

Outreach program brings relief to traumatized London bombing survivors

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A new mental health outreach programme set up after the 2005 London bombings has successfully identified and treated hundreds of survivors.

After the 7/7 bombings in 2005 a group of clinical psychologists targeted nearly a thousand survivors of the attacks by painstakingly compiling hospital treatment records, police witness files and referrals from GPs.

The need for this new method of reaching potential patients was evident after results showed that only 4% of patients contacted by the programme had been referred for treatment by their GPs - the traditional pathway to mental health care. Overall, more than a third of people contacted needed treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder.

Published today in the journal [Psychological Medicine](#), the results of the programme strongly suggest that a similar [mental health](#) care programme needs to be included in the standard planning for the aftermath of a terrorist attack.

"If this programme hadn't existed then there would be hundreds of people still suffering from post-traumatic stress or other [psychological problems](#) as a result of the 2005 terrorist attack. This intervention is really a new way of identifying traumatised people," explained Professor Chris Brewin, lead author of the study at UCL Department of Clinical, Educational & Health Psychology.

"Many of the survivors complained that GPs often did not recognise or

know how to treat their post-traumatic stress, a finding which is reflected in the literature. This study highlights that there are some extreme situations when relying on GPs and the primary care mechanism doesn't work," added Professor Brewin.

The authors of the study are calling for a similar programme to be featured in future plans for responding to disasters and terrorist attacks. Other suggestions to improve the provision of [mental health care](#) after a disaster or terrorist attack include:

- The Health Protection Agency (HPA) to be responsible for compiling a list of all affected individuals
- The Department of Health to issue clearer guidance about how strategic health authorities should respond to similar crises
- Centrally based organisation and funding to be made available for mental health treatment, to ensure equal access to high quality care regardless of where patients live

The outreach programme ran between September 2005 and September 2007. Patients diagnosed with [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) were treated with standard cognitive behavioural therapy.

The programme was a partnership between NHS post traumatic stress centres in London and the London Development Centre for Mental Health. The programme was evaluated by psychologists at University College London led by Professor Chris Brewin, with funding from the Department of Health.

More information: The paper 'Outreach and screening following the 2005 London bombings: usage and outcomes' is published online in

Psychological Medicine today.

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