

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 268

CG 031 926

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TITLE Terrorism and Worry in Rural America: Not So Far Removed?

PUB DATE 2002-08-22

NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (110th, Chicago, IL, August 22-25, 2002).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Anxiety; *College Students; Higher Education; *Psychological Patterns; *Rural Areas; *Terrorism

IDENTIFIERS *September 11th Attacks

ABSTRACT

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Terrorism and Worry in Rural America: Not So Far Removed?

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Psychological Association, Chicago IL, USA, August 22, 2002.

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Abstract

The following study sought to determine the psychological impact of the events of September 11th on citizens living about three thousand miles away from New York in a rural section of the inland Pacific Northwest. To assess reactions a six-page questionnaire was administered to 126 respondents. The results indicated an increased level of worries and anxiety felt by a sizable minority of college students due to the attacks of 9-11.

Terrorism and Worry in Rural America: Not So Far Removed?

On September 11th, 2001, three hijacked jets crashed into the World Trade Center and Pentagon causing thousands of deaths and leaving deep scars of stress and trauma for those directly exposed to the terrorist attack. Survivors, rescue workers, emergency medical and mental health providers, other volunteers, and members of the media were all at ground zero. The trauma for those directly involved has been intense and has required considerable psychological support and assistance. The aftermath of this tragic event was not only the collapse of the huge structures, but may well include the disintegration of the sense of security and well-being experienced by people across the globe who watched the tragedy on television.

The family, relatives, and friends of victims, survivors, and rescue workers may have been thousands of miles from the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, but the national and international media, especially television coverage the day of and in subsequent weeks, brought the tragic events into our homes. This study was designed to assess the affective and cognitive responses to the events of September 11th on rural Americans.

Affective Reactions to 9-11

While people around the nation and world grieved for the victims of this terrorist attack, the survivors and those people

related to the victims tried to cope with the acute stress, sorrow, trauma, helplessness, and fear. These reactions are all associated with a high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). How much worry and stress is being felt in rural America as a result of these events?

PTSD is "an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm has occurred or was threatened" (National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 2001, p. 1). To meet the diagnostic criteria of PTSD condition, a person who experiences physical harm or a threat in a horrific event, such as 9-11, needs to display the following for longer than one month: "(1) re-experiencing the event through play or trauma-specific nightmares or flashbacks, or distress over events that resemble or symbolize the trauma; (2) routine avoidance of reminders of the event or a general lack of responsiveness (e.g. diminished interests or a sense of having a foreshortened future); and (3) increased sleep disturbances, irresistibility, poor concentration, startle reaction and regressive behavior" (NIMH, p. 3).

Many survivors of 9-11 have experienced symptoms that are signs of PTSD. These include: "(1) becoming afraid of everything, not leaving the house, or isolating yourself; (2) stop usual functioning, no longer maintaining daily routines;

(3) survivor guilt - "Why did I survive? I should have done something more"; (4) tremendous sense of loss; and (5) reluctance to express your feelings, losing a sense of control over your life. (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 1). Did the tormenting images of 9-11 trigger PTSD among young adults in rural America?

There are many stress inducing events in daily life that may cause feelings of helplessness, irritability, sleep problems, isolation, poor concentrations and others similar to the symptoms to PTSD. Divorce, financial crisis, worries about future and others can lead to the certain amount of stress and anxiety; however, they are not sufficient to meet the diagnostic criteria for PTSD (National Center, 2002). A key difference between those stressful events and PTSD is an exposure to "a traumatic event in which both of the following were present: (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; and (2) the person's response to the trauma involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror "(p. 4). Therefore, survivors, victims, and witnesses of the events of September 11th who experience symptoms such as sleep problems, repeated images of attack, sorrow, irritability, guilt and others may meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD because their responses would be

based upon experiencing and/or witnessing the events of 9-11 and perceiving these events as a threat to their personal safety and security.

Cognitive Reactions to 9-11

Even before the dust settled around what was the World Trade Towers, many people were asking themselves and each other "who did this?" and "why?" People are driven to seek an understanding of the causes of events and to predict them (Smith & Mackie, 2000). As information was made available, the public conversation was about the nature of terrorism in general, the perpetrators of the 9-11 events, and Afghanistan that apparently was a safe haven for these perpetrators.

Background on Terrorism

The term, terrorism, has its roots in the French Revolution and was used to describe the actions of the French government. In the 1900's the term was used to refer to the violent revolutionaries who revolted against various governments (White, 2002). Today, the United Nations defines terrorism as "the act of destroying or injuring civilian lives or the act of destroying or damaging civilian or government property without the expressly chartered permission of a specific government, thus, by individuals or group independently or governments on their own accord and belief, in the attempt to effect some political change" (United Nations, 2002). The terrorist on the

other hand is "any person who, acting independently of the specific recognition of a country, or a single person, or as a part of a group not recognized as an official part or division of a nation, acts to destroy or to injure civilians or destroy the property belonging to civilians or to governments in order to effect some political goal" (United Nations, 2002).

According to White (2002), as a rule of thumb, the larger the terrorist group is, the larger their level of activity is. However, there are four features that serve as force multipliers in terrorist attacks, namely, technology, media, religion, and transnational support. Through the advancement in technology, a small terrorist group can operate on a higher level by using technology during their attacks. In addition, the immediate twenty-four hours media coverage serves as an enhancement to the terrorist group and an indicator of the success of that particular incident. Religious fanaticism implies the demonization of the enemy making the attack more likely to happen. That is, by dehumanizing their enemy a terrorist group is able to provide a justification of their actions. The terrorist attacks are not aimed to kill human beings. However, through the process of demonization human beings are not looked as humans, therefore it is easy to destroy what in the terrorists opinion is the ultimate evil (White, 2002).

Afghanistan, Al-Queda and Osama Bin Laden

Afghanistan is a country with a rich history. During the period in Europe known as the Dark Ages, Afghanistan was the site of various invasions from the east and the west that spread such spiritual worldviews as Indian Buddhism and African Islam Maroofi (1998). Today Afghanistan is 99% Moslem (CIA Fact Book, 2002). Most recently, Afghanistan was invaded by the former Soviet Union.

Afghanistan is composed of a series of indigenous tribes, which include the Pushtun who are the majority with an estimated population of 7 million. Other tribes of the region include the, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Aimaq, Farsiwan/Heratis, Trukmen, Brahui, Baluchi, and the Nuristani (Amnesty International, 1999; Barth, 1987). It is from the major tribe of the region, the Pushtun that the modern day Taliban government grew during the Islamic fundamentalist revolution of 1996. The word Taliban means "religious student", and is often accompanied by the word "madaris", which means religious school (Maroofi, 1998). Under the rule of Mullah Mohammad Omar, Afghanistan was united and the Taliban government was established.

Simultaneously, in other countries, such as Saudi Arabia others were contemplating Islamic revolution. Osama bin Laden, a wealthy son of a powerful construction conglomerate in Saudi Arabia, was particularly antagonized by the West's intervention

in the Palestine and Israel conflict, and the Gulf War conflict. Osama bin Laden is purported to be a highly skilled organizer and a man of action. Bin Laden's popularity with the Muslim people soared for his contributions during the Soviet Afghan conflict. It was during this period that an ultra efficient and dangerous terrorist network named Al-Queda, or "the base" in Arabic, was formed. The Al-Queda is a highly skilled and trained organization of terrorists that operate in independent groups, deemed "terrorist cells". The operatives are recruited and trained in secret camps around the world and are then dispersed to different areas to research and plan terrorist missions on targets thought to be of importance (Jihad Unspun, 2002).

Afghanistan, Al-Queda and Osama Bin Laden have all become part of American conversation following 9-11 and discussions of the "war on terrorism." Americans are trying to understand their reactions to 9-11 within this context.

Method

Participants

A total of 126 respondents completed the three part survey for this study. About two-thirds of the sample were female (n = 83) and the remaining third was male. Eighty four percent of the respondents were Caucasian. Of the 16% who were ethnic minorities Native American Indians made up 6.4% and Asian students 5.6% of the sample. The age of the respondents ranged

from 17 to 55 with a mean of 24.4 (SD = 8.92) and a median of 20.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire consisted of three different types of questions. The first section presented five incomplete sentences of "I worry about..." and asked respondents to complete each of these sentences differently in a way that expressed their real feelings. This first section also included five incomplete sentences of "One of my fears regarding the future is..." and respondents were asked to complete these using the same instructions. We believe this method of assessing of the salience of the terrorist threat is nonreactive and has advantages as compared to direct questioning strategies.

The second section of the questionnaire consisted of a variation of the Impact of Event Scale - Revised (IES-R) (Weiss & Marmar, 1996) which is a 22 item survey designed to assess post-traumatic stress related to a specific event. We asked respondents to indicate how distressing each of the 22 situations or life difficulties in the IES-R were for them during the previous seven days "with respect to events of September 11th and the subsequent aftermath". The three subscales of the IES-R measure avoidance, intrusion, and hyperarousal.

The last section of the survey consisted of Likert-type questions that assessed the amount of television watched about the September 11th events and the attitudes and feelings of the respondents towards US responses to the September 11th events. Questions in this section also directly assessed the respondents' feelings of safety and their own sense of security.

Design and Procedures

This study was designed to determine the psychological impact of the events of September 11th on citizens living about three thousand miles away from New York in a rural section of the inland Pacific Northwest. To assess reactions a six-page questionnaire was administered to 126 participants enrolled in a small, state college located in a town of a little over 30,000 people. The questionnaire was administered to volunteer introduction to psychology students during December 2001 and January 2002 during regularly scheduled class sessions.

Results

Worry and Affective Responses to 9-11

When incomplete sentences were used to assess degree of fear and worry only a small number of respondents mentioned anything related to the events of 9-11. The percentage of individuals who mentioned attacks on America, another attack, terrorism, the troops in Afghanistan, career opportunities going down due to tragedies like Sept.11, increased terrorism and more

wars, and other comments showing concern about more attacks was 11.1%.

The responses to each item of the IES-R are presented in Tables 1 through 3. Three subscale scores were computed for the IES-R. The IES-R avoidance subscale had a mean of 1.06 and a standard deviation of .72. An average of at least a moderate amount of avoidance symptoms was reported by 16.5% of respondents. The IES-R intrusion subscale had a mean of 1.14 and a standard deviation of .82. An average of at least a moderate amount of intrusiveness symptoms was reported by 19.2% of respondents. The IES-R hypersensitivity subscale had a mean of .62 and a standard deviation of .66. An average of at least a moderate amount of hypersensitivity symptoms was reported by 5.6% of respondents.

Insert Tables 1, 2, and 3 about here

General Concerns about 9-11

The remaining 35 items on the questionnaire were subjected to a principal components analysis with a varimax rotation to determine the number of orthogonal components represented. Seven of eleven components extracted were interpretable and reflect general reactions to 9-11 reported here. Table 2 presents the factor labels and the items with loadings above

.40. The response to each item that loaded on a component are also presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Interrelationships Between General Concerns and PTSD

The scores on the three subscales of the IES-R were correlated with the seven components of the general reactions to 9-11. For this analysis the response for each item that loaded on each component was averaged with high scores reflecting more of the defined construct. Thus the response of strongly agree was assigned a score of 5, agree a 4, unsure a 3, disagree a 2, and strongly disagree a one, except for items reversed as indicated in Table 4. These correlations are presented in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

Discussion

The events of September 11th and the reoccurring footage of the "Attack on America" contributed to a prolonged series of exposure to a traumatic event. This study identified the affective and cognitive responses to the events of September 11th on a relatively small but significant number of rural Americans.

About eleven percent of the respondent in our study expressed immediate concerns for the events that took place on 9-11 and the concurrent events that happened in the months to follow. The small degree of concern reported by the respondents may be due to the large distance between rural Idaho and New York City as well as the small amount of people directly affected by these events. Compared to earlier data gathered in rural Idaho since 1983, the concern about terrorism did jump to be at least five times higher than any previous point.

After the tormenting images of 9-11, are symptoms of PTSD present in young adults in rural America? Memories of the September 11th trauma did reoccur unexpectedly among people in intrusive episodes such as "flashbacks" in almost one in five respondents (19.2%). According to the American Psychiatric Association (2002), intrusive episodes may be so strong that individuals almost feel like they are actually experiencing the trauma again or seeing it unfold before their eyes and in nightmares. Similarly, 16.5 % of the respondents reported experiencing avoidance symptoms related to 9-11. While we can speculate that the intrusion and avoidance symptoms may have been aroused by the constant media exposure of the pictures depicting the traumatic event, nonetheless, a sizable minority of rural Americans did seem to be experiencing intrusive and avoidance symptoms of PTSD three to four months after September

11th indicating that they were not so far removed from these events.

Some people also may feel guilty because they survived a disaster while others; particularly friends or family did not. However, the latter would not be the case in rural Idaho. Hypersensitivity symptoms were reported by only 5.6% of respondents indicating a low degree of distress in this spectrum.

Emotional reactions to 9-11 were positively correlated with the domains of the IES-R Subscales; mostly with hypersensitivity; but also with avoidance and intrusion. The strong positive correlation indicated that the way respondents interpreted the events of 9-11 did relate to the development of symptoms of PTSD.

In-group connections were strongly correlated with intrusion and hypersensitivity. When a tragedy strikes a nation or a family an individual may experience a higher need for bonding with other people. The events of 9-11 may have caused an elevated need for people to share their experiences and interact with other individuals that were affected by the event.

The out group enmity correlated positively with hypersensitivity mostly because people may have tried to find a person responsible for the tragic events. Moreover, they wanted to seek justice and punish the people who have caused this great

malady. Hypersensitivity is marked by individual's elevated amount of anger and explosiveness that may be negatively reflected on the out-groups. However, the study also showed that there was a positive correlation between intrusion and hypersensitivity with out-group empathy that indicates people's willingness to view the situation from an out group point and express sympathy for the innocent people suffering in Afghanistan. Lastly, there was a positive correlation between the Support for US Policies and intrusion and hypersensitivity leading to the feeling of importance in supporting the government and their actions to bring about justice and come to a closure with the events of 9-11.

The events of September 11th have not had an appreciable affect on the levels of worry and anxiety for the majority of rural Americans surveyed in this study. However, for a nontrivial minority of respondents, 9-11 has increased worry and anxiety three to four months later. One in ten college students expressed worry related to the events of September 11th. One in five exhibited stress symptoms associated with PTSD concerning 9-11.

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Table 1

Percentages of Responses to IES-R Avoidance Items
Related to 9-11

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it.	23.0	27.8	31.0	11.1	7.1
I felt as if it hadn't happened or wasn't real.	37.3	24.6	12.7	20.6	4.8
I stayed away from reminders about it.	51.6	26.2	11.1	7.1	4.0
I tried not to think about it.	37.3	24.6	15.9	15.1	7.1
I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn't deal with them.	54.0	25.4	16.7	2.4	1.6
My feelings about it were kind of numb.	32.5	30.2	27.0	7.9	2.4
I tried to remove it from my memory.	53.2	19.0	13.5	9.5	4.8
I tried not to talk about it.	60.3	15.7	17.4	5.8	0.8

Table 2

Percentages of Responses to IES-R Intrusion Items
Related to 9-11

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
Any reminder brought back feelings about it	17.5	31.7	28.6	17.5	4.8
I had trouble staying asleep.	66.7	20.6	6.3	3.3	3.2
Other things kept making me think about it.	28.6	27.8	24.6	11.1	7.9
I thought about it when I didn't mean to.	35.7	29.4	20.6	11.1	3.2
Pictures about it popped into my mind.	23.0	35.7	23.0	13.5	4.8
I had waves of strong feelings about it.	32.0	32.0	16.8	14.4	4.8
I had dreams about it.	64.3	23.0	8.7	2.4	1.6

Table 3

Percentages of Responses to IES-R Hypersensitivity Items
Related to 9-11

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
I felt irritable and angry.	36.0	33.6	16.0	8.0	6.4
I was jumpy and easily startled.	75.2	15.2	6.4	2.4	0.8
I found myself acting or feeling as though I was back at that time.	68.3	22.2	6.3	1.6	1.6
I had trouble falling asleep.	71.4	18.3	3.2	5.6	1.6
I had trouble concentrating.	60.3	22.2	10.3	3.2	4.0
Reminders of it caused me to have physical reactions, such as sweating, trouble breathing, nausea, or a pounding heart.	81.0	11.9	4.8	1.6	0.8
I felt watchful or on-guard.	46.8	27.0	16.7	6.3	3.2

Table 4
Respondent Responses to the Terrorism Survey Questions

Component Name Terrorism Survey Items (Loading)	Agreement	Unsure	Disagreement
<u>Emotional Reactions to 9-11</u>			
6. I experience more anxiety in public places now. (.643)	15.9%	17.5%	66.7%
7. I have noticed I am more irritable lately. (.645)	14.3%	15.1%	70.6%
8. The anthrax outbreak in the US has changed my daily routine. (.751)	4.0%	11.9%	84.1%
10. I have an aversion toward people from other countries. (.651)	6.3%	16.7%	77.0%
12. The events of September 11th changed my daily routine. (.705)	8.7%	11.9%	79.4%
20. I feel more negatively toward people of Middle Eastern descent than I did before September 11 th . (.615)	20.6%	19.0%	60.3%
22. I am afraid of being a victim of a terrorist action in the future. (.670)	35.7%	21.4%	42.9%
24. I feel more negatively toward Muslims now than I did before September 11 th . (.539)	15.2%	15.2%	69.6%
<u>Support for US Policies</u>			
14. I am very satisfied with President Bush's reaction to the terrorist attacks. (.556)	63.5%	23.8%	12.7%
17. Other countries should be doing more to help in the War on Terrorism. (.488)	62.7%	24.6%	12.7%
21. I feel more supportive of the American government and its policies. (.438)	44.4%	34.9%	20.6%
23. The US should kill the master mind(s) behind the attacks of September 11 th with whatever military force is necessary. (.606)	56.3%	21.4%	22.2%
29. The military actions in Afghanistan are unnecessary since peaceful alternatives can be successful. (-.866) *	12.8%	28.0%	59.2%
31. The problem of terrorism should be resolved using diplomacy and peaceful methods. (-.795)**	20.6%	34.1%	45.2%

Table 4 (continued)

Component Name Terrorism Survey Items (Loading)	Agreement	Unsure	Disagreement
<u>Optimism About Short War On Terrorism</u>			
11. I am confident that the war on Terrorism will be resolved in a few months. (.804)	7.9%	28.6%	63.5%
15. I am confident that the air war in Afghanistan will be resolved in a few months. (.875)	17.5%	31.0%	51.6%
16. I am confident that all military intervention in Afghanistan will be resolved in a few months. (.852)	11.1%	30.2%	58.7%
<u>Ingroup Connections</u>			
2. I find myself seeking stronger relationships with members of my family. (.688)	56.3%	24.6%	19.0%
3. I find myself seeking a stronger relationship with my "significant other". (.684)	41.3%	23.8%	34.9%
4. I find myself seeking stronger relationships with my friends. (.644)	54.8%	31.0%	14.3%
5. I find myself watching more television news since September 11 th than ever before. (.498)	54.0%	15.1%	31.0%
13. I feel more connected with Americans. (.554)	50.8%	31.0%	18.3%
<u>Outgroup Emnity</u>			
10. I have an aversion toward people from other countries. (.454)	6.3%	16.7%	77.0%
19. I am concerned about the health and safety of Afghan people who have lost or fled their homes during the US bombing in their country. (-.752) *	60.0%	23.2%	16.8%
20. I feel more negatively toward people of Middle Eastern descent than I did before September 11 th . (.495)	20.6%	19.0%	60.3%
24. I feel more negatively toward Muslims now than I did before September 11 th . (.536)	15.2%	15.2%	69.6%
28. People who support peaceful alternatives to the war in Afghanistan are traitors to the United States. (.707)	7.9%	20.6%	71.4%

Table 4 (continued)

Component Name Terrorism Survey Items (Loading)	Agreement	Unsure	Disagreement
<u>Sacrifice of Freedom/ Human Rights</u>			
1. Recently, citizens of the United States have lost many of their freedoms. (-.784)	26.4%	16.0%	57.6%
26. I am willing to sacrifice my rights regarding privacy to ensure a higher level of security. (.505)	36.5%	23.0%	40.5%
<u>Outgroup Empathy</u>			
18. I am worried that ground troops deployed in Afghanistan will suffer high levels of casualties. (.463)	44.4%	31.0%	24.6
25. I feel more empathy toward people of Middle Eastern descent than I did before September 11 th . (.727)	24.6%	34.6%	40.5%
30. I feel more empathy than I did before September 11 th . (.691)	22.2%	38.1%	39.7%

* Items were reversed scored.

Table 5

Correlations Among IES-R and Components of General Affective Reactions

General Affective Component Name	IES-R Subscale		
	Avoidance	Intrusion	Hypersensitivity
Emotional Reactions to 9-11	.244 **	.294**	.456***
Support for US Policies	-.054	.281**	.187*
Optimism About Short War On Terrorism	-.002	.113	.188*
Ingroup Connections	.189*	.388***	.355****
Outgroup Emnity	.113	.056	.247**
Sacrifice of Freedom/ Human Rights	.075	.174	.090
Outgroup Empathy	-.036	.232**	.234**

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



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