

THE COST OF THE TROUBLES STUDY

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BACKGROUND – who are we?

- The Cost of the Troubles Study is a recognised charity, composed of people from both communities and the security forces who have suffered bereavement and injury in the Troubles, and working in partnership with academic researchers from the University of Ulster.
- The Cost of the Troubles Study has direct experience of working inclusively with a wide variety of interests in this field throughout Northern Ireland and beyond.
- Our aim is to make reliable, valid and comprehensive information about the effects of the Troubles on the population available to policy makers and service providers. We are currently conducting extensive research, including a large survey of the population of Northern Ireland, to gather reliable information on the effects of the troubles on the population

People affected by the troubles - what is the scale of the problem?

1. Since 1969, over 3,600 people have been killed in Northern Ireland. This means that somewhere over 10,500 people have the experience of one of their immediate family - parent or sibling, – being killed in a troubles-related incident.
2. According to the official figures over 40,000 people have been injured in the troubles, although this is likely to be a conservative figure. There is not readily available data on how many of this 40,000 suffer from major disability as a result of the troubles.

If we take deaths in the troubles as an indicator of how the troubles, (it is likely that injuries and trauma follow the same pattern as deaths), we find:

3. 91% of those killed were male;
4. 37% were under the age of 24, 53% were under the age of 29, and 74% were under the age of 39;
5. Civilians – those without affiliation to the security forces or paramilitary organisations – constitute the largest group amongst those killed - 53%. Security forces from outside Northern Ireland are the next highest percentage – 14.5% followed by Northern Ireland security forces – 14.3%. Within the Northern Ireland security forces, the RUC account for almost 300 deaths, almost 50% more than RIR/UDR deaths. Republican paramilitaries account for 12.5% of those killed, and Loyalist paramilitaries for just over 3%;
6. More Catholics than Protestants have been killed. The death rates for civilians are 3.01 per 1,000 population for Catholics and 1.26 per 1,000 for Protestants. If we include RUC deaths, the rates become 2.5 per 1,000 for Catholics and 1.9 for Protestants. If we exclude those killed by paramilitaries on their own side (Catholics killed by Republican paramilitaries and Protestants killed by Loyalist paramilitaries) then the rate becomes 2.3 for Catholics and 1.4 for Protestants;
7. Republican paramilitaries have killed almost 59% of the total killed 704 of whom were civilians, Loyalist paramilitaries have killed almost 28% of whom 818 were civilians, and the security forces have killed just over 11, 204 of whom were civilians, with the British army accounting for over 9% of that total;
8. Over 41% of those killed lived in postal districts BT11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 48 and BT35. Over 48% of those killed in the troubles were killed in those same districts – North and West Belfast, Derry Londonderry City and South Armagh.
9. There is some overlap between the “victim” and “perpetrator” categories: some victims go on to join paramilitary organisations, at least partly due to their experience of victimhood.

If we can generalise from all this, we conclude that the troubles have been a killer of young males from North and West Belfast, Derry Londonderry or the border areas, and who are rather more likely to be Catholic. This is also the group, which is among the most likely to become perpetrators of acts of violence.

APPROACH TO THE ISSUE

10. All discussions about "victims" of the Troubles run the risk of becoming politicised in the following ways. Acknowledgement of the damage done to a particular grouping or community can seem to some as an admission of defeat, which will gladden their enemies, and so is to be avoided. Conversely, acknowledgement of such damage can be a way of highlighting the wickedness of those who are responsible for the attacks, and so can become a political weapon. All of this runs the risk of compounding the damage done to those who have been hurt. It is of crucial importance that all discussion about "victims" or people affected is shifted onto a humanitarian basis, based on an inclusive concern about the human needs and the resources required to meet them.
11. The importance of timing, especially in relation to the risk of the recurrence of violence, is difficult to exaggerate. It has only become possible for some people affected by the troubles to begin to address what has happened to them when the cease-fires were announced. Maintaining a relative absence of violence is crucial to the task of addressing the situation of those affected by the troubles. Should there be a return to violence, it will not be possible to take this work forward in the same way. People who have been drastically affected by the troubles often live with high levels of fear. It is only when this fear is reduced, and when an atmosphere of increased safety is in place that it is possible to work constructively with the issues of coming out of violence. This is not to say that people do not have needs when violence is ongoing, but rather to point out that substantial progress can only be made in the absence of violence. Therefore the peace process and progress therein is at the heart of creating services and measures to address the needs of those affected by the troubles

THE LEVEL OF NEED

12. The assumption that people "get over" such things in time is not true. In the case of physical disablement, this is visibly not the case. One study we conducted showed that roughly 50% of people still had symptoms of emotional distress and things like sleep disturbance over 20 years after they had been bereaved in the troubles. This means that the scale of the problem may be very large. If we count only immediate family members, there could be over 50,000 people in the population whose immediate family death or injury in the trouble has directly affected, and who suffer distress or emotional disturbance as a result. This ignores all the eye-witnesses, neighbours, friends, extended family, co-workers and so on who have been affected by deaths and injuries in the troubles.
13. The converse of this is that some people who have been affected by the troubles have developed their own way of coping with their situation, and have found ways which work for them. Some of these ways involve not talking about what has happened, or distancing themselves from anything which might require them to think too deeply about what has happened, or to look at the issues from another angle. This must be recognised, and people's right not to participate must be recognised and supported.
14. Many of those affected by the troubles complain about their lack of control over the use of television or still photography of the circumstances of their loss of injury. The reprinting or broadcasting of such material can be very distressing for families and those close to such incidents, and currently little recognition is given to the distress caused by their use without consultation with those closely involved. Many of those who have been disabled have often been made dependent on benefit, and removed from the job-market. Services for the disabled are often inadequate to their needs, and can leave them bitter about their circumstances. Poverty is also another by-product for many that have suffered in the troubles.
15. There is a particular need for the provision of an effective pain management service to cater for those in chronic pain as a result of gunshot and shrapnel wounds.
16. There is also a need to support carers of those with disabilities acquired as a result of the troubles. We estimate that around 100,000 people in Northern Ireland live in households where someone has been injured in a troubles-related incident. Some of these injuries were relatively minor, but some have been severely disabling.

17. Certain groups of people have specific and different needs. For example, members of the security forces who have been injured may suffer more from isolation as a result of being unable to use civilian services, or join, for example, voluntary groups for disabled people. Families whose members have disappeared have a need for information about the bodies of their relatives. Those living in areas where levels of troubles-related violence has been high often have their lives made more difficult by repeated experiences of troubles-related violence.
18. Many individuals and groups have a sense of injustice and grievance against the paramilitaries, the authorities, the media, politicians, or the human service organisations. The lack of acknowledgement or denial of their needs, questioning of their rights to be considered sympathetically or the lack of support for them after their bereavement, injury or loss has often exacerbated this.
19. Often the needs and wishes of one group are directly opposite to the needs of another group. There are understandably strong feelings among those injured by a particular grouping about, for example that grouping receiving attention, services or sympathy. This means that the provision of services according to need or the creation of, for example, a monument including all names is unconscionable to some, while others consider such a step as important to their own coming to terms with what has happened to them.
20. There has been an assumption that counselling is the appropriate and sometimes only form of services required by those affected by the troubles. This assumption is questionable. Many people are not in need of counselling, but rather of some other service. Even some of those who could benefit from counselling are reluctant to use counselling because of the stigma attached and the implication that there is "something wrong" with the person being counselled.
21. A small number of people only will need psychiatric, psychological or counselling help. It is erroneous to assume that because so few require or want psychiatric help that the general level of needs of those affected by the troubles is low. Those who do not need or wish to use psychological or psychiatric help often have other needs, such as needs for befriending, social support, relief for carers, physiotherapy, pain relief, public recognition, legal or financial advice, control over old footage or photographs of the incident involving them or at least advance consultation about their use by the media, or further information about the circumstances of the incident which caused their suffering.

SERVICES TO THOSE AFFECTED BY THE TROUBLES

STATUTORY SERVICES

22. Many of us, including those providing services to vulnerable people have operated during the troubles by not mentioning the troubles, not identifying ourselves or our true responses to certain situations, and being cautious or silent when troubles related issues were raised. This has meant that there can be a conspiracy of silence in organisations about the effects of the troubles, and people are fearful that if the issues are discussed, it will be divisive and lead to conflict, so they are ignored.
23. Currently there is no specialist training available for psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, health visitors, general practitioners, teachers and other professionals to prepare them for the kinds of effects the troubles may have on their clients and patients, nor is there specific training or information on the range of appropriate services or approaches to use.
24. Currently, there is one trauma team based in Belfast, which caters for the needs of people immediately after a major incident. This does not address the long-term needs of people, not does it cater for individuals injured, bereaved or traumatised in incidents where small number are involved
25. There is an acute shortage of psychiatric help for adolescents. In South and East Belfast, for example, there are only six beds available, and many already distressed adolescents are held in adult psychiatric wards. Levels of outpatient support can be totally inadequate. One adolescent we know of in the NorthWest was offered a fortnightly phone call as follow-up care after a serious suicide attempt.

VOLUNTARY SERVICES

26. Currently, the major service providers providing dedicated services for those affected by the Troubles are in the voluntary sector. WAVE, whose main service is befriending and home visiting throughout Northern Ireland and who also provide a counselling service and facilities for children; Survivors of Trauma, who are a locally based self-help group in North Belfast; An Crann/ The Tree who listen and collect people's accounts of the troubles, Cunamh, a locally based project in Derry Londonderry, CALMS a project which offers training in stress management for local groups. Other voluntary organisations began to become more involved in working with those affected by the troubles after the cease-fires such as CRUSE and Victim Support.
27. The system of financial compensation for those who have been bereaved, injured or have had property damaged as a result of the troubles has also caused some disquiet and distress. There are wide disparities between amounts paid to those with apparently similar injuries. Compensation in the case of injury or bereavement is based not on need but on loss sustained, and is partly calculated according to loss of earnings. This means that some have received little or no compensation where the victim was unemployed, where others receive relatively large amounts. This is perceived as some lives being regarded as more valuable than others are. There are strong feelings amongst some that the system is unjust and insensitive.
28. The system of compensation has also been found unsatisfactory by those suing for criminal damage to property. Long delays in processing and paying claims, together with interest payment incurred on loans taken to rebuild or repair business premises has caused financial difficulty to claimants.

Where do we go from here?

29. Any initiative in this area carries a heavy emotional charge, and those injured and bereaved have often been used to further political agendas, sometimes at the expense of their own welfare. It is imperative that any new initiatives on so-called victims of the troubles (we prefer the term "people affected by the troubles") avoids further misuse of people's suffering and loss.
30. Provision that has been made elsewhere has fallen into the trap of raising unrealistic expectations on the part of those who have suffered, only to have their disappointment added to their suffering.

For these reasons we would suggest the following:

31. That all measures and initiatives are based on a clear understanding that the losses sustained by many people in the troubles are irrecoverable, and that no measure or compensation can possibly make good that loss. Everything that we can do is destined to be inadequate. We cannot bring back the dead, restore the maimed, turn the clock back. Measures should not therefore be based on principles of restorative justice, but rather on the principles of meeting existing and future need.
32. That the timing of such proposals be carefully considered, that nothing is rushed into and that a lengthy inclusive and exhaustive period of consultation is engaged in before any decisions are made or announced
33. For many people who have suffered, one of the casualties was their trust in outside authorities. This should be recognised by such authorities, and confidence building measures aimed at those who have been bereaved and injured should be composed of the democratic involvement of this group in decision making about the kinds of services and initiatives to be embarked on. Only in this way can trust be built slowly.
34. Authorities (and politicians) must recognise the anger and rage that are part of the response of those who have suffered most. This anger must be respected, without getting involved in conflict or arguments with people. People have a right to be angry and to express it, and it is a small enough service to listen and acknowledge the depth of their feelings.

Aims and Goals

35. We would also suggest the need for clarity and transparency about the long term goals of any initiative on the situation of those affected by the troubles. We would suggest that the goal of such initiatives must be linked to the overall political process and should be:

To contribute to reconciliation through healing of individual and collective wounds and hurts

36. This could be achieved through initiatives which manifest:

- the support of the society for those bereaved, injured or otherwise damaged
- the recognition of the society of the suffering and loss sustained during the troubles
- the acknowledgement of the sense of injustice of the suffering, which is commonly held but differently understood in the various sections of people who have suffered
- the remembrance of those who have lost their lives for what they believed to be just causes
- the practical support of those who have been injured in the Troubles
- the specifically acknowledgement of the suffering of civilians and non-combatants
- a new willingness to acknowledge the suffering of people from all walks of life and sections of the community
- a new willingness on the part of all of us to take responsibility for our part in creating and maintaining a society which has hurt so many of us
- the regret and remorse of all of us about the hurts that has been caused.

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