

Lessons learned

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Shooting Incidence in Imatra

Description of the event

During the night between the 3:rd and 4:th December 2016 a shooting incidence happened in Imatra, a town with 30 000 inhabitants near the Russian border. The shooter was a 23 year old man with mental health problems. The time of the incident was special. In Finland the first advent is celebrated as "Small Christmas", what means that many people go together to the restaurants to eat together and have fun. All restaurants were full up of celebrating people.

The shooting happened in a square with many restaurants. The shooter came to the square with his care, took the gun and started to wait for the first who came out form the restaurants. He shot the three first ones and then he went to his car and waited that the police came and arrested him.

The first ones who came out from the restaurants happened to be three women: two journalists from the local newspaper and a politician, who was the chairman of the city council in Imatra. They all died immediately. During the shooting there were 200-300 people in these restaurants; some saw the shooting and many heard it. The restaurants closed the doors and they cloud come out 1-1½ hour later.

The special aspect of this incident was that there were so many eyewitnesses and because the victims were chosen randomly very many thought that it cloud had been them. The victims were very known in Imatra and also that was why this event touched so many.

Psychological first aid

This incidence happened at 01 am. on Sunday. It happened in an area where the social and health care is very well organized by South-Karelian health district called EKSOTE. This EKSOTE and local Red Cross opened a walk-in centre immediately and it opened the doors at 2.30 am.. This centre was open until Monday. Red Cross volunteers also walked around the place were the shooting happened and discussed with people. The restaurants closed their doors at 4 am. and that was why there was quite a lot of people at that time.

Management System and Early Intervention

EKSOTE contacted Finnish Red Cross Readiness Group of Psychologist and asked for help in organizing crisis help on Sunday. Next day two members of Red Cross psychologist group traveled to Imatra and started the early intervention together with the local EKSOTE. Next day two more psychologists joined to the work. The work were started with a meeting where the groups who needed crisis help were investigated and also decision of collaboration and division of labour was made between Red Cross Psychologists and the local crisis workers. Red Cross psychologists took

the main responsibility of the crisis help to the family members of the deceased and also for the family of the shooter. We also decided that one local worker participated in the crisis sessions. They could continue with the crisis help later. Crisis sessions were organized also to the working places of the deceased, to the restaurant personal, to kindergarten and schools and also the personnel of EKSOTE who had met the shooter in their work.

One problem in organizing crisis help was those who were in the restaurants in the time of shooting. After meeting two such persons we noted that they have very strong reactions and many of them needed help but we did not know who they were. The need for crisis help of this group came out when we met some of them. Everybody knew 3-4 other who needed help, In case when getting names of this attached, they were contacted by crisis workers. EKSOTE also tried to contact them by facebook and asked them to phone to a number where they could get contact to a crisis worker. About 20 persons called this number: some got individual help and some took part in a crisis session.

Long term intervention

The family members of the deceased and also the family of the shooter has had three crisis sessions during two months and their will be still one after the legal proceedings of the case. EKSOTE has organized individual help for those who have needed it.

The city has organized a memorial for the deceased 1½ month later. About 700 citizens took part in this memorial.

Evaluation and implications

This is a good example when crisis help is very well organized and where the management of the crisis work functioned well. The collaboration with Red Cross Psychologists and local EKSOTE functioned very well and the local decision makers understood the meaning of the crisis help and gave all the resources need for the work.

The great challenge was those attached who were in the restaurants. It was impossible to reach them to proactively offer them crisis help. Much effort was made to reach this group, but still there are persons in need for crisis help who did not got it. We hope they contact the normal mental health services when they are in need for crisis help.

The other problem was the earlier disasters in the town. For almost ten years ago a young 14 year old girl was killed and it took some days before she were found. It took many months to find out who was the killer. After this case the crisis help was not well organized and that was the reason this incident came up in many discussions after this shooting incidence.