political-religious movement, a new ideology, which was designed by charismatic leaders, along with a typical fundamentalist organizational structure. They see themselves as key representatives of the divine will (Armstrong 2001; Zertal and Eldar 2004). In addition, its extremist factions are characterized by a radical and uncompromising messianic worldview, which directs the conduct of its members in all areas of life and Jewish religious law and constitutes the only source of authority (Schwartz 2009).

National religious society is characterized by adherence to the vision of a “Greater Israel” and presents a combative and uncompromising stance on this ideal (Schwartz 2011; Gross 2012). The researchers suggest that this movement is an “extremely logical” one that sees the enemy as anyone trying to harm West Bank settlements (Eisenstadt 2004;

Hunter 1993). Settlements have become an imperative part of the redemption process, even at the cost of confrontation with the Israeli government. National religious society maintains the sanctity of the land to be greater than the sanctity of the state (Taub 2010). Pedahzur (2012) describes the ideological change occurring in national religious society, which is now composed mainly of the radical right. He claims that the “old radical right” believed in the ideal of a Greater Israel in terms of security and sovereignty. Over the years, a “new radical right” has evolved; these are ethnic nationalists embracing religious symbols, who believe that the Jewish people and not Israeli civilians should be making both general and political decisions. The activities of the “new radical right” focus on striving to change the existing order by political activism directed toward taking over the government, and the establishment of theocracy in all parts of the Land of Israel (Peleg 1997; Zertal and Eldar 2004; Inbari 2008). The ideal of “a greater Eretz Israel” is very relevant to our research.

The Protective Edge military operation was Israel’s reaction to the shelling of Israeli settlements from Gaza and the Gush Katif area. Israel had earlier withdrawn from Gaza (2005) and was therefore no longer “the occupier.” The national religious settlers who had been evacuated during the disengagement had protested, arguing that these areas belonged to the State of Israel, and they expressed their fear that the evacuation would bring additional massive rocket attacks on Israeli settlement, which indeed did take place.

## Research Background

This study was conducted among Israeli religious adolescents during a period when residents of the State of Israel were subjected to rocket attacks across the country. As explained above, the Protective Edge military operation began in July 2014 and ended in August of that year. This period was characterized by an escalation in rocket fire from Gaza into Israel and Israel’s attacks on Gaza.

In this study, we examined two main questions: first, we tried to ascertain whether there were differences between national religious and ultra-Orthodox adolescents on the main research variables (attitudes toward the resolution of the I–P conflict, sense of coherence and state anxiety). Secondly, we examined whether there were relationships between the study variables among both groups.

## Hypotheses

Based on a review of the literature, we hypothesized as follows:

1. In general, during a violent operation in a political conflict, youth from both camps are more likely to express stances of combat rather than ones of peace (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2015; Lavi and Solomon 2005). However, we expected to find group differences in attitudes toward peaceful solutions, means of war, sense of coherence and anxiety levels:
  - A. National religious youth would be less open to a peaceful solution than the ultra-Orthodox youth, and the former would prefer to resolve the I–P conflict by war (Zertal and Eldar 2004; Inbari 2008).
  - B. Ultra-Orthodox teenagers would have higher personal coherence and exhibit a lower sense of anxiety than the national religious youth (Rosmarin et al. 2009).

2. We further postulated that overall support for a military operation and war as a way of solving the I–P conflict would be linked to more anxiety than to attitudes in support of peaceful resolution and negotiation with the enemy (Braun-Lewensohn et al. 2015; Shamai and Kimhi; 2006).
3. Regarding our question about whether there was a significant difference in the relationships of these variables across groups, there is not enough evidence; thus, no hypothesis was formulated.

## Method

### Sampling and Participants

One hundred and seven Israeli–Jewish teenagers, aged 14–18, living in Israel, participated in the study:

The ultra-Orthodox group—54 participants (90.6% girls). Mean age was  $M = 16.43$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ ; the reported socioeconomic status was 37.5% below average, 35.4% average and 27.1% above average.

The national religious group—53 participants (52.8% girls). Mean age was  $M = 15.00$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ; their reported socioeconomic status was 8.3% below average, 37.6% average and 52.1% above average.

The sample was based on the snowball method (Atkinson and Flint 2001) taking into consideration different social streams in each group, such as Lithuanians, Hassidim and Sephardi Jews for ultra-Orthodox, and modern Orthodox and “Hardalim” for national religious groups. Choosing this sampling method was related to the suspicion that members of these relatively closed social groups feel toward research in general.

### Procedures

Questionnaires were administered between July 2014 and August 2014, after receiving approval from the departmental ethics committee of Ben-Gurion University. We received approval from the adolescents’ parents to administer the questionnaires to their children. Participation was voluntary, and we ensured anonymity. Adolescents were told that we were interested in studying their ways of coping during the military operation, and should they encounter any discomfort during the process of filling out the questionnaires, they were free to terminate their participation at any time.

### Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included questions about gender, age, religious affiliation and socioeconomic status of their families.

### Attitudes Toward the Military Operation (Operation Protective Edge)

Based on the research of Braun-Lewensohn et al. (2015), we formulated five items relating to the “Protective Edge” military operation: “The operation will not help at all, and the situation will continue,” “The operation will help for a limited time,” “The operation will solve the problem of the missiles,” “Following the operation it will be possible to talk to



Hamas,” “Everything is in God’s hands, so the operation is meaningless.” The fifth option was adapted for the two groups studied, both of whom believe in God’s providence in the world (Shah and Duffy 2006). Answers to all the items were ranked according to a Likert scale from 1—strongly disagree—to 5—strongly agree.

### Attitudes Toward the I–P Conflict

We examined the young people’s attitudes about how to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Sagy et al. 2002). Eight alternatives were presented, ranging from hope for peace to the total negation of the possibility of peace (Ben-Ami (Shapski) 2005; Cafri 2002): “Mutual agreement between Israelis and Palestinians,” “Building trust,” “Wars and other conflicts,” “Common economic interests,” “The process of education and socialization,” “Shared environmental interests,” “The conflict will never be resolved,” “The conflict will not be resolved because each party clings to its goals.”

Answers to all the items were ranked according to a Likert scale from 1—strongly disagree—to 5—strongly agree. In this study, Cronbach’s alpha for peaceful resolution was  $\alpha = .65$  and for more wars  $\alpha = .62$ .

### Sense of Coherence

In an attempt to examine the current personal sense of coherence (SOC) (Antonovsky 1987) of the adolescents, 13 items were presented with seven options on a Likert-type scale.

A high rating meant a high sense of coherence and vice versa (Antonovsky 1987, 1993).

An example of one of the questionnaire items was: “Do you have the feeling that you do not care what’s going on around you?” The answers ranged from (1) “a source of pain and boredom” to (7) “a source of deep pleasure and satisfaction.” Cronbach’s alpha reliability was  $\alpha = .79$ .

### State Anxiety

This study attempted to evaluate the anxiety of adolescents during Operation Protective Edge, examining its connection toward war and peace (Spielberger et al. 1970; Teichman 1978). To this end, we presented the participants with a broad scale which allowed them to express their feelings during the military operation. This scale consisted of 17 items on a 4-point Likert scale.

Anxiety state level was assessed by a 17-item questionnaire presented to the respondents. Answers were rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much) Examples of questions: “I feel calm,” “I feel anxious,” “I’m afraid of disasters” and more. Cronbach’s alpha reliability was  $\alpha = .76$ .

## Results

This study examined attitudes of teenagers, from two different religious groups in Israel to war and peace, in general, and in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, in particular. We also examined their anxiety responses and sense of personal coherence.

First, we examined the gaps between the different positions toward the variables of peace and war and to stress: state anxiety and the coping resource: sense of coherence.

To examine the first hypothesis, a *t* test was run and the results are presented in Table 1. The results indicate that both groups thought that the I–P would not be resolved peacefully and that there were more wars to come. Furthermore, both national religious and ultra-Orthodox adolescents thought that this operation would have limited success for only a restricted amount of time. Regarding the differences between the groups, sense of coherence was higher among the ultra-Orthodox. This group also believed more than their counterparts that everything was in God's hands.

To examine the second hypothesis, Pearson correlations were calculated separately for each group and results are presented in Table 2. Furthermore, *z* tests were calculated to examine differences in strength of the relationships among the different groups.

Interesting results emerged with peaceful resolution being linked to more anxiety among the national religious group. Among the ultra-Orthodox, no relationships were indicated on these two variables. Furthermore, while there were no relationships between SOC and more wars among national religious adolescents, significant positive relationships were found among the ultra-Orthodox group. A last significant note was between peaceful resolution and more wars which were negatively correlated in the national religious group, but no correlations were found in the ultra-Orthodox group.

## Discussion

The present study was conducted during Operation “Protective Edge,” a long-lasting military engagement between the State of Israel and Hamas in Gaza, during which hundreds of rockets were fired from Gaza into various regions across the country. At the same time, Israeli forces bombed Gaza and sent in ground troops.

This is actually the first study that has examined the general attitudes of teenagers from two religious societies in Israel to war and peace, and their relationships with anxiety reactions and personal sense of coherence.

The first hypothesis assumes that the two groups studied during a military operation will express more confrontational stances than peaceful attitudes. In keeping with this hypothesis, indeed, the two groups, both national religious and ultra-Orthodox youth, expressed militant opinions rather than peaceful ones in relation to the I–P conflict. This is the same finding as in Braun-Lewensohn et al.'s (2015) study, in which teens expressed similar positions. Moreover, they predicted that the present military operation would not be the last and that more would follow. Because of the ideological background of the national religious youth, we postulated that there would be differences between the two groups with respect to resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Zertal and Eldar 2004; Inbari 2008). This hypothesis was proven wrong, and both demonstrated belligerent views rather than peaceable ones. The depth of the ongoing political conflict and the accompanying combat has probably left a significant mark on these Israeli youths, and they share similar attitudes toward war.

But there may be other reasons for the preference for combative perceptions rather than peaceful ones. Among the national religious youth, there are two possible reasons: first, national religious Israelis regard military service as an ideal of great significance in the identity of Jews in Israel, and they educate youth, if necessary, to sacrifice their lives for their country and to strive to serve in the elite units of the IDF. Yaar et al. (2011) believe

**Table 1** Differences among the different groups on the study’s variables

	National religious <i>N</i> ≈ 53		Ultra-Orthodox <i>N</i> ≈ 54		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
	The operation will not help at all, and the situation will continue	2.31	1.22	2.27	
The operation will help for a limited time	3.20	1.14	3.50	1.21	−1.26
The operation will solve the problem of the missiles	2.76	1.27	2.62	1.25	.60
Following the operation it will be possible to talk to Hamas	2.17	1.17	2.10	1.38	.27
Everything is in God’s hands, so the operation is meaningless	2.02	1.17	3.06	1.61	−3.70***
Sense of coherence	4.53	.90	5.01	.75	−2.95**
State anxiety	2.25	.53	2.28	.41	−.23
State anger	1.68	.57	1.42	.52	2.46*
Peaceful resolution	2.51	.87	2.34	.78	.98
More wars to come	3.11	.97	3.26	.92	−.78

\* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01; \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

**Table 2** Pearson correlation among the different variables

	Peaceful resolution	More wars	Sense of coherence	State anxiety	State anger
Peaceful resolution	–	−.42** <i>z</i> = 2.08**	−.23 <i>z</i> = −.46	.36** <i>z</i> = 1.7*	.13 <i>z</i> = .49
More wars	−.02	–	−.02 <i>z</i> = −1.61^	−.16 <i>z</i> = −.74	.12 <i>z</i> = .69
Sense of coherence	−.13	.29*	–	−.28* <i>z</i> = −.05	−.36** <i>z</i> = −1.03
State anxiety	.03	−.02	−.27*	–	.43** <i>z</i> = .47
State anger	.03	−.02	−.17	.34*	–

*N* ≈ 53 (national religious); *N* ≈ 54 (ultra-Orthodox)

\* *p* < 0.05; \*\* *p* < 0.01; ^ *p* = .05

that the experience of military service may be causing an increase in distrust of the possibility of achieving peace and doubts about whether it is at all desirable. Most national religious youth serve in the army, participate in wars, advocate military service and thereby experience the conflict in a tangible way (Levi 2014). Although participants in this study were teenagers prior to military recruitment, we are of the opinion that the ideal of service included in the principles of national religious education directly affects teenagers. Additionally, family members of the national religious participants have served in the army in the past and continue to serve. Some of them have been physically injured or even killed during the I–P military conflict, so there will be a preference for combative perceptions rather than peaceful ones.

The second ideal which the national religious society holds dear is settlement in all parts of the “Land of Israel” (Feitelson 2013). The research literature presents settlers in this society as representing a clear model of a militant fundamentalist movement, in which

settling the Land of Israel is of the highest value in their eyes and maintaining the integrity of the settlements justifies any means and any price (Sivan et al. 2004). During its existence, the State of Israel has evacuated settlements, in stark contrast to settlement ideology. Many settlers have indicated their will to fight any such governmental moves. One of the most significant of these moves, which left its mark mainly on national religious society, was the unilateral evacuation of the Gush Katif settlements in Gaza. As part of the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, 25 settlements were abandoned and about 8000 people were evacuated from their homes (Bar Siman Tov 2009). This traumatic experience has perhaps increased the tendency to prefer combative perceptions.

In addition, we assumed that there would be a difference between the two groups in the degree of sense of coherence, and indeed ultra-Orthodox youth revealed a higher sense of coherence, alongside a strong belief in God and absolute belief in the idea that everything is in His hands. This difference is understandable in light of the ideological characteristics of ultra-Orthodox society: first, dominance by and submission to the community leader, and second, the strict maintenance of a strong religious ideology with clear religious principles (Zicherman and Kahaner 2012). These provide a strong source of support for the individual, and a sense of protection and security due to the solid faith and well-defined lifestyle. These two features, both religion and the status of the leader, are based on the belief that they are derived from the divine injunction. This belief negates doubts and fears and characterizes societies with fundamentalist ideologies (Liebman 2007). The individual believer's way of life matches the ultra-Orthodox view of the coherent approach in which the individual feels security and order in his life (Antonovsky 1987). Therefore, the gap in sense of coherence among the ultra-Orthodox youth and national religious youth is understandable.

In accordance with the second hypothesis that relates to the relationship between the variables, we found three interesting facts: first, among the national religious youth, we found that peaceful resolution is linked to more anxiety in contrast to the ultra-Orthodox group, where no relationships were indicated on these two variables.

One of the differences between the two groups presented in this study is the different narratives that each group embraces, although the two groups share the same religion. While national religious Jews are identified as politically right and even extreme right wing, the ultra-Orthodox are seen as the center and right on the political spectrum, but not engaged, socially or politically, in pursuing peace. They retain their narratives, such as the Torah study, and are involved in day-to-day economic survival (Kalagy et al. under review).

As mentioned, national religious Israelis, on the right, are characterized by a lack of belief in the proposed format of peaceful resolution. This distrust is dominant among the national religious and is reflected in actions taken, on a daily basis, against any proposed blueprint for peace. Ideologically and practically, the individual in this society feels secure with the positions of the religious right leadership. But when these positions are challenged, there is concern because the threat to such a worldview could undermine the values to which he/she was raised.

In contrast, peaceful resolution is not on the agenda of the ultra-Orthodox, and when necessary they leave any dilemmas on this matter to the religious spiritual leadership and therefore there is no connection between these two variables (Zicherman 2012). Furthermore, while there were no relationships between SOC and further war among national religious adolescents, significant positive relationships were found among the ultra-Orthodox group.

The current security situation in Israel sharpens the understanding that sense of coherence protects against pressure generated due to political violence. Various studies have examined this hypothesis and have found that the SOC is indeed a contributing factor that reduces the level of stress reactions that people experience and report, following a tense situation (Braun-Lewensohn and Sagy 2011; Sagy and Braun-Lewensohn 2009).

As is clear from the study, sense of coherence was higher in keeping with the approach of solving the conflict by means of war. This finding can be understood since the views of ultra-Orthodox society in relation to the conflict are rightwing, even though in practice, they do not belong to the broad-spectrum right in Israel (Zicherman 2012). But since fighting is ideologically grounded in ultra-Orthodox ideology for solving the I–P conflict, it is understandable that the individual will feel a stronger sense of coherence.

A last significant note was the association between peaceful resolution and more wars, which were negatively correlated in the national religious group, but no such correlations were found in the ultra-Orthodox group. Among the ultra-Orthodox, no association existed between peaceful resolution and more wars since the ultra-Orthodox do not engage in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in their daily lives.

## Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations to the present study. The first lies in the relatively small number of participants. In the future, we should consider conducting research on a larger number of participants. Large models take the variance among all the different religious groups into account.

The second limitation involves the reliance only on self-reports of the youth, and therefore the data collected are subjective; there is clearly a need for a more objective review of attitudes. Also, social desirability can bias the results, that is, teens are loath to reveal less popular opinions and positions within their group. Perhaps future studies will include questionnaires assessing social desirability. Another drawback concerns the difficulty of access to subjects, since they belong to closed religious communities which prefer not to be exposed and are objectively difficult to access because of their insularity (Atkinson and Flint 2001).

A long-term follow-up is required and should include representative samples and a wider age range.

## Conclusion

Results of this study may help in understanding the continued fighting throughout the world, in light of the strengthening of fundamentalist movements in recent decades. In other words, there is a relationship between religious identity and concepts of war and peace, with war preferred by the two religious groups studied.

The additional finding, which strengthens the process of expansion of religious movements, relates to the perception of coherence among the two groups. A higher sense of coherence was found among the ultra-Orthodox youth, alongside a strong belief in God and an absolute belief in the notion that everything is in His hands. On the one hand, the faith-based resources help to cope with conflicts in general, and armed conflict, in

particular. On the other hand, this belief may undermine the stability of democracy and efforts for peace in the context of wars throughout the world.

We place great importance in the preparation of further research which will examine situations of continuing political violence and which will include comparison of groups of young people from different religions in order to achieve a comprehensive worldwide perspective.

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