Terrorists, Victims and Society
Wiley Series in

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Terrorists, Victims and Society

Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences

Edited by

Andrew Silke
University of Leicester, UK
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Dr Deborah Browne has lectured in forensic psychology and has worked as a principal research officer for government. She has published papers in various academic journals and has presented at a number of national and international conferences. Previous work has included a period as consultant for the United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Sarajevo during the Bosnian conflict. Key areas of her research interest have included the development of antisocial behaviour in children and young people, the consequences of child abuse, and psychological issues affecting foster children.

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Dr Margaret Wilson is an applied psychologist who has for many years been teaching forensic psychology in the UK. She has conducted a great deal of research on terrorist behaviour and lectured extensively on the subject worldwide. She can currently be contacted through the University of Kent at Canterbury, where she holds an honorary post.
The Wiley Series in the Psychology of Crime, Policing and the Law publishes integrative reviews on important emerging areas of contemporary research. The purpose of the series is not merely to present research findings in a clear and readable form, but also to bring out their implications for both practice and policy. In this way, it is hoped that the series will not only be useful to psychologists, but also to all those concerned with crime detection and prevention, policing and the judicial process.

As Andrew Silke, the editor of Terrorism, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences, makes clear, this book is no fast-buck response to the events of September 11, 2001. Rather, it represents a considered and comprehensive appraisal from a psychological perspective of the motivations and origins of terrorists, the impact of their acts on its victims, and of ways of combating terrorism. While terrorism has been repeatedly studied from the perspective of its political, ethnic or religious roots, the psychological element has frequently been ignored.

The first section of the book is given over to the debate surrounding acts of terrorism and their perpetrators. The contributors do not duck the subjective and judgemental element of the label ‘terrorist’—we must remember that the resistance heroes of the Second World War were called ‘terrorists’ by their Nazi occupiers—but focus on the personality and behaviour of terrorists. What combination of personality traits and family and societal influences produce a terrorist? The acts themselves are frequently horrific, with violence and death meted out to all, without regard to traditional distinctions between combatants and the innocent. As the contributors emphasise, such acts are rarely random but precisely calibrated for their psychological impact: terrorists can be psychologists too. To understand, but not excuse, such behaviour is the first step to coming to terms with terrorism.

The second section is devoted to the victims of terrorism and the impact of such acts on their lives, attitudes and behaviour. As we have seen in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, terrorism can persist over generations,