

Bali anniversary: trauma's impact and recovery

The anniversary of the first Bali bombing reminds us that our world is not short of traumatic events, from terrorism and combat to violent crime and natural disasters. Our sympathy is with the survivors of the Bali bombing and those who lost family and friends. It is not unusual for anniversaries and other reminders to bring back distressing memories and strong emotions for survivors, and the loved ones of those who died.

With the Bali anniversary on our minds, it is timely to think about the psychological effects of these events. Although a proportion of people will be affected in the long term, we know that most people recover with the support of family and friends. Despite the horror they experienced, research shows that most survivors of the Bali bombing will have recovered from the psychological wounds. While the memories are still painful, most will not be suffering from ongoing distress or painful symptoms.

For some, however, the effects are longer term. The reasons why some recover while others do not are a complex interaction of someone's characteristics and life events before the trauma, what happened to them during and immediately after the event, and what has happened since. These factors can interact to inhibit recovery in some people and they are left with significant problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety or depression. We now have effective evidence based treatments for these problems and it is worth seeking professional help (see *The Australian Guidelines for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* at www.acpmh.unimelb.edu.au)

Equally, it is vital that we do not overlook the resources we have at our fingertips to aid recovery. As Australians watched the horror of the Bali bombing unfold on their television screens five years ago, we also witnessed the resourcefulness of those at the scene. The Balinese locals and many tourists at the scene helped others, drawing on their own initiative and the limited resources available.

Similarly, help to aid emotional recovery does not have to come from a health professional—the answers are often found within ourselves and with the help of family and friends. Immediately following a traumatic event, or when dealing with the distress of an anniversary, a list of simple 'do's' and 'don'ts' can significantly improve our chances of recovering and getting on with our lives:

Do's	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time with people who care and pay special attention to close family • Give yourself permission to feel some distress – it's perfectly normal • Limit time spent reading, listening to, or watching media reports of the event – don't avoid them altogether but try to maintain a balance • Visit websites or read brochures to find out more about impact of trauma: what to expect and how to deal with it • Try to keep a normal routine going – work, study, leisure activities • Talk about how you feel or what happened with those close to you if/when you feel ready • Do things that help you relax and that you enjoy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use alcohol or drugs to cope • Keep yourself extremely busy or work too much as a way of coping • Engage in stressful family or work situations • Avoid thinking or talking about what happened altogether • Spend too much time thinking about the event – try to keep a balanced perspective • Withdraw from family and friends • Stop yourself from doing things that you enjoy • Take unnecessary risks

As people in our community face traumatic experiences—65 per cent of Australians at will experience a traumatic event at some time in their lives—the need for effective public health education strategies becomes paramount. The more people understand about likely psychological reactions and how best to deal with them, the easier it will be for individuals and the community to get on with their lives in the aftermath of disaster and trauma. It is equally important that easy access to effective specialist treatment options is made available for those people who will require them. A comprehensive approach to psychological recovery following disaster and trauma has the potential to save considerable costs to the community in terms of human suffering, as well as economically through saved disability and impairment.