

**"MANAGING UNDER DEADLY CONDITIONS"**

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# MANAGING UNDER DEADLY CONDITIONS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This exploratory study looks at the behavior of a number of CEOs (mostly owner-managers) who kept their companies running during a situation of great stress. Interviews were conducted with thirteen Lebanese CEOs in order to investigate what kind of impact the Lebanese war had on their behavior and emotional well-being. At the time of the interview, major PTSD symptoms were lacking and the subjects had no other noticeable psychiatric illnesses. Postulations are made about a number of personal and social factors that could explain such an outcome.

## Introduction

The effects of stressful life events on physiological and psychological well-being have been recognized by many stress researchers ( Osler, 1910; Hinkle, 1961; Langner & Michael, 1963; Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Rahe & Arthur,1978; Minter & Kimball, 1980; Sibai, Armenian & Alam, 1989). In this study, our main interest lies in war-induced stress disorders. A literature review of these disturbances shows a wide spectrum of responses and symptoms (Grinker & Spiegel, 1945; Kardiner & Spiegel,1947; Leopold & Dillon, 1963; Bennett,1970; Kutash, Kutash & Schlesinger,1978). Disasters, such as war, can either reactivate previous psychiatric illnesses or cause the development of a new syndrome classified under the DSM III-R (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third revised edition) as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) (Pasnau & Fawzy, 1989).

In the DSM III-R, reference is made to the PTSD in case of symptoms "following a psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience" (APA, 1987, p.247). This kind of stressful event is of such magnitude that it evokes symptoms of distress in most people. Examples of such events are serious threats to one's life, threat of harm to one's children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends, the destruction of home or community, or seeing others injured or killed. The habitual symptoms of PTSD are the recurrent reexperiencing of the traumatic event in various forms (dreams, play, flashbacks, and so on); the avoidance of stimuli which are a reminder of the event (i.e., the avoidance of thoughts or feelings associated with the trauma, avoidance of activities that arouse recollections of the trauma, inability to recall important aspects of the trauma); psychic numbing reactions (diminished interest in significant activities, feelings of detachment and estrangement, restricted range of affect, or a sense of a foreshortened future); and persistent symptoms of increased arousal not present before the trauma (i.e., difficulties with falling or staying asleep, irritability or outbursts of anger, difficulties in concentration, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, physiological reactivity upon exposure to

events that symbolize or resemble aspects of the trauma, and so on). In each case, a number of the symptoms mentioned have to be present to indicate the presence of PTSD. The duration of the disturbance must be at least one month.

Since the DSM III-R definition was formally accepted, data on PTSD in the general population and among victims of specific disasters have been accumulated. In the general population, PTSD is a rare disorder occurring in 0.5 percent of men and 1.2 percent of women (Kinzie, 1989). Research has shown that manufactured disasters produce a higher prevalence of PTSD than do natural disasters. A study of former World War II prisoners showed that 67 percent suffered from PTSD after their release (Kinzie, 1989). In a study of Vietnam veterans it was discovered that 7 to 26 percent of the cases developed PTSD depending on the intensity of combat exposure (Kinzie, 1989). It was also discovered that this disorder could persist for a long time; in some instances more than a decade.

The etiology of PTSD combines the interaction of many factors, including the type of stressor, the personality of the specific individual, and the social environment during the traumatic and post-traumatic period (Kinzie, 1989). How a specific trauma is perceived and what kind of coping mechanisms will be used depends to a large extent on the individual's character (Kets de Vries & Perzow, 1991). Character is perceived as deeply ingrained ways of dealing with both internal and external pressures. Different people exposed to the same stressor will not react in the same way (McFarlane, 1988). The person's upbringing -- the interpersonal shaping process which takes place, taking into consideration constitutional factors -- determines the type of reaction he or she will have. In certain instances, because the person possesses a strong sense of identity and resorts to more mature defense mechanisms, the threshold for stress symptoms will be higher (Kernberg, 1975, 1985). The existence of some form of support in the person's environment will also serve as an important buffer mechanism (Card, 1987). Social support is often achieved through group solidarity, an effective way to respond to the stressor and decrease its negative effects.

In our study, conducted on a representative sample of Lebanese CEOs, we looked at the behavior of the CEOs and their responses to the stressor, trying to identify the factors that would explain the outcome and psychological findings. In order to understand the conditions under which the CEOs in this study were operating, a short description of the situation during the Lebanese war may be useful. Such a brief account may help clarify the kind of stressors to which these CEOs were exposed.

The Lebanese war lasted from 1975 until 1991. Combat of varying intensity took place for periods of a few months to two years. Street fights were frequent. It was common practice to live in shelters with neighbors, friends, and acquaintances for weeks on end. On the demarcation lines, snipers were active. Kidnapping for ransom, (but often also because of religious or political affiliations) was a frequent practice. There were times when mass executions took place. All these events were interrupted by periods of relative calm, when people tried to rebuild what had been destroyed.

Because of the war situation, basic services such as the water supply and electricity were regularly cut off. As a result, people had to obtain water from neighboring wells, and those who could afford to, bought their own generators. New problems emerged with the scarcity of fuel and the danger associated with fuel storage. Telephone lines were also frequently damaged, resulting in a disruption of local and international communication. Obviously, all these problems seriously affected the day-to-day functioning of a company. At the same time, the country's economy was rapidly deteriorating: one could observe the breakdown of the infra- and supra structures, a high inflation rate, high unemployment, and a fall in per capita income.

The results of the war can be illustrated by the following numbers: out of a population estimated at 3,700,000<sup>1</sup> inhabitants, 130,963 people were killed during the war<sup>2</sup>, 50,000

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of the Interior sources, 1991

<sup>2</sup>Interior Security Forces sources, 1991

were handicapped<sup>3</sup>, 13,968 were kidnapped from the onset of the war and until september 1987<sup>2</sup>, and at least 8 out of 10 inhabitants were forced to leave their homes either temporarily or permanently (Sader, 1988). In 1983, reconstruction needs were estimated to be around \$16 billion (Nahas, 1988).

### Methodology

Thirteen Lebanese CEOs, aged 34 to 61, were the subject of investigation. Ten out of these thirteen executives were also the owners of their firms. All of them had spent at least eight years in their present positions during the Lebanese war. All were male, a factor reflecting the relative scarcity of female executives in Lebanon.

In order to obtain a group as representative of the Lebanese executive population as possible, selection of the CEOs was carried out in such a way as to diversify the sample with respect to geographical location, community affiliation, and company size. Exhibit 1 shows some of the background factors for the CEOs and their firms. (Note that much of the demographic data is incomplete due to the CEOs' concern about confidentiality).

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Insert exhibit 1 around here

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Interviews with the CEOs were done by the first author at the work place. The interviews lasted from an hour to an hour and a half, and no third parties were present. Two types of questions were asked: specific and open-ended. The purpose of the first type

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<sup>3</sup>Red Cross sources, 1991

of question was to obtain particular information; the open-ended ones were submitted to give the CEOs an opportunity to express what they felt was pertinent.

In our study, we not only wanted to verify established responses to stress, but we were looking for insights into the way these particular executives coped with their very stressful environment. The second type of question was seen as crucial in helping us develop themes that became the subject of new questions to the subsequent interviewees. Following Glaser and Strauss's (1967) notion of grounded theory, it was our belief that the processes of generating ideas and verifying them should go hand in hand. Such an approach would make for an on-going learning process as the inquiry proceeded. Doing so did indeed help us shed light on certain findings that could otherwise have gone unnoticed. The data generated by the open-ended questions contributed to the emergence of new themes that we checked out as the study progressed.

The questions were divided into four major categories:

1. General background information about the company and the disruptions caused by the war.
2. Personal information about the CEO's age, health, priorities, concerns, and behavior during the war. In this category, were included questions about the effects of stress, responses to it, and the kind of activities used for coping (hobbies, sports, and social undertakings).
3. Effects of the war in general and the husband's situation in particular on family members.
4. Organizational functioning in terms of employees' attendance, productivity, and motivation; intra-organizational relations and corporate climate; and special managerial problems.

In asking certain sensitive questions (particularly the stress related ones), we were well aware that the frankness of some responses would be circumscribed, as only a limited time



had been available to obtain the confidence of the CEOs. However, the fact that the interviewer was both a medical doctor and a Lebanese national, may have enhanced their willingness to contribute to the study. Obviously, the interviewer didn't listen only to what was said, but also observed very carefully how things were said. The transference elements existing in the interviewer/interviewee process became an additional source of information (Devereux, 1978).

## **Results**

### Upheaval at the work place

War-induced disasters at the work place are listed in exhibit 2. (Destruction of individuals' homes is not included, although this was undoubtedly an additional source of stress.)

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Insert exhibit 2 around here

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According to the interviewees, in most cases, damage was repaired as soon as possible to enable work to continue. Some CEOs mentioned, however, that such devastation had a serious effect on output and productivity. The inability of the employees to reach the work site, and/or decreased demand due to the carnage, were listed as other factors contributing to fluctuations in output. One CEO actually reported having worked for periods of up to 6 months at only 10 percent of pre-war capacity; at its peak his company was operating at only 50 percent of capacity. Given the kind of wholesale slaughter taking place, serious fluctuations in revenue were to be expected.

The war situation exposed the CEOs to a great number of dangers daily. For many, a major problem became how to reach the work place during intermittent shelling. In seven out of thirteen cases, new facilities were opened in order to have work places accessible to all employees. However, because the CEOs had to visit all the work places, it was necessary for them to cross demarcation lines (where snipers were active) regularly. The CEOs had to go into sections of town or regions where the militia men were hostile according to their particular political or community affiliations. There was the additional risk of kidnapping, and two of the CEOs were actually kidnapped.

#### Stress-related symptoms

In order to assess the psychological effects of these stressful conditions on our interviewees, we asked them about symptoms and diseases developed during the period under study and at the time of the interview. To begin with, none of the CEOs interviewed had a history of psychiatric illness according to what they told us themselves. Our interviews with them and the kind of behavior we observed did not contradict this. Then, although a complete assessment of acute PTSD episodes during the war or of a chronic form with residual aspects at the time of the interview couldn't be made with certainty in this study, major symptoms required for its diagnosis were absent in most cases.

At the time of the interview, there was no numbing of responsiveness, no avoidance of stimuli which are a reminder of the event, no recurrent reexperiencing of the traumatic event and no evidence of increased arousal such as insomnias, outbursts of anger or difficulties in concentration. Most of the CEOs were feeling quite happy, having survived both personally and businesswise. They were also satisfied of having contributed to maintain a minimum level of economic activity in the country, therefore preventing a total collapse of the economy. One of the CEOs, however, felt bad. He believed that being so close to death led the human being to mechanical reactions, a state he called "robotisation".

Against the likelihood of previous acute PTSD episodes, was the fact that the CEOs kept exposing themselves to the traumatic situation, although each of them to a different degree. Our interviewees reported that, during the war, they had gone through a whole range of emotional states, from "feeling sad, bad, mad to glad" (Scott, 1964). Seven out of the thirteen CEOs mentioned instances of insomnia during some of the difficult periods (shelling for example), associated with anxiety. However, only one CEO said that he had needed sedatives in order to alleviate his symptoms. Nine CEOs spontaneously admitted to having been prone to anxiety during the period of strife which was, according to them, "only normal given the circumstances". They denied having given in to outbursts of anger or to scapegoating of their employees. Two CEOs said that they had never been anxious. One of them actually mentioned that he tended to stay very cool whatever the circumstances, a characteristic that, according to him, had surprised many of his associates. For example, he said that he had had no difficulty sleeping in his plant's shelter when the region was bombed. And that was at a time when "others couldn't sleep a single minute." The other CEO who declared that he had never become anxious or suffered from insomnia said that transcendental meditation, a practice which he had started six years earlier, had helped him reach this level of self-control. (A summary of the symptoms developed during the war is given in exhibit 3).

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Insert Exhibit 3 around here

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In order to identify the personal or social factors that might have modified emerging stress reactions, we analyzed the various responses of the CEOs to the situation. First, we tried to identify their major concerns during that period. They all gave "survival" as their primary concern. They agreed that, under extreme circumstances (shelling and fighting), people's survival (the survival of themselves, their families, and their employees), was their overriding preoccupation. As one CEO summarized, "The first reflex is to secure people from danger, and only then does one start thinking about money and ways to minimize the risk to one's assets." However, securing the safety of employees was a real source of anxiety, especially in companies where it was necessary for them to move around in spite of the shelling and fighting to deliver the products.

The survival of the family was another (if not the greatest) concern for the CEOs. When the war started, the first step for most of them had been to safeguard their families by sending them abroad. Only then, with their minds more at ease, were they able to resume their work. However, sending their families out of the "hot" regions led to another form of stress: separation anxiety. And that worked both ways. In our sample, six of the families of CEOs had lived abroad for at least three years while their husbands/fathers were working in Lebanon. Although the CEOs had tried to see their families as often as possible, the distance led to a certain tension among the family members because of their concern about their husbands/fathers. Seven of the CEOs mentioned that their family members (not themselves) had suffered from psychosomatic illnesses during that period.

Other sources of stress mentioned had to do with the difficulty or even impossibility of making long-term plans given what was happening in the country. Another, related complaint which was repeatedly heard had to do with the absence of an efficient government to whom the CEOs could resort in order to solve certain company problems. Then there were a number of daily hassles mentioned, such as cash unavailability, difficulties with communications, keeping delivery promises despite erratic production, reaching markets in a divided country, and keeping employees from emigrating.

At this point, we felt that it was important to understand the executives' reasons for staying in Lebanon in order to make sense out of their behavior. From the interviews, it became quite clear that, at the outset of the war, some of the CEOs were faced with the dilemma of whether to stay in Lebanon or leave. Our interviewees had opted for the first alternative for multiple reasons: a few CEOs had seriously believed that there was a growth opportunity for their business, an opportunity they shouldn't miss. They had come to this conclusion for two reasons: they felt they could gain market share due to the departure of many of their competitors, or they expected an increase in demand for their products for various reasons. Other CEOs had been in a bind, suddenly being faced with very serious business problems when the hostilities started. Therefore, preoccupied as they were, they had felt it was not the right time to leave. In other instances, the decision to stay was connected with the family's reputation and wealth, the family having, in the words of one of the CEOs, "deep roots in Lebanon." The returns they they expected they would gain from staying (whether in social recognition or monetary terms) were in their opinion, well worth the risks.

There were many reasons why the CEOs exposed themselves to danger. What drove them to do so differed quite a bit from one person to the next. The explanation given could be business reasons (they had certain commitments to the company) or patriotic ones. Some CEOs reported that, since they had decided to stay in Lebanon, they were committed to keeping their companies in the best possible shape and thus had to meet the challenge till the end. Other CEOs felt that, by moving across demarcation lines, they were maintaining a physical link among the different areas. That was their own small way of resisting the partition of their country, to which they objected.

Another patriotic motive was expressed by CEOs who refused to collaborate with the invaders when the latter were pushing for the establishment of working relationships. For

two of the interviewees who worked under foreign occupation, the determination to pursue their activities led to considerable exposure to danger.

Another motive for facing risk was the plain fact that the boss's absence or presence at work affected morale in the organization, and his presence decreased absenteeism. Indeed, the employees felt compelled to be on the job when their boss was present at the work site despite the dangers they were exposed to to get there.

Finally, some CEOs possessed a personal Weltanschauung that facilitated the process of being exposed to danger. Three out of the thirteen managers had a rather fatalistic attitude to life, which meant that they believed that their destiny was already determined and they therefore couldn't change much by hiding in shelters.

Only one of the CEOs in the sample had truly a liking for taking risks. He enjoyed the thrill of exposing himself to danger; he compared it with an exciting sports activity.

Two out of the thirteen CEOs interviewed had a more conservative attitude toward exposure to danger despite their decision to stay. They were more inclined to stay at home or not travel. They said that they could afford to do so because of the way they had organized their jobs at the office: they had replacements at work. For them, nothing was worth risking dying for or becoming handicapped for. To illustrate, one of them mentioned a colleague killed right next to him by a bomb when they were leaving their offices.

According to the CEOs, once they had decided to stay, escaping from the upcoming difficulties was out of the question. From that moment on, the wish to leave which accompanied the most difficult war episodes became a temporary preoccupation and was rapidly pushed out of their minds. An illustration of such a way of dealing with the issue was given by one CEO, who decided to question his initial decision not to leave only if he was severely injured.

The interviews gave also a number of insights into the way these CEOs looked at death and the way they dealt with the daily dangers they were exposed to. One CEO described the attitude when someone comes close to death as "a mental blockade." He said: "When you are in danger, you only think of getting home safe. Later you realize that you were close to death, especially if you had a shell fall nearby, but you try to forget it. Anyway, what else can you do? You have to face the same situation the next day."

This attitude was shared by all the CEOs interviewed. They denied thinking about death in their daily lives. It was at most a fleeting thought which they suppressed. The feeling that bad things (including death) only happen to other people was a common reaction pattern.

It became quite clear from the interviews that most of the CEOs had repressed some of the more disturbing things which were going on. One of the CEOs' comments illustrates this pattern very well: "When you face great risks, you don't think about the bad outcome. You feel that others will get injured, but not yourself. Often, you are aware of the risks you have taken only afterwards. Only then do you realize that exposing yourself to so much danger was mad."

#### Factors contributing to company continuity

The CEOs ascribed their success in keeping their companies going to a number of factors. A frequent reason given was that, as owners, they were running their families' firms. According to them, there was a much greater commitment to the company and more willingness to expose themselves to danger for this reason. Consequently, companies of this type had a much better chance of survival. One CEO said that he could't dissociate survival of his company from survival of his family.

Some CEOs stressed adaptiveness and innovativeness as critical factors in the company's survival. According to these CEOs, the ability to be innovative and adaptive had permeated the company and could be seen in all activities from the simplest individual ones to more elaborate group actions. The war had given these companies a competitive advantage in that it had led to the acquisition of such survival skills.

The Rassemblement des Chefs d'Entreprise Libanais (the Lebanese managing directors association: RDCL) was cited as an example of group action that positively affected the survival of companies by helping them adapt to the stressful new environment. The RDCL was started in 1986 to make up for the lack of a central authority in Lebanon, and more than half of the executives in the study were members. Through this organization, the CEOs worked together to solve some of the problems pertaining to the war situation. They were much more successful as a group than they would have been individually.

Surprisingly, three CEOs mentioned as an important factor for survival the level of trust that prevailed among the different stakeholders in their companies. For example, they mentioned financial risks, which remained surprisingly low with respect to accounts receivable or shipped goods despite the absence of a central authority. Some mentioned that they had not received a single bad check. Another factor that very much contributed to the survival of the various enterprises was that business relationships were spared the kind of political divisions that were ruining the country.

Looking specifically at the enterprises, we can identify a number of organizational issues. First of all, having realized that their employees were a critical resource, the CEOs had to prevent them from emigrating. One thing they did was give their employees the financial incentives needed to maintain a decent lifestyle despite the economic crisis. An illustration of the importance given to keeping their employees satisfied was presented by one executive, who explained the risks he took to distribute salaries to employees' homes, at a time when, due to gun fire, they could not come to the plant. Non-financial incentives



were also used to keep the employees' morale high. For example, despite the great need for cost reduction, one CEO furnished his employees' offices in the same luxurious style as his own when he transferred the work site from one place to another.

In most instances (according to the CEOs), the motivation of their employees and their commitment to the companies remained high. Among the reasons given for this, were the difficulties encountered if employees tried to leave the country, what would have happened to their livelihood if the company had had to close, and a strong identification with the CEO and the company. Employees, therefore didn't hesitate to expose themselves to nearly the same degree of danger as their bosses. For example in one company, two employees who had been injured at the work site showed up the next day to work. When employees couldn't come to work because of shelling and sniper fire, it was common practice for them to make up for the lost time at a later date. This is what one CEO described as "travail elastique" (elastic work), a new form of flex time. All in all, there seems to have been a great willingness to work. There was one exception, however. One CEO complained about his employees' lack of loyalty, especially the wealthier ones who were less dependent on the company for their financial well-being.

Thus, in spite of the war, the employees' productivity remained at a satisfactory level for many companies. What is interesting to note, however, is that four CEOs commented on a worrisome decrease in their employees' productivity during the few months preceding the interviews, i.e., at the end of the war. One CEO actually mentioned that he had told his employees that they "needed another war to work effectively again." Closely related to this new development (according to the CEOs) was a reported increase in the incidence of depression and depressive moods among employees.

From the interviews, it became clear that, during the war, life at work had been modified to adjust to the prevailing conditions. For example, one way of solving the problem of absenteeism due to the difficulties in getting to work was setting up dormitories

at the workplace where employees could live for prolonged periods of time. They would frequently bring their families to these newly constructed shelters at the plant, because it was often more secure there than at home. In one plant, more than a hundred employees lived in such shelters for months at a time. They would often be joined by their CEO.

Sharing concerns about safety, shelter, and food made for a very strong bond. It created a family-like atmosphere, deepening the ties among all members of the organization. It also led to a very strong commitment to the company. One CEO who had employees of multiple political and religious affiliations working for him, told his employees that they were free to do whatever they liked outside the plant, but that they were obliged to act as one family inside the company. According to him, not one incident occurred during all the years of upheaval.

## **Discussion**

As to be expected, there were certain differences in responses across our sample: some of the CEOs had more problems with stress than others. Despite these variations, it is clear that the general outcome for this group of CEOs was positive, and PTSD or other major psychiatric disturbances were not (at least not directly) noticeable. Given this result, the question becomes what factors that could have had a buffering effect can be identified? Why wasn't there a greater evidence of stress?

First of all, it can be argued that, in situations of crisis, being exposed to a common danger facilitates the sense of a common vision and mission. This mutual identification process, sharing one's goals and objectives with others, can be a source of great strength. Having a common purpose creates some form of guiding structure that can have a buffering effect against depressive symptoms and other signs of stress. Both CEOs and subordinates may have profited from this psychological dynamics. What also helps in this process is

having a common enemy. And, as we know from the situation in Lebanon, there were many "enemies" around. Moreover, in the case of depressive disorders, we can often see how the absence of a specific goal or aim facilitates the emergence of symptoms. For some people, the need to continue living disappears; the energy is missing for going on with life.

An illustration of this phenomenon in our study is the increase in depressive symptoms among the employees at the end of the war. Perhaps this period, with its sudden lack of the daily fight for survival, resulted in feelings of emptiness and aimlessness contributing to depressive symptoms.

For many of the CEOs in our study the survival of the company became one of their overriding purposes in life. And the CEOs' sense of vision and mission must have reverberated throughout the company. The companies' results indicate that their presence was probably highly inspirational to their employees. Most likely, the employees strongly identified with their CEOs (Freud, 1921). All being in the same boat, having common goals, fighting the dangers outside, and sharing the same fears and joys, conceivably may have created an enormous amount of energy in the organization and made for group cohesiveness and an extremely strong sense of commitment.

This feeling of group solidarity seems to have played a major role in minimizing the stressor damage within the organization: the atmosphere became like that of a family. The group cohesion had a positive effect on the business, and it prevented the kind of stress that could have been the outcome of a tense atmosphere at work or poor management/employee relations. This process of group dynamics may have modified the level of stress the CEOs were experiencing. For many, the survival of the company seems to have become their personal strategy for coping. Having a sense of purpose, not being alone in this quagmire, but having others to share it with must certainly have increased their stress threshold level.

Not only was there the strength the CEOs drew from the other members of the organization, but their families were an additional source of social support for these executives. Knowing loved ones were somewhere safe helped them continue working, even under very difficult circumstances. The CEOs seem to have drawn a great deal of strength from the nuclear family, even though many of their interactions with family members took only place in fantasy since they were absent.

We also have to keep in mind that, in spite of all the uncertainties, the CEOs (particularly the owner-managers) had a certain amount of control over their destiny. As has been shown by many stress researchers, having a sense of control ("the power effect") will serve as a buffer against stress (Seligman, 1975; Zaleznik, Kets de Vries, and Howard, 1977). Some stress researchers have even commented on the notion of hardiness, the idea that certain people are more resistant to stress than others. The feeling of control plays a role in hardiness as well (Lefcourt, 1976; Kobasa, 1979). In contrast, as research on stressful life events has shown, feeling completely subjected to outside forces can effect one's immunological system and lower one's stress resistance (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

Moreover, in the context of a sense of control, a few comments can be made about Lebanese national character. One study looking at national character (Kanbar, 1985) concluded that the Lebanese have a great capacity for adaptation, possess a strong sense of responsibility, have courage, and like adventure. All these personal qualities could be well put into practice given what was happening in their country.

Not only can we name a sense of purpose, group cohesiveness, and the feeling of control ("the power effect") as possible buffering factors against stress, but the role specific defense mechanisms played should also be mentioned. One very familiar way of protecting oneself against a stressful environment is the defense mechanism of denial (Freud, 1966; Cramer, 1990). It seems that the CEOs resorted to this defense mechanism as a way of coping with death and injury, and with the stressor in general. This defense mechanism

may also be seen as an explanatory factor for the rather positive outcomes reported by the CEOs, given the kind of devastation they were exposed to. Given the extreme circumstances under which the CEOs were operating, we may postulate that there was a strong unconscious desire not to see: it may have become their way of dealing with life-destroying events. From the interviews, it became very clear that the ephemeral awareness of real, objective dangers did sometimes occur but seemed to be rapidly suppressed. Faced with the incredible carnage taking place in Lebanon, denial may have played a major role in facilitating daily functioning. Dangers were blotted out, minimized or negated. Probably, a more lucid processing of the devastation around them could have led to flight and withdrawal behavior. Indeed, after the choice of staying was made, an immunization from the surroundings may very well have been the best adaptation to the new life. In addition, taking this kind of defensive strategy makes disturbing outside events less damaging to one's mental health. It can therefore partially explain the higher threshold for vulnerability to stress which we observed in our study.

Other factors that contributed to a decrease of the stressor effect included traditional mechanisms for stress alleviation. Among the most frequent ones mentioned by the CEOs were sports, reading, and playing cards. These undeniably helped in the sublimation of repressed fears. Also, according to them, regular trips abroad made it easier for them to "reload" and better tolerate the daily difficulties they faced upon return to their country.

## **Conclusion**

In this exploratory study, we looked at a group of CEOs who worked for many years in an extremely stressful environment. In spite of the life-threatening situation, they found themselves in, they didn't seem to suffer from major stress disorders. We have identified a number of factors that may explain this relatively positive outcome. However, other studies are needed in order better to evaluate the significance of our findings. A broader study would be useful in order to compare the incidence of stress disorders among Lebanese

CEOs with that of the general population. Also, other studies of executives working under extreme conditions may help to indicate whether the pattern of response differs among nationalities or whether it is shared by executives in general.

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Exhibit 1

Background of the CEOs and their Firms

	Age	Marital Status (1)	Ownership	Years in function in Lebanon	Family (f) or public (p) firm	Type of company	Number of Employees (1991)	Gross Revenue (\$) 1991	$\Delta(1975-1991)$ (3)
1	35	S	yes	10	f	Manufacturing/Transport	50	na (2)	↓
2	37	S	yes	8	f	Library/Distribution	na	na	↔
3	42	M + C	yes	14	f	Distribution/Wholesaling	52	2 million	↑
4	43	D + C	yes	16	f	Construction Distr./Wholesaling	35	na	↑
5	50	M + C	shareholder	16	p	Manufacturing	90	<2 million	↑
6	38	S	yes	16	f	Manufacturing	25	na	↑
7	40	M + C	yes	11	f	Manufacturing/Retailing	90	na	↓
8	45	M + C	shareholder	16	p	Insurance	80	5 million	↑
9	43	M + C	yes	16	f	Insurance	120	na	↑
10	48	M + C	no	16	f	Manufacturing	200	>2 million	↑
11	50	M + C	yes	16	f	Manufacturing/Wholesaling Retailing	300	>10 million	↓
12	34	M	yes	8	f	Manufacturing	900	>10 million	↑
13	61	M + C	yes	16	f	Manufacturing Agricultural products	750	10 million	↓

(1) S: Single - M: Married - D: Divorced - C: Children

(2) na: not available

(3) ↑ : increased - ↓ : decreased ↔ : remained the same

Exhibit 2

War-induced Disasters at the Work Place

	<b>FIRE</b>	<b>PILLAGE</b>	<b>DESTRUCTION*</b>	<b>BOMBS</b>	<b>OTHERS</b>
1	Plant (1x)	X (Plant)		X	Transport Company stopped its activities
2	Library (1x) Warehouse (1x)	X (Library)		X	
3				X	
4				X	
5	Plant (1x)	X (Plant)		X	Lot of WIP spoiled because of irregular work
6				X	
7				X	
8				X	
9				X	
10		X (Warehouse)		X	
11	Warehouse > 1x	X (Warehouse)	Retail shops	X	
12	Plant 2x		60% of a plant	X	
13	Plant 1x		X (plant)	X	

\* > 50% destruction

Exhibit 3

Symptoms or Diseases Developed During  
the Period Under Study

	AGE	ANXIETY	INSOMNIA	SEDATIVE INTAKE	OTHER SYMPTOMS OR DISEASES
1	35	No	No	-	Abdominal cramps when heavy shelling
2	37	Yes	NA(1)	-	Allergic rhinitis related to nervosity
3	42	NA <sup>1</sup>	NA	-	NA
4	43	Yes	NA	-	NA
5	50	Yes	Yes	-	None
6	38	No	No	-	None
7	40	Yes	Yes	-	↑ in weight related to stress ↑ in cholest. and triglycides
8	45	Yes	Yes	Yes	Tachycardia - Extrasystoles Hypercholesterolemia - Anosmia
9	43	Yes	Yes	-	NA
10	48	NA	NA	-	NA
11	50	Yes	Yes	-	Hypertension Hyperuricemia
12	34	Yes	Yes	-	NA
13	61	Yes	Yes	-	None

(1) NA: Not applicable