

THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY IN THE PREVENTION AND FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND DEALING WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF TERRORISM

Kalina SOTIROSKA IVANOSKA¹

Abstract: *This article discusses the benefits of using the knowledge and tools of psychology in counter-terrorism, which can contribute to maintaining security and defense nationally and internationally. A number of contemporary psychological strategies, such as increasing the awareness of the general population, using methods and techniques for staff selection, offering psychological support and training, as well as increasing the resilience of individuals can provide typical and proven psychological solutions in the fight against terrorism. The problems and challenges faced by cyber security employees, as well as the possible psychological response to such challenges are briefly discussed. It can be concluded that the greater the range of psychological interventions that will be used in repairing the psychological consequences of terrorism, the greater the benefit for the whole community, and not only for those directly involved in the terrorist act.*

Keywords: *psychology, counter-terrorism, psychological strategies*

Introduction

The rapid progress of the world in the twenty-first century makes terrorism one of the most complex concepts faced by governments of all countries, as well as the international community.

When it usually comes to defending against terrorism, the emphasis is on technological innovation and technical means that contribute to the success of terrorists. Terrorists use the mobility provided by modern transportation, as well as connectivity and autonomy through contemporary ways of communication. The main goal of counter-terrorism is to increase the capacity of governments to counter the threat of terrorism. In addition to the benefits of numerous scientific studies in areas such as electro-optical counter measures, information technology and the technical aspects of protection, knowledge from the social sciences has made a major contribution to the defense against terrorism. Above all, psychology with its various subdisciplines stands out as a key social science for understanding the defense against terrorism in all its forms, such as anti-terrorism, counter-terrorism, and managing the consequences of terrorism (Koltko-Rivera and Hancock, 2004).

¹ Associate Professor, Institute of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy-Skopje, Ss. "Cyril and Methodius University" - Skopje

There are many definitions of terrorism as a complex concept of the new age that differ according to which aspect is positioned as central. One definition defines terrorism as 'acts of violence deliberately committed against civilians in order to advance an ideological, religious, or political goal' (Borum, 2004, p.4). It can be defined as a special kind of strategy that uses public violence intended to bring about social or political change. In order for an act to be categorized as terrorism or an act of a terrorist nature, it must contain approximate victimization of non-combatants, civilians, to influence far more distant actors, both governments and agendas (Taylor, 1988). In the name of the cause, people are killed, which is a symbolic means of achieving a far more ambitious goal (Hofman, 1998).

Contemporary research in psychology focuses on fundamental findings that address a number of key issues, the results of which can have effective practical implications. Psychology as a science tries to answer the question why some individuals become terrorists or engage in terrorism. Several analysts suggest that the connection between perceived injustice, affiliation and identity determines the decision to join terrorist groups (Basra and Neumann, 2016; Kruglanski and Fishman, 2006). Motivation stems from the need to belong, to have a stable identity, or, the individual need to unite oneself and society, which explains the similarity in the behavior of terrorists in groups with different composition and purpose (Post, 1984). Belonging to a terrorist group gives a sense of true affinity, which creates a powerful pressure of conformism by organizing against the society. The results of the research in the field of psychology of terrorism indicate that mental disorders are not usually critical factors in the behavior of terrorists (Weatherston and Moran, 2003; Corner, and Gill, 2020). Numerous theoretical foundations have been laid for the extent to which individual experience is relevant for understanding and preventing terrorism. Based on the research results, there is a view that is consistent with the theory that enthusiasm for a terrorist activity is primarily a developmental phenomenon of the late adolescence and the early adulthood (Achtar, 1999). The idea of terrorism as a result of psychopathology is discredited.

Terrorist activities have a cycle of stages, including planning, preparation, execution, escape and evaluation (Koltko-Rivera and Hancock, 2004). Each successfully completed action encourages the start of another or spiral of several other attacks on a larger scale. Counter-terrorism and the involvement of the security forces at one of the stages is an end to that cycle. Counter-terrorism operations include measures to monitor, prevent, gather intelligence, deter, intercept and direct actions of terrorist activities that take place in the country or are internationally widespread. Counter-terrorism involves more than just technological solutions. Numerous psychological methods can be included and applied, the application of which shows great effectiveness in counter-terrorism.

Development of psychological resilience in the population

The psychological, cultural, and economic impacts of terrorism reach far more people than those who have been directly injured or in close contact with those injured in terrorist attacks (Woods, 2010). Steps need to be taken to make the general population less vulnerable to the psychological effects of terrorism. Positive psychology, as an area of psychology can contribute to increasing the subjective well-being of people. Within this subdiscipline, subjective well-being is defined as an optimal psychological functioning, manifested through a positive feeling towards oneself and one's own life,

as a personal experience that arises from self-evaluation of life in general - which is significantly based on the assessment of realized desires and valued things that will make life fulfilled and pleasant (Spasovski, 2013). Hence, subjective well-being is defined as the frequent experience of the life satisfaction and pleasant emotions and only rarely unpleasant emotions, the terrorists create attacks that are dramatic, interrupting daily life, blaming and intimidating the population (Abrahams, 2006). After exposure to the news of terrorist attacks violence, people increase their personal feelings of threat, anxiety, insecurity and loss of control (Delhey and Newton, 2003). Since they are all powerful drivers of anxiety, people respond by seeking order and belonging (Kent, 2019). The usefulness of the programs for promotion of the development of resilience among the general population will help the population to be less vulnerable to the negative effects of terrorism. They become stronger because they refuse to succumb to the tragedies perpetrated by terrorists, and they can help others who have suffered similar losses. This increases the resilience because they recognize the community support, so the terrorists have a good reason to fear resilient people (Grotberg, 2002).

Raising awareness of terrorism among the general population

Psychology focuses on the challenging question how to deal with terrorism. Individuals involved in terrorist acts seek for comprehensive response from society, and not simply their detention (Silke, 2011). Believing in untruths, speculation and pointing out inappropriate attributes inevitably leads to harmful policies, while prolonging campaigns of violence. Educational psychology, as a field of psychology, focuses on the ways in which people perceive knowledge and how they retain knowledge, so it can offer methods for raising awareness of terrorism among the general population. In order to achieve the social goal of increasing awareness of terrorism, the method of persuasion from the psychology of consumer behavior can be used, which changes the personal and social behavior (Koltko-Rivera and Hancock, 2014).

Fabick (2004, according to Arciszewski, T. et al., 2009) believes that one of the possible effective strategies against terrorism is to change the usual process of perception that precedes discrimination, based on the division "we vs. they", also suggesting that social identity and deviation from the group could be the base for terrorism.

Developing communication campaigns that use core cultural values to motivate individuals who oppose terrorism are more likely to be effective than those who either ignore or oppose such values. For the negativity of terrorism and hostility to the state, it is necessary to involve local leaders who will speak and discuss openly with the people (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2002).

Using the psychological methods of selection and training of employees in the fight against terrorism. Working in the fight against terrorism is defined as a highly stressful profession. The difference between life and death is in the untimely reaction of the counterterrorism staff, when thousands of people are likely to die.

Counterterrorism staff are involved in detecting relatively rare events but with catastrophic consequences. Changing the nature of terrorist threats to physical and cyber security leads to identifying and planning jobs for future security. Industrial-organizational psychologists are experts in job analysis, job evaluation, performance measurement, individual assessment of individual differences, as well as mental and physical abilities, which can provide analysis of future-oriented jobs (Sanchez and Levine, 2012). Also, with their expertise, industrial-organizational psychologists can acquire skills appropriate for each job based on training and learning models, as well as specialized training programs.

Employees focused on cyber security

The nature of the work of cyber security professionals is complex, since they are on the front line of the defense. Employees who are focused on cyber security may experience higher levels of burnout and exhaustion from work. Therefore, leaving the workplace by these individuals is common, because their work tasks are repetitive and tedious, the work shifts are long or overnight, and are directly burdensome for the employees. The number of cybersecurity practitioners is relatively small, although the needs for the profession are growing. The findings show high prevalence of burnout in cyber security employees (Dykstra and Paul, 2018). When employees feel exhausted, cynical about the job and have reduced self-efficacy, their job performance decreases. Psychologists with knowledge of industrial-organizational psychology face the challenge of exploring the role of cyber security professionals, and can provide valuable assistance in structuring the work shifts, redesigning work, increasing employee motivation and engagement. Employees focused on cyber security do a job in which they face people who are actively trying to ruin the day, 24/7 (Schueler, 2019), thus experiencing a high level of burnout and therefore it is necessary to develop self-awareness, mental health care and maintain the well-being. Hence, there is a need to organize training and support for employees focused on maintaining cyber security, so that they can do the job as best as they can.

Psychological training and support

Psychological training is aimed at improving the quality of mutual communication and cooperation, as well as trust and cohesion among the members involved in the counter-terrorism team. Counterterrorism staff need ways to optimize performance under stress. In addition, they face problems in mental health and well-being as a result of the traumatic events they encounter at work. Most often faced by members of the military and staff of intelligence teams, they need to be encouraged and offered psychological support so that they can overcome stress faster and return to work faster. Occupational safety and health psychology as a subdiscipline of industrial-organizational

psychology is aimed at improving the quality of work life, maintaining and improving occupational safety, assessing factors related to resilience and well-being of employees, understanding how leadership and teamwork factors affect the development of mental health symptoms, as well as providing support to employees who need mental health treatment (Landy and Conte, 2019; Quick, 1999). Counter-terrorism staff, such as military personnel and intelligence teams, include frequent relocations, separation from family, and 24/7 access, murder requests, murder avoidance, care for the wounded and witnessing deaths and injuries, so these are professions that operate in a high-risk context (Adler and Castro, 2013).

Diversity in the workplace in security and counter-terrorism teams

As in all organizations, members of the military and members of counter-terrorism teams face differences in the workplace. The challenges of diversity, equality and inclusion, followed by sexual harassment, ethnic discrimination, sexual orientation and gender identity lead to anxiety and worry about staying in the job. Industrial-organizational psychologists have employment policies that take into account the discrimination and the harassment. They also develop models of assimilation, recruiting, selecting, training and motivating employees to have the same values and organizational culture, a model of protection that identifies the disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and gives them protection, as well as a model of values where each element of the organization is valued for what it is unique to the organization (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995).

Psychological strategies in educational security programs

The two most important roles of education are teaching the students how to learn, but not what to think, and let them appreciate that learning is a lifelong activity. Innovative thinking and broader understanding will make it easier for them to adjust to the future and take appropriate conflict resolution strategies. The dramatic changes expected in the future require a profound transformation of how services educate and prepare leaders at every level. Industrial-organizational psychology abounds in rigorous methods for measuring knowledge and skills, as well as organizing trainings and education that facilitate the development of the necessary skills. Industrial-organizational psychologists have different approaches for assessment, including structured tests and assessment centers. The assessment centers represent a set of procedures for evaluating a group of individuals in simulated exercises, performed by several assessors (Landy and Conte, 2019) up to integrity tests. By linking knowledge, skills and other relevant characteristics to workplace performance, they can adequately determine whether the knowledge gained from military education and security education is applied in the workplace. The revision of security education programs with the inclusion of psychological strategies is necessary for national strategies in the fight against the terrorism in the future.

Conclusion

Terrorism physically hurts only a small part of the society, leaving many more people with consequences followed by periods of hardship, stress and fear, a period in which they question their choices about the life and the work (Inness & Barling, 2005).

The value of psychology in the fight against terrorism is increasingly being recognized, but it is necessary to involve psychologists directly. It is necessary to include programs explaining the aspect of psychology in the already existing traditional training for education of the staff that will be involved in the fight against terrorism, as well as to hold in continuity workshops for professionals already working in this field. In addition, it is necessary to expand the models of assistance beyond the witnesses and the services that are first responders, including the entire population. Psychological methods are used by governments to raise awareness of terrorism among the general population. With an explicit understanding of the professional context and the use of culture, mental health initiatives can become even more effective tools for promoting the well-being of employees involved in the fight against terrorism. The immediate recognition of the benefits of incorporating psychology focused on problem areas directly related to the relevant issues in the fight against terrorism will be evident in the near future.

Psychology can offer very much in counter-terrorism, but it can also be very useful for developing programs for education, prevention and overcoming the consequences of terrorist activities.

REFERENCES:

- Abrahms, M., (2006) 'Why terrorism does not work', *International Security*, 31(2), pp.42-78.
- Arciszewski, T. et al., (2009) 'From psychology of terrorists to psychology of terrorism', *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale* (Tome 22), p. 5-34
- Adler, A.B. and Castro, C.A., (2013) 'An occupational mental health model for the military', *Military Behavioral Health*, 1, 41-45.
- Akhtar, S. (1999) 'The psychodynamic dimension of terrorism', *Psychiatric Annals*, 29:350-355
- Basara, R. and Neumann, P. Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus. Perspectives on Terrorism, North America, 10, dec. 2016. Available at: <<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/554>>. Date accessed: 08 May. 2021.
- Borum, R. (2004) *Psychology of terrorism*. Tampa: University of South Florida
- Corner, E. and Gill, P. (2020). Psychological Distress, Terrorist Involvement and Disengagement from Terrorism: A Sequence Analysis Approach. *J Quant Criminol* 36, 499–526. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-019-09420-1>
- Dykstra, J., and Paul, C. L. (2018) 'Cyber Operations Stress Survey (COSS): Studying Fatigue, Frustration, and Cognitive Workload in Cybersecurity Operations' in 11th {USENIX} Workshop on Cyber Security Experimentation and Test
- Grotberg, E. H. (2002) 'From terror to triumph: The path to resilience' C.E. Stout (Ed.), *The psychology of terrorism: Volume 1: A public understanding*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002, pp. 185-207
- Herriot, P., & Pemberton, C. (1995) 'Competitive advantage through diversity: Organizational learning from difference', Sage Publications, Inc

- Horgan, J. G. (2017). Psychology of terrorism: Introduction to the special issue. *American Psychologist*, 72(3), 199-204. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000148>
- Inness, M., & Barling, J. (2005) 'Terrorism', In J. Barling, E. K. Kelloway, & M. R. Frone (Eds.), *Handbook of Work Stress* (pp. 377-397). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kent, D. (2019) 'Giving Meaning to Everyday Work After Terrorism', *Organization Studies*, 40(7), 975-994
- Kruglanski, A. W., & Fishman, S. (2006). The psychology of terrorism: "Syndrome" versus "tool" perspectives. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18, 193-215
- Landy, F. J. & Conte, F. J. (2019) *Work in the 21st century: an introduction to industrial and organizational psychology*. Hoboken: NJ Wiley
- Post, J. M. (1984) 'Notes on a Psychodynamic Theory of Terrorist Behavior', *Terrorism: An International Journal*, 7 (3), 242-56
- Pyszczynski, T, Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (2002) 'In the wake of 911: The psychology of terror in the 21st Century', Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Quick, J. C. (1999) 'Occupational health psychology: The convergence of health and clinical psychology with public health and preventive medicine in an organizational context', *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 30(2), 123-128. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0735-7028.30.2.123>
- Sanchez, J. I., & Levine, E. L. (2012) 'The rise and fall of job analysis and the future of work analysis', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63(1), 397-425.
- Schueler, C. 2019. "Why Cybersecurity Burnout Is Real (and What to Do ...," DarkReading. ([https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/why-cybersecurity-burnout-is-real-\(and-what-to-do-about-it\)/a/d-id/1333906](https://www.darkreading.com/threat-intelligence/why-cybersecurity-burnout-is-real-(and-what-to-do-about-it)/a/d-id/1333906), accessed May 09, 2019)
- Silke, A (2011) *The Psychology of Counter-Terrorism*, London: Routledge
- Smith, N. and Barrett, E. C. (2019) 'Psychology, extreme environments, and counter-terrorism operations', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 11:1, 48-72, DOI: 10.1080/19434472.2018.1551916
- Spasovski O. (2013) The Relation of Basic Psychological Needs, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Life Goals, and Collectivism with Subjective Well-Being: A Case in Macedonia. In: Knoop H., Delle Fave A. (eds) *Well-Being and Cultures. Cross-Cultural Advancements in Positive Psychology*, vol 3. Springer, Dordrecht. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4611-4_5
- Weatherston D. and Moran J. (2003) Terrorism and mental illness: is there a relationship?, *Int J Offender Ther Comp Criminol*, (6):698-713. doi: 10.1177/0306624X03257244. PMID: 14661388.
- Woods, J. (2010) 'The 9/11 effect: Towards a social science of the terrorist threat', *Social Science Journal*, 48, 213-233.