

Legacies of the Troubles

At a glance

The PSE research in 2012 finds that the 'Troubles' had a deep impact on people's lives in Northern Ireland:

- 10% of adults lost a close relative
- 11% of adults lost a close friend
- 33% witnessed a bomb explosion
- 3% of adults had witnessed a murder

The study finds that these experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental and physical health and higher levels of unemployment and deprivation.



The PSE research

Evidence of the impact of 'the Troubles' on people's lives across the population of Northern Ireland is almost entirely absent from most discussions of the legacies of the conflict. The Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) study carried out in 2002/03 was the first attempt to gather such evidence and this has now been repeated in the current PSE research in a slightly modified set of Troubles questions in the 2012 PSE living standards survey.

The questions cover the death and injury of close friends and relatives, and asked if people had directly witnessed particular events such as a bomb explosion, gunfire, rioting and so on. There were questions on house searches carried out by the police or army, and on whether people had had to move house or a job because of attack, intimidation, threats or harassment. People were asked whether they, or anyone they knew had spent time in prison because of the Troubles. They were also asked to think about the worst thing that had happened to them because of the Troubles and to say

when this was. Finally they were asked if they had followed up the worst experience by taking action of some kind, such as joining a support group or seeing their GP.

Prevalence of experience

The 2002/3 survey found that 14% of adults had lost a 'close relative' and almost 8% had been physically injured, a half of these on more than one occasion. Nearly 9% of respondents had had to move house due to attack, intimidation or harassment and 4% had been forced to leave a job for the same reasons. Almost a quarter had themselves spent time in prison or knew someone else who had.

The 2012 survey found that the prevalence of these experiences remains high. More than a third of adults (35%) knew someone who was killed. Nearly 11% lost a 'close friend' and 10% a 'close relative'. And a third of adults knew someone who was injured and a similar pattern of who they knew emerges as can be seen in Figure 5.1: Experience of injury to others in the Troubles.

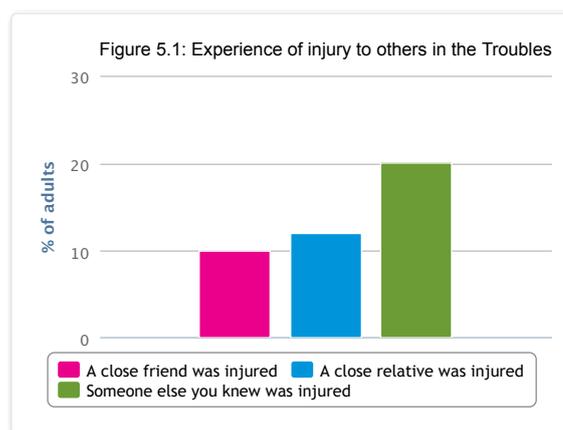
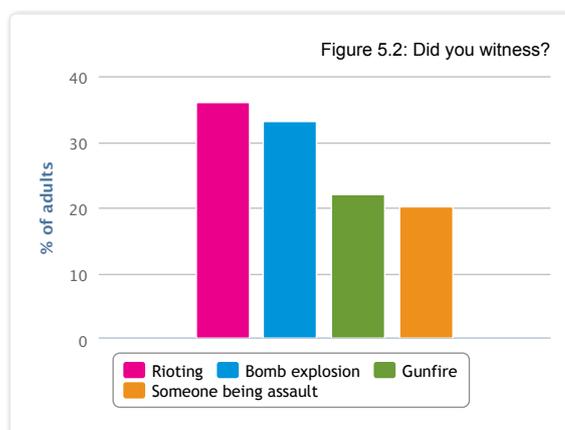
Overall, just under a half of all adults (45%) experienced either the death or injury of someone they knew personally.

Looking at other types of violent events such as rioting, bomb explosions, gunfire, assaults, murder and other serious violence, overall, more than half the adult population (57%) has witnessed one or other of these events. Figure 5.2 'Did you witness?' (below) illustrates the high percentages witnessing these other events.

According to the survey an estimated 41,000 people had witnessed murder, which means that an average of eleven people witnessed each of the Troubles-related killings.

45%

of all adults experienced either the death or injury of someone they knew personally



Community experience

Experiences of these events by the 'protestant' or 'catholic' community in which people were brought up, or with which they identify, were very similar. For most of the experiences there are no statistically significant differences between Catholics and Protestants.

The most striking and statistically significant differences concerned having your house searched and imprisonment. Overall, 9% had had their house searched and 19% know someone who had spent time in prison. But Catholics were 4.4 times as likely to have experienced a house search by the police and/or army, 1.5 times as likely to know someone imprisoned because of the conflict than Protestants. They were also 1.4 times as likely to have had a close relative injured and 1.3 times as likely to have witnessed gunfire and an assault.



Explore the scatter plot [Experiences of the Troubles by groups](#).

The impact of these experiences

Injury to self stands out as having the highest risk ratios across the board. Experience of injury – to self, close friend or relative – is also associated with greater risk of a number of circumstances. Those who have these experiences of injury are 1.8 times as likely to have had a spell of unemployment for up to 12 months in the last five years compared to those with no experience (of injuries or killings). The deprivation rate (deprived of 3 or more of 22 items) of those with injury experience is 40% compared to a rate of 30% for those with no experience of injury or killings. Those with a close relative injured are 2.3 times as likely to report 'bad or very bad health' than those with no such experience, and they are 1.5 times as likely to have a mental illness.

Losing a close friend or relative are both associated with higher reporting of bad health and illness though losing a close friend appears to be more important to adverse health than losing a close relative.

Witnessing a murder, assault and other serious violence are all associated with high risk ratios, as are moving house, moving job and house searches (though less so).

All of the conflict experiences are associated with a higher risk of poor mental and physical health except one: those who said they had been in prison were slightly less at risk (a risk ratio of 0.9) of mental illness. They are, however, 2.7 times as likely to be in bad or very bad health. For some conflict experiences, the risk of poor health is only marginally increased. Those witnessing a bombing have 1.2 times the risk of bad/very bad health; those who lost a close relative are only 1.1 times more likely to have a long-standing illness than those who did not.

Conflict-related experience is also associated with low 'life satisfaction'. Over eighty per cent of those with no experience of witnessing Troubles events have high life satisfaction scores. This compares with 63% of those who lost a close friend in the Troubles, the same low average score as reported by disabled people across Great Britain. Exceptionally low life satisfaction scores were found for those witnessing murder – using an 11-point scale, almost a quarter (23%) have a score between 0 and 4 (5.8% is the GB average). Those with no Troubles experience have higher life satisfaction scores than those for the GB population as a whole.

Conclusion

While some events are more associated with the past, others, such as assaults and rioting, are an enduring part of conflict experience post-1998. The strong imprinting of a number of experiences on sections of the adult population in terms of physical and mental health show a deep and lasting legacy of the Troubles.

Further details

In the PSE research, [Northern Ireland](#) section: see Legacies of Conflict: evidence from the 2012 PSE survey, [paper](#) and [presentation](#) by Mike Tomlinson to the Northern Ireland Assembly, Knowledge Exchange Seminar, 24th October 2013.

For details of 2002/3 findings see Hillyard, P., Kelly, G., McLaughlin, E., Patsios, D. and Tomlinson, M. (2003) [Bare Necessities: Poverty and Social Exclusion in Northern Ireland](#). Belfast: Democratic Dialogue. The conflict data was further analysed in Hillyard, P., Rolston, B. and Tomlinson, M. (2005) [Poverty and Conflict in Ireland: An International Perspective](#). Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency/Institute of Public Administration.

About the survey

The PSE NI 2012 living standards survey gathered evidence from a representative sample of 988 households with 2,311 individuals – 624 children (under 18 years old) and 1,687 adults. Of the adults, 80 per cent agreed to answer the ten Troubles questions.

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I've lived through the Troubles, took part in the Troubles. For me, it's like there's nothing for people.

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long-term unemployed and disabled man, Belfast