

## The Transcending Trauma Project

Since 1991, The Transcending Trauma Project (TTP), as part of CFR, has conducted 307 in-depth life histories with 98 Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren to better understand coping and adaptation after extreme trauma. The Phil Wachs and Juliet Spitzer Archive of the Transcending Trauma Project are housed at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and, in the near future, at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Israel.

## Approach

Post World War II, the field of Trauma Studies focused almost exclusively on the negative consequences of traumatic experiences. The Transcending Trauma Project (TTP) team found this to be untrue in our clinical practices and in our life experiences with survivors of the Holocaust. The team decided to address the absence of a fuller understanding of trauma's impact – especially extreme trauma – by conducting an expanded qualitative interview-based research project with survivors of the Nazi Holocaust during World War II and their family members. The goal for the TTP was to gather evidence for a psychological understanding of how individuals and families cope differently with extreme trauma and how they rebuild their lives.

Based on grounded theory methodology TTP sought to gain an understanding of how Holocaust survivors coped with and managed to rebuild their lives after the devastating suffering, deprivation, and losses experienced during the Nazi Genocide. To expand the focus beyond the individual survivor and the study of coping and adaptation after extreme trauma, TTP not only analyzed the individual survivor as a single unit but also analyzed the individual survivor within his or her family unit. Interviews gathered data not only about the war years but also about the respondent's life before and after the war.

## Learn More



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### Transformative Narratives

Adult children of Holocaust survivors have questions about good and evil in the world and expressions of sadness for their parents' suffering. TTP reveals fascinating insight into the impact of these stories of trauma on these adult children.



### Family Dynamics

Family dynamics contribute to the development of healthy relationships between parent and child and are foundational to adult development. These healthy relationships influence the resilience by influencing the positive development of belief systems, family structure organization, and communication within families.

The quality of family relationships was found to be the prevalent mediating variable in the intergenerational transmission of trauma and resilience pointing to the quality of parenting that was directly affected by the severity of the traumatic impact experienced by survivor parents.



### Mission

It has always been a mission of TTP to promote, through its findings, a greater understanding of trauma's impact on groups, families, and individuals, along with promoting healthy adaptation and growth so that the trauma, whatever it may be, can be left in the past without impinging on the future.