



# Testimonials: Involving victims/survivors of terrorism in P/CVE

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Practitioners



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## Introduction

**Involving victims/survivors of terrorism in the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) can be extremely valuable.** This paper addresses a range of **opportunities for and challenges** to the participation of victims/survivors in P/CVE. A set of concrete recommendations to be employed in future work with victims/survivors are provided to support organisations and institutions, as well as practitioners, and inform them about the **high value of victims'/survivors' contribution to P/CVE.**

The primary audience for this paper is organisations within the P/CVE sector that (wish to) engage with victims/survivors of terrorism. Although aware of the high value of the victims'/survivors' voices, practitioners working in P/CVE have been rather cautious about involving victims/survivors in their work due to **the lack of know-how** and specific concerns such as their **potential re-traumatisation.** This paper aims to fill in these gaps in knowledge and assist organisations in this regard. The foremost priority of P/CVE efforts, including victims'/survivors' voices, remains the victims/survivors, their well-being, and their sense of ease with the entire process in the lead-up to, and during, the sharing of their experiences and expertise.

**Victims/survivors are involuntary experts of terrorism,** as they have first-hand knowledge of a wide range of consequences that come with the victimising experience. Relying on their experience, the P/CVE strategies offer authentic, truthful and undeniable proof of the harmful effects that violence produces, on both individual and societal levels. Not all victims/survivors may wish to participate in P/CVE and their decision should be respected. For those who choose to be involved and wish to develop expertise in victims' rights and/or P/CVE, support should be provided. It is important to ensure that their participation does not negatively impact their coping or healing process.

Successful P/CVE relies upon a holistic approach that involves engagement with multiple stakeholders across an array of different sectors, including government, civil society, the media, academia, and regional and international institutions. Victims/survivors of terrorism have an important role in P/CVE efforts as they provide **a unique perspective** on the concept of violent extremism that they have been directly confronted with. Their voices can play an important role in P/CVE.

Finally, it is critical to reflect on **gender perspectives and P/CVE challenges.** There is a need for a gender-sensitive approach to P/CVE to benefit from complementary perspectives and experiences on violent extremism and ways to counter it. Outreach strategies, in particular, should be more mindful of the gendered representation of victims to avoid barriers that directly contribute to exacerbating vulnerabilities and allow for more meaningful inclusion.

## The value victims/survivors add to the P/CVE sector and the limits concerning their engagement

### The added value of victims/survivors for the P/CVE sector

Victims/survivors are **involuntary experts in terrorism and add value to all P/CVE efforts**. The motivations of victims/survivors for engaging in P/CVE work range from truth- and justice-seeking efforts to pleas to bring about change, raise awareness and prevent future cultures of violence. For many victims and survivors, the P/CVE work is also part of personal trauma elaboration and meaning-making about the loss and endured consequences of violence. As such, P/CVE-related work has some capacity to support one's dealing with the trauma by giving it a "positive" purpose. By engaging in P/CVE some victims/survivors find comfort in providing peer-to-peer support to other victims/survivors, their family members, or persons and communities affected by new acts of terrorism.

One of the main values assigned to the P/CVE work of victims/survivors is **to keep the memory alive** and therefore **bear historical witness** to the watershed moments in local/national/regional history. P/CVE outreach activities rely on communicating and disseminating victims'/survivors' experiences to diminish the risk of recruitment into violent extremist groups. Through the engagement of victims/survivors, it is expected that the individuals at risk familiarise themselves first-hand with the devastating repercussions of acts of terrorism and become dissuaded by understanding the serious consequences of violence. Showing that anybody could become a victim/survivor of terrorism, victims/survivors contribute to rehumanising the "numbers" in the news by **putting faces to faceless and names to nameless individuals**.

Victim/survivor-focused P/CVE programmes and initiatives aim at defending the **values** of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights. These programmes and initiatives offer platforms and spaces for victims and survivors to share their experiences and voice their concerns. Another approach, explored by governments and international organisations, consists of their participation in specific projects to raise awareness on violent extremism and its consequences in, for example, schools or prisons. All in all, these initiatives aim at better understanding the effects and consequences of violent extremism, thus supporting the consciousness of its horror and resulting in P/CVE **to the benefit of broad (society) and specifically targeted audiences (e.g. youth)**. Victims and survivors are, in these endeavours, largely supported by their associations.

### Engagement of victims/survivors in P/CVE efforts

**Victim organisations are key facilitators of effective and meaningful engagement of victims/survivors in P/CVE work.** While not all organisations directly engage with P/CVE strategies, they are to a certain extent concerned with P/CVE efforts. For instance, all organisations that engage in memorialisation processes in an attempt to commemorate preserve the memory and draw lessons from painful experiences that can inform the public. Through keeping the memory alive, victim organisations contribute to broad objectives of P/CVE such as "awareness raising" and to that end make use of victims'/survivors' voices. The victim organisations are in a privileged, "gatekeeper" position concerning the narratives and meanings assigned to the memorialisation process. Moreover, they can discuss the possibility of delivering the victim's/survivor's testimonial in emphatic, direct contact with the victim/survivor — considering his or her personal situation.

**Memorialisation** can be an efficient support to the P/CVE effort. Memorialisation is key to public recognition and acknowledgement of the experiences of victims/survivors, yet the process of attributing meanings to remembrance and creating successful memorialisation strategies is not without challenges. A normative ideal is a memorialisation approach that espouses both a **private and public dimension of remembrance**,

**reconciling the memorial needs of victims and survivors and society as a whole** <sup>(1)</sup>. In order to bridge such an existing gap and put memorialisation in service of P/CVE:

- the memorial needs of victims/survivors must be recognised by the state and society;
- the voices of the victims/survivors should be integrated into P/CVE efforts;
- victims/survivors need to foster and maintain ownership of their narratives and experiences; and
- it is important to reconcile the private and public dimensions of remembrance.

Not all victims/survivors engage directly in the work of organisations, nevertheless, their witness-bearing and coping with the consequences of violence can still inspire social action and bring about positive change. Some victims/survivors might feel uncomfortable in revealing their suffering in public spaces and artistic approaches can represent a privileged tool to share experiences and tailored P/CVE messages. **Art and culture** entail great potential concerning victims/survivors of terrorism in terms of healing and commemoration as they overcome the limits of logic and verbalisation and foster emotional connections. Cultural and artistic approaches can reach society more rapidly and broadly by virtue of their nature, accessibility and enjoyability: artworks represent a privileged tool for victims/survivors of terrorism to elaborate tailored P/CVE messages and spread them through a larger audience.

## The value of victims'/survivors' testimonials in P/CVE approaches

Victims'/survivors' testimonials have a manifold purpose. Testimonial evidence as an oral or written statement of the victims/survivors is a critical element to progress in the **criminal investigation**. In judicial proceedings, the testimonials have a witness-bearing quality that can attest to the culpability of the perpetrator of a crime, establish facts, and support the quest for truth and justice. Aside from the witness-bearing quality of such testimonials, there are several different meanings that victims/survivors themselves assign to testimonials as well as the uses these can have. Testimonials can increase awareness of the violence suffered, and inspire empathy and a positive change for the affected communities.

The role given to testimonials and their presumed effects can be quite different for those who provide and receive them <sup>(2)</sup>. The motives behind giving and receiving a testimonial can be patently different, with outcomes that are hard to measure or even predict. However, the link between the sender (victim/survivor) and receiver (audience) of a testimonial is a message that is travelling across. For that message to reach its destination, it is crucial to have a certain **match between the profile of a person who gives a testimonial and those who receive it**. That match is determined, for example, by suitability in terms of age, social and cultural characteristics, gender, expectations or even a trauma suffered. Determining the right target audience and setting and deciding which victims/survivors and other credible voices are ready to engage are key considerations to ensure meaningful participation and impact of all stakeholders involved in the process.

Schools, prisons and the online world are three arenas where P/CVE programmes use testimonials. Anyone in any of these settings may become a focus of radicalisation. As such, prevention is key. Preventing future cultures of violence by stimulating discussion and promoting democratic values is reflected also in memorialisation. Fostering citizens' participation in memorialisation initiatives, for example, in commemorations, should be made a key priority of any P/CVE strategy that seeks to raise importance on the consequences that violent extremisms, including terrorism, have on societies.

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<sup>(1)</sup> Milošević & RAN, 2022: [Incorporating memorial needs of victims and survivors in P/CVE efforts](#)

<sup>(2)</sup> Milošević & Truc, 2021: [\(Un\)shared memory: European Parliament and EU Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism](#), p. 15.

## The value of testimonials for victims/survivors

The victims'/survivors' experience is pertinent not only to the **personal elaboration of victimisation and trauma** suffered. It can also be a highly valuable resource in **highlighting the effects of terrorism on individuals, communities and society itself**. Testimonials can be used to signal positive resilience, prevent further radicalisation and convince people to reject violence <sup>(3)</sup>. In addition, private memories of victimisation have a specific **historical value** as they seep into collective memory: on local, national and regional levels.

Some victims/survivors of terrorism do experience the need for collecting, recording and distributing their testimonials as a way of a heritage-making process aiming at keeping the memory alive. By choosing to share their private stories and experiences, the victims and survivors put significant effort into raising awareness of the perils and consequences of terrorism. Bearing historical testimonials and putting testimonials in service of, for example, museums is crucial for **remembrance**, becoming a **collective act of sharing, listening to and reflecting upon personal experiences of victimisation**.

Reaching out and being heard through sharing of personal experiences can be beneficial to P/CVE efforts. Inspiring understanding of the experiences of victims/survivors is essential in all efforts of preventing and countering future cultures of violence. Receiving an empathic testimonial and participating jointly in commemorative rituals can better sustain mutual understanding. To a certain extent, it can also be “transformative” since it humanises the “abstract” victim/survivor and triggers self-reflection and identification with others' traumatic experiences.

## The value of victims'/survivors' testimonials for P/CVE

Despite the often assumed linear association between revealing and healing, telling, and hearing to reaffirm the rule of law and help prevent future cultures of violence, we still know little of the effectiveness of testimonials in the prevention of terrorism <sup>(4)</sup>. However, **testimonials from victims/survivors of terrorism are impactful, and a high-value resource that can convey a powerful narrative to dissuade, prevent and counter violent extremism**. Testimonials of those who are **ready and willing to share** their experience to support the P/CVE effort need to be tied to a strategic approach and linked with related issues such as civic education, history and critical thinking <sup>(5)</sup>.

**The impactfulness (rather than effectiveness) of testimonials** is dependent upon several factors, as illustrated in the table below.

### The impactfulness of testimonials given by victims

The Planning Guide
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the testimonial-giver himself/herself</li> <li>b) the existence of a clear message to convey</li> <li>c) the choice of a medium</li> <li>d) the goal</li> <li>e) the audience</li> <li>f) the desired effect</li> </ul>

Those organisations or institutions using the testimonials should be aware of **the local context** and use channels of communication depending on specificities related to tailoring testimonials to the specific situation. For testimonials to be impactful, those giving testimonials must also be aware of the objective of the action,

<sup>(3)</sup> See McGowan, 2022: [Victims of political violence and terrorism: making up resilient survivors](#)

<sup>(4)</sup> Milošević & Truc, 2021: [\(Un\)shared memory: European Parliament and EU Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism](#), p. 159.

<sup>(5)</sup> See Samuel, 2022: [Education in preventing and countering violent extremism \(P/CVE\) among the youth](#)



able to emotionally sustain and manage interactions with audiences, and above all be aware of their motives and possible effects that such testimonial-giving can have on them.

Using *the planning guide* (the table above) in a group exercise <sup>(6)</sup> with participants across a wide range of stakeholders (victims/survivors, organisations, museums, psychologists and local authorities) suggests some of the key elements of what constitutes an impactful testimonial:

a) The testimonial-giver himself/herself should be **aware and critical of his/her motives/objectives** of sharing their testimonial, and sufficiently **emotionally stable** to share their story publicly and to engage with an audience. Particularly vulnerable categories of testimonial-givers are more impactful speakers (e.g. persons who bear visible consequences of violence; youngsters; women). General and specific relatability to the target audience is advantageous (e.g. victims/survivors with ties to the region or area) to the overall success of the testimonial given.

b) The existence of a clear message to convey: the message that comes across must be **“catchy”**, **simple and memorable**. It should communicate a positive message (not only concerning overcoming hardship but also for society as a whole).

c) The choice of a medium: in-person, small groups of listeners facilitate better interaction and are more easily managed should tensions occur. **Face-to-face testimonials** allow for personal exchanges with the audience and are particularly effective with younger people. However, the message of the testimonial reaches only a limited number of people. Testimonials included in **social media messages or documentaries** can reach a larger audience and can therefore have a greater impact on society. However, this approach does limit the ability to tailor the message to the specific audience, and there is no opportunity for the audience to interact with the speaker and their story.

d) The goal: good storytelling ability can engage audiences, yet a **convincing and authentic story** can solicit critical thinking and support P/CVE efforts and an emotional reaction. A logical link between the goals and a good understanding of the local context is key and highlights **the importance of the role of subject matter experts** in planning and implementing outreach activities.

e) The audience: **knowing the audience** (their values, needs and interests) can help craft the message more effectively. Open and constructive engagement with the audience implies also protecting them from feeling stigmatised, which is counterproductive for the overall success of the testimonials.

f) The desired effect: the broad and specific objectives of the planned outreach initiatives involving victims'/survivors' testimonials are multiple and often compounded. Outreach initiatives aim at, for example, supporting awareness of the P/CVE objectives, promoting cultures of tolerance or relating to educational activities. Those planning to work with victims'/survivors' testimonials should be mindful of **the emotional impact** that the testimonials produce both on the testimonial-givers and testimonial-receivers. Testimonials are genuine narrations and are most impactful when they result in a produced emotional response. Victims/survivors might inspire empathy in relation to the vulnerable situation they lived through or are living through. This can positively affect the testimonial and contribute to critical thinking, rejection of cultures of violence and promotion of a culture of solidarity instead.

Time and temporality affect victimhood experience and are crucial to impactful testimonials and victim/survivor readiness should be individually assessed. It should be clear to the speaker that pulling out at any moment is allowed, and that the speaker is well prepared, his/her expectations realistic and the risks well explained. The victim associations can be a reliable source to assure access to victims/survivors as they can support, prepare and manage the expectations of all stakeholders involved. A quality stakeholder analysis should be mindful of measures to be taken to ensure equal access to and the active participation of

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<sup>(6)</sup> RAN VoT meeting Nice (France), 29-30 September 2022. Within a randomised sample of the meeting's participants, a group exercise was conducted (Dr Ana Milošević) on the best practices including the V/SoT in P/CVE work. The objective was to understand better what constitutes a “high quality” testimonial and which indicators can help us measure the impact of a testimonial.

men, women and individuals with diverse gender identities in the outreach activity. For instance, consider the time and location of activities at times when anyone can attend (before or after work hours, not at night, not during prayer times, etc.).

## Victim/survivor participation in the P/CVE sector: Specific challenges

The strategy of engaging victims/survivors in the P/CVE sector should be mindful of the wide array of challenges they face. The key consideration for the meaningful participation of victims and survivors is **the prevention of further traumatisation** <sup>(7)</sup>. Secondary victimisation is a well-documented occurrence that affects many victims/survivors. Ensuring the well-being and mental health of victims/survivors when involving them in P/CVE efforts should be made a priority.

The P/CVE strategies that are inclusive of victims/survivors should adopt suitable **risk prevention and mitigation procedures** — a set of ethical considerations and preventive measures to avoid the risk of victims/survivors feeling re-victimised as a result of interactions with institutions or individuals they meet in the wake of the attacks they experienced. Keeping ownership of one's process of dealing with the consequences of violence should be maintained, at all times, also respecting the right of victims/survivors to maintain anonymity and silence and easily opt out from initiatives they do not feel at ease with. In terms of assessing and securing victim/survivor participation, practitioners should be mindful of the time elapsed since the victimisation experience occurred. Meaningful participation of victims/survivors should consider personal victimisation experience and readiness to engage, expectations and their eventual roles in P/CVE.

## Risk prevention and mitigation procedures

Participating in P/CVE efforts is **a novel experience for most victims/survivors**. The risk analysis should first assess the (realistic) expectations of the victims/survivors concerning the work in the P/CVE initiatives. Further, the specificities of what such a role may entail should be discussed and assessed, including availability for providing testimonials. Testimonials can put a lot of emotional strain on victims/survivors to publicly engage with the past and its consequences, sometimes setting back their progress in elaborating trauma. While it is a gratifying and valuable experience for some, it can also contribute to the amplification of negative effects, for example feeling instrumentalised by political agendas or feeling pressure to conform with expected behaviours such as forgiving those who did them harm before they are personally ready to. **Professional guidance and good practices are necessary as the risks are extremely high that victims'/survivors' participation in P/CVE will leave traces for the future inducing stigmatisation. This should be discussed, analysed and continuously followed up with the victim/survivor.**

The risks of secondary traumatisation in testimonial-giving should be highlighted by practitioners. Target audiences might not always be open to listening nor empathic towards victims/survivors but challenging, indifferent or even hostile towards them. In the contexts where work with former terrorists is envisaged, these risks are multiplied and should be cautiously analysed and assessed with scrutiny. Risk prevention approaches and mitigation procedures must take ethical considerations on board, such as protection of privacy and providing safeguards to enable victims/survivors to voluntarily opt in/out of certain programmes and initiatives while at all times retaining ownership of their own story. Peer-to-peer support can be an important tool to contain and manage tensions that might arise during the implementation of the outreach initiatives. **Yet, professional consultation and guidance of the victim/survivor remain a necessity.**

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<sup>(7)</sup> See for example, Hammar et al., 2023: [Inhibitory control as possible risk and/or resilience factor for the development of trauma related symptoms—a study of the Utøya terror attack survivors](#)

## Time and victimhood

The relationship between time and victimhood is not measured and viewed as linear, having a beginning (trauma) and an end (healing, or other forms of trauma resolution), but rather as spiral. Victimhood is characterised by different and evolving temporal dimensions.

It is not ideal to involve victims and survivors in P/CVE initiatives in the immediate aftermath of traumatic events: while victims/survivors of more recent incidents might also be willing to participate in P/CVE, such cases should be analysed individually to assess the perils of re-traumatisation and to support victims'/survivors' better and more timely recovery from a traumatic experience. In addition, the consequences of past violence can continue to impact victims'/survivors' lives and can be exacerbated by contemporary experiences of victimisation. Witnessing or even hearing about new terror attacks can rewind the clock on a victim's/survivor's personal progress of recovery.

## Media portrayals

Many factors such as age, gender and the existence of previous trauma affect the victimisation experience and challenges posed by the P/CVE engagement and its value for the victim/survivor. The role and work of media, while being critical, might prove valuable in influencing **a more mindful approach to working with and talking about the victims/survivors** <sup>(8)</sup>. The overall planning and implementation of outreach activities with victims/survivors can benefit from the inclusion of mental health professionals and trauma experts. In particular, support should be provided (or at least advanced) to the victims/survivors to support the preparation and delivery of testimonials. Media professionals (e.g. journalists) and communication experts can equally support victims/survivors in preparing their testimonials with professional advice. Some of the victims/survivors emphasise that reporting trauma needs to be done in “an appropriate way” and what is “appropriate” differs in the immediate aftermath, mid to long term. Mid to long term, victims/survivors argue that both the state and media often have a very static image of the victim/survivor and an extensive focus on the perpetrators. The challenge here is to raise awareness among media representatives about the value that a different kind of portrayal of victims/survivors can have for these individuals, to be seen and heard by society and made part of that society again.

The role of media in supporting P/CVE strategies is important and reliant upon **“appropriate” media portrayals of the victims/survivors** that are mindful of their needs: for empowerment, to be respected, to testify, to be seen and heard, to receive empathy and to make sense of their experiences <sup>(9)</sup>. Factors affecting victims'/survivors' experiences with media relate largely to the work ethic and experience of a journalist in dealing with vulnerable populations, as well as the type and quality of the medium. The journalist is also part of the story — in how she/he interviews, frames the questions, relates to the victim/survivor and shapes the outcome as well as the expectations of what the interviewee wants to get from or achieve with the interview. Victims/survivors highlight the importance of projecting “a true image” of themselves. They are concerned if the journalist is portraying them through **all aspects of their identity, not only through their victimhood and vulnerability** that are rendered sensationalist.

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<sup>(8)</sup> See for example, UNESCO, 2017: [Terrorism and the Media. A Handbook for Journalists](#)

<sup>(9)</sup> Milošević & RAN, 2022: [Incorporating memorial needs of victims and survivors in P/CVE efforts](#)

## Needs and challenges faced by young victims/survivors of terrorism in the P/CVE sector

**P/CVE work can be challenging for any person** (professional or not), and young victims and survivors are particularly vulnerable. Age is an important factor that can significantly impact the extent of the consequences of terrorism. Many young people are among the direct victims/survivors of terror attacks. In addition, the young are also indirect victims/survivors affected when losing parents, siblings or family members. As a vulnerable population, young people's engagement in the P/CVE sector is of particular importance. A general approach to young victims and survivors is bidirectional: it relates to **making the young part of the P/CVE initiatives** and at the same time **making them beneficiaries of P/CVE efforts**. Successful approaches that are aimed at young people are based on the creation of a peer community, without singling out the "victim/survivor" part of the youngsters' identity as their core. Such approaches include organised activities and camps, either for the whole family or only the youth.

As active contributors to the P/CVE initiatives, young people and their stories might resonate better with certain target groups (such as school children). In addition, as youth often represent innocence, their stories and work in P/CVE might be widely perceived as more genuine and can contribute to the creation of hope in society. However, young victims/survivors are more vulnerable and need more extensive support than adult victims/survivors.

Young victims/survivors should receive adequate support when it comes to shaping their identity, learning that being a victim/survivor is not their defining attribute. Their eventual participation in P/CVE is arbitrary yet they should be placed in a condition to make an informed decision on the terms of their engagement. The legal guardians, caretakers and/or members of victim organisations can inform and support the young victim/survivor in discussing and deciding about their **needs, expectations and challenges pertaining to the P/CVE work** and their specific roles in it, including risk assessment and long-term consequences. However, it must be acknowledged that the definition of professional standards in providing support to victims/survivors has not yet been fully developed. This paper and the guidelines that will follow are contributing to addressing this gap.

## P/CVE as a viable career path for victims/survivors

The field of P/CVE is very specialised, with professionals developing a great deal of expertise in specific topical areas, particularly in assisting different types of victims/survivors or working within government-based programmes. Within the sector, victims/survivors assume a diversity of roles grounding **their expertise in their own experience** to assist in and count in shaping the needs, objectives, results and impact of P/CVE strategies and initiatives. The diversity of organisations and individuals that serve victims contributes to the emergence of a **victim–expert profession** and its further diversification in topical areas of, for example, advocacy for victims' rights, community crisis response, crisis counselling and victim/survivor assistance.

On the one hand, the professionalisation of the victim–expert roles within the P/CVE sector is grounded in the **demands of the sector to engage victims/survivors as highly credible sources** able to serve as advocates of violence prevention. On the other, the **proliferation and professionalisation of victim organisations** work hand in hand to assure organisations' competitiveness, relevance and long-term sustainability. The victim organisations appear in reaction to a specific terrorist attack, yet most organisations disappear over time as they tend to lose support or public interest. The professionalisation of their activities and overall work, including financial management as a major challenge for the financing and survival of their activities, can enhance membership levels, and contribute to the impact and activities offered, donations and access to public funding.

A variety of skills are necessary to enhance **the ability of victims/survivors as P/CVE practitioners** to do their jobs well, make a difference in the lives of other traumatised victims/survivors, and collaborate with other organisations and the community. For instance, *public speaking* skills in addressing small and large

groups in order to provide information and resources about, and encouragement to support, victim assistance initiatives is a basic attribute. Yet, the victims'/survivors' duties as experts working within the P/CVE sector often extend far beyond his/her job title and duty statements. It is important to ensure that these individuals are not publicly "outed" as victims/survivors and that their participation does not negatively impact their healing process.

## Recommendations

### Victim/survivor participation in the P/CVE sector

- Key to meaningful participation of victims/survivors is ensuring an effective impact where it is most needed, after the physical and psychological well-being of the victims/survivors is ensured.
- Ensuring the meaningful participation of victims and survivors starts with the **prevention of further traumatisation**.
- Participation in a P/CVE activity should not be an additional source of harm for a victim/survivor, nor, by extension, an action resulting in **secondary victimisation**. These can be compounded by factors such as age. Minors and the elderly are particularly vulnerable, and if it is deemed that the victim's/survivor's participation in P/CVE efforts might have negative consequences, it should not be implemented.
- **Access to victims/survivors:** Not all victims/survivors are members of victim associations, and not all victims/survivors wish to directly engage in the P/CVE effort. While assessing and securing victim/survivor participation, practitioners should be mindful of the time elapsed since the victimisation experience occurred. Practitioners should prioritise victims and survivors who had sufficient time (usually years) to engage with their experience as they are generally more accessible and willing to become part of P/CVE initiatives.
- Raise awareness and knowledge on **gender-related dynamics in violent extremism and in P/CVE**. Gender dynamics play a role in radicalisation processes towards violent extremism and terrorism as well as in the attempts to prevent and counter these phenomena. The involvement of victims in P/CVE efforts should, thus, take into consideration the impact of gender considerations on the victims/survivors, in their actions and reactions (i.e. how views of masculinity affect mourning).
- **Risk prevention and mitigation procedures** are a set of ethical considerations and preventive measures to avoid the risk of victims/survivors feeling re-victimised as a result of interactions with institutions or individuals they meet in the wake of the attacks they experienced. For instance, victims/survivors must be treated with compassion and respect for their dignity. All professionals in regular contact with victims/survivors should receive training on victims' rights and be given the appropriate tools to carry out individual needs assessments to determine the needs and status of individual victims/survivors.
- The risk analysis should assess **the (realistic) expectations of the victims/survivors** concerning the work in the P/CVE initiatives.
- Participating in P/CVE efforts is a novel experience for most victims/survivors. The utmost care while approaching new victims/survivors must be taken. **Peer support** can prove very valuable; therefore, **pairing inexperienced victims/survivors with victim-experts** (or victims/survivors with more experience in, for example, giving testimonials) can be advantageous.
- Consider the inclusion of mental health professionals and trauma experts to support victims/survivors in preparing a testimonial. Expert or otherwise professional support should be provided (or at least advanced) to the victims/survivors to aid the preparation and delivery of a testimonial. Media professionals (e.g. journalists) and communication experts can equally support victims/survivors in preparing their testimonials with professional advice.
- The risks of **secondary traumatisation in testimonial-giving** should be highlighted by practitioners. Target audiences might not always be open to listening nor empathic towards the victims/survivors

but challenging, indifferent or even hostile. The presence of expert facilitators can support the management of tensions in that regard. Facilitators can be experienced practitioners or other victims/survivors with more experience in public speaking.

- Mitigation procedures must take **ethical considerations** on board, such as the protection of privacy and providing safeguards to enable victims/survivors to voluntarily opt in/out of certain programmes and initiatives while at all times retaining ownership of their own story.
- The relationship between time and victimhood is **not linear, having a beginning (trauma) and an end (resolution of trauma), but rather a spiral** with prolonged and sometimes unpredictable effects.
- **The issue of recovery and temporality of victimhood** is extremely compounded with time. Witnessing or even hearing about new terror attacks can often rewind the clock on victims'/survivors' personal progress of recovery.
- **Media** representatives should be mindful of the value that a portrayal of victims/survivors can have for these individuals, to be seen and heard by society, and made part of that society again.

### P/CVE as a viable career path for victims/survivors

- Victim/survivor experts are highly valuable assets in P/CVE. Victims/survivors assume a diversity of roles grounding **their expertise in their own experience** to assist in and count in shaping the needs, objectives, results and impact of P/CVE strategies and initiatives.
- Being a victim/survivor does not immediately mean being a P/CVE expert or expert on victim/survivor rights. Some victims/survivors do become experts. However, expert or not, their involvement can always be valuable.

### Considerations on victims'/survivors' testimonials in P/CVE outreach activities

- **Discrepancies** between a testimonial given shortly after the events and another testimonial by the same witness years later are quite common.
- Testimonials given under pressure, and emotional and psychological duress (especially in the immediate aftermath) should be avoided.
- Where possible, victims and survivors should be **adequately prepared and trained** to give testimonials, convey their experiences to different audiences, handle emotions and tackle the psychological costs of talking publicly about their trauma.
- Audiences should be informed before listening to a testimonial, that it is a recollection of personal truth as experienced by the victim/survivor sharing the testimonial.
- Sharing graphic **images** or too many **details** of the attack **can be harmful** to both the audience and other victims/survivors. It also serves to spread fear, which inadvertently plays into the hands of the perpetrator. Both the speaker and the supporting organisation have a responsibility to ensure that the testimonial does **not have negative consequences**.
- There are challenges related to **generalisations**. For instance, religiously inspired extremist attacks might lead people to believe that all individuals adhering to that religion are extremist or support extremist views; therefore, generalisations should at all times be avoided.
- Framing the story to be conveyed through testimonials should be done carefully to **avoid the imposition of meanings** of both “positive” notions (e.g. resilience-building objectives) and alternatively “negative” emotions such as anger, retribution and a blame game. However, it is important to **encourage non-retaliation** as soon as possible.

- **Every victimisation experience is different.** It is important to emphasise that a victim/survivor has his/her own, unique experience and view and is not representative of all victims/survivors and all experiences.
- **Engendering testimonials:** Incorporating a gender perspective into the situational analysis is an important stage in the design of testimonials to ensure that gender aspects will be reflected in the design (of activities, and indicators). An engendered situation analysis requires sex-disaggregated data and ensures that testimonial-giving incorporates the roles, needs and participation of women, men, girls and boys.

## Further reading

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2. RAN (2022). [Incorporating memorial needs of victims and survivors in P/CVE efforts](#)
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4. UNODC. (2020). *From victims of terrorism to messengers for peace: A strategic approach*. United Nations. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/Victims%20Publications/From\\_Victims\\_of\\_Terrorism\\_to\\_Messengers\\_for\\_Peace\\_-\\_UNODC-ICCT\\_.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/Victims%20Publications/From_Victims_of_Terrorism_to_Messengers_for_Peace_-_UNODC-ICCT_.pdf)

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