OBSERVING FROM A DISTANCE AND FEELING INSIDE: THE AFFECTIVE PROCESSES OF INDIRECT VICTIMIZATION TO ONGOING TERRORIST ATTACKS

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Introduction

Intentional harm from another human being is associated with severe and long-lasting psychological distress in victims (Norris et al., 2002). Although psychology of terrorism literature mostly focuses on direct victims, terrorist attacks generate also a large number of indirect victims, who are exposed to the events only vicariously through the media (Blanchard et al., 2004).

Aim of the Study

Since indirect («hidden») victims are usually forgotten in the literature, exploration towards their psychological experiences were the focus of the present study.

Methods

In line with the aim of the study, interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted. 10 undergraduates (5 F, 5 M; Ages: 21-25) were recruited through word of mouth method. They were living in Ankara and exposed to three terrorist attacks in Ankara vicariously. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during May-June 2017. The interview data were analyzed using IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Findings

1. THE RECOLLECTIONS OF TERRORIST ATTACKS

Identifying with the victims	"I saw how parallel Ozancan's [victim] life was with mine. He went to a science high school upstate just like me, and then continued studying electrical and electronics engineering... Again just like me. On that particular day, he was waiting for the bus to return to the campus. I mean, this is my exact everyday routine" (P2).
Brutality of terrorism	"You kill someone; you do not care about it and go on killing everybody with a gun. You begin to think what that kind of a man would do more... You see the death of someone and despite that you go on killing. You hear those people screaming... When you realize how brutal the human beings could be, you begin to feel even more afraid." (P8)

2. HEIGHTENED FEELINGS AND TRIGGERS

(Sadness, Anger, Fear, Guilt, Despair, Disappointment and Hopelessness)

Sadness	"I was feeling like I was in a funeral. The identities of the deceased were visualized in my mind one by one. It was as if I knew all of them... Constructing the identity of that person in your mind and finding similarities with yourself was making me very sad. It is the person who died, not a number. Not really a number..." (P2)
Anger	"Anger... to all the people who are responsible for all of these and not doing their jobs". (P1)
Fear	"I feel the most tension when I see police crowds... I feel tensed when my bag is searched... That security measure prompts me to remember the event... That always reminds me that yes there could be another attack any time". (P9)

3. WAYS OF COPING

Seeking safety	"Going back home, to Kızılay, seemed nonsense. Some people called me and offered their help for taking me from the campus. But, somehow, I just wanted to go home. I cannot explain this. I thought I would be safe at home". (P2)
Attempts of re-adaptation	"I studied since the school work was very demanding. You know, in fact they keep you busy. You do not have time to think about these things... Of course, nothing is forgotten but everybody has to move on somehow... At first I was thinking more. But that made me worse. As I began to concentrate on other things, I felt better." (P5)
Togetherness	"I feel stronger, more peaceful, and protected when I am with people I love". (P1)
Avoidance	"How did we god used to this process... By staying away from crowded places, not going to night clubs, avoiding those places, going to lectures and returning home immediately, avoiding police officers when we see one". (P10)
Holding onto a positive future	"I need to do something here today so that maybe one day I have the power to change all of these or in order to prevent things that may harm my loved ones, to help them in a way... You begin to focus on your hope of graduating and doing something for Turkey". (P1)
Acceptance	"I got used to the fact that this danger is part of my everyday life. That we have to cope with it and that it will always stay still at some point in our minds, as long as we are here" (P9)

Discussion

These results demonstrated that indirect victimization results in psychological outcomes quite similar to that of direct victims as shown in the literature (Shalev et al., 2006). The main mechanism for this similarity seems to be the process of identification. Further quantitative studies are required to test these results.

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