

# Life After Death Row: Post traumatic stress and the story of Philip Takedi

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Post Traumatic Stress  
and the story of Philip Takedi

by

Lloyd Vogelmann, Sharon Lewis & Lauren Segal

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**Lloyd Vogelmann** is a founder and former Director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

**Sharon Lewis** is a former Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

**Lauren Segal** is a former Researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

**Historically, South Africa has had one of the highest rates of judicial executions in the world. In February 1990, President F W de Klerk announced a moratorium on all executions, and three months later, the Death Penalty Act was passed. At present there is a de facto moratorium on executions, although the death sentence continues to be passed. Philip Takedi is a former death row prisoner, whose sentence was overturned. His experience of having lived on death row has had profound effects which have prevailed long after his release. This article explores the long-term effects of being sentenced to death, incarcerated on death row, and then released. Takedi's particular experience and response are illustrative of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and they also**

# highlight the effects of the conditions and experiences of death row.

## Introduction

On October 5, 1987, Philip Takedi<sup>1</sup> was sentenced to death for murder. Takedi then spent two years in a section of Pretoria Central's Maximum Security Prison, commonly known as 'death row'. On November 3, 1989, the Appeal Court overturned Takedi's conviction and he was immediately reprieved. However, Takedi's 770 days on death row will forever have a significant impact on his perceptions of and relations with the world. This article chronicles the passage of this particular death row prisoner from the gallows back into the hubbub of everyday society. It tells of the indelible effects of Takedi's time on death row, and the extent to which the horrors prevail well beyond the confines of the prison cells of Pretoria Central.

Takedi's experience is the story of one individual, but it stands as a poignant example of many others who have suffered a similar fate. His story is especially relevant in view of South Africa's long history of judicial executions. In 1987, South Africa had the third highest incidence of judicial executions in the world. The total for that year was 172 (Amnesty International, 1989), which is an average of one nearly every two days. This alarming number of executions led to numerous anti-death penalty campaigns, the success of which was partly reflected in the reforms announced by President F W de Klerk on 2 February, 1990.

De Klerk's death penalty reforms included a moratorium on all executions, and the establishment of a special committee to investigate the death sentence. As a result of this announcement, South Africa has relinquished its status as a country with one of the highest rates of judicial executions in the world. Five and a half months after De Klerk's announcement, on Friday 27 July 1990, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, or 'Death Penalty Act' was published in the Government Gazette. This new Act introduced procedures for executive and judicial reconsideration whenever the death sentence is passed. It also makes provision for a panel of experts to review the cases of those sentenced to death before the Act was passed.

At present there is a *de facto* moratorium on executions, although the death sentence continues to be passed. In a parliamentary debate in June 1993, a vote was taken to lift the moratorium. However, the Minister of Justice has deemed that this does not mean that the execution process will be reinstated. Although executions could recommence at any stage, it seems unlikely that they will until agreement is reached by the joint negotiating bodies.

Despite the above-mentioned reforms, and the absence of executions since November 1989, those sentenced to death still live under the traumatic conditions of Pretoria Central Prison's death row. More importantly, these reforms do little to alleviate the trauma of those who have spent time on death row but have escaped execution, like Philip Takedi. Through this study, we hope to support the claims that the stresses and symptoms of life on death row persist long after the euphoria of release, and Takedi's experience will be contextualised in terms of the theory of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. This article does not deal comprehensively with the issue

of death row as a violation of basic human rights, in that it constitutes a form of psychological torture and trauma (Amnesty International, 1989);<sup>2</sup> and although the need for appropriate social services will be highlighted, specific interventions will not be explored. These subjects belong to another article.

### Interviews with Takedi and Source Material

Takedi was interviewed by Vogelmann five months after his release. The first interview took place in the home of his maternal aunt, and the second at a hotel in Aliwal North. In total the two interviews were of approximately ten hours' duration. Most of this article is based on the material emanating from these interviews. Other material is drawn from interviews with inmates who were on death row prior to 1990, at the same time as Takedi, and who are now in ordinary prisons, or still on death row. The few clinical practitioners who provide counselling for ex-inmates were also consulted.

Philip Takedi was 21 years old when he received his death sentence. Despite the fact that he awaited trial for 21 months, the death sentence was passed after a court case which lasted only 11 days. Takedi was one of six who were accused of necklacing the son of the mayor of an Eastern Cape township, an incident which was part of a national spate of attacks against black local authorities during the period 1984-1987. Much of the anger directed towards these authorities was the consequence of the perception amongst anti-apartheid groups that these authorities were implicated in, amongst other things, increasing rents and the detention and harassment of anti-government activists in the community. Takedi, for instance, claimed that prior to the necklacing he was continually harassed for being a member of a youth congress which was affiliated to the United Democratic Front. Of the six accused of the murder, one became a state witness, three were sentenced to 18 years imprisonment and two received death sentences. Takedi's claim that he was at home at the time of the necklacing was refuted by the court. The evidence of the state witness that put him at the scene of the offence was accepted. It was largely on this basis that the judge sentenced him to death.

At the time of his arrest, Takedi was completing his Standard 5, as his family's financial position had prevented him from going to school earlier. The interviews confirmed that prior to his imprisonment, Takedi had no history of psychiatric disturbance, substance dependence or violent behaviour. He did not have a criminal record. With regard to family, Takedi was unmarried and without dependants. As a result, he was mainly reliant on his family of origin for both emotional and financial support.

### Life on Death Row

Living on death row is a traumatic experience, whether or not it results in execution. Amnesty International (1989) make the following statement:

**The cruelty of the death penalty is not restricted to the actual moment of execution. Its unique horror and one**

**which cannot be relieved by developing more "humane" methods of killing is that, from the moment the sentence is pronounced, the prisoner is forced to contemplate the prospect of being taken away to be put to death at an appointed time. (p. 61)**

Death row is a place whose sole purpose is to preserve those who live there so that they may be executed. While the condemned live there, they are the 'living dead' (Vogelman, 1989). This section will describe some of the conditions of life on death row, in order to provide a background for Takedi's responses to the experience of being an inmate of Pretoria Central Maximum Security Section the place where all death row prisoners in South Africa (excluding the homelands) are held.

#### Arriving on Death Row

The first and most significant impression of death row for its incumbent inmates is the noise. One ex-inmate commented: 'The first thing is that I could hear so many noises. It was like birds and animals in a cage. The noise was like the noise of a zoo.' (Vogelman, 1989, p. 1). Hugh Lewin (1974), makes a similar point in his book *Bandiet. Seven years in a South African Prison*:

**The first thing you notice as you come into Central is the singing, the sound of the Condemned. Up behind the huge sign in the hall saying Stilte/Silence, the Condemned sing, chant, sing through the day and before an execution, through the night. At times the chant is quiet, a distant murmur of quiet humming softly. Then it swells: you can hear a more strident urgent note in the swell, sounding through the prison, singing the hymns that will take them through the double doors into the gallows. Condemned, waiting their turn, singing their fellows through their last nights. (cited in Black Sash, 1989, p. 42)**

Walking into death row is a chilling experience. The heightened security arrangements remind the prisoner that the place is inescapable. It is a place which is designed to hold no survivors. As the new prisoner walks through the corridors and glimpses the populated cells, he realises that all in this prison are waiting to die. This realisation is intensified by putting on the new prison clothes. One ex-prisoner commented: 'The first time I wore the prisoner's clothes, it was funny wearing them because I was thinking about the people who were wearing them before I had these clothes. I think those people are already dead. Wearing these clothes you can never be free because all the time you are thinking about those who are dead'. (Vogelman, 1989, p. 2)

While each prisoner has a different experience of their first few hours on death row, most are warmly welcomed (Vogelman, 1989), as was the case for Takedi. The new prisoners provide fresh stimulation and new relationships for the imprisoned. For

Takedi, the initial warmth generated by the welcome he received from fellow inmates quickly evaporated. He was soon struck by the grim reality of death row: 'It was a graveyard. It's a place not fit for a human being. It was like an animal waiting to be slaughtered at an abattoir.'

#### The Cell

Takedi's cell, like all the others on death row, contained a bed, a few dirty blankets and a tray table which flapped out of the wall; there was no chair. The cell also included a basin and a radio speaker through which the transmission of a local radio station was broadcast.

#### A Typical Day on Death Row in the Men's Section

Takedi's description of his days on death row was the same as those described to Vogelman (1989):

**The bell rings at six (this marked the start of the new day). The rules say you must prepare your bed. You must take off your pyjamas and wear your daily clothes.**

**At seven they call you for counting. Every prisoner must stand at the door. Then they go to each cell taking the dirty things from each cell. After they take the dirt out they open the cells to go shower. We all shower together. We were only allowed to shower for 4 to 5 minutes.**

**Breakfast would be served at 8. Sometimes during or after breakfast a man with medicines would come by and ask if we wanted any tablets for aches. For breakfast we got a dish of soft porridge We got cold coffee and there was not enough milk and sugar. The coffee was like dirty water We were able (to buy food from the tuckshop) and I began to eat this rather than prison breakfast ...**

**Every day the head would come in. He would ask us what complaints or requests people had. After breakfast they would come and collect all the dishes out. Every second day we would shave. When we were finished shaving we go back to our cell Later we would go exercise. Sometimes for twenty or thirty minutes. In exercise we were not allowed to talk. We had to walk or jog in a circle ...**

**At 11:30 they served lunch – they served soup but it was water with uncooked cabbage and crushed Jungle Oats and sometimes carrots. They also gave us jam with white margarine.**

**We were allowed visits between 9-11 am and 2-3 pm. At 3 we would get supper. Sometimes we would get boiled fish. We got raw cabbage; they called this salad. (p. 2/3)**

For those who are literate, like Takedi, spare time in the cell is generally spent reading censored newspapers, library books, the Bible, and transcripts of their case, and writing letters to loved ones. Time is also spent sleeping, speaking to fellow inmates, singing and praying. Much of the activity described is also a substitute for sleep, which is in short supply because of anxiety and the cell light, which is left on 24 hours a day.

#### The Prison Authorities

Takedi, like other death row prisoners, had varied relationships with the prison authorities. Some warders were found to be insulting and persecutory, while others were supportive and more helpful than their work required. The question often posed in relation to the former, is why are they abusive toward people about to die? One probable reason is the perception they have of their prisoners. The prisoners are not seen to be human, and for white warders this perception may be compounded by a prisoner's black skin, criminal behaviour, and political convictions, all of which confers on them the image of 'the enemy'. Warders' negative treatment of death row prisoners may also be their attempt to deal with an extremely difficult situation, where concern for their prisoners is directly contradictory to their participation in a prison system which is designed to ensure the death of those to whom they show compassion.

Despite the above, close bonds do develop between some of the prisoners and their warders, although this was not something Takedi reported. In such cases, conversation mostly centres on the prisoner's family, sport, past hobbies and plans for the future if a reprieve is granted. The warders often also attempt to lift the prisoner's spirits and to ensure that he is eating correctly and making good use of the facilities available, for example, the library.

#### Suicide Fantasies on Death Row

Suicides are not common on death row, largely because of preventative measures taken by prison security. Nevertheless, suicides have occurred. In 1987 Frikkie Muller killed himself one day before he was due to hang by cutting his wrists with a shoe nail. *The Star* (1987) reported: 'Prison officials put him in a straitjacket, but attempts to save his life were to no avail.' (cited in Black Sash, 1989, p. 39). Such incidents are infrequent, but suicide fantasies, contemplated when emotional pain becomes too much to bear, are more common. Being within the confines of a strictly controlled environment, unable to escape, unable to influence the legal process and with no positive prospect in sight, two inevitable questions arise: How much more can I endure? What is the point of existing if this is what makes up life? When the trauma

that constitutes death row is viewed as permanent then suicide ideation is heightened and the potential for suicide is increased.

### The 'Pot'

When death row prisoners receive their official date of execution, they are moved to a group of cells called the 'pot'. These cells are not separated from death row proper. Takeda's cell, for instance, was next door to the pot. Prisoners are normally transferred to the pot seven days before they are to hang. The term 'pot' was apparently coined because prisoners believe it to be the place where people 'stew before they die' (Vogelman, 1989).

The news and the actual move to the pot is done quickly. The prisoners are asked for their 'baadjie en adres' this refers to their clothes and the address to which they should be sent to after their execution. It appears that the idea of hastening the pace to the pot is to inhibit the possibility of panic and physical resistance from the prisoners.

During the initial period in the pot, the prisoner's neck and body measurements are taken. By obtaining the correct measurements, the various death-inducing materials can be properly prepared before the execution. The ropes, for example, need to be the right strength and the length of the drop needs to be worked out in relation to the prisoner's weight. Besides trying to increase the immediacy of the death, there are a number of other benefits of such preparation. It probably decreases the trauma of a more lengthy execution for both those awaiting death and the executioner. It also serves to limit the possibility of hysterical outbursts or resistance by the condemned. Finally, if the measurements taken are appropriate and the prisoner dies immediately, there is less bodily mess.

The cells in the pot are similar in size and shape to the inmates' previous cells, but their contents are different. There is no mattress, which makes sleep more difficult. Prisoners are not permitted to have their toothbrush and toothpaste with them. Clothing requirements also change: shoes have to be left outside of the cell, and prisoners are without vests and underpants. The rationale for these changes is to ensure that the occupants of the cells are unable to commit suicide.

In the pot prisoners are not permitted to exercise outside. This does not seem to bother pot prisoners too much. Some reports suggest that the (up to) seven prisoners who occupy the pot are often manic. The mania sometimes extends to discussions about the process of hanging. Jokes would be made about who had the largest neck and how much rope the hangman would need.

The mania experienced must be understood within the framework of ambivalent and complex feelings towards death. On the one hand there is terrible fear, while on the other there is relief that the trauma is coming to an end. With reference to the former, there is intense anxiety about the unknown, the physical pain, and the pain of leaving their family.

Johnson (1981) found that prisoners under sentence of death were intensely preoccupied with the thought of execution. They were anxious about how they would behave during the walk to the death chamber, whether they would break down, whether the execution would be painful, and how the memory or image of the

execution would affect their families. For many prisoners, these and similar thoughts had become obsessive. Some prisoners had recurring and vivid nightmares in which they went through the execution process step by step.

Some prisoners also discuss the process of the hanging in detail. One even practised what it would be like: 'I thought maybe I can't breathe. I used to put my hand over my nose and mouth to see what it is like not to have any air when your neck breaks' (Vogelman, 1989, p. 10). As indicated, Takedi stayed in the section next to the pot, and he described how he spent sleepless nights listening for 'the bang' which he believed to be the opening of the trapdoor and the operation of the gallows machines in the execution chamber.

In South Africa, it was customary for the condemned to receive a tasty last meal the night before their morning execution, consisting of a whole, deboned chicken. If anxiety doesn't impede appetite, this is often the condemned's last taste of food. The night before the execution is normally filled with singing of hymns. At approximately six in the morning a prayer is said with a priest. The prison chaplain commented:

**Warders who are present at the service tell us if it is time to go. We usually know that we must end, but we wait until the last moment. Then the warders say: "finish up". And they take the prisoners. (Black Sash, 1989, p. 46)**

There have been reports of resistance before the condemned were led to the gallows. In one incident, teargas was used to get the prisoners out of their cells (The Star, 1981, cited in Black Sash, 1989). In another case, a prisoner pleaded that he did not want to die, and excreted in his pants while being led to the gallows (Black Sash, 1989).

These incidents are unusual. In general, the condemned are said to walk to the gallows quietly. The Black Sash report (1989) describes the execution as follows:

**The prisoners ascend the steps to the gallows. Inside the execution chamber the hangman is waiting for them. So is a medical doctor who has to certify the bodies are dead and a policeman who takes a set of fingerprints to ensure the correct person is hanged. The condemned men are lined up. Pretoria's gallows can hang seven at one time. Their wrists are tied behind their backs. A rope is put around each neck with the knot next to an ear. Hoods are fastened over their faces. When all is in order the executioner pulls a lever which opens a trapdoor and the condemned men drop. (p. 46)**

With reference to what happens to the body, Chris Barnard, South Africa's famous heart surgeon, writes:

**The man's spinal cord will rupture at the point where it enters the skull, electro-chemical discharges will send his limbs flailing in a grotesque dance, eyes and tongue will start from the facial apertures under the assault of the rope and his bowels and bladder may simultaneously void themselves to soil the legs and drip onto the floor. (Rand Daily Mail, 12 June 1978, cited in Black Sash, 1989)**

A service is held in the prison soon after the execution, which families are permitted to attend. The bodies are then transported to the particular cemetery which houses the racial group of the hanged. As some have noted, even in death apartheid lives. Families are not present when the hanged are buried. They are given the number of the grave if they wish to visit it. The inability to accompany the coffin and mourn at the graveside has been a source of frustration and anger for families.

Takedi's Reactions to Life on Death Row

Amnesty International (1989) cites numerous examples of prisoners who have become severely mentally ill or depressed while on death row. They also document several suicides. Johnson (1980) describes the effects of death row on inmates:

**Death row emerges as an environment in which prisoners feel impotent, afraid and alone, defenceless against their keepers and unable to alter their fate. A few prisoners deteriorate dramatically; all experience, in varying degrees, a living death. This image of death row as a living death symbolises the human environment of death row and the human consequences of confinement in this oppressive penal milieu. (p. 545)**

For the first few weeks Takedi cried every day. His heightened depression manifested in decreased appetite, sleep disturbance and an inability to communicate. He became thin and had a headache for virtually his whole stay on death row. Frankl (1984), in his examination of the literature on prisoners, describes this phase of the prisoner's reaction to incarceration as 'the phase of relative apathy ... a kind of emotional death' (p. 33). These feelings of apathy and helplessness prevented Takedi from engaging in constructive activities such as reading or exercise.

Human interaction also became a source of psychological strain as it carried with it the potential of losing emotional control. Takedi was afraid that in this interaction, he would lose the last vestiges of control that he retained over his emotions. In his state of extreme stress, he preferred to be alone rather than to suffer the embarrassment of his stress becoming noticeable in interactions. Thus, at his most vulnerable, social withdrawal became Takedi's means of ensuring emotional containment and his apathy can be seen as a necessary mechanism of self-defence (Frankl, 1984). Takedi was

able to engage with inmates in the cells close by only on days when he was hopeful about his appeal and felt emotionally strong.

Family visits were generally characterised by a continual flow of tears from both Takedi and his relatives. Johnson (1981) observed that the death row prisoner's relationships with family and friends deteriorate because of the prospect of permanent separation, and a sense of the futility of pursuing relationships. These visits are often a cause of terrible anguish. The condemned are particularly concerned about the consequences of their death. They are anxious about being unable to take emotional and financial care of family members, and about the sadness that will be caused by their death. Often there is an attempt to lift the spirits of the other, and sometimes family members insist that hope must not be lost since a stay of execution is still possible. Nevertheless, the day before the execution, the last goodbyes are said. As could be expected, tears, words of love and apology generally characterise the last visit (Vogelman, 1989).

#### A Sudden Release

Takedi's release was unexpected. The wardens arrived at his cell and jokingly instructed him to pack his bags as they were 'taking him to the pot'. After a long wait in the cell, the sheriff called him into his office and informed Takedi that he had been granted a reprieve. The usual feelings of elation which would accompany such news were smothered by the confusing manner in which Takedi was released he did not know why he had been set free, nor did he know whether anyone else knew of his new fate.

Takedi left Pretoria Central a supposedly 'free' man. This sense of freedom, however, had been diminished by the endless struggles and readjustments he has had to make after his traumatic experience on death row. For Takedi, the aftermath of death row has been characterised by heightened depression, anxiety and strain. These symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder have become a prison for him.

#### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The following sections will illustrate some of the clinical symptoms of PTSD, as evidenced by Takedi and others, both during their time on death row and after their release. All of these symptoms will be contextualised within the framework of the individual's perceptions of the world, relationships, and community responses to the trauma.

##### Re-experiencing the trauma

The most central symptom of PTSD is the persistent re-experiencing of the event, through dreaming or thinking about it continuously (Kaplan & Sadock, 1985).

In the time after his release, Takedi had frequent intrusive recollections of his time on death row. He was also haunted by the spectre of his former fellow inmates. As is typical of survivors in a range of circumstances, from concentration camp victims to earthquake survivors, Takedi experienced strong feelings of guilt and anxiety

(Bettelheim, 1979; Hodgkinson & Stewart, 1989; Kaplan & Sadock, 1985; Vogelmann, 1989) and believed that it was unfair that he had survived, while others were hanged. He felt as if his life were a privilege rather than a right. He also felt that he was unable to reciprocate the support that he had received from his fellow inmates, and consequently believed that he had abandoned them in some way. These feelings were compounded by his intimate knowledge of the conditions of their incarceration. He spoke of his anxiety in the following way:

**The condemned condemn me because I worry about them all the time. The other prisoners are with me every day. I continually hope for the success of their appeals and their release. I think about their families and how unhappy they are.**

Takedi reported that he prayed constantly for their release, and especially for those prisoners who gave him enormous support. It is probable that ex-inmates who spend less time on death row experience less guilt, as they do not develop the same intense relationships or have the same extensive memories of those who have been executed. Takedi's guilt arose from feelings of care and concern, but ultimately it was self-destructive as it served to reduce his self-confidence and feelings of integrity.

The symptoms of PTSD also feed on themselves, and create further problems, such as sleep difficulty, and irritability. Takedi had recurrent dreams of death row. In his dreams, he fought with the hangman or the sheriff who was to inform him of the day of his death. These dreams were a means of reasserting his control and power, the antithesis of the experience of trauma. Once awoken by these nightmares he was usually unable to go back to sleep. Takedi required medication in order to overcome the chronic nature of his sleep disturbances.

For Takedi there was a range of activities, some of which were very mundane, that were redolent of his time on death row. The singing in church in Burgersdorp reminded him of the singing of the condemned who, while waiting their turn, frequently spent their days singing to their fellow inmates awaiting execution. Silent times of prayer and meditation reminded him of the deathly still and quiet of the nights. A stomach-ache reinvoked meal times on death row as it was there that a stomach complaint, an ulcer, originated. This often made it difficult for Takedi to eat and he usually had only a small bowl of porridge during the day. He also felt pain in his gums and teeth.

At the time of the interviews, Takedi was tormented by images of bloodstained hoods sometimes conjured up by the blood of raw meat. Of all his memories of death row, this remained one of the most vivid. According to Takedi, the hoods of those who were hanged were washed by inmates and then re-used. Takedi spoke passionately about the subject of killing. He was categorical in his opposition to killing and stated that he did not want even those who had implicated him to be killed.

### Psychic Numbing

The experience of psychic numbing has two components: emotional numbing, or an inability to feel emotions of any kind, particularly feelings connected with intimacy and

sexuality (Kaplan & Sadock, 1985); and social detachment, which involves the inability to engage with the world, such as feeling detached or estranged from others, or the loss of the ability to enjoy activities.

Hodgkinson and Stewart (1989) view emotional numbing as a defence which prevents a person from experiencing the full reality of the trauma, and the experience of too much unbearable and overwhelming emotion. This numbing suppresses anger and resistance, and thus serves as a means of self-preservation. Being in touch with one's anger implies the possibility of carrying out actions which may lead to reprisals, a frightening prospect for someone in Takedi's position.

Takedi also evidenced many signs of social detachment as a consequence of his sadness. He was a keen student prior to his imprisonment, but after his release he showed a marked disinterest in education and other activities, such as reading the newspaper. He also became disinterested in finding a job and making money. His disengagement from these activities was mirrored by a general detachment from others. His mother often remarked that he was 'many miles away' when she spoke to him. Takedi generally felt bored with people if he was with them for a sustained period of time, which pointed to his need for a change in stimulation. Ultimately, however, he preferred to be completely alone. In this way he was able to exert some control over his life, as he did not have to meet anyone else's social or emotional demands.

#### Hyperarousal

In apparent contradiction to the symptoms of psychic numbing, detailed above, people experiencing PTSD also experience a variety of symptoms of arousal – mainly linked to factors pertinent to the trauma – such as hyperalertness, and an exaggerated startle response, particularly if someone touched him. Noise which seemed to have no purpose, for example, the noise of children playing, tended to make him irritable. He walked around constantly, checking left and right to see if there was anyone following him. He was worried that he was in danger, and was afraid of being hurt. These experiences of 'intrusion' are similar to re-experience phenomena, and both these symptom groups are like the trauma itself, in that the individual has no control over them.

#### Perceptions of the world

After his release, Takedi experienced a continual fear of victimization, and his daily life was overlaid by a heightened sense of vulnerability in the world.

For Bettelheim (1979), Frankl (1984) and Lifton (1983), one of the primary concerns for survivors of trauma is finding a way to make sense of the event. The survivor needs to formulate an understanding of the experience in order to gain mastery over it. One of the difficulties with this process is that individuals generally transpose the specific understanding of the trauma onto the meaning of life in general. For Takedi, his belief in his own innocence meant that he had to find an explanation for his unjust conviction. He appeared to have pinpointed human imperfection' as the reason. Takedi was prone to generalise his perception of the fallible and prejudicial nature of the judge who sentenced him, to all those around him. He believed that if judges were able to make mistakes which endangered human life, then it was possible for anyone

to make such mistakes. He thus spoke of death row as undermining his trust in all human beings.

In Takedi's mind, if he could be wrongly arrested and convicted once, then it could happen again. The police who were responsible for his arrest were the obvious targets of his fear, a feeling which was intensified by the fact that there had been no formal acknowledgement of his ordeal by any of the authorities concerned. Worse still, according to Takedi, a particular policeman in the city where he lived continued to believe that he was guilty of the offence and that he had been unjustly released. He also claimed that the police continued to provoke him by frequently driving past his house extremely slowly. He perceived the police as biased, persecutory and responsible for his trauma. Despite these attitudes towards the police and the judiciary, he was unwilling to express any anger towards them. This suppression of anger can be seen to be linked to the psychic numbing detailed above.

Frankl (1984) suggests that this feeling of vulnerability emerges because the possibility of dying results in an acute awareness of the limitations of human power in ensuring one's own safety and survival. For Takedi, this was evident in the failure of the numerous condemned individuals to save themselves from execution. The helpless and defenceless feelings that developed on death row thus mutated into a constant fear of victimisation once he returned to society.

According to Frankl (1984), a near-death experience allows for the development of an unbridled and zealous passion for improving the world. This emotion often manifests in strong benevolent desires to help others; but if the individual feels that this desire is defeated, or is overwhelmed by the inability to do anything about this desire, it may cause depression at the unnecessary destruction of life which is witnessed in the world at large. The wish to help others may be hampered by the individual's lack of skills, and the necessity of obtaining any available job, even if such work has little to do with social action. Furthermore, unless the individual is able to recover from the effects of the trauma, these desires will never be actualised because the problems of apathy, depression and detachment further inhibit the opportunity for constructive action. For Takedi, his freedom was undermined by the bleakness and desolation of the world that he re-entered:

**I see very bad things in the world. I see police repression, violence between people in Natal and suffering and poverty in Burgersdorp. I come out and see in the world and in South Africa the taking of life and this makes me very sad.**

These perceptions proved to be debilitating in Takedi's everyday life. He was highly politically active prior to his arrest but no longer displayed a wish to be involved in organisation or to participate in community affairs.

#### Family Relations

The family is often the place where emotions are most intensely played out, as it is the place where the individual feels most secure. In this regard, families have the potential to be sources of support, but they also have the potential to be the site of enormous conflict (Marsden, 1978). In the case of ex-inmates, the latter is common. A

large part of the problem centres around attempts by family members to revert to familiar patterns of behaviour that existed prior to an ex-inmate's imprisonment.

It became evident during the interviews that Takedi's relationships with his family were plagued by intensely contradictory feelings. During his imprisonment, he gained a heightened sense of their importance. His love for them intensified during his imprisonment and after his release, and he felt great relief to be united with them. As time wore on, however, his excitement was tempered, and his psychological exhaustion and strain began to manifest most strongly within the family situation. Most importantly, Takedi experienced extreme irritation with his family's overprotective behaviour towards him, and their constant desire to be with him. While he realised that their protectiveness was born out of care and concern, he experienced it as restrictive and confining. It was reminiscent of his experience in prison.

Takedi also expressed resentment at the plethora of questions his family, both nuclear and extended, asked about his time on death row a place that is a greater source of intrigue than an ordinary prison. Rather than providing any kind of cathartic release, Takedi found that his family's constant questioning about his experiences made him tired and depressed. Takedi felt that the family's constant questioning about his experience made it impossible to escape his past when he chose to. He also stated that he would prefer to share his experiences at his own convenience.

Takedi's feelings of resentment and irritation towards his family were offset by those of guilt. He believed that his time on death row had contributed to his mother's illness. In an attempt to overcome his guilt, Takedi became more conscious of helping his mother with domestic work. Takedi's release also provoked feelings of guilt and shame with regard to his previously unappreciative attitude towards his sister. On death row, he had held his sister responsible for his continued imprisonment, because he believed she had not made enough of an effort to ensure him a successful appeal. Those perceptions, he said, were unjustified and her enormous efforts in this regard became clear to him after his release.

Takedi's feelings of guilt toward his family were also related to practical concerns, for example, finance. For many families who live a great distance away from death row, the cost of travelling to visit their relatives, both in terms of money and time, is enormous. This was certainly true in Takedi's case, as family members had to travel a distance of approximately 1,000 km to visit him. The issue of finance may thus intensify the trauma. It is also likely to affect treatment, as there are no social services for those who are unable to afford private treatment and, even if there were, the victims may be unable to afford transport costs.

#### Relationships Outside the Family

The consequences of a traumatic experience, such as Takedi's are not confined to relationships within the family. In general, ex-inmates display a range of responses to people outside the family. With regard to sexual relations, for example, clinical experience with male ex-detainees indicates that some of them coped with their stress by becoming increasingly sexually active. In these cases, sex is viewed as a symbol of life and becomes a means of compensating for depression and death anxiety that ex-detainees experienced whilst imprisoned. Fleeting sexual relationships also enable the individual to avoid long-term relationships. These relationships are often more intense and lead to greater depression should they end.

Takedi also developed an extremely cautious attitude towards relationships, and he constantly prepared himself for disappointment. This distrustful attitude even extended to close family members, and is likely to be a problem in the therapeutic setting also. For the most part, Takedi expressed a distinct disinterest in relationships. He stated that he was terrified of rejection and would only show interest in a woman if she could demonstrate that she was completely committed to him. This fear of rejection was linked to his general distrust of people. The experience of distrust is common among survivors of trauma, and has been referred to by Hodgkinson and Stewart (1989) as a 'nurturance conflict'.

Takedi was also protective of his experience, and expressed a wish to exclude others, who he felt were unable to understand what he had gone through. Thus he wanted to talk about his experience, but felt that no-one understood him. Takedi needs to integrate the experience of having been a victim, but also to establish that his identity is not solely that of a victim.

### Community Responses

The community to which an ex-inmate returns can have an impact on the quality of his 'new' life. They may spurn and condemn him merely because he has spent time on death row, albeit under unfair circumstances. They may also have difficulty in discarding the ex-inmate's appellation of 'murderer' and reformulating their perceptions of him as an innocent man. Under these circumstances, it may become very difficult for a prisoner to reintegrate into the community as he may sense this ostracism. His reintegration is thus made difficult by his new identity – of being a victim and an ex-death row inmate. This new identity creates tension because people perceive him differently, and treat him accordingly.

Takedi was fortunate in that most members of his tightly-knit community provided him with support. They held a welcome home party for him on his return, a significant event in assisting his process of reintegration. He recounted how some people were uncertain that they were actually greeting him and wanted to touch him to see if he was real. One or two people were antagonistic as they still believed that he was a murderer.

Takedi reported that he did not receive a visit from the Apostolic church, of which he was a member. He believed this to be because the state witness who identified him was a member of the same church. Again, Takedi denied being angry or having expectations that the situation would be any different. From the outset, the only expectation he had was that his family would care for him.

### Therapeutic Implications and Policy Considerations

PTSD reactions consist of a set of interconnected emotions, physical reactions, behaviours and thoughts. Hodgkinson and Stewart (1989) point out that PTSD can be distinguished from other anxiety disorders because the traumatic event is of monumental significance and violates formerly held basic concepts of safety. PTSD involves a 'loss of faith in the world', which includes the destruction of the individual's faith in humanity. Bettelheim (1979) asserts that coping with trauma of this magnitude involves two main processes: understanding what the trauma meant to the individual

and how it happened; and the formulation of a constructive way of dealing with what this trauma evokes emotionally. Takedi's experiences on death row resulted in strong feelings of powerlessness and loss of control. For those people who have experienced trauma, and particularly trauma that is caused by other human beings, one of the crucial elements of recovery is obtaining sufficient support in which this meaning can be found, and restoring a sense of control over their lives.

Most importantly, Takedi needs a space to describe the events of his trauma. Ideally, he should have had the opportunity to tell his story to a therapist, or to share his experience with others who have undergone similar trauma. This telling and re-telling of the story is a cathartic experience which serves to integrate the event into the personality, in order to reach the point where he accepts that he cannot change the trauma, but that the past does not have to totally define his future.

Takedi also needs to feel safe enough to express his anger, without fear of retribution. This includes the opportunity to take legal action for corrective retribution, which would help him to restore some of his faith in the world, and would foster a perception of having greater control over his world. This, however, is extremely problematic, given the powers and lack of accountability of the police.

At the time of the interviews, there was no formal support for Takedi. He received no visits from a state social worker or welfare organisation, a reflection of the limited and appalling welfare system in South Africa. As has been indicated, he also received no support from his church. This has had serious implications for Takedi's psychological well-being. Dealing with the trauma of life on death row requires immense professional support and assistance, and because Takedi was unable to finance this, he was reliant on state structures. If the Black Sash report of 1989 is still accurate, this is likely to be the case for most of the inmates of death row, as 85% of these prisoners will have grown up in families which struggled financially.

The unique conditions on death row mean that those released from its confines require a unique and special type of assistance, something for which the government should be accountable. At present, this assistance is provided on a voluntary basis, or through the establishment of a few trauma clinics nationally. Although these clinics are a welcome development, they are funded largely by overseas organisations, and are not an adequate response. In order to meet this need and develop more effective treatment strategies, state support is needed.

## Conclusion

Interviews with inmates of death row, and with those who have been released, such as Takedi, indicate that life on death row constitutes a severe trauma. Takedi's sad words capture the pain and suffering that he continues to endure:

**It does not matter that I am free physically. I've been destroyed. I always feel condemned. ... It does not matter that I'm not behind bars. I'm in prison with all my worry.**

This quote is a portent for those whose death sentences may be repealed under the new legislature. Clearly, any new-found freedom that ex-inmates enjoy is likely to be undermined by the prior trauma of their experience on death row. Legal and financial reparation, support, and opportunities to rediscover meaning and express emotions are some of the crucial ingredients necessary to deal with the PTSD of the death row survivor.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The pseudonym Philip Takedi will be used in order to protect his identity.

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1984, defines torture as 'severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental', inflicted by or with the acquiescence of a public official for certain specified purposes. The death penalty has been called a form of torture as it involves the infliction of severe pain or suffering, both mental and physical.

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