

## **The children victims of terrorism**

The terrorist attacks that have occurred in France in recent years have claimed countless victims, inevitably involving a large number of children. They have lost a parent, a brother, a sister, survived scenes of horror or were directly targeted. This article aims to highlight their experiences and analyse their special status in the difficult aftermath of an attack. Through journalistic and personal accounts, the focus is on a particularly sensitive subject in the handling of terrorism in France.

### ***Surviving and grieving children***

In a special article on the subject, France Inter describes these children as "not quite like the others". Indeed, the carefree attitude that often characterises young years has been taken away from many children, starting with those who have directly experienced a terrorist attack. This is the case, for example, of the youngest person present at the Bataclan on the evening of 13 November 2015, a 5-year-old boy. Police officers from the anti-crime brigade (BAC) had the opportunity to testify to this situation during the large-scale trial currently taking place in Paris - the scene of a very young boy who had to be pulled from the pit by covering his eyes after several hours of horror. His mother and grandmother passed away by his side.

Furthermore, the Nice attack in July 2016 is particularly telling in terms of the status of children, as there were many children at the scene. A dozen of them died and about fifty were injured, not to mention the number of children present in the area or having lost a relative. An article in Le Monde reports the words of psychiatry professor Florence Askenazy, who states: "the paediatric population affected, the violence of the attack, with the intention to kill, in a country at peace, made the situation unprecedented".

The specificity of the status of children as victims of terrorism has not escaped the attention of scientists, particularly since 2015, the start of the largest-scale attacks in modern history. Thus, several studies have been carried out to understand the psychological implications of such a trauma in childhood. Neuropsychologist Francis Eustache and historian Denis Peschanski are behind the '13-November' programme, a 12-year scientific study to understand the brain mechanisms of an attack victim. These researchers have understood that children are a specific case - they will therefore be studied separately from adults, which was not obvious at first. Indeed, the researchers told France Bleu that it was a "very complex" subject. The same is happening in Nice, where 378 children are being followed in a study specifically dedicated to them. This is the 14-7 programme set up by the university hospital.

### ***Children as targets of attacks***

In addition to large-scale attacks that inevitably claim victims of all ages, France has experienced terrorist attacks where children were deliberately targeted. In March 2012, Mohammed Merah chose to attack the Ozar Hatorah Jewish school in Toulouse, killing three children aged 3, 6 and 7, and seriously injuring another. Samuel Sandler, who lost his son and two grandchildren, does not understand how the assailant could have attacked such young people and in such a context. On

the back cover of the book he wrote it says: "Samuel Sandler thought that in France no more Jewish children would be killed, that after the horror of the Shoah, his family could finally live in peace". Incomprehensible as it may seem, children are thus directly targeted by terrorism in some cases.

### ***The need for specific support***

The assistance provided to victims of terrorism requires a certain degree of individualisation of the follow-up, and the young age of these victims must therefore be taken into account. The main element specific to the care of children in France is the possibility of becoming a Pupil of the Nation. This status was created in 1917 to protect the hundreds of thousands of orphans following the war. As threats have evolved, terrorism was incorporated into the scheme in 1986 and any person under the age of 21 who is a victim of an act of this type can benefit from this scheme, which is supervised by the National Office for Veterans and Victims of War (ONACVG). This involves administrative, social and human support. Among the actions put in place for these child victims, and this for their entire lives, are financial aid, reserved jobs and support for professional retraining.

On the psychological level, follow-up must also be personalised and adapted to the age and understanding of each individual. Through certain structures, children benefit from specialised care - this is the case, for example, of three psychotherapeutic projects proposed by the French Association of Victims of Terrorism (AfVT), the Mimosa, Papillon and Phoenix Ado projects. These projects provide psychological support in the form of stays in small groups.

Therefore, the status of child victims of terrorism is extremely sensitive and specific, and has unfortunately developed in recent years in France. This status requires special administrative and psychological care.

### ***Links to the articles used***

<https://www.franceinter.fr/justice/pierre-mael-gary-thelma-circee-les-enfants-du-13-novembre>

[https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/14/attentat-de-nice-le-traumatisme-des-enfants\\_5489236\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2019/07/14/attentat-de-nice-le-traumatisme-des-enfants_5489236_3224.html)

<https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/sante-sciences/les-enfants-des-victimes-des-attentats-du-13-novembre-au-coeur-d-une-etude-de-chercheurs-caennais-1605260465>

<https://www.grasset.fr/livres/souviens-toi-de-nos-enfants-9782246815501>

<https://www.europe1.fr/societe/le-pere-et-grand-pere-des-victimes-des-attentats-de-2012-veut-quon-ne-les-oublie-pas-4031519>

[https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/pupilles-de-la-nation-un-droit-unique-au-monde-mais-trop-meconnu-20211006\\_UUW3NJ67WZCXFGG46KQ7JLYISA/](https://www.liberation.fr/societe/police-justice/pupilles-de-la-nation-un-droit-unique-au-monde-mais-trop-meconnu-20211006_UUW3NJ67WZCXFGG46KQ7JLYISA/)

<https://www.onac-vg.fr/votre-situation/victime-dacte-terroriste>