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Support Services for Victims of Political Violence and Their Families: A Comparison Between Israelis and Palestinians

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This report summarizes interviews with five social workers who helped families that experienced political violence, and with 16 families that lost a family member due to terrorist activity in Israel and Palestine from 2000 to 2005. Results revealed a great disparity between the Israelis and the Palestinians on the types of and extent of benefits and support services given to the victims and their families of a terrorist incident. Israeli has a well-established system of victim compensation and has immediate and long-term benefits. Palestinian victims and their families have few services, little money for reparation, and no well-organized system for the support and compensation for acts of political violence.

KEYWORDS family support services, Israel and Palestine, victim compensation, victims of terrorism

Political violence and terrorist activity are growing problems throughout the world (Friedman, 2002; Hoffman, 2006). Terrorism is the use of violence (or the threat of such) directed at civilians to create fear and to bring about some social, religious, or political objective. Political violence is a broader term that encompasses terrorist activity but also includes the discrimination, repression, and murder of civilians by their own governments, such as in the Darfur region of Sudan (Croissant, 2005). Admittedly, these definitions are imperfect because one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter (Martin, 2003; Sinclair, 2003).

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The U.S. National Counterterrorism Center (2008) reported that terrorist attacks worldwide increased 25% from 2005–2006, killing 40% more people than the previous year. In 2006 approximately 14,000 attacks against civilian non-combatants caused nearly 20,000 deaths (National Counterterrorism Center, 2008; Woods, 2007).

Victims of political violence are affected in many ways. People die or are seriously disabled, they may be jailed and imprisoned without trial, their homes may be destroyed, and family members may be displaced to refugee camps or living on the streets (Fenimore, 2006). The victims, if still living, and their families are often in desperate need of support services, yet in many countries little is given.

Support for the victims of terrorism and their surviving family members varies tremendously based upon country of origin, specific government policies, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, religion, and availability of human services and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Some individuals receive extensive psychological and financial recompense, for instance, like the American families of the 9/11 victims who received an average of $3 million dollars, whereas terrorist victims in places like the Philippines, India, Iraq and Afghanistan, Indonesia, and South Africa receive little or no compensation (Dixon & Stern, 2005; Feinberg, 2005; Silke, 2003). The purpose of this report is to describe the type and extent of services given to a small sample of civilian families who lost a family member due to political violence in Israel and Palestine (Harms, 2005).

The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

These incidents in Palestine and Israel, provided below, are part of the second Intifada, the uprising against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza. The Al-Aqsa Intifada began September 2000 and continues to the present day (Smith, 2004).

On October 4, 2003, a 29-year-old female Palestinian lawyer detonated herself in a suicide bombing at Maxim, an Arab–Israeli restaurant in Haifa, killing 23 people and wounding 60. Among them were Zeev Almog, his wife and son, and 9- and 11-year-old grandsons. His daughter and two other grandchildren were wounded. On March 27, 2004, Khalid Walwil, a 6-year-old Palestinian boy, was shot in the head by an Israeli soldier. Khalid was standing in front of the window of his home. Palestinian youths had been throwing rocks at soldiers, who were hunting for a resistance fighter. On February 5, 2006, 58-year-old Kinneret Hajbi was stabbed to death by a Palestinian while traveling in a taxi to Tel Aviv. Five other passengers were wounded. She was on her way to volunteer at a hospital and was afraid to take the bus. June 21, 2006, while visiting relatives in Gaza, Fatma Khader, who was pregnant, and her brother Zakaria Almend, both from Saudi Arabia, were killed instantly by an Israeli bomb that went off target, hitting
a residential home. Two days earlier, Muhammad Rocka and Samia el-Sharif, both 5 years old, and 16-year-old Bilal Al-Hassi were also killed by a misguided Israeli missile. January 29, 2007, a Palestinian suicide bomber killed three Israelis at a bakery in Eilat, a tourist town on the Red Sea in southern Israel. The attack was praised by Hamas leaders as legitimate resistance to Israel occupation.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has existed for nearly 70 years. Thousands of people have died and thousands more have been wounded or disabled (Berko, 2007). During the eight years of the second Intifada, an estimated nearly 1,000 Israelis have been killed (67% civilians, including 127 children) and almost 5,000 Palestinians have died (73% civilians, including 700–800 children) (B’Tselem, 2008; Defense for Children International, 2005; International Middle East Media Center, 2008).

Due to many centuries of murder, oppression, and discrimination in Europe, Jews began a slow but steady immigration to Palestine during the late 1800s. By mid 1930s and early 1940s, Jewish immigration had increased to the extent that Arab Muslims worried that Jews would come to dominate the land and politics of Palestine. Thus, a violent conflict commenced between Jews and Arab Muslims (Bard, 2003; Friedman, 2002).


Palestinians consider the Intifada a war for liberation against the Israeli occupation of their land and oppression and discrimination against Arab Muslims. Causes include Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem and the West Bank, illegal arrests and detentions, assassinations, land confiscation, Israeli settlements in the West Bank, home demolitions, and rocket bombings in civilian neighborhoods (Berko, 2007; Gabrielson, 2003; Palestine Centre for Human Rights, 2006).

Most of the Palestinian civilians were killed by Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), but a few were killed by Israeli settlers and police. Nearly 200 Palestinians killed themselves in suicide attacks on Israeli targets, and another 250 were Palestinians killed by other Palestinians who thought they were Israeli collaborators (De Rooij, 2004; Palestinian Monitor, 2007; Palestine Red Crescent Society, 2006).

Immediate causes of death included metal bullets, rocket shells, rubber-coated bullets, tear gas, and untreated or poorly treated medical
wounds (Palestine Centre for Human Rights, 2006). Another 40,000–50,000 Palestinians have been injured or wounded during the past seven years of political violence. Property damage in the West Bank and Gaza is difficult to estimate but may approach half billion dollars.

The Israelis consider the Intifada to be a terrorist campaign to kill their citizens and destroy their country (Geron, Malkinson, & Shamai, 2005). From the Israeli perspective, the violence is due to the Arab’s long-standing hatred for the Jewish people, the Arab resentment of Jews creating a democratic state within the Middle East, and the unprovoked attacks on civilians and military personnel (Goitein & Cohen, 2005).

Killings have occurred on buses, in cars, at military checkpoints, in cafés, markets, and public transportation sites (Israeli Defense Forces, 2007). Most of the Israeli deaths were caused by suicide bombers, but a few victims were shot or stabbed to death. Using a representative sample of 512 Israelis, Bleich, Gelkopf, and Solomon (2003) estimated that nearly half of all Israeli adults have been affected directly or indirectly by political violence. No such estimates were available for Palestinians, but the percentage is undoubtedly much higher.

METHOD

Data Collection

Data was collected in two ways. In 2006 the author interviewed seven Israeli families and nine Palestinian families who had a civilian family member killed due to political violence from 2000–2005 (see Table 1). Most of the

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<th>TABLE 1  Victim Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Victims Year killed Sex Age How killed Person interviewed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Palestinian 2000 Male 15 Gun shot Mother</td>
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<td>2000 Male 30 Gun shot Wife</td>
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<td>2001 Male 19 Suicide bomb Mother</td>
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<td>2001 Male 21 Gun shot Mother</td>
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<td>2001 Male 13 Gun shot Father</td>
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<td>2002 Male 13 Rocket Father</td>
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<td>2002 Male 20 Rocket Mother</td>
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<td>2002 Male 15 Gun shot Mother</td>
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<td>2004 Male 28 Gun shot Wife</td>
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<td>Israeli 2001 Male 41 Bomb Wife</td>
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<td>2003 Female 13 Bomb Father</td>
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<td>2003 Female 15 Bomb Mother</td>
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<td>2003 Male 14 Bomb Father</td>
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<td>2003 Male 16 Bomb Father &amp; mother</td>
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<td>2005 Male 28 Bomb Father</td>
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information gathered in these interviews dealt with how the death influenced family functioning (Abbott, 2008). One of the interview questions asked family members about the type and extent of support services they received following the death of a family member, which is reported in this article. In addition to the family interviews, the author also talked with five social workers in Israeli and Palestine about support services for the victims’ families.

The interview statements regarding support services and the written notes from the social work interviews were analyzed using content analysis (Creswell, 2007). In this process all statements are read several times and then initial coding categories were created (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). All the data was related to benefits, compensation, and other support services and was easily compiled and summarized.

The Israeli family interviews were conducted in English by the author, tape recorded, and transcribed for analysis. The Palestinian interviews were conducted by a Palestinian social worker in the West Bank and then translated and transcribed into English by a team of three Palestinians fluent in Arabic and English. The author took notes during the interviews with the social workers, but these conversations were not tape recorded.

FINDINGS

Support and Services for Israelis

To be considered for services due to terrorist activity, the civilian death must be classified as a “hostile action” by the Israeli Ministry of Defense. A hostile act is an injury or death caused by an enemy force or those who are defending against the enemy (National Insurance Institute of Israel, 2000). Once the death was classified as resulting from a hostile act, the victim’s family was contacted by a government social worker within 1–2 hours following the incident.

Initially Israeli victims are separated into two groups: civilian or military casualties. If any victims are soldiers then the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) assumes responsibility for the support of remaining family members. Treatment for civilians is based upon laws and regulations similar but not identical to those used by the IDF. Services are divided into two divisions: Rehabilitation and Benefits, and both are processed through 20 branch offices of the National Insurance Institute (NII) and 54 suboffices throughout Israel.

REHABILITATION FOR SURVIVORS

Rehabilitation support provides counseling, temporary housing, travel for medical services, and vocational training or advanced education for survivors and some family members. For example, an education grant may be provided for a spouse of a seriously disabled victim. Services are given based
upon the percent of disability that is determined by a committee of doctors and social workers. This percent of disability classification can change over time if the victim improves or deteriorates.

**BENEFITS FOR FAMILIES**

The Benefits division provides medical and/or funeral expenses, physical therapy, and cash compensation based upon percent of disability, the number and ages of surviving family members including the victim’s parents. Benefits may change with time and individual circumstances. For example, a man with a 29% disability with three children younger than age 18 years was awarded 5,953 New Israeli shekels (NIS) (about US$1,200) per month for life. The amount increased with the yearly cost of living. A single woman with a 55% disability was awarded 4,653 NIS ($950) per month for life with a yearly cost-of-living increase. All victims receive the same amount of cash compensation if the percentage of disability is the same, so whether a victim was (or is) a doctor, plumber, or teacher with a 50% disability, each would get the same monthly stipend.

**IF THE CIVILIAN VICTIM IS WOUNDED**

Intervention begins immediately after the attack. A wounded victim is taken directly to the hospital, and two social workers are assigned to the case, one from the hospital and one from the city administration. They gather and report family information to the NII, which then provides services to the victim and the victims’ family for life. A social worker from the NII meets with victims, family members, doctors, and others to coordinate services. The NII pays for all medical costs, and expenses for food, shelter, and transportation for family members to and from medical facilities and any other incidental expenses such as child care, or taxi services for shopping or taking children to school.

**IF THE VICTIM IS KILLED**

If the victim dies, the body is taken to Abu-Kabir, a suburb of Tel Aviv. This is the national morgue for all terrorist victims in Israel. A team of two city social workers are assigned to assist the victim’s family. The social workers accompany the family members to Abu-Kabir to identify the body. If there is more than one family member killed, a team of social workers is available. City social workers manage the case for seven days, “Shiva,” the time of mourning, until the burial, at which time social workers transfer the coordination of all family services to the NII.

Benefits include burial costs, the gravestone, seven days of food during the mourning period, and a lifetime stipend for surviving family members including the parents of an adult victim. For example, a widow with no children was awarded 6,112 NIS ($1,300) per month and the victim’s aged
parents were awarded 4,800 NIS ($1,021) per month. The widow is also awarded a one-time grant for special needs and incidental expenses. If the only surviving family members were children younger than age 18 years, they would be provided with living expenses and higher education grants. Children receive a special grant at the age of 12 or 13 and a marriage grant if and when they marry. The NII continues to assist remaining family members in many ways. Services include psychotherapy, low interest loans for a home or automobile, vocational training or university expenses for any family member.

In Israel there are also many support groups for family members of victims of terrorism. Several foundations offer a variety of services to victims’ families such as the Koby Mandell Foundation (http://www.kobymandell.org), The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation (http://www.theweinberfoundation.org), and the Michael Cherney Foundation (http://www.cherfund.org), The Terror Orphan Program NAVAH (http://www.navah.org.il), One Family Fund (http://www.onefamilyfund.org), and NATAL (http://www.natal.org.il). Such foundations provide limited medical services, some counseling, and money for youth programs, child educational grants, summer camps, bereaved mothers’ groups, and reunion gathering.

**SUPPORT FOR BYSTANDERS TO THE VIOLENCE**

Uninjured bystanders to a terrorist incident may also receive some support, though it takes much longer to classify them as “victims” and therefore longer to receive services. A distressed bystander must apply to the NII for assistance. The case is investigated by a committee. If approved, the bystander may receive temporary assistance such counseling for treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Support and Services for Palestinians**

Information about assistance and support for Palestinian families who suffer the death or disability of a family member due to political violence caused by Israeli soldiers, police, or civilian settlers is difficult to find and document. Terrorist acts include rocket bombing, home demolition, illegal arrests and imprisonment, and deadly shootings by IDF soldiers during civil demonstrations and riots.

Unlike Israel, no central government agency within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or in Hamas coordinates benefits and services to victims of political violence. A few services are provided by PLO and Hamas and other Muslim NGOs outside of Palestine, but facts and figures are impossible to obtain because such assistance is not reported to any kind of central government data bank.

One source of Palestinian victim compensation is the Israeli government. Israelis have provided medical treatment, resettlement funds, and
counseling for some civilian Palestinians who were victims of Israeli military actions. But in July 2005, the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, passed the Civil Wrongs/Civil Torts, Liability of the State Law. Under this new rule, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are considered “residents of a conflict zone” and are not entitled to collect compensation from the Israeli government for the death, injury, or property damage caused by “legal” or illegal acts of the IDF (Amnesty International, 2005).

This decree “enables the Israeli state to avoid suits and payment of compensation for damage sustained by Palestinians during any armed conflict” (Human Rights Watch, 2005). This would apply even if Israeli soldiers clearly acted wrongfully. This new law appears to continue “Israel’s long-standing policy of denying any meaningful compensation or restitution to Palestinians for actions of the Israeli military” (Yoaz, 2006). Thus, it is difficult if not impossible for Palestinian victims of political violence or terrorism to sue for compensation. Occasionally, a civil suit is successful, but this is expensive and time consuming.

The author’s interviews with Palestinian families provided additional details about compensation. If a Palestinian victim is killed or injured, ambulance and immediate medical services are provided by the PLO. Victims are treated in local hospitals or sent to Israeli hospitals, but this is often difficult because of Israel border crossings and security checks that often deny Palestinians access to Israel. Some victims are sent outside the country for specialized and extensive care in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, or the United Arab Emirates. Transportation to these countries and medical treatment is provided without cost to Palestinian families.

Monetary compensation for Palestinian victims is uncertain. Two Palestinians reported receiving money from Iraq: “Saddam Hussein sent us $10,000; he sent that to all the martyr families.” Other Palestinians reported free medical care in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. Several families were given thousands of dollars by sheikhs from Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates. Most of the Palestinians who were interviewed reported receiving a little money from the PLO, including free medical care for the victim and funeral expenses. One Muslim mother reported, “Sometimes we get $110 or $150 dollars a month (from the PLO), but sometimes nothing.” Some families said they received small donations of a few hundred dollars from various Muslim charities. Three Palestinians received grants from Saudi Arabia to go on hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, an important religious obligation for Muslims.

**DISCUSSION**

There is great disparity in benefits and services given to Israeli and Palestinian victims of political violence. The Israelis have a codified system of compensation and reparation for victims of terrorism. Help is given
almost immediately to victims and their families. Money, counseling, education, and job training are readily available. For over 60 years, Israelis have passed laws and created many services for victims and their families, and though their system is not perfect, their policy and practice is well defined by law and tradition. It operates in a timely and uniform way across the country.

Two conclusions can be made about benefits and support services for Palestinian victims of political violence and terrorism. First, monetary compensation is minimal and short term (Palestinian Human Rights Monitor, 2007), with no guarantee of the timing or amount of compensation. Also, there are no wide-ranging services available to all citizens of the West Bank and Gaza (Global Policy Forum, 2002). Some may get counseling, but others will not. A few may be resettled, but most are on their own to find a new place to live and work. Money for education and/or job training is almost unheard of.

Second, because of the increasing conflict between the political and religious factions within the PLO and Hamas and due to global economic sanctions against Palestine, it is nearly impossible to create, fund, and maintain humanitarian services for Arab victims of political violence (Carter, 2006; Salinas, 2007). In general, Palestinian victims of political violence have received little compensation, rehabilitation, and reparations for acts of terrorism committed by Israelis (Bongar, 2006). On a small scale and in small ways, some families are helped (Amnesty International, 2005).

Looking beyond this Middle East conflict, victims of political violence and terrorism span the globe from Bali to Baghdad to Bogota, Columbia. Political violence in some countries has lasted for decades in places such as Nepal, Zaire, the Congo, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, India, and in Israel and Palestine. The civilian death count increases yearly, as more and more world citizens suffer oppression, torture, rape, maiming, and murder (Marshall, 2007). Most victims have little or no recourse to compensation (Shapo, 2005; United Nations, 2006).

Some countries are responding to the growing threat of terrorism and are cooperating to establish programs and policies for victims of terrorism (Nesi, 2006). The “Guidelines on the Protection of Victims of Terrorist Acts” (Mammarberg, 2006) outlines how European nations can prepare and respond to the growing threat of terrorism and to provide both material and psychological support. Yet, in most places in the world, little progress is being made to help the victims of political violence and terrorism (Mammarberg, 2006).

Too often it is the legal government itself that is the worst perpetrator of terrorism, as evidenced by the mass murders by Mao Zedong in China (1930–1950s), by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union (1930s), the Nazi Holocaust (1940s), the Khmer Rouge killing fields in Cambodia (1970s), and genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia–Herzegovina (1990s), and the destruction in Darfur (2003–2008) and Somalia (2005–2008). The future is grim for most victims of terrorism. More and more civilians worldwide will suffer disability,
displacement, or death due to the continued acts of political violence (Bjorgo, 2005; U.S. State Department, 2007).

Political violence and acts of terrorism continue intermittently between the Israelis and the Arab Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank (Milton-Edwards, 2009). Thousands die or are wounded each year in this conflict that seems never-ending (Ross, 2005). Great inequality exists between the support resources and services available to victims of this political conflict. Victim compensation in Israel is almost immediate, and benefits (e.g., money, housing, transportation, job training, and medical care) can last a lifetime for some individuals and families. In Palestine remuneration and resettlement is too little and too late (Khalidi, 2007). At this point in time there is little hope for lasting peace and an equitable settlement; the conflict and the causalties continue (Miller, 2008; Milton-Edwards, 2008).

REFERENCES


