

# CRISIS RESPONSE

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JOURNAL

PROTECTION | PREVENTION | PREPAREDNESS | RESPONSE | RESILIENCE | RECOVERY



## MANIPULATION

**FAKE NEWS, FAKE PRODUCTS: WHO & WHAT TO TRUST?**

**PUBLIC FEAR & TERRORISM | SCHOOL SAFETY & CONTINGENCY PLANNING | DISASTERS  
& THE WORKPLACE | CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES | AVIATION FIRE & RESCUE IN MONGOLIA  
| IRAN QUAKE | DISASTER RISK REDUCTION | TRAUMA PSYCHOLOGY | BUSINESS &  
SOCIETAL RESILIENCE | GENDER PARITY IN BUSINESS CONTINUITY**

# contents

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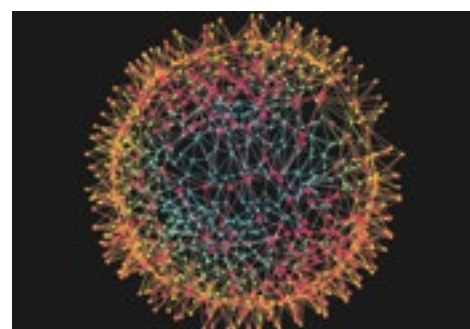
<b>News</b> .....	<b>4</b>	<b>Disaster Risk Reduction</b>	
<b>Comment</b> .....	<b>8</b>	<b>Reducing risk requires robust data</b> .....	<b>36</b>
People lie at the heart of effective resilience, says Matt Minshall. So how can we harness their strength in the face of terrorist ideologies that seek to strike fear?		Sebastien Penzini, Rosalind Cook and Paola Albrito report on the launch of new international disaster loss monitoring systems	
<b>Features</b>		<b>Disasters and opportunities</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Preparing for the dragon</b> .....	<b>12</b>	Paolo Garonna explores novel shifts in bridging the chasm between sustainability, disaster risk reduction and the funding that is required for sustainability	
Allan Jones asks whether public attitudes to preparedness have changed, influenced by fear that is heightened by media and social media coverage		<b>DRR technology</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Learning in safety</b> .....	<b>16</b>	Vladimir Kuvshinov describes a network of international monitoring and co-ordination centres	
Brian Dillon says that holistic contingency planning adds immense value to school security and emergency planning		<b>One city's road to resilience</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Disasters and the workplace</b> .....	<b>20</b>	Greater Manchester in the UK has been working with 100 Resilient Cities. Kathy Oldham describes the journey thus far	
Hollis Stambaugh looks at countermeasures for business resilience in the face of floods, fires, active shooters, terrorist attacks and other events		<b>Fakes and truth</b>	
<b>Earthquake response in Iran</b> .....	<b>24</b>	<b>How safe are the products you buy?</b> .....	<b>46</b>
Behrouz Moghadassi analyses the response to the November 12, 2017, tremor that killed more than 800 people		It's a proven fact that the manufacture, sale and distribution of counterfeit goods fund organised criminal entities, including terrorism. Jason Daniels looks at the problem	
<b>Breaking California's wildfire cycle</b> .....	<b>26</b>	<b>Normalising the unthinkable</b> .....	<b>48</b>
Now is the time to see fire management as both a societal and political issue, according to Bill Peterson		Casey Brunelle investigates how the late 19th century term 'fake news' is being exploited by both sides of the political spectrum as a tool of increasingly partisan, zero-sum game politics	
<b>Call for Disasters Inspectorate</b> .....	<b>30</b>	<b>Cutting 'fake news' down to size</b> .....	<b>54</b>
After the Grenfell Tower fire, a formal governmental inspectorate for disasters is overdue in the UK, say Alex Thompson and Helen Turner		Fake news is neither new, nor as widespread as many might believe, according to Alasdair Dick and Kate Rawlins, who say the bigger issue is that of misleading content	
<b>Airport firefighting in Mongolia</b> .....	<b>32</b>	<b>Fake news and the art of war</b> .....	<b>58</b>
Pete McMahon describes recent intensive emergency response training at Khanbumat Airport in Mongolia		With physical objects, the ability to detect fakes is supported by trademarks or testing marks. When it comes to propaganda, there is no such source of truth, says David Stewart	
<b>Arctic SAR in mass rescue ops</b> .....	<b>34</b>		
As sea records continue to be broken, the potential for more incidents in remote polar regions is increasing, explains Martin Boyle			

## People power p8



Katisa | 123rf

## Data loss monitoring p36



Studiom | 123rf

Cover story: Fake news products and the art of manipulation

Cover image: Nick Lowndes

### Mental health & resilience

#### Surviving a terrorist attack ..... 60

Nils Petter Reinholdt presents work carried out with a group of survivors of the Utoya attack in Norway, both in the immediate aftermath and in the longer term

#### Psychological first aid for migrants ..... 64

Emily Hough speaks to Alessandro Dibenedetto, a psychologist with the NGO Emergency, who works with newly-arrived immigrants in Italian ports in Sicily, and who emphasises the importance of early intervention

#### Normal reactions to abnormal events ..... 66

Working on the consequences of trauma in society, especially after conflict and war, is more challenging than working with individuals, according to Larissa Sotieva, who draws on her experience in Ukraine

#### Intergenerational trauma ..... 68

Intergenerational trauma is an unspeakable pandemic that is plaguing many communities, whether in war torn countries or poverty struck urban neighbourhoods. How do we address this? Nadia Elkarra investigates

#### Mental wellbeing in the workplace ..... 72

Charlotte Copeland examines the re-emergence of psychological debriefing as an effective method for mitigating the after-effects of shock and trauma for employees

#### Children and disaster resilience ..... 74

It is vital to talk more about emergency response and resilience with children, who are one of the most under-represented voices in resilience and emergency planning, according to Laurie Gale and Kelsey Smith

### Business & societal resilience

#### Blue whale challenge: Reality or myth? .... 76

Patrick McIlwee investigates the facts and realities of websites that groom and encourage vulnerable youngsters to harm themselves, then post images of the self harm online, exploring whether this phenomenon is fact or fiction

#### Drug abuse: Tackling the source ..... 80

The escalating opioid epidemic in many countries is considered by some to be a clear threat to societal resilience. Lina Kolesnikova looks at how this could be addressed

#### Gender parity in BCM ..... 82

Chloe Demorvsky presents research that looks at the needs, interests and challenges of women in the field of business continuity management

#### Planning to fail? ..... 84

This article by Stuart Hughes illustrates some of the factors that lead to organisations failing to respond to crises successfully

#### Infrastructure crisis warnings ..... 86

Tony Jaques outlines how a number of warning signs were ignored before the 2017 fuel crisis in Auckland, New Zealand

#### Community in disaster response ..... 88

Jay Levinson and Abraham 'Avi' Domb describe an organisation in Israel that makes resources available to responders and disaster victims

### R&D / Technology

#### Innovation awards in Paris ..... 90

CRJ reports on the winners of the inaugural Milipol international innovation awards

#### Machine learning and social media ..... 92

Open source intelligence helped responders in Puerto Rico after two major hurricanes, says Simone Moreau

#### Communications and tribal entities ..... 94

As the First Responder Network deploys its communications across the US, it is eager to help tribal entities benefit from all the system can offer, writes Margaret Gutierrez

### Regulars

#### Diary and events ..... 96

#### Frontline ..... 98

In this issue, you will find news reports of the World Economic Forum's (WEF)

*Global Risks Report 2018*

and the *2018 Allianz Risk*

*Barometer*, which survey

experts and businesses on

what risks concern them most. Both reports note the usual suspects – extreme weather events, natural disasters, cyber attacks, data fraud and terrorism among others.

Landscapes inevitably change over time. Risk topography is no different, with new concerns such as illicit trade, large-scale involuntary migration, new technologies, food crises and disease finding their way into these reports.

Old foes and new... But regular readers of CRJ will already be familiar with these threats.

Very rarely do we get frustrated on CRJ, but a perennial (if, thankfully, relatively rare) irritation is meeting somebody who simply cannot conceptualise why events and factors outside their immediate area of expertise have a direct and material relevance to their work in resilience, preparedness, response or security.

Events inevitably demonstrate how deluded this myopic attitude can be.

Years ago, when researching for the launch of this publication, I got in touch with a number of contacts in this sphere to research the effects climate change might have on their roles. Every single person replied that they envisaged no impact at all. How times have changed.

Opioid addiction; trauma and mental health (whether in the workplace or between generations of societies enduring poverty or conflict); the malevolence of online predators encouraging vulnerable youngsters to self-harm or to hurt others; fakery, fraud, propaganda and misleading news; the shifting acceptable window of political views and how these are being shaped by manipulation – these are all topics in this issue. And they are often entangled with one another; it can be a matter of making connections between seemingly disparate phenomena or events, and extrapolating potential consequences and impacts to get a truly global vision of what could lie over the horizon.

Understanding these linkages and their possible consequences on your business, community or service is imperative. Failure to do so not only implies a lack of vision and planning, but also demonstrates a deep failure to understand and appreciate the intricate, dark kaleidoscope of today's ever-evolving threats and risks.

Emily Hough



### Fake news & propaganda p58



Hi-Story | Alamy Stock

### Social media & self harm p76



Blueananas | 123rf

# Short and long-term perspectives on surviving a terrorist attack



**Nils Petter Reinholdt** presents work with a group of survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Utøya attack, which was reconvened several years afterwards. How did long-term follow up work? In what way did their experiences affect their lives today? What experiences can they share?

**O**n July 22, 2011 Norway was hit by a terrorist attack in which 77 people were killed – nine in a bomb explosion in Oslo’s city centre, and 69 youths shot dead at a political camp on the island of Utøya outside Oslo. As part of multiple follow-up activities, the Norwegian Ombudsman for Children established an expert group with eight adolescents who survived the island attack. Supported by the Ombudsman and a representative for RVTs East (Regional Centre on Violence, Trauma and Suicide prevention), they met every month from November 2011 until June 2012. The young people’s experiences were systematised in a report.

As survivors of a terrorist attack, in addition to being relatives of two of the executed youngsters, these young people had extensive expertise on what assistance children and young people who have experienced a disaster require. The report’s purpose at that time was to provide advice and recommendations on how different

actors (health, school and others) could best assist children and families who had experienced a disaster.

The youths described both positive and negative experiences with support services. Most survivors were offered counselling from a psychologist or the local crisis response team when they got home and this was perceived as supportive. Those who took part in individual and group counselling with other survivors were highly satisfied. The youths were also concerned by the fact that parents and siblings needed support and follow-up. Many families showed a temporary reduction in parental capacity after the trauma, with one member of the expert group saying: “We experienced the terror at first hand, but our parents and siblings were exposed to a trauma as well; something that affected the ones they love most of all. If psychologists or schools are not providing follow-up for the family, the parents have a much harder time.”

The expert group’s advice to the support services is as follows:

- It is crucial that support and follow-up is established early on after the incident;
- If the affected individual or family initially declines an offer for help, it is important to repeat the offer at regularly basis later in the process;
- Individual follow-up, in combination with group therapy, is helpful for many; and
- Support personnel should warn the affected individuals that difficulties with friends could occur.

In December 2016, five-and-a-half years after the terrorist attack, we gathered the group together once again. We wanted to consider the long-time effects of trauma and systematise their experiences in a new report. How did the long-term follow up work? In what way did their experiences affect their lives today? And what experiences can they share that are useful to society and to those who are going to endure the next disaster?

When we reconvened the youngsters, it was natural to follow up on many of the topics that the first report focussed upon. By organising it this way, we could observe developments over time. It was interesting to see how some themes had become less relevant, while other topics, such as the support of the youth and the families,

were as relevant today as they had been five years ago. In addition, some feelings and experiences had grown over time.

What follows is a summary of the findings six years after the terrorist attack.

■ **Consequences on personality:** The young people all agreed that the terrorist act had been significant in their shaping process. Some felt they became more introverted than before; this occurred quite soon after the experience and never went away. At the same time, others believed they had become more outspoken. This shows that personal changes are individual and that it can be difficult to know what is caused by the traumatic experiences, and what is related to other actions in life. One of the youngsters commented: “I feel I matured quickly. A dramatic event that throws you up in the air and when you land, you have gone through an extreme maturation process that your friends have not experienced. I was in another place in life. Maybe, therefore, I became more introverted.”

■ **To turn something negative into positive:** A consequence of the events these youths experienced is that they do not want to waste life on “nonsense,” as one put it. In addition, they want to do something that is good for others and for society. One of the group members spoke about giving something back to society, which looked after her very well after the terrorist attack: “I really want to work for this to not happen again. The trivial things are not important anymore. I would rather spend time on the big issues.”

## Empathy & strong reactions

The fact that the youths react very strongly when they hear about terrorist attacks today is because they relate to the experiences at Utøya. One girl in the group also has strong reactions when she sees people fleeing their homes, as has occurred during the refugee crisis: “When I watch TV from Syria, I feel their fear so deeply, and they have no one to come home to. When I returned from the island alive, the entire nation stood ready to help.”

■ **Trauma reactions:** Several of those in the group struggled with different post-traumatic reactions. One has memory problems and cannot remember from one day to another. Others are more sensitive and struggle when it comes to personal relations, especially when it comes to new relationships. All the youngsters are studying, but some still struggle with concentration, which affects their progression. This means that they cannot access further student loans and might run into financial problems. A common issue was also a tendency among the youngsters to be rather strict on their own behalf, putting great demands upon themselves. As one says, it is: “Pretty amazing how strict you are against yourself. If I had not made such great demands of myself, I would have felt a lot better.”

■ **Feeling angry:** The first report published in 2012 revealed that it was difficult for the youths suppress their own aggression, as this was in big contrast to the wider society’s response to these acts of terror, which were more focussed on love and tolerance, not hatred. This has been a problem

for other survivors from Utøya and at gatherings for survivors, several say they still struggle with this. In retrospect, the wider community response could have contributed to many of the young people suppressing

## Several struggled with different post-traumatic reactions

their own anger and rage. To feel hatred and anger after being exposed to extreme evil is a natural feeling that needs to be expressed, especially for those directly affected.

■ **Contact person and continuity of care:** Several of the youngsters call for guidance as to what kind of help they are entitled to, and where they can turn to get it. The contact person from the municipality was supposed to cover parts of this assignment. Based on what we now know, it would have been advisable to take a more long-term perspective on the follow-up, defining what tasks could be associated with such a function. As stated in the report, no advanced therapeutic interventions or measures were sought. It is possible to assist a whole family with guidance on how a crisis can affect the individual family members and the dynamics between them. Many of those involved would have benefitted from advice and guidance related to school and job functions.

■ **Family perspective:** Individual family members can be at various stages in the recovery process after the

event and thus have different needs. Parents need time and space to process their own emotions to support their children effectively in managing theirs. Adults supporting children and adolescents require knowledge about normal crisis reactions, and techniques to calm themselves, so they can support their children. Said one parent: “Losing her has almost destroyed our family. We have struggled with anger, post-traumatic stress and social isolation”.

It can be challenging to watch and support children’s needs, for parents struggling with their own emotions. One of the important learning points when evaluating the psychosocial follow-up after the terrorist events was that not enough attention was paid to the family perspective.

■ **Grief among bereaved friends:** This has not been extensively studied or sufficiently prioritised in the follow-up after traumatic deaths. The Centre for Crisis Psychology in Norway performed in-depth interviews of young adults who lost a close friend in the 2011 terror attacks. It found that friends felt left out of the circle of bereaved; their grief was overlooked and many did not receive the support they required. The study showed that 68 per cent of close friends needed help from the public health system, but only half of them actually received support. Many friends felt they were not recognised as being bereaved and they had to seek help on their own initiative. Of those who were offered assistance, several felt their grief was not understood or taken seriously enough.

The group facilitators also have a number of reflections, as these youngsters have been our advisors through their violent experiences during and after a terrorist act. It is easy to see that the advice they give is important to us as a society. They make us better equipped to adapt our actions and our systems to violent actions. The advice provided by these young people first in 2012, and then in 2017, coincides largely with what research evaluating psychosocial care after Utøya shows. It is important to listen to those directly affected by disasters as their contribution is crucial in planning measures for future crises, in addition to what we learn through research and evaluations.

All of the young people found the group work important to them. They described how the event and subsequent varied follow-up became more manageable when they could discuss these openly. The concept of empowerment deals

*The Centre for Crisis Psychology worked with groups of survivors immediately after the attacks, then followed up on the group several years later*

RVTS East



with how the individual empowers him/herself by defining his or her challenges and actively seeking solutions. They find explanations together and discuss how to tackle future challenges, both individually and as members of society.

## Learning resilience

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of traumatic events, in other words, the ability to ‘bounce back’ from difficult experiences. Research has shown that people commonly demonstrate resilience after experiencing terror attacks and adversity. This is ordinary, not extraordinary. Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learnt by, and developed in, anyone.

A combination of factors contributes to resilience.

Many studies show that the primary factor is having caring and supportive relationships within and outside the family. Several additional factors are associated with resilience, including:

- The capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out;
- A positive view of oneself and confidence in one’s strengths and abilities;
- Skills in communication and problem solving; and
- The capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses.

American professor in clinical psychology, George Bonanno, is a pioneering researcher in the field of bereavement and trauma. His theory of resilience is based on humans possessing the same fundamental stress-response system developed over the years, which we share with other animals. Most people are good at using that system to deal with stress. Still, there are huge variations from individual to individual.

One of the central elements of resilience, Bonanno found, is that of perception: Do you conceptualise an event as traumatic, or as an opportunity to learn and grow? He says: “Events are not traumatic until we experience them as traumatic,” and has defined the term – potentially traumatic event (PTE) – which he argues is more accurate. Every frightening event, no matter how negative it might seem from the sidelines, has the potential to be traumatic – or not – to the person experiencing it.

To quote one of the young people: “A crisis or disaster is always personal. My experience is that it is possible to live a good life after such events. You must have good people around you, and you must accept that the crisis has occurred. When I realised that, the latter is not the same as accepting, or attempting to forget, it became possible to move on. Acceptance is for me to accept the feelings of sorrow, missing someone you loved, fear and anger, without thinking of it as something negative or weakness. It is actually completely necessary and natural. It is about living with these experiences, for good and for bad. Sometimes it is difficult. Other times, I have experienced that my experiences may help others.

“There are many tips on how to best live in the aftermath of an experienced crisis. In summary, I have learned that this is the most important: Stay together with others, try to accept help you are offered, prioritise to get enough food and sleep, stay somewhere you have previously felt safe, be honest, do not be too strict with yourself. I found this ground-breaking to be able to take back the control, the safety and safety in my life. Everything else comes afterwards.”

CRI



The memorial to those who lost their lives on Utoya island

Robert Maldeno | CC Flickr

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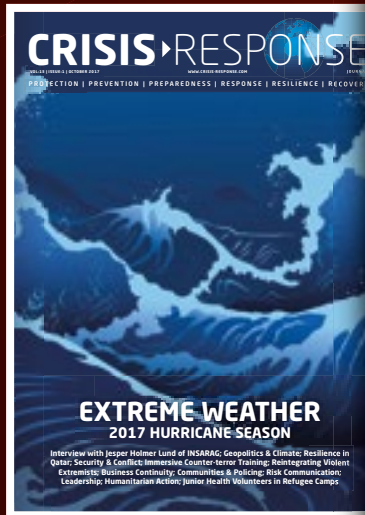
**NILS PETER REINHOLDT** is a psychiatric nurse and holds a Master's degree from Oslo University. He has worked with crises intervention and disaster management at local, regional and national levels for the last 20 years, including a wide range of follow-up activities after the terror acts in Norway in 2011. He also has extensive international experience, especially from projects in Eastern Europe.

RVTS East is now piloting a new Crisis Leadership Academy, which aims to develop crisis leaders of the future. The academy is designed around the cutting-edge RVTS web-based training portal ([psbs.no](http://psbs.no) – see CRJ 12:3). A key resource in development and implementation of this concept is the London-based member of CRJ Editorial Advisory Panel, Robert McAlister. The Academy is focusing on promoting crisis soft skills and the emotional intelligence of the trainees, through increased self-awareness: to support positive group dynamics and critical thinking processes

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