



Diverse Perspectives on Mental Health

Impact of 'The Troubles'

Trish:

Where we lived, at night I could hear the bin lids from West Belfast, we'd hear the bin lids going because the hunger strikes were on at the time and the women would come out at night and bang the bin lids in protest.

Narrator:

In many ways Trish is an ordinary citizen who's lived through extraordinary times.

Trish:

A lot of the time it made me feel quite scared and isolated particularly because my husband was working shifts and he was often working away from home quite a bit, so some of the time I would have been totally on my own in the house and of course you would be scared, I mean I can remember it was an old house we'd bought and it creaked at night and when I was on my own in that house, when I heard the creaks I imagined gun men, terrorists, everything coming up my stairs as you do when you are lying on your own in the middle of the night with the bin lids rattling half a mile up the road.

Narrator:

For Trish, and many other people who lived in Belfast, the sectarian violence became a way of life.

Mary:

I think a good example of that for me was the day there was a major incident ...

Narrator:

This is Mary, a mental health worker.

Mary:

... a lot of people were coming back into the area and they were bleeding and there was very high tension, you could have felt it in the air and the fear. Somehow that fear swamped into me, it overwhelmed me in a sense and I remember thinking I need to get home, and I only lived about 7 miles away but the difference would have been amazing and even trying to get out of that area, I had to leave my car behind because they were burning buses and anything that drove through and having this terrible fear, and that was within my own community where I was working.

Narrator:

Joan lived outside the city. But even for her, the background of violence was clearly reflected in her first experience of mental ill-health.

Joan:

Because of the Northern Ireland political situation I knew people were being put out of their home almost daily, out of working class communities like what I lived in, and the day I got ill I misinterpreted something that was written and I thought that I was going to be put out of my house by paramilitaries, so I was misinterpreting things because I was afraid and I was seeing everything in the light of feeling threatened.

Narrator:

Alan now works at a trauma centre in north Belfast. He helps young people whose lives have been affected by the Troubles. But this current role is not the identity he's more publicly known for.

Alan:

I lost my wife in the Shankhill bomb in 1993, murdered by the IRA and my father in law as well and I happened to work on the Shankhill, I was a butcher there and just worked in the next block down from where Sharon was killed, but I lived in North Belfast up in Ballysillen and yet the sort of label that was always attached to me was the 'Shankhill widower', you know so when I meet people now they would say to me you know, 'oh what's it like on the Shankhill now', or they would talk about the Shankhill as if I was from there and I have to tell them, I don't know I am not actually from the Shankhill, but that's the label that is attached and um I've done a lot to turn my life around and to lose that victim tag if you like.

Narrator:

Trish is now a volunteer at a mental health day centre just outside Belfast. From her experience of talking to people there, she's become convinced that her own story is part of a larger picture.

Trish:

I had always regarded my mental ill health as something quite personal to me and my family circumstances and so on, as opposed to a cultural thing. And yet I talked to other people within the centre, being a volunteer I've been here quite a long time, I've talked to a lot of people that have come through here and a lot of them who've lived in hot-spots and have had some really really dreadful dreadful things happen to them and to their families. And I can see that, yes, the troubles have had such a huge huge impact on people, on their lives, on their families, on their mental health, on their view of life, on their expectations, or lack of them. We didn't have any great expectations so I think that does affect the mental health or the mental outlook of us as a people.