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Post-Mumbai: Trauma, panic attacks, depression

By Sreya Basu | Published: 06th December 2008 10:37 AM Last Updated: 14th May 2012 05:15 PM

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KOLKATA: The tremors of the terror attacks in Mumbai were felt across India, with live television coverage of the 60-hour carnage. The terrorists have been vanquished but the imprints that the horrific scenes left on people's minds have led to a sharp rise in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, say psychiatrists.

'I got my first case on Nov 28, when security forces were still battling terrorists in Mumbai. Professional ethics don't allow me to name her so all I can say is she was having frequent panic attacks and was emotionally numb,' city-based psychiatrist Shraboni Chowdhury told IANS.

'It's not that any of her relatives or friends were in Mumbai at that time. She had the attacks just by watching the blasts and the sight of Mumbai's Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus after the massacre.

'This is not unusual...individual brains have different absorbing capacities. This 32-year-old lady's brain is hyperactive and she, knowingly or unknowingly, was fantasising herself as one of the victims,' said Chowdhury.

The psychiatrist said she has so far received seven cases where patients suffered from the after-effects of last week's terror attacks in Mumbai.

'Another of my clients is a nine-year-old girl who, after watching the terror in Mumbai on television, is suffering from PTSD. Thankfully, it's not an acute case but the girl is so traumatised that she is unable to sleep. Even if she manages to sleep with the help of tranquillisers, she shakes and wakes up in the middle of the night due to nightmares,' Chowdhury said.

'My daughter is unable to concentrate on her studies. Every time any news about Mumbai flashes on screen, she starts crying and asks, 'Will the bad men (terrorists) kill me if I don't study and top my class?' We have stopped watching news channels due to her mental condition,' said the girl's mother.

The child is slowly recovering after rigorous counselling sessions and medication, said Chowdhury.

Psychiatrist Indrajit Sengupta too has received four patients suffering from PTSD since the Nov 26 terror strikes in Mumbai.

'A young engineer came to me Monday with the complaint that he is becoming hypervigilant, which is always thinking a danger may erupt anytime and hence being alert and getting easily startled. He had remained glued to the television set throughout the terror drama in Mumbai. It is a case of PTSD,' Sengupta told IANS.

However, not all people psychologically affected by the Mumbai attacks are willing to take medical help.

Every time 81-year-old Paritosh Ghosh sees or reads about 26/11, he gets panic attacks followed by chest pain, headaches and fits of fainting as the massacre reminds him of 9/11 in the US, when he lost his only son.

'The 9/11 massacre killed my only son Rajarshi who worked in New York. I have still not recovered from that shock and now this Mumbai terror attack is nothing but a brutal reminder of the incident,' Ghosh said.

He feels distressed whenever remained of the trauma.

'My wife called a general physician when I remained unconscious for four-and-a-half hours on Nov 27. The doctor said it's a psychological problem and I need to consult a psychiatrist. But I don't want that for personal reasons,' Ghosh said.

In the most audacious terror attack that India has ever seen, terrorists struck in south Mumbai, including the Taj Mahal Palace and Tower Hotel, Oberoi Trident Hotel and the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus, on the night of Nov 26.

The standoff between security forces and the terrorists lasted nearly 60 hours, during which at least 172 people were killed and 248 others injured.

(Sreya Basu can be contacted at sreya.b@ians.in)

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