

Victim Support press release

Wednesday 9 November 2016

People traumatised after being caught up in terrorist attacks are falling through gaps in the support system, Victim Support report reveals

The lack of a widely recognised definition of a ‘victim’ of terrorism is putting at risk survivors receiving the emotional and practical help they need after being caught up in an attack, new research conducted by Victim Support (VS) reveals.

While families bereaved by terrorism have automatic access to high quality care through the Government funded Homicide Service - which is delivered by Victim Support - British citizens who survive an attack abroad and suffer psychological or less serious physical injuries are often falling through gaps in the system. Many are left struggling and only receive help after referring themselves.

The new VS report, *‘Meeting the needs of survivors and families bereaved through terrorism’*, published on Thursday 10 November, also finds that survivors can struggle to know where to turn to for information and support in the days and weeks following a terrorist incident.

A survivor of the Paris attack, the first anniversary of which falls this Sunday 13 November, told VS: *“...they class me as a ‘witness’ to the murder of one individual (a British citizen). But I am not just a witness - I am also a victim. Extremists tried to kill me and I am still struggling with the impact of it on my life. Victims should not be fighting for support and recognition. We need to focus on our recovery and deserve to be supported.”*

A survey of VS caseworkers who have supported (or continue to support) people directly affected by terrorism, as well as interviews and questionnaires with survivors and bereaved families, reveals the significant emotional and psychological effects of terrorism and the shortfalls in provision of care. 93.5% of survivors suffered effects including difficulties sleeping, intense distress when reminded of the incident, anger, flashbacks and anxiety. 78.8% required emotional and psychological support, including from specialist services, but the waiting times for counselling or therapy services on the NHS can feel too long, and deter some from accessing that support. And while post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is relatively common among those who have experienced a traumatic event, treatment is not offered by all NHS mental health trusts in England.

Other apparent shortcomings of the current system include financial hardships exacerbated by challenges in claiming compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) and a lack of assistance in dealing with excessive media attention.

A survivor of the attack in Sousse, Tunisia on 26 June 2015 said: *“I was injured and, as a result, hospitalised. There is still a long recovery period ahead of me. My life has changed beyond recognition... I don’t know when I will be able to come back to work... I still don’t socialise as I used to... being able to go to the cinema with a friend, or walk in the park, or sit in a restaurant. It is really hard and a lot to take in.”*

In the report, VS makes a series of recommendations based on the findings of its research with VS caseworkers, survivors and bereaved families. These also draw on the experiences of individuals and organisations that have a role in providing services to survivors and international examples of what VS believes to be good practices. The recommendations include:

- Those who are ordinarily classified as direct witnesses should be considered and treated as survivors by all agencies, enabling them to access suitable support services
- A pathway of support should be mapped out and agreed by all agencies involved in assisting survivors and a working group should be convened immediately to co-design this
- A seamless referral mechanism to victim services should be established for survivors who have been physically and/or psychologically injured by an act of terrorism abroad
- Survivors, their families and those bereaved by terrorism should have access to a single online information and support portal - and the Government should put plans in place to enable such a portal to be set up and accessible in the immediate days after an attack and for as long as those affected require it
- NHS England should ensure that those who have been directly affected by an act of terrorism are not adversely affected by long waiting times to receive psychological therapies. They should also ensure consistent and equal access to treatment of PTSD
- A taskforce, led by the Ministry of Justice, should be convened to look at the length of time it takes for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA) to make a final award to victims of terrorism
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) staff should, as part of consular assistance, advocate on behalf of UK casualties with hospital management to make sure their wishes are known regarding media access at the earliest opportunity. These wishes should also be passed on to victim services in the UK

Cathy Owen, National Homicide Services Manager for independent charity Victim Support, says: “Sadly, the frequency of international terrorist attacks continues to rise and we know, from supporting survivors and the bereaved, just how devastating and long lasting the psychological, physical, social and financial effects can be.

“While there are positive aspects to the current system, such as the support provided by Humanitarian and Survivor Assistance Centres, improvements clearly need to be made. We hope this report will encourage all the agencies involved to work together to ensure that

everyone caught up in such harrowing events receives the support and assistance they deserve.”

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Interviews: VS spokesperson Cathy Owen (Homicide Service Manager) is available for interview by appointment.

For further information or to arrange an interview please contact the press office by phone on 020 7268 0202 or email press@victimsupport.org.uk.

About the report: The executive summary of the Report *‘Meeting the needs of survivors and families bereaved through terrorism’*, is pasted below for your information. If you would like to receive the full report before it is published on the VS website at 09.00 GMT tomorrow, Thursday 10 November 2016, please contact the press office by phone on 020 7268 0202 or email press@victimsupport.org.uk.

About Victim Support: Victim Support (VS) is the independent charity for victims and witnesses of crime in England and Wales. Last year we offered support to just under 1 million victims of crime. VS also runs the national Homicide Service supporting people bereaved through murder and manslaughter and local projects, which tackle domestic abuse, antisocial behaviour and hate crime, and help children and young people. VS is a member of the Home Office’s Joint Fraud Taskforce, addressing fraud and cybercrime. The charity has around 1,100 staff and 1,600 volunteers.

Website: www.victimsupport.org.uk

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Executive summary

In 2015, acts of terrorism resulted in 151 deaths across the European Union and more than 360 people injured.¹ Overall, data from the Global Terrorism Database shows that the frequency of international terrorist attacks continues to rise, with recent incidents suggesting that, increasingly, private citizens have become the primary targets.²

Terrorist attacks significantly impact survivors and bereaved families, psychologically, financially and socially. Despite this, victims’ issues remain at the edge of the debate on terrorism. In many respects, the current policies and practices in England and Wales for supporting British nationals and residents who

fall victim to these acts are falling short of what they need and deserve.

New research conducted by VS shows that while families bereaved by terrorism have access to high-quality care through the government-funded National Homicide Service, those who have not been seriously physically injured or bereaved but were at the scene of the incident do not have the guarantee of a service that meets their needs due to inconsistent referral mechanisms. British families bereaved through terrorism that occurred either in the UK or abroad will, in almost all cases, be offered assistance from a police Family Liaison Officer (FLO) and, provided they are resident in England or Wales or the deceased is a British national, will also be offered support from VS's Homicide Service. Through the Homicide Service, bereaved families are offered dedicated support by a named, specially trained caseworker who can provide ongoing emotional support and immediate practical help. In contrast, while there is support available for those who have not been bereaved and did not suffer serious physical injuries, including from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and victim services, gaps in provision mean that survivors can and do struggle to access the support they need to move beyond the incident.

This report presents VS's research findings on the support needs of survivors and families bereaved through terrorism. It examines the range and co-ordination of available services in England and Wales and, using examples of what we believe to be international good practice, looks at how the provision of support can ultimately be improved. At a time when the threat of terrorism to the UK is 'severe' and public concern is high,^{3,4} it aims to provide personal insights into the survivor's journey through the system, and to inform key agencies with a responsibility to deliver help and support about the shortcomings that have been identified through practice.

Summary of findings

VS has supported more than 150 people directly affected by terrorism, including the attacks in Sousse and Paris in 2015. Between March and October 2016, we conducted research into the needs and experiences of survivors and those bereaved through terrorism. This included conducting a survey with VS caseworkers who have supported (or continue to support) people who have been directly affected. A total of 92 questionnaires were completed. We also conducted four interviews with survivors and bereaved family members and five individuals completed a self-administered questionnaire anonymously.

The impact of terrorism on survivors and bereaved family members

- Our research suggests that the consequences of an act of terrorism on the lives of those affected are, in the majority of cases, severe.
- Acts of terrorism cause significant psychological harm, including difficulties falling or staying asleep and a feeling of intense distress when reminded of the incident. Based on the opinion of VS caseworkers, almost all survivors and bereaved family members were affected psychologically as a direct result of their

experience. Consequently, in the first month after referral to VS, the most commonly reported requirement was for emotional and psychological support (78.8%).

- It is not just survivors who have been physically injured who can suffer significant psychological consequences but those who witness an attack as well. All of those ordinarily considered ‘witnesses’ to an act of terrorism, who are referred to as survivors in this report, were affected psychologically.
- Those who had been bereaved and the survivors themselves were also affected financially (21.7%) and physically (13.0%). Our research found that bereaved family members were particularly affected, with almost a third suffering financial difficulties as a direct consequence.
- The needs of people affected by terrorism change over time. In the second month after referral to VS, the number of people identified as needing relationship support increased by 167% when compared with the first month.

Shortcomings of the current system

- In the absence of a widely recognised definition of a ‘victim’ of terrorism, ‘witnesses’ are not always considered to be victims by all of the agencies and organisations involved in supporting them. We believe this may have implications for the support they receive.
- There is no guarantee that a British national and/or resident who has suffered psychological injuries or less serious physical injuries as a result of an act of terrorism overseas will be referred to victim services.
- There is a lack of clarity as to where survivors should seek information about the support they can receive and the options available to them. All of the survivors who completed the self-administered questionnaire reported that it was unclear to them who they should turn to for support in the days and weeks following the incident.
- For some survivors and bereaved family members, the waiting time to receive counselling or therapy services on the NHS can feel too long. Accessing peer support groups, particularly locally, can also be problematic.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is relatively common among those who have experienced a traumatic event, such as a terrorist attack.¹ However, treatment for PTSD is not offered by all NHS mental health trusts in England.
- Survivors can experience challenges in claiming compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA), particularly where they are involved in a related civil claim for damages.

¹ According to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, around 25–30% may develop it. See: NICE (2005) Post-traumatic stress disorder management. Clinical guideline. (www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg26/chapter/1-Guidance)

- Coping with intrusion from the media is an issue a small number of survivors in our study struggled with. They found the attention they received from journalists to be intense, intrusive and upsetting. In some instances this began in hospital.

Recommendations

In consultation with individuals and organisations who have a role in providing services to survivors, VS has identified elements of the approaches taken in the Netherlands and Massachusetts as good practice. We believe the Government, criminal justice agencies and delivery organisations in England and Wales can learn from these.

Based on these findings, VS recommends that:

- Those who are ordinarily classified as direct ‘witnesses’ should be considered and treated as survivors by all of the agencies involved in assisting them, in accordance with obligations under EU law and international norms, and be able to access adequate support services.
- Informed by the direct experiences of survivors of terrorism and their families, a pathway of support should be mapped out and agreed by all of the agencies involved in assisting them. This should clarify what services should be provided and at what point. A multidisciplinary working group should be convened immediately to look at co-designing this pathway.

As part of this support pathway, and to address the existing gaps in provision, we recommend that:

- A seamless referral mechanism to victim services for survivors who have been physically and/or psychologically injured by an act of terrorism abroad should be established.
- Survivors, their families and those who have been bereaved through terrorism should have access to a single online information and support portal. The Government should put in place plans for this to be set up and accessible in the days immediately following an attack, either in the UK or abroad (where it involves British nationals and/or residents), and for as long as those affected require it (which may be a number of years).
- NHS England should ensure that those who have been directly affected by an act of terrorism are not adversely affected by long waiting times to receive psychological therapies. An effort should be made to provide them with emotional support to help them cope in the interim, in line with NICE guidelines.
- NHS England should also ensure consistent and equal access to treatment of PTSD to guarantee that no one is adversely affected by where they live, either with regard to waiting times or the availability of services.

- Led by the Ministry of Justice, a taskforce should be convened to look at whether the length of time it takes for the CICA to make a final award, including in cases where the claimant is involved in a related civil action for damages, has any negative implications for survivors of terrorism. VS recommends that this group also has a remit to review the length of time between the date of an application and the claimant receiving an award, with a view to reducing it.
- As part of consular assistance, FCO staff should advocate on behalf of UK casualties with hospital management at the earliest opportunity to make sure their wishes are known regarding media access. In addition, the wishes of casualties and bereaved family members should be passed by FCO staff to the relevant victim services in the UK, so that further intrusion can be prevented.

¹ Europol (2016). *EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)*. The Hague: Europol.

² Institute for Economics and Peace (2015). *Global Terrorism Index 2015: Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism*. Retrieved from: economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2015-Global-Terrorism-Index-Report.pdf

³ Home Office (2014). Threat-level from international terrorism increased. Retrieved from: www.gov.uk/government/news/threat-level-from-international-terrorism-increased

⁴ European Commission (2016). Standard Eurobarometer 85: UK Factsheet. Retrieved from: ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/74304

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