

Postterrorism Services for Victims and Surviving Family Members: Lessons From Pan Am 103

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This study presents the findings of a services utilization and satisfaction survey of surviving family members of the Pan Am 103 (Lockerbie, Scotland) bombing. The goals of this study were to evaluate satisfaction with services provided; to gather information from surviving family members about experiences that might be expected to affect satisfaction; to estimate the psychological, physical, and financial impact of the homicide on surviving family members; to obtain recommendations regarding how services can be improved; and to solicit opinions regarding needs for future services. Participants were surviving family members who were interviewed twice using telephone interviews, once prior to completion of the criminal trial and again 7 weeks after the verdict. Results indicated that many surviving family members suffered from considerable problems associated with the loss of their loved ones. However, families found services provided by the United States Office for Victims of Crime, such as information about the court process, to be helpful. Finally, participants made specific recommendations for the improvement of services, including greater emotional support.

ON DECEMBER 21, 1988, Pan Am Flight 103, bound for New York City from London, exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing all 259 people on board and 11 people on the ground. When subsequent investigation revealed that the incident was caused by an explosive device, the largest air disaster in British history also became the largest mass murder in Scottish history.

In 1991, two Libyan citizens were indicted on charges of conspiracy and murder associated with the bombing, but Libyan authorities refused to extradite the suspects for trial until 1999, more than a decade after the bombing. After a protracted series of diplomatic negotiations, the government of Libya agreed to allow the suspects to be tried under Scottish law in the Netherlands. In May of 2000, a criminal trial began at Kamp van Zeist, resulting in a verdict on January 31, 2001, that found one suspect guilty and one suspect not guilty. Families of victims, therefore, waited over 12 years for the initial legal resolution, which is subject to appeal, of the terrorist attack that took their loved ones from them.

Although the passengers included citizens of 21 nations, the majority of the deceased in the Pan Am 103 bombing were United States citizens. In the U.S., terrorist attacks are considered crimes, and victims of crime (including surviving family members of homicide victims) have specific rights. Under many circumstances, crime victims are eligible for compensatory and ameliorative services. Because the Pan Am 103 crime took place outside the United States, however, no coordinated victim

services were offered by the U.S. government for some time. In 1996, 8 years after the bombing, legislation was enacted that authorized the U.S. Department of Justice's Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) to provide services to victims of terrorism and mass violence. However, technicalities in the law interfered with OVC's ability to deliver services until 1999, when Congress passed legislation specifically authorizing OVC to assist the Pan Am 103 families throughout the trial process. In response to this legislation, OVC worked closely with the Scottish government to provide an array of services to the Pan Am 103 families.

These services were based in large part on previous research and theory, and on lessons learned from caring for the victims of the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City (Office for Victims of Crime, 2000). Edwards (1998) has noted that families confronted with disaster often focus on three general coping tasks in the aftermath: defining the situation clearly, identifying actions that need to be taken, and obtaining access to available resources. In the longer term process of post-crime adaptation, past research has identified the importance of legal protection and rights for victims (Beatty, Howley, & Kilpatrick, 1996) and that providing victim services is important to later victim participation and satisfaction with the criminal justice system (Kelley & Erez, 1997). The services offered to Pan Am 103 surviving family members by OVC were generally designed to meet these goals. OVC services included: (a) an international toll-free telephone line that contained information about the progress of the investigation and trial; (b) a secure Web site providing case information, an "electronic scrapbook" of information about the bombing, a discussion forum for family members, and daily

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trial summaries; (c) remote, closed-circuit viewing of the trial at Kamp van Zeist; (d) funding and coordination of travel and lodging to Kamp van Zeist or one of the remote viewing sites for two family members; (e) safe, secure waiting areas separate from defendants and their families at the Scottish Court at Kamp van Zeist; (f) on-site personnel at the Scottish Court to assist with local needs, provide family services, and explain Scottish law and procedures; (g) funding and coordination of travel for families to attend pretrial briefings with the Scottish prosecutor; (h) a Lockerbie Trial Handbook that provided information about the trial, Scottish law, local amenities at Kamp van Zeist, and other pertinent logistics; and (i) funds to pay for mental health counseling for victims' family members throughout the trial process. Many of these services, or similar efforts, were developed and offered to victims following the Murrah Federal Building bombing and during the trials later held in Denver, Colorado.

Unfortunately, there was quite a time lag between the bombing and the authorization of OVC to provide services. During this delay, many families were distraught and in need of services, creating a less-than-ideal situation for family members. Thus, surviving family members in the Pan Am 103 case may have developed very negative attitudes because of their dissatisfaction with the lack of services and lack of legal movement in the early years of the case. Despite this, given the threat of future large-scale terrorist actions, it is important to examine the extent to which OVC-provided services were used in the Pan Am 103 case, families' satisfaction with services, and their insights regarding possible improvements and enhancements to services. This information should prove useful to policymakers and responders as they plan and provide services for future terrorist attack victims.

Methods

Participants

Participants for this study were identified through the OVC, which maintained a list of 573 adult surviving family members of the Pan Am 103 victims that included contact information. All persons on this list were mailed a letter from the OVC director describing the project. They were invited to return a postcard if they did not wish to be contacted. From this mailing, 68 (11.9%) refused via postcard, and 505 names remained eligible. Contact information for these names was provided to Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a survey research firm with extensive experience with telephonic survey methods. Of these, 70 (12.2%) had no working phone numbers, and another 75 (13.1%) could not be contacted because of incorrect or changed phone numbers. Another 5 (1%) potential participants were contacted but were

ineligible because they were either married to another family member participant or were not related to a victim. Of the 355 remaining eligible participants who could be located and contacted via telephone, interviews were completed with 300. This represents 84.5% of the 355 eligible participants contacted by telephone and 70.9% of the 423 (355 plus 68 postcard refusals) with whom direct contact was made. Thus, the refusal rate was 15.5% for those contacted by telephone and 29.1% for those with whom the researchers had any direct contact (by telephone or postcard). Limited demographic information was obtained, but participants were well-educated, with 81% having completed at least some college course work and only 3% who did not complete high school. Over half of respondents (64%) were married, with smaller percentages of widowed (16%), single (9%), and divorced (7%) participants.

Procedures

SRBI conducted two waves of telephone surveys with adult surviving relatives. The first survey of 300 respondents was conducted in fall 2000 during the trial of the two accused bombers. Wave 2 was conducted in the spring of 2001, approximately 7 weeks after the trial was completed and the verdict was announced. Of the 300 original respondents, 241 (80.3%) completed the second interview. The first interview averaged approximately 42 minutes in length, and the second interview averaged approximately 22 minutes.

If the interview was not conducted at the time of initial telephone contact, the interview was rescheduled at a time convenient to the respondent. There were no maximum attempts placed on the number of times interviewers attempted to reach each telephone number during the field period. If the phone number was judged to be working, it was called at least once a day during the field period. If the phone number was identified as a wrong number or disconnected, directory assistance was contacted to attempt to obtain a working number. When the household was reached, the interviewer asked to speak to the designated person on the OVC list. In cases where the OVC list contained multiple relatives at the same number, SRBI asked to speak to any one of the relatives on the list.

Because of the multinational nature of the sample, some respondents required special language accommodations. All households in which a language barrier was encountered were set for special call back. Based upon their country, SRBI attempted to have a native language-speaking interviewer call the contact to make sure they could reach the contact in case someone else had answered the phone. If the contact could speak English, the interview was conducted in English. There was one language barrier in German, where the respondent did not speak enough English to conduct the interview. One interview was conducted with a respondent in Italian using

an Italian translator. When SRBI contacted the other cases with language barriers, they determined that the phone number was wrong or that the respondent did not wish to participate.

No refusal conversion was conducted on this study because of the very sensitive nature of the interview.

Interviews

Wave 1. After introductory queries establishing that the respondent was indeed a relative of a Pan Am 103 victim, questions assessed the helpfulness of various agencies, including U.S. government branches and other government branches, in providing information, assistance, and support. Awareness of the OVC services and satisfaction with those services were then specifically assessed. Because the purpose of the survey was to evaluate the utilization of OVC services, and because the crime had occurred nearly 12 years prior to the interview, in-depth queries about psychological symptoms and physical reactions at the time of the bombing were not practical. Instead, global questions assessed difficulty coping, time lost from work, family conflict, and financial losses related to the bombing. Finally, respondents were queried regarding their expectations with respect to the trial verdict, their opinions about airline security, and their views about how to meet the needs of victims of terrorist acts.

Wave 2. Designed to be much briefer, the follow-up interview assessed reactions to the verdict, repeated questions regarding OVC service utilization and satisfaction, inquired about satisfaction with the overall investigative and legal processes, and assessed opinions regarding mental health service utilization (including possible barriers to access).

Results

Results regarding the psychological, physical, and financial impact of the bombing on family members are reported from Wave 1 data. Information regarding utilization of and satisfaction with OVC services, recommendations for improvements of services, satisfaction with process and outcome of the legal case, and opinions regarding public policy changes in OVC services are reported from Wave 2 data because these provide the most comprehensive time frame for service utilization and assessment of the impact of the verdict on perceptions.

Psychological, Physical, and Financial Impact

The data in this section are based on the full sample of 300 Wave 1 respondents. Not surprisingly, many surviving family members reported considerable problems associated with the loss of their loved ones. Over half (54%) reported that they had missed work days after the disaster, either due to their own poor health, emotional distress,

or to demands of the investigation, although only one-third (31%) reported that they felt a need for financial assistance to help them recover from their loss. Forty percent reported that they increased their personal health care expenditures as a result of the bombing. Over half of respondents (53%) reported increased conflict and other problems with family members. Nearly three-quarters (72%) reported great difficulty coping in the aftermath of the bombing, with 57% reporting that they felt the need for individual counseling or therapy, and 61% expressing the need for family support groups.

Over four-fifths of the sample (81%) reported a need for better information about the bombing and investigation, and 75% stated they felt they needed someone to advocate for their interests in the criminal justice system and with government agencies. Participants were asked about their satisfaction with official efforts to keep them informed during three different time frames: 1988 to 1991 (prior to the indictment of the defendants); 1991 to 1998 (after the indictment but before the extradition agreement); and 1998 to the present (after the extradition agreement). Figure 1 clearly indicates increased satisfaction after the extradition agreement. This also coincides with OVC's provision of services to surviving family members (which began in 1999), which many respondents identified as marking a significant change in their attitudes toward the government's response to victims' family members.

Utilization of and Satisfaction With OVC Services

During the Wave 2 interview, after the verdict was announced, each family member was asked whether they had ever used each OVC service during the trial and how helpful it was. Data on utilization of OVC services are presented in Table 1, which shows that many of the services were used by a substantial proportion of family members.

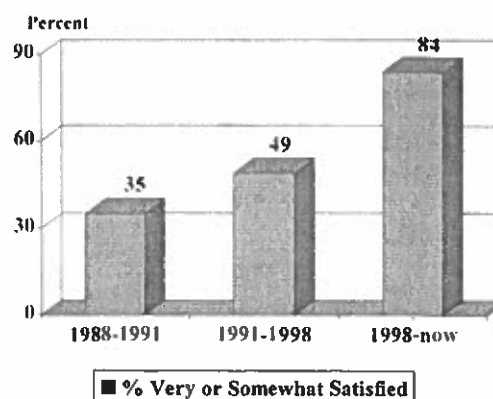


Figure 1. Satisfaction with official efforts to keep families informed (Wave 1).

Table 1
Wave 2 Participants' Utilization of OVC Services

OVC Service	Percent Ever Used
Toll-free information number	24
Secure Internet Web site	61
Funding for mental health counseling	6
Travel funds to attend trial or remote site	42
Assistance with travel arrangements	36
Family liaison officers at trial court	33
Secure waiting areas at trial court	32
Lockerbie Trial Handbook	75

Three-fourths (75%) of family members reported using the Lockerbie Trial Handbook, and approximately 6 out of 10 family members (61%) reported having used the secure Web site. More than 4 out of 10 family members (42%) said they had used OVC travel funds to attend the trial or one of the remote viewing sites. Over one-third of family members (36%) reported having received assistance with travel arrangements; one-third of family members (33%) had used the services of Family Liaison Officers at the Trial Court; and almost one-third of family members (32%) had utilized the secure waiting areas at the trial court. Almost one-fourth of family members (24%) had used the toll-free international telephone number. Only 6% of family members had used OVC funding for mental health counseling, however. It should be noted, though, that by the time this service became available, it is likely that many family members no longer desired or needed mental health services. This may account for the very low utilization of this particular service.

With respect to satisfaction with these OVC services, family members almost uniformly thought each of the services was helpful. Respondents who had utilized a service were asked if they thought it was very helpful, somewhat helpful, or not too helpful. As is quite clear from inspection of Figure 2, virtually all family members thought that each OVC service was helpful. The combined *very helpful* and *somewhat helpful* ratings of family members ranged from a low of 93% for the crime victim compensation fund for mental health counseling to a high of 100% for the Lockerbie Trial Handbook. This means that only an extremely small proportion of family members said that any OVC service was not too helpful.

Satisfaction With Process and Outcome of Case

In the Wave 2 interview, respondents were also asked whether they were very

satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with elements of the case, ranging from the investigation to the verdicts. Only 17% of family members said they were very satisfied with the split verdict (one guilty, one not guilty), but 54% said they were somewhat satisfied. In contrast, 20% said they were somewhat dissatisfied and 9% said they were very dissatisfied. A majority of family members (54%) said it had been very (17%) or somewhat difficult (37%) to cope with the stress and upsetting situations since they learned of the court's verdict. Most family members reported being relatively symptom-free during the week prior to the Wave 2 interview; however, over one-third reported having been bothered by trouble falling asleep (37%); almost one-fourth were bothered by restless, disturbed sleep (23%); and approximately one-eighth were bothered by frightening thoughts and images (13%) or feeling hopeless about the future (12%).

Figure 3 provides a visual comparison of the relative levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the case elements on a scale ranging from -100 to +100. The positive scores from 1 to 100 were assigned to ratings of *somewhat satisfied* or *very satisfied*. Thus, if all family members said they were somewhat or very satisfied with a given aspect of the case, the entire bar for that variable would be displayed above zero. Likewise, negative scores from -1 to -100 were assigned to ratings of *somewhat* or *very dissatisfied*. Thus, if all family members rated an aspect of the case negatively, the entire bar would be displayed below zero. Thus, the relative satisfaction versus dissatisfaction of family members for each aspect of the case corresponds to the proportion of the bar above or below zero.

In general, family members' satisfaction with all aspects of the case was more positive than negative. However, there

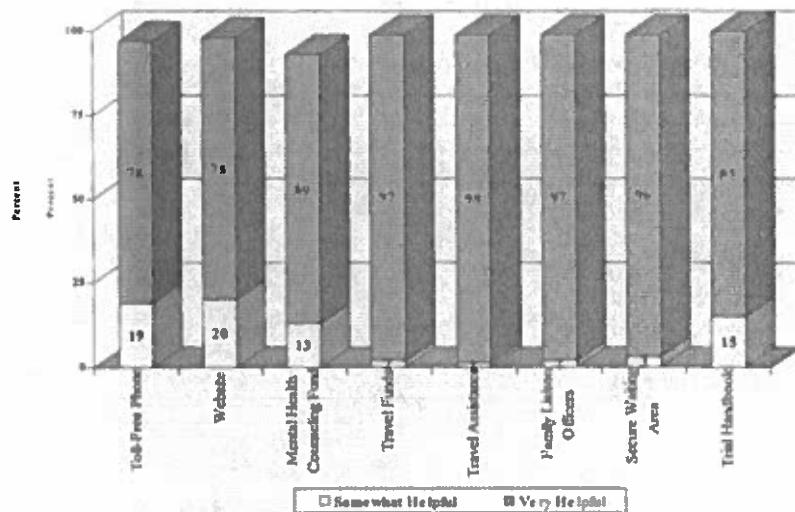


Figure 2. Perceived helpfulness of services (Wave 2).

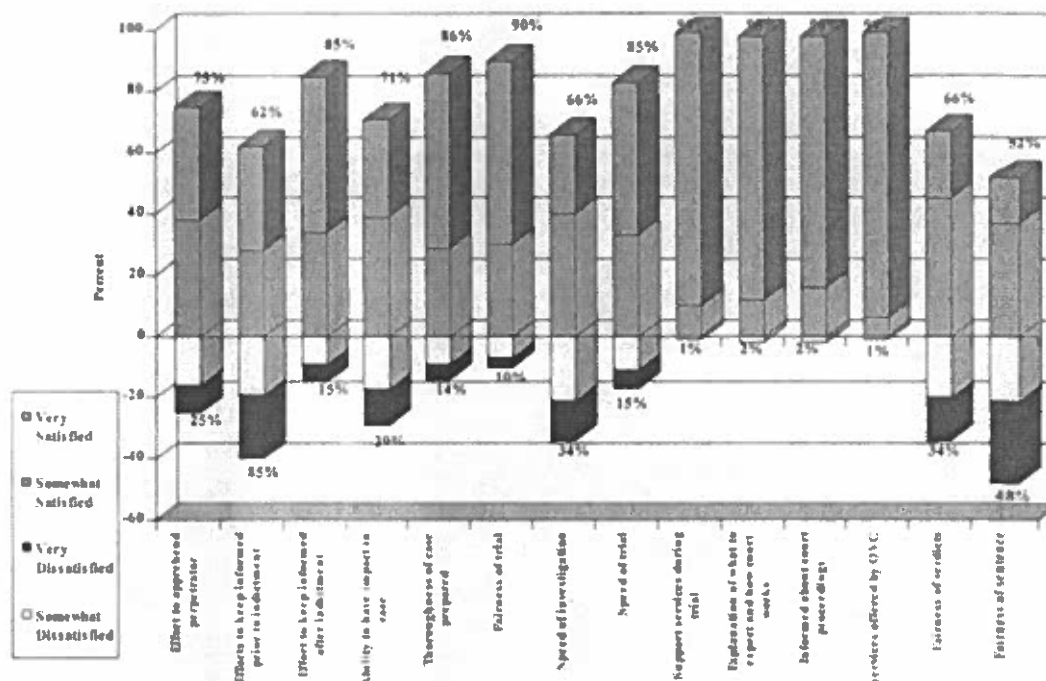


Figure 3. Satisfaction ratings with aspects of the case (Wave 2).

was considerable variation in the extent of family member satisfaction. For example, almost all family members were either very or somewhat satisfied with support services during trial (99%), explanations of how the court works and what to expect (98%), how informed they were about court proceedings (98%), and the services provided by OVC (99%). In contrast, a significant minority of family members were either somewhat or very dissatisfied with efforts to apprehend the perpetrators (25%), efforts to keep family members informed prior to the indictment (38%), ability to have input into the case (29%), and the speed of the investigation (34%). Almost half of family members (48%) said they were dissatisfied with the fairness of the sentence of the convicted bomber (life in prison, minimum of 20 years).

Mental Health Service Utilization

At Wave 2, questions about mental health focused on past utilization of services rather than on problems or symptoms, per se. Forty-eight percent of family members said they had experienced emotional or behavioral problems since the bombing that were sufficiently bad that they considered seeking mental health counseling. Only 36%, however, had actually sought mental health services (this value is different from the 6% who used OVC funds to pay for mental health services because many family members sought and received services prior to the avail-

ability of OVC funds, which could not be applied retroactively). Of those who actually received some type of mental health services, 57% rated them as very helpful and 27% as somewhat helpful. Only 15% rated the mental health services as not too helpful. Given the relatively low level of mental health service utilization, it was important to determine why family members did not seek mental health services.

Two open-ended questions obtained family members' opinions about this issue. First, all respondents were asked for their opinion on why some victims' family members do not seek mental health counseling in a case like this one. Of 214 responses, the most frequent reasons were (a) because they think that they can handle it on their own with the support of family, friends, and their religious faith; (b) mental health counseling is stigmatizing or a sign of weakness; (c) their financial or insurance situation precluded it; and (d) they may be in denial or cannot admit they have a problem. Second, the 30 family members who considered seeking, but did not actually obtain, mental health services were asked about the reasons they personally did not seek mental health services. The most frequently mentioned reasons were a desire to grieve privately, lack of time to attend counseling sessions, financial limitations, lack of knowledge about and access to available services, and perception of adequate support from family members.

Recommendations for Improving OVC Services

All family members who had ever used an OVC service were asked if there were any improvements they would like to see in that service. Those who responded affirmatively were asked open-ended questions about what changes or improvements they would like to see. Generally, responses clustered around two primary themes: perceived need for more timely and more comprehensive information, and greater emotional support. For example, with respect to information, several respondents commented that the toll-free telephone number and Web site sometimes contained outdated information and needed to be updated more frequently to avoid providing incorrect information. Others commented that some information communicated in briefings and summaries was too technical and needed to be "translated" into lay language. Several requested more information about emotional reactions to disaster after becoming upset during various aspects of the investigation and trial. With respect to increased support, family members expressed a desire for OVC to help pay for more than two family members to attend the trial and for mental health services to be covered before and after, not only during, the trial.

Discussion

These findings have some important implications for intervening with victims of terrorism and surviving family members of terrorist attacks. Prior to the involvement of the OVC, family members held negative opinions about virtually all official responses from U.S. federal entities and corporations. Once OVC became involved, however, and served to coordinate information and support services for victims' families, satisfaction ratings increased. Furthermore, despite generally negative prior opinions of federal involvement, family members expressed considerable awareness and utilization of almost all OVC services and very high (over 90%) levels of satisfaction with these services. Satisfaction ratings were not uniformly positive and differed according to the aspect of case being rated, which indicates that family members were able to distinguish among the different agencies involved and services provided. The aspects of the case that obtained the highest satisfaction ratings were those that OVC services were specifically designed to address, suggesting that providing information about investigatory activities, access to legal proceedings, and financial and personal support is useful and may meet some needs of victims' family members. Indeed, future changes in OVC services recommended by family members centered around providing even more information and allowing for greater access to personal and professional support, further underscoring the importance of these resources for terrorism victims. While the design of this study does not permit

the conclusion that OVC involvement led directly to improved satisfaction, anecdotal information provided by family members during interviews certainly supports this view. That information and support should be perceived as beneficial and increase satisfaction for crime victims should come as no surprise to most cognitive-behavioral practitioners, as many interventions within this framework include components that focus on psychoeducation and problem solving (e.g., Abueg, Woods, & Watson, 2000; Muran & DiGiuseppe, 2000)

Results also indicated that many family members reported considerable stress and/or coping problems associated with the bombing, with some concerns continuing to the present time. Very few, however, had ever sought counseling services. This is particularly unfortunate, as research has identified several effective interventions for posttrauma adjustment problems (e.g., Foa, Keane, & Friedman, 2000). Access and ability to pay for such services were cited as common obstacles to mental health treatment. The high rates of stress and mental health-related problems reported by victim families, and the contrasting low levels of awareness and utilization of this service, clearly highlight the need for efforts to increase access to counseling.

Implications for September 11, 2001

The results of the study have particular relevance for survivors and family members of those killed during the September 11 terrorist attacks. First, the importance of developing a prompt, coordinated response to provide victims and surviving family members with information about the attacks, services for which they might be eligible, avenues for accessing those services, common reactions to disaster and disaster-related bereavement, and the progress of any subsequent legal actions taken against the parties deemed to be responsible should be emphasized. Pan Am 103 family members found that having one agency (in their case, the OVC) take clear responsibility for communication with them was helpful and may have served to reduce their feelings of being overwhelmed by the complexity of the many systems, agencies, and governments involved.

In addition, data from the Pan Am 103 case indicate that timely access to mental health services was absent for many family members, in part due to lack of awareness and limited finances. Efforts should be put in place to offer services to victims and family members, not simply make services available and presume that individuals that need treatment will find them (Mitchell, 1997). This may require innovative collaborations among practitioners, governmental agencies, and other responding charitable services, but such efforts are clearly worthwhile and important. Given the apparent inevitability of future terror attacks, such partnerships and collaborations may become

essential in providing needed mental health counseling to those affected.

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In the Face of Tragedy: Placing Children's Reactions to Trauma in a New Context

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The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, have moved our country into a new era. In the aftermath of the attacks, and with the threat of terrorism continuing, it is important to better understand how children may be affected by these events. Common reactions of children following trauma have been examined in the literature; however, mediating variables, problems with assessment, and current diagnostic criteria related to PTSD may temper our understanding of the issues. Furthermore, the unprecedented nature of the terrorist actions raises new issues regarding how children may respond to and cope with trauma. Because of the enormity of these events, mental health services are available in an unprecedented fashion. As these services are developed and implemented, and as future services are planned, it is critical that intervention issues and ideas be examined in order to provide the most efficacious treatments to terrorism's youngest victims.

WITH the coordinated terrorist actions of September 11, 2001, the United States of America and, indeed, the entire world entered a new era in history. The enormity of the horrific event resulted in the mobilization not only of rescue and recovery efforts, but also of mental health professionals. Toward this end, attention has been directed to helping children in the face of this large-scale trauma. The literature concerning the impact of terrorism on children is relatively sparse, with most of

the work emanating from war-torn countries or places where violence is chronic (Almqvist & Brandell-Forsberg, 1997; Ayalon, 1993; Fields, 1982). Indeed, prior to the bombing in Oklahoma City in 1995, large-scale acts of terrorism in the United States were unimaginable (Sitterle & Gurwitsch, 1999). However, by examining current knowledge about children's reactions to trauma, the development and implementation of appropriate intervention services become possible. While this article will provide information related to children and trauma, the primary focus will be related to children and potential issues arising from the trauma of terrorist actions.

Although children and adolescents are being exposed to traumatic events at an increasing rate through both direct experience and indirect exposure, the study of

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Continuing Education Quiz located on p. 327.