

## **Guidelines for victims of collaboration with media just after a traumatic event**

In disasters the media is very interested to interview victims, who have just experienced a shocking traumatic event. On the point of view of the victim the pressure for giving an interview can be felt hard and it is difficult to say no. The experience of the crisis work, however, is that to be interviewed just after the traumatic experience can harm the victim and make the recovery from the experience more difficult (Haravuori, H., Suomalainen, L., Berg, N., Kiviruusu, O., Marttunen, M. (2011) Effects of media exposure on adolescents traumatized in a school shooting. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 24, 70-77.)

Experience from previous disasters is that the media is extremely pushing in contacting the affected and their families. Within hours after the incident, the affected receive sms, mail, calls by the press or can be contacted at their home address. The first contact from the press can be questions for confirmation that they are directly affected or in family with people who are missing. A positive answer will give the media a confirmation of a contact being created and may publish this and continue their persistent inquiries.

It may also be important to note that if the victims and their closest families are protected from the press, other family members and friends will be asked to confirm the relationships to those who are affected or asked for interviews, pictures etc

These are the reasons why EFPA ( European Federation of Psychologist Associations) Standing Committee on Disaster Crisis and Trauma Psychology has made guidelines for the victims of disaster in collaboration with media during the first hours and days after disaster.

It is important to notice that:

- The victims just after the disaster are in shock which means that they have a very strong need for talking of the experience.
- The victims can have a strong need for giving an interview immediately after the experience also because the experience is felt to be so unfair, so wrong.
- Just after a shocking experience the victims are not able to see and evaluate the consequences of giving an interview for the media.
- After the first hours and days the feeling of shock will decrease and the victim might feel and think in a different way. They can then regret what they disclosed in an interview right after the event
- After giving an interview the victims do not have any control how the interview is used. It can be used again and again in news but also in many circumstances months and years after the disaster.

For these reasons the victim should first:

- Not answer any inquiries from the media the first hours
- Deny to give any interviews during the first hours after the disaster.
- Calm him/herself and take a distance the experience before giving an interview.
- Discuss with family members or a friend of giving an interview and its consequences

If the victim still will give an interview it is important that

- He/she has a support person with him/her when giving the interview
- To make an agreement how and where the interview is used
- To make an agreement of what the journalist can ask and what is not allowed to ask
- After the interview, the person being interviewed should be allowed to read the interview or have it read aloud by the journalist, before published
- It is always possible to deny answering the question asked.

If any of the affected wants to provide information through the press without themselves giving interviews, they can point out a person they trust who can be the family spokesperson.

In addition to these precautions, it is important to emphasize that some affected have experienced that a certain collaboration with the press, when the event is more clarified, gives more control over what is written and the photos being used by the media.