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PTSD expected for many terror victims after release

By RUTH EGLASH
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"There is now a deep fear that no one is listening to these people," says psychologist; 1,000 killed, 17,000 injured in Second Intifada.

In the coming days, as more than a thousand Palestinian political prisoners are released from Israel's jails, psychologists working with victims of terror warn that the images and notion of their freedom could trigger severe trauma or flashbacks, known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in some cases.

"These feelings are very complex, but I am sure this situation could reactivate some of their trauma," said clinical psychologist Dr. Eleanor Pardess, a lecturer at Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center and a volunteer for the non-profit organization SELAH, which provides a range of supportive services to immigrants that have experienced any type of trauma.

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According to the most recent figures from the National Insurance Institute (NII), close to 1000 people have been killed and 17,000 injured since the Second Intifada began in 2000. Since 1950, 2443 people, including 119 non-Israelis, tourists and foreign workers, have been killed in terror attacks.

While both the Foreign Ministry and various non-profit organizations working with terror victims claim the numbers of those affected directly and indirectly by terrorism in Israel is much higher than this, what is clear is that this deal has opened many of the psychological wounds that some have experienced individually and that have been felt collectively as a nation.

Within days of the announcement that Gilad Schalit was coming home thanks to a prisoner exchange, many deeply affected by the ongoing violence warned that the price was too high. On Thursday night, Shvuel Schijveschuurder, who lost his parents and three of his siblings in the 2001 bombing of the Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem, vandalized the Yitzhak Rabin memorial to show his anger over the deal.

On Sunday, several individuals and the Almagor Terror Victims Association filed a number of petitions in the High Court of Justice against the release of certain prisoners who were involved directly in attacks that killed or maimed multiple people.

"There is now a deep fear that no one is listening to these people," observed Pardess, adding that the victims and their families need understanding and "must not be left to feel like they have been forgotten."

"They have to know that what they and others have been through has not been for nothing," she said, adding that there is also the fear factor and the security element.

"As they see these prisoners being released, it is important for us to emphasize to them that the government or the state will continue with its security procedures," said Pardess.

Professor Danny Brom, head of the Israel Center for the Treatment of Psychotrauma at Herzog Hospital, also pointed out that while "the response from the public is ambivalent, everyone is glad that Gilad is coming home. On the other hand, people are angry because they fear it could cause deaths of others in the future."

"All this is very hard for people who have suffered as a result of terrorism," he said, pointing out that it could cause deep anxiety among those who have suffered attacks.

"With most people sympathizing with the Schalit family, it is important for all of us not to forget the bereaved and injured families," said Ruth Bar-On, the director of SELAH, which works very closely with hundreds of bereaved families whose lives have been impacted by terrorism.

"We must always remember that these people have seen their lives change significantly and their pain never goes away. It goes with them everywhere," she said.



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