

Adolescents who have experienced terror attacks suffer from sleep disturbance

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Adolescents who have experienced terror attacks suffer from sleep disturbance for years after the event. Researchers believe there is a need for better assessment and treatment of sleep disturbance in adolescents who have been exposed to trauma.

A new study has shown that adolescents who have experienced [terror attacks](#) were more prone to insomnia, were excessively sleepy during the daytime, had frequent nightmares and suffered from [obstructive sleep apnea](#). Obstructive sleep apnea is defined as difficulty breathing when asleep, often causing the sufferer to waken frequently, resulting in poor quality of sleep.

"This indicates that sleep can be affected by stress, and that the extent of insomnia is cause for concern for these young lives," confirms Anne Marita Milde, Centre Director at Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health and Child Welfare, Uni Research Health, and one of the researchers behind the study.

Insomnia is also a risk factor related to drug use, attention deficiencies, poor performance at school, and injuries and accidents among the younger population in general.

More than 50% suffer from sleep disturbances

The new study comprises 42 of the young persons who experienced the

terror attack on Utøya island on 22 July 2011. The study shows that 52.4% of this group suffered [sleep problems](#) for two years after the event. They had not experienced [sleep disturbances](#) prior to the events on Utøya island.

The mass shooting on Utøya island is the deadliest attack in Norway since World War II. 564 members of the Labour Party's youth division (AUF) were taking part in the annual summer camp on the island of Utøya in Norway and experienced the mass shooting. The terrorist travelled over to the island by ferry, dressed as a policeman. In the space of 80 minutes, 67 persons were brutally shot and killed, two died from a fall and drowning and 66 were shot and injured.

Link to mental health

Sleep disturbance also appears to have links with mental health. The researchers found that sleep disturbances were more prevalent in adolescents with [psychiatric diagnoses](#) than in adolescents without psychiatric diagnoses.

"It is therefore necessary to assess and treat sleep-related disturbances after trauma in order to prevent intensification of existing disorders. There is also a need to continue to clarify the link between trauma, psychiatric diagnoses and sleep disturbance so that we are more capable of developing tools for the treatment of victims of [traumatic life events](#)," states Anne Marita Milde.

The researchers believe that by treating sleep disturbances after a trauma, it will be possible to reduce the risk of the outbreak of [mental health](#) disorders and problem behaviour.

More information: Janne Grønli et al. Life Threat and Sleep Disturbances in Adolescents: A Two-Year Follow-Up of Survivors From

the 2011 Utøya, Norway, Terror Attack, *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/jts.22196](https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.22196)

Provided by Uni Research

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