

Improving violence victims' mental health

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(Medical Xpress) -- New guidance developed by Cardiff experts to improve mental health outcomes for people affected by violence has been published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

People who are injured in or affected by [physical violence](#), including [sexual violence](#), are at risk of developing [mental health](#) problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and [substance misuse](#) problems. But services to help these people are relatively underdeveloped.

The guidance, Managing the impact of [violence](#) on mental health, including among witnesses and those affected by homicide, is co-authored by Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Violence and Society Research Group and School of Dentistry, and Professor Jonathan Bisson, School of Medicine. They and the Royal College of Psychiatrists worked in partnership with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the College of Emergency Medicine and the national charity Victim

Support.

Professor Jonathan Shepherd, Professor of [Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery](#), said: "Having treated people injured by violence for many years, I'm convinced that the mental health problems that are inflicted are often more serious and long-lasting than their physical injuries. About 300,000 victims of violence are treated in emergency departments in England and Wales each year and about 40 per cent of these will go on to have mental [health problems](#). But although the mental health impacts of violence are common, they are also often neglected. We hope this guidance will help make sure that people who are victims of violence get the help they need."

The new guidance includes a new stepped care pathway to show how emergency departments, GPs and the criminal justice system can work better together to identify those people who show signs of mental ill health and provide them with information about relevant support services.

The guidance recommends:

- Health professionals who treat those affected by violence and the health services in which they work should be recognised as major advocates for victim health and wellbeing.
- Doctors working in emergency settings should refer patients with signs of [mental health problems](#) as a result of violence to third sector support services or to the patient's GP, depending on the severity.
- Victim support and other competent statutory and third-sector personnel should refer victims and others affected by violence who demonstrate signs of mental ill health to primary care health professionals for further assessment.

Javed Khan, Chief Executive of Victim Support, said: "Our trained volunteers have been helping victims deal with the emotional and psychological effects of all kinds of crime for nearly 40 years. We are therefore keenly aware of the psychological impact that being a victim of violent crime can have. Victim Support has systems to identify and refer victims to mental health services, where it is needed. However, greater collaboration between all the agencies and individuals involved to ensure that more victims with trauma-related and mental health conditions are identified and appropriately referred would benefit all involved – not least victims. We look forward to working with the Royal College of Psychiatrists and other parties to ensure more [victims](#) get the help they need."

More information: Full report at the Royal College of Psychiatrists website: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/PS01_2012.pdf

Provided by Cardiff University

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