

Reactions, attitudes and media consumption in the aftermath of terror

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Introduction

Most studies on reactions after terrorist attacks focus mainly on reactions of the direct targets of the terrorist attacks and their relatives and reactions of people directly witnessing the terror (rescuers, journalists, etc.). However, by their actions terrorists intend to frighten the whole population and by fear achieve their political, religious or ideological aims. Studies have shown that general population is indeed impacted by terror, but not necessarily in the way which terrorists intended. There is also a significant individual variation in the reactions on terror. The reactions of the Norwegian population after 22.7. are summarized by Thoresen, Aakvaag, Wentzel-Larsen, Dyb &

Objective

In the current study, we focus on:

- the relationship between the amount of media use and the intensity of reactions after 22.7.
- the relationship between the intensity of reactions and attitudes towards security measures and freedom of speech

Method

A representative sample of a Norwegian population aged 16-75 was drawn from the General Population Registry of Norway (N = 6000). All individuals first received a postal invitation letter with information about the study, and they were subsequently phoned and asked to consent to participating. Those who consented were interviewed by telephone 4-5 months after the terrorist attacks. The total sample comprised of 1181 participants, M = 45.9 years, 51.8% women, 48.2% men.

Media use and reactions

In the period 22.7.-24.7., people spent on average 16.5 hours on following news. The amount of time spent was positively related to all types of measured reactions on the terrorist attack. This relationship was particularly strong for reactions during the first weekend (crying, powerlessness, sadness, unrest, a feeling of unreality, fear, anger) and for reactions during the first week after the attack (difficulty to think about other things than the terrorist attack, sadness, unable to perform planned activities, sleeping problems). The relationship between following news and reactions was significant also when controlled for knowing someone who was present at some of the two locations of terrorist attacks (Utøya island, government quarter).

35.7% of the population reported using social media in relation to the terrorist attacks. Using social media in this context was related to many types of reactions, including posttraumatic stress reactions 4 months after the attack.



Table 1: The relationship between news consumption and reactions

	Total amount of time following news 22.7.-24.7.	p
Immediate reactions	0,337	<0,001
First-week reactions	0,378	<0,001
First-week jumpiness	0,189	<0,001
Last-month jumpiness	0,125	<0,001
Posttraumatic stress reactions	0,191	<0,001
Depression and anxiety symptoms	0,135	<0,001

Table 2: The relationship between social media use and reactions

	Used social media in relation to 22.7. M (SD)	Did not use social media in relation to 22.7. M (SD)	p
Immediate reactions	1,98 (0,57)	1,73 (0,63)	<0,001
First-week reactions	0,86 (0,55)	0,67 (0,52)	<0,001
First-week jumpiness	0,41 (0,53)	0,24 (0,43)	<0,001
Last-month jumpiness	0,23 (0,39)	0,19 (0,37)	0,075
Posttraumatic stress reactions	0,30 (0,38)	0,22 (0,31)	<0,001
Depression and anxiety symptoms	0,33 (0,43)	0,24 (0,40)	0,001

Reactions and attitudes

Participants who reacted with increased worry about new terrorist attacks had supported strengthening security measures in all respects, even at own costs. This association was significant also when controlled for gender, age, ethnicity and place of residence.

Table 3: The relationship between reactions and attitudes to security measures

	Personal safety has decreased after 22.7.2011		Concerned about terrorist attacks in Norway in near future		Concerned that new terrorist attack will affect you, your family or	
	r	p	r	p	r	p
Safety measures in Norway should increase, even at cost of my own inconvenience	0,18	<0,001	0,33	<0,001	0,27	<0,001
Norwegian police should start to carry weapons	0,13	<0,001	0,22	<0,001	0,18	<0,001
Access control at Norwegian schools should be introduced	0,20	<0,001	0,26	<0,001	0,23	<0,001
It should be free access towards public buildings, such as the Parliament or the Royal Palace	-0,12	<0,001	-0,19	<0,001	-0,16	<0,001
Norwegian politicians should still walk on streets without visible protection	-0,13	<0,001	-0,13	<0,001	-0,15	<0,001



Table 4: The relationship between reactions and attitudes towards freedom of speech

	Personal safety has decreased after 22.7.2011		Concerned about terrorist attacks in Norway in near future		Concerned that new terrorist attack will affect you, your family or friends	
	r	p	r	p	r	p
All websites should remove statements which promote hatred towards minorities	0,10	<0,001	0,14	<0,001	0,14	<0,001
Hateful statements about immigrants increase danger of terror and violence	0,08	0,011	0,14	<0,001	0,04	0,173
Possibility of writing anonymous comments on the internet should be limited	0,06	0,036	0,124	<0,001	0,08	0,008
Open criticism of Islam increases danger of terror and violence	0,07	0,024	0,09	0,002	0,04	0,206
If one cannot openly criticize immigration politics, the danger of terror and violence increases	0,08	0,012	0,16	<0,001	0,06	0,039
Everyone should have the right to publicly express their opinions, including extreme points of view	-0,10	0,001	-0,12	<0,001	-0,11	<0,001
Any form of criticism of religions should be allowed, even if some can get offended	-0,05	0,102	-0,12	<0,001	-0,14	<0,001

Conclusions

- Extensive following news on the terrorist attack and use of social media in relation to 22.7. related to more intensive reactions, both immediately after the attack and also months later.
- Participants who became worried about future terrorist attacks held attitudes supporting strengthening security measures and limiting freedom of speech.

References

Thoresen, S., Aakvaag, H. F., Wentzel-Larsen, T., Dyb, G., & Hjemdal, O. K. (2012). The day Norway cried: Proximity and distress in Norwegian citizens following the 22nd July 2011 terrorist attacks in Oslo and on Utøya Island. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 3.