

Report warns of jury service 'trauma'

March 19 2009

A new report by psychologists at the University of Leicester warns of the dangers of jurors facing trauma because of their exposure to harrowing and gruesome evidence.

In the first study of its kind, the research highlights how women [jurors](#) are more vulnerable, particularly if the trial covers material that resonates with their personal histories.

The research confirms that [jury service](#), particularly for crimes against people, can cause significant anxiety, and for a vulnerable minority it can lead to severe clinical levels of stress or the symptoms of [post traumatic stress disorder](#).

The study led by clinical psychologist Dr Noelle Robertson has been published in *The Howard Journal*. It warns of the perils of undergoing jury service- and the fact that people cannot talk about their experiences for fear of being held in contempt of [court](#).

Dr Robertson, with University of Leicester colleagues Professor Emeritus Graham Davies and graduate student Alice Nettleingham, is the first UK exploratory study to look at the possible traumatising of jurors.

The report claims jury service can be a significant stressor for a vulnerable minority and goes on to debate whether screening might be employed to eliminate jurors from potentially traumatising trials.

Dr Robertson said: "Recent research on post-traumatic stress disorder has revealed that it is not only victims of violence or crime that suffer trauma, but that those who interact with them may also be affected.

"If called to jury service, citizens of Britain, as well as the US and most Commonwealth countries, are obliged to serve and may be exposed to gruesome exhibits and harrowing stories, which, the study shows, can lead to traumatisation for some of them."

An average of 390,000 British citizens serve on juries each year and, after no other preparation than a film outlining their duties, may be exposed to the distress of witnesses or required to handle repellant exhibits and examine graphic and shocking photographs.

When they retire to reach their verdict they have to discuss and weigh up the evidence and may be under pressure to change their own views or to try and change the views of others.

All this can lead to short-term or long-term distress.

The times during trials when jurors were required to make decisions were cited as the most stressful, but having to deal with evidence that might be horrific was also a source of concern, particularly for women, who were also more adversely affected by dissension and questioning in the [jury room](#).

While Dr Robertson urges caution in the interpretation of what was a small-scale Leicester study, it does bear out research from North America, and confirms that jury service can be a source of stress, which for some people can be overwhelming.

The report recommends more support for jurors, including more comprehensive preparation, briefing and clear directions, as well as

guidelines for the decision process in the jury room. It also recommends that Crown Courts could provide a supporter for jurors, who might lessen the sense of isolation jurors can feel, since they are unable to discuss the court case outside the jury room.

Currently, people called for jury service are allocated by lot to juries, and the report also calls for use of a questionnaire highlighting past experiences which would save jurors from the trauma of cases that might resonate with their own past experiences.

Dr Robertson commented: "Jury service is a civic duty, yet we know little about its consequences for the individual. At present, anyone who talks openly about their experiences runs the risk of being charged with contempt of court."

Source: University of Leicester

Citation: Report warns of jury service 'trauma' (2009, March 19) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-jury-trauma.html>

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