CTRC

Conflict Trauma Resource Centre

Perceptions of victimhood.

PERCEPTIONS AND OPINIONS REGARDING VICTIMS, SURVIVORS & CASUALTIES IN AND ABOUT NORTHERN IRELAND

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Table of Contents

For many years now but particularly since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement the debate around 'victims' of our violent political conflict has ebbed and flowed its way along a bumpy journey through time. Indeed in the course of this journey many others have suffered as a result of heightened emotions around this issue. Certainty with respect to whom is actually identified as a 'victim' and who is the 'victimiser/perpetrator' has been as clear as 'black and white' or if you are resident in, or associated to, another contesting constituency as clear as 'white and black'!

Clearly society at large still appears to be wrestling with 'others' interpretations of their definition and the resulting determinations apparently continues to contribute to a denial of legitimacy for some individuals trauma, pain and suffering. It is these interpretations and perceptions that we as an agency working in the field of conflict related trauma, pain and suffering decided to explore through this research.

Our goal has been to highlight the complexities of the commentary around this emotive issue, that we may all have a better understanding. Hopefully with this insight we may add the necessary colour to what has been a simplistic 'black and white' perspective and in so doing better equip ourselves to further explore this contested moral and painful territory.

Our organisational policy in this area has been that we do not determine who is a victim, or indeed who is not a victim of the violent conflict. This non-judgemental approach opens our resources to all those who are experiencing trauma, pain and suffering without discriminating on a basis of the event(s) which caused such distress. We, amongst others, have identified that there is much work to be done. We have limited resources, your support in the field in which ever form appropriate will be well received.

Finally it gives me pleasure to acknowledge and commend our Stanford University intern, Robin Thurston, for conducting herself in the course of this research with integrity throughout. Thank you Robin for furthering our understanding of peoples' perspectives.

Martin Snoddon
Centre Director
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Introduction

In order to explore the issues that Martin has described, we created a questionnaire to provoke useful discussion about perceptions regarding victims and survivors in and about the Northern Ireland conflict.

We attempted to gather input from people from as many different communities and backgrounds as possible. Contacts were made with people in victim/survivor support groups, local politicians, community leaders, religious leaders, people with Republican or Nationalist backgrounds, people with Loyalist or Unionist backgrounds, people from current and former security force personnel, ex-prisoners, people who work in peace and reconciliation groups, mental health workers, community and social workers. In total, about forty people or groups provided their input through directly filling out the questionnaire or partaking in conducted interviews

Many people shared personal and sometimes painful feelings and stories in the interest of better explaining how they felt about these issues. As one respondent pointed out, 'it's not just like ticking off boxes about your favourite cola.'

I greatly appreciate the time and thought that all respondents put into the research.

The responses suggested six general themes, which have formed the framework for this report. First, we asked respondents to comment upon a number of possible definitions of 'victim,' as well as to provide alternate definitions. Discussion regarding terminology, such as 'victim,' 'survivor,' 'casualty,' and its utility is the second theme. The third theme regards the social understanding of victimhood, both the breadth of definition and whether a hierarchy, or levels, of victimhood exists. Fourth, the question of whether people who have engaged in the violence associated with the Troubles should be considered victims is presented; this discussion includes opinions considering peoples' motivations or the circumstances which may have contributed to their becoming a 'perpetrator.' The fifth theme attempts to ground the discussion more in personal experience, as it includes respondents' answers regarding how they see themselves as being victims or not, as well as whether they feel that the greater society has recognized and supported them. The final section regards the relevance and usefulness, or possible lack thereof, of debate regarding these issues.

Within each of the larger sections are descriptions of types of opinions, followed by the respondents' own words. These have been presented somewhat like a conversation. We have avoided numerical breakdowns of answers, as we do not feel such a format is as useful or meaningful for this type of research.

It is important to recognise, and we are very aware, that these respondents are a fraction of the many, many people in and around Northern Ireland who have strong feelings about the issues raised in the questionnaire. While it seems that the opinions you will read represent a broad spectrum of sentiment, we have no doubt that many issues and different opinions are yet to be raised and heard. Hopefully, the opinions expressed in this report will simply be the beginning of ongoing, healthy and productive discussion.

On a personal note, we have attempted to avoid colouring this report of others' perspectives with our own conclusions. I cannot help but say, however, how much I have been struck by our respondents' thoughtfulness and openness to engage with difficult issues. I have been further touched by so many peoples' willingness to acknowledge the validity of opinions that differ from their own, as well as the predominate sentiment that discovering and understanding these differences is a vital part of healing, as individuals and as a society.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed to this project. The respondents have been extremely generous with their time and thoughts. Everyone at M.A.R.C. has made me feel very welcomed and supported while being here this summer. We have all contributed to the completion of this research, whether it be through conducting interviews, initiating contacts, editing the report or simply creative thinking; of which there can never be too much.

Robin Thurston
Summer 2002

Points on presentation

Language:

The importance and intricacies of what terminology to use in order to discuss these ideas became abundantly clear during this process. From the outset, in so far as it might be possible, our intention was to use even-handed language. Finding a vocabulary, however, that matches the diversity of feelings and sensitivities proved difficult. Words used such as 'perpetrator,' 'security force,' and 'conflict' are some that respondents commented on especially.

In the interest of consistency, this report continues to use those words.
This issue further illustrates the complexity of the debate; we acknowledge this.

Respondents' identities:

In the interests of privacy and comfort, as well to separate opinions from personalities, all responses have been presented anonymously. Respondents were asked, however, for a generic description of their background to provide further context for their answers.

The personal descriptions cited with each quotation are how each respondent chose to describe themselves.

Definitions

The opening of the questionnaire, and the interviews, included a series of possible definitions of 'victim' in terms of the political violence in and about Northern Ireland. We did not aim to decide upon the best definition, so much as to gather opinions about the different types of definitions and language that people in and about Northern Ireland may use in association with 'victim'.

We suggested the following definitions:

1. *Those who have been physically or psychologically injured from violent, conflict related incidents and the close relatives or partners who care for them, along with those who mourn their dead or injured loved ones.*[1]

2. *All those who have been affected by the cumulative effects of three decades of violence in Northern Ireland.*

3. *An innocent, who has been killed, injured or harmed through no fault of their own, rather by the unjustified actions of another.*

4. *One whose life has been significantly and negatively affected by violent, political conflict. This effect may be, but is not limited to: personal death or injury, death or injury of a loved one, emotional trauma, loss of a sense of security, displacement, loss of educational or job opportunities, discrimination or substantively lowered quality of life.*

The respondents were asked:

How do you feel about such definitions? What parts of them do you find valuable or not?

What kind of definitions do you find more meaningful and accurate?

A number of respondents felt that all of the definitions were legitimate; and that one's preference would be determined by personal experience.

"I don't think that you can exclude any of these definitions at all, because they're all true to a certain extent. That's where the difficulties have been. If you pick one and exclude the other three...Well I can't exclude any of them, no." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"I would agree with all those as being fair definitions of a victim. Probably if I'm bringing in our own group, the one that would be probably closest to us would be the last one, which would cover the broader spectrum of victims. But definitely all four of them would be fair definitions of a victim." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

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[1] Adapted from the Bloomfield Report.

"Personally, I prefer the person affected to define themselves, definitions such as 'victim' are, at best, an indicator of where someone is in their journey through trauma and healing. Therefore they are best used by the person themselves rather than running the risk of labelling the person and freezing them at a single moment or event in their lives… The broader the definition the more encompassing it is. I find the definitions which differentiate between one victim and another to be less helpful when I am working with people. Yet I can also understand an individuals' needs for having these distinctions (as in #3 above)." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

On the other hand, a roughly equal number of people - slightly under one-fifth of the respondents - were unsure whether any of the definitions were meaningful. They were inclined to feel that definitions are often more hurtful than helpful. This sentiment emerged most strongly from those with a Republican background.

"But it's hard to see how any of them could be valuable. We feel that they keep us in a time warp." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

"They are not true or valuable." [*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term.*]

"I don't find any of them particularly helpful or otherwise. Being a victim, or however else you might personally term yourself, is a subjective thing and other peoples' definition of what you are doesn't always gel with what you think you are." [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

The fourth definition - *one whose life has been significantly and negatively affected by violent, political conflict. This effect may be, but is not limited to: personal death or injury, death or injury of a loved one, emotional trauma, loss of a sense of security, displacement, loss of educational or job opportunities, discrimination or substantively lowered quality of life* - received the most positive responses. Over a quarter of the respondents throughout the different communities found this definition acceptable or preferable.

"That's one that people often don't recognise. How's its impacted on decisions they've made in their lives, educational or job opportunities. Or people would not be comfortable calling themselves a victim simply if they've only been discriminated against. Because in their mind they think that a victim is someone who has lost a loved one or been physically damaged. It's the emotional psychological consequences that people are uncomfortable with." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"If I were to choose one of these, then I'd probably choose the last one." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"The last one seems to embrace the most people." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

"The latter is most useful since it encompasses the conflict itself and therefore all affected. The first three seem to either exclude certain people and/or communities or to appear to be to bland (e.g. no. 2) to make 'victim,' as distinct from 'witness,' meaningful." [*Former member of the IRA*]

"There would seem to be a need to define a 'victim' otherwise it is left to personal perception, some of whom would not be seen as justified by the majority. All but the third definition could include

paramilitaries who many do not see as victims. The fourth definition covers a wider definition of how a person can be affected and perceived as a victim but again leaves it open for paramilitaries to be included... The fourth definition is more meaningful and accurate as it extends beyond the usual narrow definition of victims who have suffered death or injury and their relatives." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

One man expressed concern that it could be hard to measure some of the effects mentioned in definition four, or to attribute them directly to the Troubles.

"Loss of educational or job opportunities, discrimination, lowered quality of life, nothing wrong with that. But how do you measure that? How do you measure whether your quality of life's been lowered? There might be some difficulties there." [*Community worker*]

The first definition - *those who have been physically or psychologically injured from violent, conflict related incidents and the close relatives or partners who care for them, along the those who mourn their dead or injured loved ones* - was also somewhat well received, again cross-community.

"Because a lot of people have suffered who haven't actually been injured. And that's what appeals to me about that one. Because very often, the lives of children for instance aren't looked into... A lot of people think they're only affected because something has happened to them. I would say no." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

"I would be very comfortable with the first one. Because for me a victim is not necessarily the first line received of the Troubles. There have been those whose lives have been affected as a result as well." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

A few people felt that either the first or fourth definitions were acceptable, as they were fairly broad and inclusive, yet within a specified limit.

"I think the first and fourth are more likely to involve the people who might be considered victims... It can be anyone who has been bereaved... I think the second one is probably a bit broad and could include a lot of people who may not be considered victims." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

A few people, about a tenth of those questioned, felt that the second definition - *all those who have been affected by the cumulative effects of three decades of violence in Northern Ireland* - was particularly useful for the extent of its inclusivity.

"The second one... I think everyone in Northern Ireland who have lived through the conflict is a victim and have been affected psychologically in some way, maybe not physically. Everybody is in some way a victim." [*Works in support group*]

"I actually do believe that it is everyone living in the north of Ireland that have been affected by the Troubles. Because you're living in an atmosphere, and you don't have control over what's happening... A lot of other people out there, as I said earlier on, by living here, probably don't even realise it's affecting them in some way." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"I feel that definitions of 'victims' should cover anyone who has been affected, in any way, by the conflict of Northern Ireland. I believe that all parts of the definitions are valuable to those they concern." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

On the other hand, substantial objection existed to the breadth of the second definition. Many of these respondents argued that such breadth made the definition feel meaningless.

"I think victim has been somewhat misused. Everybody and his brother who live in Northern Ireland would believe that they're victims. So that can't be true. I suppose that without trying to make a hierarchy of victims, there are different levels of victimhood." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

"The second one: all those who have been affected, is very wide, perhaps a little too vague to really capture something about the harm or the injury associated with the word 'victim' about the different ways, captured by the last one, in which people were affected by the violence." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

"I don't subscribe to the idea that 'everyone' who has lived in N.I. during the Troubles is a victim as this is too broad a generalisation. There are those who have been affected to a greater degree than have some others." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Only a very few respondents preferred the third definition - *an innocent, who has been killed, injured or harmed through no fault of their own, rather by the unjustified actions of another.*

"[The third is] more closely associated with my views... My view is that the police officer who's sent out on the street, first and foremost, is the innocent victim here as well. And he's somebody carrying out his duties on behalf of the state." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"Whatever definition is used must recognise totally innocent victims. We're not really interested in how perpetrators would see themselves. They made the victims. We became victims because of their actions." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

A somewhat greater number of respondents felt that the third definition would be meaningful to some people. This sentiment was particularly true among ex-combatants some of whom said they could understand the motivation behind a fairly limited definition such as this, but they would probably not agree with it.

"An innocent – I can look at both sides of it, relate to both sides of it. Although we would differ on our definition of a victim, I sympathise with their attitude to it. If I put myself in the security force end of things, I can understand." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"*Rather by the unjustified actions of another.* You would need to know, in terms of the person that was injured or killed what was their motivation or what was going on in their minds, you know. To the victim or the family or friends, it would be unjustified. But even in terms of sectarian killings or injuries, there's a motivation behind that, to instil terror in that community. So there's still a political connotation to it. Although the individual who's been hurt or killed may not have been involved, so there is a motivation there and a sense by the people who carried it out, a political perspective to it. So that would cause quite a lot of difficulty." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

A substantial number of respondents were very uncomfortable with the exclusivity they felt associated with the third definition.

"It would suggest that those who would be on the side of the security forces or those from the paramilitary groups themselves would not have been victims. So I was uncomfortable with that in many respects. I know there are a number of others who would be as well." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"I think it excludes a very large constituency of other people who have had strong consequences from this whole conflict, and I don't think that we can afford to be exclusive. We have to be inclusive if that's what we're after – an inclusive society." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"The third one, to be honest, there's a judgment element to that there, who's been innocent? There are values there as to who is a legitimate victim or not." [*Community worker*]

Most people did not suggest definitions that were substantially different from the ones included in the questionnaire; some alternatives were provided, however. Along with these, a number of people described the complexities they saw in the attempt to create a definition.

"Anyone who died or was murdered as a result of the conflict, but who was not engaged directly or indirectly with terrorist activity, I would construe as a victim." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"There must be an emphasis on the person having no choice of their own in creating their victimhood. This would include someone who's been injured, insulted, or had a loved one murdered as a result of terrorist activity. This definition is accepted by our group." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

"I would be more comfortable with 'a victim is someone who has suffered.' Suffering, it's much less objectionable, I think. I think ultimately it's what ties us all together, perhaps the rawest human experience." [*An American researcher*]

"I don't have a clear definition of 'victimhood.' I am still searching for language that can really capture the moral, psychological and human dimensions of the impact of a violent act... I steer away from using 'victim' in an unqualified sense. I prefer to talk of somebody who has been deeply harmed, somebody who has been violated, thus attempting to link the pain to a specific event, place or context, which makes you sensitive to the possibilities of that person occupying a different role in a different context." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

"Given the root of the word victim is the Latin noun 'victima' meaning someone who is sacrificed for a cause, religious or otherwise. Then I am not a victim...my son is! It could be argued that my peace of mind and quality of life has been sacrificed. Nevertheless, it becomes tiresome to constantly remind people that I am not a victim so I adhere to the term for the sake of convenience." [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

"Definitions of victim will invariably be governed by one's personal experience. As the parent of a young boy killed by an IRA bomb, I expect my definition could differ in substance, tone, political connotation, from that of a parent whose young child has been killed by security forces. Consequently, I doubt that one universal definition will ever be agreed upon. It is better therefore to listen to all experiences with an open mind and try, in so far as one ever [can], to set aside personal judgments and hierarchies of injury or injustice." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"A definition that recognises that N. Ireland has experienced a conflict, (a political conflict) involving all of society. This definition would require us to accept the legitimacy of every person's victimhood or possible victimhood, [without] requiring anyone to simultaneously accept or deny the legitimacy of the victim's political opinion or actions." [*Former member of the IRA*]

Terminology

Nearly everyone expressed an opinion on the complex issue of terminology. We asked a series of questions attempting to explore the wide range of feeling regarding the use and utility of words such as 'victim,' 'survivor' and 'casualty.'

A number of people have suggested the words 'survivor' or casualty' rather than 'victim.' How do you feel about these terms? Are there any other words that you feel are more useful?

Do you find the debate surrounding the use of words and their meanings valuable? Why or why not?

How do you feel about the argument that labelling someone a victim (or a survivor or casualty) perpetuates that identity? Could one's identification as a victim either enhance or detract from the process of healing?

Across the spectrum, some people did not find any of the words useful, either to describe themselves or others.

"[We] don't like these words, we have all been hurt, traumatised and suffered, maybe we need a new word." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"I am not happy calling myself any of these labels as they seem to keep me in one place." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

"Well, part of me is wondering why, necessarily, do we want to put the label victim onto ourselves? If you're looking for reasons to be a victim, there are issues as to why you want to do that... Or is it just acknowledging that we all are victims? Which, at the end of the day, is possibly a meaningless thing anyway... So we all label ourselves as 'survivors.' It's more positive, but it's still...why do we need to necessarily pigeon hole ourselves?" [*Community worker*]

"I find it quite hard to use the word victim as it gives people a label. Quite often it portrays them as a helpless person. Survivor is to some extent easier to live with because it implies that someone has overcome something, but that might not always be the case. The word casualty, as I've said before, from people in this island that implies that there has been some sort of war... I don't know what the word might be, but I am not happy with any of these." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

Most of the people who responded did use the terminology, at least to some degree. A number of people, particularly those who have suffered great losses directly, preferred 'victim.'

"For me to be a victim shows people that something has happened to me. And then they're wondering what do you do? How do you get by each day? What are your coping strategies?" [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"It's not that they [people who prefer to call themselves 'victims'] enjoy that role, but they feel it's the role they've taken on. And they don't want people to... It's almost as though by being a victim, they can be the conscience of society." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"And some people, [who I work with] have become comfortable with the term 'victim' because they don't see it as a negative thing. They see it as a group of people and they've built friendships and things from that. So their own definition of being victims is a positive thing in that sense." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"No, I think the word victim aptly describes it...any other words are not that valuable." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"Once you become a victim it cannot be undone. A victim is a victim... Being called a victim does not indicate the depth of your grief or the stage you might have reached in your journey to full recovery... It's rather like saying that an amputee will not fully recover unless he/she stops missing the lost limb. The limb is lost, they are still an amputee...how long it takes them to recover is down to them not what others might want to call them." [*English with Irish ancestry*]

At least one respondent who favoured the term 'victim' felt that alternate words are being used by ex-paramilitary members for political purposes.

"I could understand why they [paramilitaries] would want to use words like 'survivor,' and why they might want to use other terminology, like 'we're all casualties of the conflict,' which is a favourite one of theirs you know. I would want to disassociate myself from those types of comments, because I don't think they're useful to innocent people on both sides of the community in Northern Ireland... I think that those words are more for paramilitaries... so I wouldn't associate myself with it." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

The majority of people expressed the sentiment that the use or overuse of the word 'victim' can detract from the healing process.

"I would agree with that. [*That labelling someone a 'victim' can perpetuate that identity.*] 'Victim' means you're a victim of someone else's actions. And that can lead to argument that it's holding back the process if you like." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"In [our] group experience, no-one wants to be labelled as a victim. By not agreeing to be a victim healing has already started. [The] feeling of victimisation will stop healing process." [*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term*]

"I think it [terminology] is boxing people in. And I think that sometimes even people who are victims groups...saying 'we're victims.' I think that boxes people in and puts them back." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"I feel that words/labels always stop true growth and healing. A more positive word/label would lead to more positive actions." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

"Yes, ['victim'] invariably detracts from the process of healing. [It] becomes their life." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]

A few people pointed out that whether or not the word 'victim' is harmful depends upon its use.

"I think it has more to do with the group that is calling itself a victim. I have seen that some victims groups do not give the opportunities for healing and some do. Also any individual victim can use the label not to heal." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

"I think it's an extremely personal matter, something that each individual must define for themselves. I suppose if you get really locked into the whole victim thing, it's a very dis-empowering term: to be a victim. I know that in the media, and in some respects politicians, would lock people into that sense of victimhood because they need there to be victims for one reason or another. And for people themselves it can be dis-empowering. However, I know that some people like the term victim." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"I think it depends on how the word victim is perceived…it could imply some kind of helplessness or long term identity. But I also see the benefit in using the term when people have been traumatised." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

Fewer people felt that the use of 'victim,' does not impact healing.

"The process of healing is always going to be difficult in a divided society. I don't believe by labelling one as a victim, survivor or casualty makes any difference to the healing process." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

"To be honest with you, I don't really feel that it's important what word you use. It's really the individual who sees themselves as a victim, a survivor or casualty." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

A few people pointed out that the word 'victim' is often the only appropriate description, regardless of its perceived impact on healing.

"People need recognition of their pain or loss, that they are victims. Lack of such recognition can cause anger and resentment and detract from the healing process. Victims are not helpless, they can have great strengths emotionally to overcome pain or loss." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

"If someone is a victim, then they remain a victim. It cannot be a status that can be awarded or removed by public opinion. Healing can't take place by denying the above." [*Former member of the IRA*]

The sense that the term 'survivor' carries more positive connotations emerged as a predominant theme across the different groups. Community support workers and those who would perceive themselves as 'outside' the conflict were particularly apt to mention this feeling.

"I like the word 'survivor' more than 'victim.' I think that's more healthy to have that understanding of what we've been through… To acknowledge that they have been traumatised [by the Troubles] and at the same time to say, 'well, I am a survivor. I have coped with this and I am getting better.'" [*Works in support group*]

"'Survivor' or 'casualty' are better – 'victim' implies too much helplessness and can give people an identity in suffering rather than a way out." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]

"The word 'survivor' is a good one that is often used. I think many people who see themselves as victims are more comfortable with this idea of survival because of the negative connotation of passivity, or being a powerless object of someone else's actions associated with 'victim.'" [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

"Survivor is ultimately more life-giving." [*An American researcher*]

"The survivors are all those who are in the target area. They're the survivors, including ourselves. Your loved one gets killed, and you're in the area, and it's an attack on your family. You're the survivor. Because you're the family member that's left. The one who died is the victim." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

The use of 'casualty' was rather contentious among those who commented on it. Most people focused primarily upon the use of 'victim' or 'survivor.' Those who did favour casualty often came from security forces or had been targeted by their own community.

"In the case of a security member, I would consider them a casualty of the conflict, but members of their family would fall into the category of victim." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

"Casualty feels better than the others. It suggests an accident rather than deliberate action." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

"I'm not sure that one word will ever describe it. I see myself as a casualty." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

Most people articulated or implied that the use of one word over another is very much an individual's personal choice. A substantial number of respondents argued that people who have suffered must be allowed to choose to call themselves victims, or not, depending upon their own sense of healing.

"I think it's an extremely personal matter, something that each individual must define for themselves." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"The definition depends on the person themselves. For me that's the end of it, you know... People don't realise that it's a process and that it's often interchangeable: being a victim or a survivor or feeling one day you forgive and another day that you hate. It's an ongoing daily battle that people feel, and it's legitimate. And it's not contradictory. It's part of the trauma. It's part of grieving." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"People will move if allowed in their own time. They must be allowed to use their own 'label' and heal in their own time and space." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"For me, until I am truly recognised as a victim, I can't heal or move on. Even the friends we had in RUC circles didn't understand why we gave up everything and moved, but at the time of death there was no support from them." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

"Yes I think the debate needs to continue around these words and what they mean to people. Having learnt from experience that individuals reach different stages of 'victimhood' at different times. Each individual must reach the stage they are comfortable with in their own time. For some, this may mean moving at a very slow pace... I think that is entirely up to the individual concerned." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

Similarly, concern exists surrounding the use of 'survivor,' that it can be and has been pushed upon people who are not ready. Some people, especially those working in support groups in different communities, felt that has been done for political reasons.

"['Survivor' suggests] moving on, showing their strength, character...The funders keep concentrating on innocent victim and about being a survivor. Getting on with the job, moving on, battling for money, all that type of stuff. And that doesn't work for people who have been through major trauma...there are people who can't move on. They suffered so much that they just can't." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"There's the whole question of someone getting stuck in the term 'victim.' Who decides that? Who decides when enough time has passed and they shouldn't be calling themselves a victim anymore? I don't think other people can decide that... And they're two words [victim and survivor], but there's an awful lot of damage that can be done by the use of those words... So I would have a big issue around that whole political game that's being played around the terms." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"My group resents attempts by the establishment to remove the word 'victim' from the vocabulary. It's an attempt to sanitise language." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

"Because we're all survivors. And everybody's trying to be brave for everybody else. So there's that hidden thing there that's part of the survival role that we all take I think. Because there are times that we can expose our true emotions and then there are times that in a sense we cannot because we have to be able to cope in that particular situation, because the situation demands that." [*A priest*]

A strong sense emerged that many people go on a 'journey' or 'progression' from 'victim' to 'survivor' to a further stage in life. A number of people, from all constituencies, described the personal journeys that they had made, or the journeys they have witnessed others make. Most did not know where the journey would end, if it would end. Words like 'healer,' 'thriver,' 'rescuer,' and 'witness,' have been used to describe this personal progression.

"Or neither...It's only when they go through the healing process that they would see themselves as a survivor... Because I see it, well certainly in my case I would say that I was a victim first, then a survivor, then a healer." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

"The only people who can say if they are a victim, or survivor, is themselves. When they feel comfortable. That's the whole start of a journey into something else. For most of them, it's a journey from victimhood to survivor. And from survivor onto something else. We don't know where it ends, but the world's your oyster when you make that step." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

"Having once thought of myself as a 'victim' and now feeling that I have moved on and recognised myself as a survivor, I feel that each individual must see themselves as what they are comfortable with at any given time." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

"Victim – survivor – witness – thriver: think of it as a progression. Words and terms are a symptom of people healing, but they are also an integral part of healing." [*A victim/survivor group facilitator*]

"'Victim' and 'survivor' suggest to me stages on the road to recovery and healing. 'Victim' suggests someone at the stage of powerlessness where things are outside their control; while 'survivor' suggests to me someone who has been able to reclaim some sense or measure of control over the trauma that has occurred." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Finally there was a sense, especially amongst ex-prisoner respondents, that it does not matter which word is most used, as long as it is done in an inclusive way.

"I don't know what is the best terminology, but something that's acceptable to everyone I suppose… If we could find some type of terminology which people feel comfortable with, fine. It doesn't really matter what they call it at the end of the day…what we're trying to do is bring this society forward out of conflict. And whichever [word] is the best, with that perspective would be fine." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"I think that the ones who have the difficulty with it [the use of terminology] are the ones who are using a strict definition. But I honestly believe that as time goes on and they talk to other groups and they meet people from other groups they will understand that there are many more who have suffered." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

A few people felt that all of these words could be applicable in various circumstances.

"All of these words are useful, but perhaps we should first really attempt to ascertain or define what type of conflict existed in N. Ireland over the past 30 years. If we agreed on that, i.e. what type of conflict, we would/should probably be able to use all of the above words in their normally understood context. If we can't agree [on] the form of the conflict – all definitions can be contentious… I use all words because those are the words that apply to peoples who have experienced a civil conflict where lethal force was frequently used." [*Former member of the IRA*]

"'Victim' and 'casualty' both imply death or injury to themselves or a loved one, whereas 'survivor' is more general and could be someone who has lived through the Troubles but has not personally been killed or injured. Perhaps the word 'casualty' is more appropriate for paramilitaries killed or injured whilst on operations." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

Another respondent addressed the use of 'labelled' itself.

"I would use the term 'acknowledged as' rather than 'labelled as.' Acknowledgement of one's hurt helps with healing." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

A significant minority of people argued that debating the use of terminology is not necessarily useful.

"The debate is probably not that valuable, we should try to move beyond it." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

"Victim or survivor both mean the same thing to me. You know, you're a victim, yes, you've come through it. If you're a survivor, you've come through something that has been hurtful. So both of those definitions mean the same thing to me, so I don't have any angles on that, you know…. I don't find it

18

significant at all. I think the people class themselves more as victims. I haven't really heard much of the word." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"Debate? I would rather explore how we heal and move on. Do words matter so much?" [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

"No I do not find it valuable, I think it is counterproductive. Who is a victim and who is not greatly depends on which group you belong to: i.e. Republicans believe they are victims and therefore the British army is the terrorists. The army believes that the Republicans are terrorists and they (the army) are the force for good and therefore they are the victims. The Loyalists believe that everyone is out to get them so they are victims." [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

"Having debated the words and their meanings previously, I'm bound to conclude that it's rather like examining the meaning of life, and can become a full time occupation in its own right. Better, I think, to accept a wide, slightly woolly set of parameters and then, in an inclusive fashion, move ahead… I am a victim. It is a fact. It cannot be undone. Deal with it and stop the fruitless search for alternative language - people are crying and hurting whilst the debate goes on … and on." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

A somewhat larger number of people felt that this sort of discussion can be helpful. For many, it depends upon how such discussion is conducted.

"I suppose if a name helps us move on, we should debate it." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

"I probably change – sometimes thinking it's a waste of time getting caught up in definitions etc. However, I believe there is a need for all those who have experienced trauma to have the opportunity to talk this through – i.e. what happened, how they felt, how has it changed their lives, what repercussions does it still hold for them. While also realising this is needed by some but not by all – each individual needs to be treated as such and do what is right for them." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"I think it depends on who is having the debate…. It's important that the debate is involving the victims rather than just being decided by people who are removed, such as policy makers, and that what is decided is what victims actually feel happy with." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"Yes, find the most relevant and helpful word." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]

"I am always struck by how emotional these debates tend to become, by how much is at stake for people in holding on to certain meanings – perhaps understanding this dynamic is what the debate should be about, with less emphasis on finding the 'right' definition?" [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

"The debate can/could be useful if there is a genuine commitment by all to reach a conclusion to the discussions. Unfortunately, this is not the case and too many people have a desire to establish a political position via the use of definition. This renders the current debate less than useful." [*Former member of the IRA*]

"[This debate is] very valuable and much needed. It is in such debates that we gain greater insight into what is helpful for people going through a trauma. It increases our sensitivities in the language we use at such times." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Breadth & Hierarchy

To further examine the complexities of what victimhood means in and about Northern Ireland, we attempted to uncover respondents' feelings about how broad the social definition and recognition of victims should be. Moreover, we felt that within the question of breadth, the issue of whether a hierarchy exists amongst victims is pertinent – are some considered more 'truly' victims than others? Many people had clearly thought about these issues before; in a number of cases they discussed them even before being asked the following questions:

There has been some debate about how broad the definition of a victim should be. For example, should everyone who thinks of himself or herself as a victim be considered that way by society?

How do you feel about the suggestion that there could be a hierarchy or different levels of victims? (i.e. some would say that those who have been injured without cause are more 'truly' victims than those who may have provoked the actions that led to their injury.) What are your thoughts on this issue?

The responses to these questions were, again, broad and wide-ranging. Not only did respondents have different opinions about the answers, many interpreted the questions themselves differently. Their answers illustrate the many intricacies within the broader theme.

The majority of people felt that differentiations between victims do exist. Some construed these distinctions as a hierarchy, while others described them with alternate language or meaning. Their interpretations of why such differentiations exist, as well as their effect upon victims themselves and society as a whole, generally determined whether respondents felt positively or negatively about the general concept of a hierarchy.

A number of respondents from different backgrounds felt that peoples' community affiliations often colours their recognition of victims. Those who made this argument generally agreed that this sort of perspective, although human, is problematic and often divisive.

"I think victimhood, like anything else in Northern Ireland, has become sectarianised… If someone who seemed to be from the other side, had become a victim, was injured, or whatever, it's their fault, because they're the aggressors and we're the defenders. And therefore we're the real victims in this scenario. It's a bunch of nonsense." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"So the sense is where, sometimes, when there's such a definite divide, people can empathise with their own side, the victims of their own side very readily. But they don't find it as easy for the other side, because they find that they try to rationalise the reasons that these people are suffering." [*A priest*]

Similarly, some argued that although most people try to avoid language like "hierarchy," many people often act in deference to one anyway, which seemed to strike many as hypocritical.

"Even though everyone/group say they are working against this [a hierarchy] in their definition of each other, they continually pay lip service to it and then blame it on each other." [*The moderator of a group of Nationalists/Republicans*]

"I see that from a Republican side, you know, 'there's no hierarchy of victims and we're not going to create hierarchy of victims.' And that's coming from their sense of who would be seen as victims of the conflict. But in the very next breath they don't extend 'sorry' to the security forces because they're not proper victims. They're perpetrators. So the very people who are seen in society as perpetrators are calling other people perpetrators. And they're not acknowledging that they're also victims and that their families are also victims... The same is true for people on the Loyalist side who were involved in the conflict. Until people take personal responsibility it's difficult to move forward." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

A strong sense emerged across the communities that a hierarchy of victims has been created by political or funding motivations. Again, virtually everyone who felt this way expressed the opinion that such an artificial hierarchy harms society.

"All victims are victims, but some are more victimised than others? Sounds like something from George Orwell. Well, yeah I think there would be people who see a hierarchy of victims. Those who would see themselves as disadvantaged would see money going into rehabilitation for ex-police and military and whatever else, and them not getting money to do the support work that they want to. So yes, I think there is a perception of a hierarchy of victims." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"There is, in some peoples' minds, a hierarchy on all sides which allows them to be political and score points. [There] should not be a hierarchy, but representatives allow this to happen then shout about it." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"Well I think it's something that's very present, from the whole issue of victims. And that was brought up in political sort of vacuum. And it was used. And it was also funders that hold responsibility... I think there's no hierarchy of victims." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"I feel that people continue to say that there should be no hierarchy, and I don't think there should be. But it comes through that there is...we have a wee group here and we're working away merrily, everyone apart from me works away unpaid... I see sometimes a hierarchy coming in among people who are more mouthy than we are, who attend more conferences or talk more... I think people should be working, with people, for people." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"I think that we're very cautious here of the hierarchy of victims that has been created. And this is emphasised, particularly by government, and things such as the Bloomfield [Report] added to that. For instance, a special case was made of security forces and families; and I can't understand how their suffering is worse than mine...having buried one of my children." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"I always think people who class themselves as victims, there is a motive to this... I always wonder how many are genuine and how many not... People may be just out to get money. There are some genuine people, and always that section that jump on the bandwagon." [*A Minister and a councillor*]

At least one woman felt that paramilitary groups, or people associated with them, have created their own hierarchy.

"Well there's a hierarchy of victims certainly within paramilitary organisations. I mean if a member of their battalion or company has been shot, there're wreaths laid on the road and there're murals on the road. And there's a lot of acknowledgement. And I don't see that for security forces or normal people who've been affected in their everyday life." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

Some people rejected the concept of a hierarchy of victims upon the basis that all have suffered similarly. A strong sense exists that families of people who have been injured or killed have suffered equally, regardless of their background.

"More and more people would accept that there is no hierarchy of victimhood. That all, especially the dead all, are equally dead; whatever is said or done, they can't come back... We do live in an extremely divided society, where historically people from various traditions have accepted or thought that 'our dead good, their dead bad.' If we can get to the situation where people say 'all dead bad,' then we'll have made some significant progress." [*A community worker*]

"So I can understand why some people would dig their heels in and claim that there are more superior victims than others. But I disagree with it. I think it goes much further and much deeper. And I think through time they'll be able to look and see that. That everybody has suffered to some degree... In this town a number of UDA men have been shot dead or blown up, killed. How is their 3 year old son or sons any lesser of a victim because they've lost their father than the UDR man who was killed round the street? Or the British soldier, or the police man, their three year old son? How can you make a difference between the two three year old sons? In my point of view you can't. You know, they're equal. They're victims and that's it. There can be no difference." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"I think that every life is precious and unique and [that] every life that has been taken has caused sorrow for somebody. Every person that has been hurt is continuously going through pain. And for me, there shouldn't be distinctions made between victims." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"If your son was killed in the Troubles, whether he was a police officer or he was member of a paramilitary organisation, he was killed. Those feelings of loss and pain are the same in the mother irrespective of what that individual did. So, it's about value laden in terms of innocent and guilty. If you're looking at what the actual trauma is, it's the same irrespective of their position or what they were involved in... So I would not find it useful...and I don't think that's a positive way of trying to go forward and trying to mend the issues that we have as a community" [*Community worker*]

"In a sense, everyone's a victim in this society from thirty years conflict. It depends on the degree of victimhood. I would recognise personally that there are people from Loyalist or even security forces who are victims to a very heightened sense: anyone who's been injured physically or has lost a loved one." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

Similarly, others felt that no one should judge what another's suffering and pain have been.

"I do not believe that there is or should be a hierarchy of victims. However anyone is affected by conflict, there is no higher or lower level of pain. No one has the right to say that someone's pain is less than their own because of the level of injury or degree of involvement." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

"I have seen this played out [a hierarchy]. I guess there's something innately human about it; that the worse thing that could happen would be for someone to lose his or her life… My impression is that these are just different kinds of trauma and that they should all be accorded some kind of equality in terms of support… If there is not enough money put in to deal with trauma, in whatever form, then inevitably there will be disagreements about who should be prioritised and this 'hierarchy' becomes real." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"I believe that no one has the monopoly on calling themselves victims. It depends on circumstances surrounding their death or injury." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

Many people wrestled with the question of innocent victims. A number from all communities, except those with a paramilitary background, felt that people who had been harmed by, but did not engage in Northern Ireland's political violence, were more 'truly' victims than those who did engage.

"Yes, some of us were victims more than security forces or IRA/UVF." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

"My thoughts change on this one. My gut feeling is that someone, particularly a civilian has been murdered then they are 'more of a victim' than those who made choices and decisions to use violence on others. Although I believe that those who have perpetuated acts of violence can be perceived as victims, not because of their actions, but the repercussions it may have on their lives after." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"This is a big question for me. I don't think the term [hierarchy] is helpful… Those who work on the perpetrator's side would often say 'this is not a helpful term, hierarchy of victims, we don't want a hierarchy of victims, can't have a hierarchy.' And I agree with that in a sense, saying 'ok, that's not a helpful term if it means that we're losing this whole group of people.' So that's one part of it. But while you may not want to use the term [hierarchy], I can't get away from that fact that some people were less innocent and some people were more responsible. And there are some people who I shed less tears for. Sad though as it is, and you feel for their families and all the rest of it. But at the end of the day, that's what they were out to do, and they paid the price, and I didn't lose any sleep over it." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"No, I still feel…that perpetrators and their families who supported them are not victims…my father and through him, us are true victims. No I can't at this point change my mind." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

[Responding to: *How do you feel about the suggestion that there could be a hierarchy or different levels of victims?*]
"I think this is true and there must be a line drawn between innocent and perpetrator." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

"Northern Ireland has a victim culture and everyone seems to see themselves as victims. Paramilitaries see themselves as victims as a justification/reason for their violent actions… No, [not everyone should be considered a victim] especially if they have caused death or injury, but we should try to understand why they did so, what caused them to become involved and to make that choice when others didn't." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

Others argued that 'innocence' is a difficult issue, for many different reasons.

"I don't think anybody at the end of the day would argue that there haven't been innocent victims. But again, it's challenging that thought process that many people would have, that their loved ones or people from their community or their tradition are somehow more important than others." [*A community worker*]

"A hierarchy can be divisive. But I can't be judgmental of the feelings of people who have experienced tremendous pain, without having gone through it myself." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

"Well, I would say, yes there are innocent victims. But sometimes I would feel that the name of 'innocent' is put onto victims who have actually been involved in conflict. And I don't agree with that because I think it takes away from the person who's just been walking across and been injured." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

"I would love for them to tell me what it means to be an innocent victim, what exactly they mean by that, or a real victim. Does it mean that they're excluding some people? And I wonder are they excluding people from my community? Because quite often we would have been seen as the perpetrators." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

A number of respondents attempted to reconcile their sense that differences exist amongst 'types' of victims with their rejection of a hierarchy by talking about 'categories' of victims. In general those who responded this way desired to avoid the valuation of some peoples' suffering above others, but did feel it was necessary or useful to recognise that variations exist.

"I think victim has been somewhat misused. Everybody and his brother who live in Northern Ireland would believe that they're victims. So that can't be true. I suppose that, without trying to make a hierarchy of victims, there are different levels of victimhood…[which is demonstrated with a series of concentric circles indicating the degree to which someone is affected by a violent act.] It's the head that's divisive. The hearts cannot be. The hearts can only have love and understanding and empathy. Everyone's pain is legitimate." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

"Hierarchy requires judgements which build or diminish individuals. It is very destructive to use such terms. It is better to recognise different types of victims with different stories and perhaps needing different support structures." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"I believe in <u>no</u> hierarchy of victims, I see human beings with different needs, and on an individual base need to be assessed, asked what their needs are. This way we can move forward and create real peace." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

"Categories, rather than hierarchies, is more useful." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]

"I reject the idea of a hierarchy if this is used to deny suffering on all sides, if it forms part of a destructive, exclusivist "victim Olympics." However, being anti-hierarchy in this sense does not imply being pro-homogeneity; rejecting exclusivity does not deny legitimate differentiation. The challenge is to balance the need for inclusive acknowledgement of widespread suffering and harm with a sensitivity to context." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

A few people suggested that a hierarchy, of sorts, would be useful if it were based upon peoples' pain and needs. Doing so, they often argued, would result in society focusing on providing support to those who need it the most.

"There are different levels of grief and probably different levels of victimhood… So I think there is a hierarchy, to me, of people who've lost someone… Pain and suffering… There are a lot of people out there who are real, real victims to me. And that's the people who have lost members of their family." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"I think actually you can quantify suffering in some way. It would be absurd for me or you [both Americans] to say we have suffered as much as someone living in Northern Ireland from the Troubles. I would think someone here would be rightly angry if we said, 'I've been as much of a victim as somebody on the Shankill.' That'd be unreasonable, kind of offend our basic intuitions. So, I think, if you want to call it a hierarchy I guess I'd accept that, or quantification, I'd accept that. Somewhere between the flabby everyone's a victim and the overly rigid, I'm an A victim and you're only a C victim." [*An American Researcher*]

"I feel that that the government should not simply throw money at victims' support groups. Money should be spent with consideration on where the real needs and wants are. It is important to do so to avoid perpetuation of bitterness." [*A person who would like to see peace in my day, working in a victim support group*]

About one-quarter of respondents felt that in providing recognition and support to victims, society as a whole ought to be as inclusive as possible. In essence these respondents answered the question '*should everyone who thinks of himself or herself as a victim be considered that way by society?*' with a fairly explicit 'yes.'

"I think that's just sufficient. If a person feels that…they're hurting, or that they were traumatised by some experience, or even watching the television and seen something terrible and that feeling disrupts everything. I think it [social recognition of victimhood] should be open to anybody who wants it." [*Works in support group*]

"I believe that if someone feels they have been victimised, then that is their reality. However if the debate does not move beyond labelling and identifying people as victims, then positive movements may not happen." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"I would probably be quite inclusive. How do I know what some people have gone through? … There are a lot of victims out there, and it's not for me to say that anyone's a victim more than another person." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"In the end the individual must decide (and, if necessary) justify his/her calling themselves a 'victim.' It is unhelpful if others sit in judgment, telling them who and what they are. It creates resentment, distrust and fosters divisions." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"If someone calls themselves a victim then there are needs that are not being met and maybe society could help create structures that could help meet these needs." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

Others answered the question: *should everyone who thinks of himself or herself as a victim be considered that way by society?* with explicit negative responses. In some cases they argued that doing so would include people who, in their opinion, aren't really victims. No Republican or Loyalist ex-paramilitaries made this argument; otherwise it emerged from nearly all groups.

"No, some love it." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

"No, most in my society made the victims." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

"No, e.g. during the Workers' strike of 1974, a lady in North Down was heard saying: 'this strike is awful! You can't get aubergines anywhere!'" [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"I feel that the government's perception is that if someone self-defines as a victim that makes him or her a victim. By the same logic, if I define myself as the Prime Minister, then I am; it seems opportunistic." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

"I guess I'm a little uncomfortable with 'anybody who feels like a victim sign up and we'll give you money.' Because I think there is such a thing as imagined victimhood… But just because it's very complicated, I don't know that, there might be some costs to completely jettisoning this notion of a hierarchy. Because that could just kind of dissolve into this flabby 'we're all victims.' I think we can do better work than that." [*An American researcher*]

"No – not state forces, or informers, but maybe their families?" [*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term*]

A few argued that creating an official definition about what it means to be a victim is impossible or hurtful; it would probably not be a valuable exercise.

"For me, well, I'm not sure actually if there should be an official line." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"But you can also say that people who use the term [victim] very broadly, and I wouldn't readily recognise them as a victim. But who's to say that they don't feel that. You can't… Once you start to say who cannot be remembered, you're beginning to say to yourself, 'I could be becoming part of the problem here.'" [*A priest*]

"There's an exclusivity that's developing around victimhood and that's a danger, because that's divisive and about making judgments over other people. It's creating division, rather than bringing communities together, which is what the whole ideas around reconciliation are. But if you can't bring people together, classifying people into different types of victims, we're never going to get there… And likewise, if it's too vague a thing, us all standing up and saying that 'we're all victims' doesn't mean anything. It becomes a meaningless thing as well. But, it's about acknowledging what has happened to people and the needs assessment and identifying how people move on from that." [*Community worker*]

"I would be inclined to take the claim [to be a victim] seriously because even in less visible cases there might be genuine cry for acknowledgment… But there are a number of reasons why society should resist the exploitation and cheapening of victimhood, whether for narrow party political or selfish financial gains, which would undermine the position of those in genuine need… I would rather err on the side of inclusivity as far as protected persons/victims are concerned." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

Named Perpetrators & Questions of Inclusivity

One of the themes that the respondents seemed to find most significant and complex surrounds the perception of people who have been named perpetrators in the conflict. Our research aimed, in part, to explore the degree to which people feel that those who have engaged in violence can or should be considered victims of the conflict as well. We expected intricacies regarding this issue to include discussion about what the perpetrators may be victims of. Who might be considered perpetrators? How do different constituencies define who a perpetrator is? Should they be considered victims at all? Are they victims of the violent acts that they engaged in? Are they victims of the socialising effects of a violent society? Are they victims of community pressure to join organisations? Are they victims of history or circumstance? Moreover, how do an individual's responsibility and personal choices reflect upon his or her victimhood? Opinions regarding these issues and many others were illustrated in the respondents' thoughtful answers to the two following questions:

There has been significant debate about the degree to which people became involved in violent community conflict due to the force of circumstance/community pressure as opposed to individual choice and responsibility. How do you feel such a debate could apply to Northern Ireland?

Do you feel that someone who has been a perpetrator in the conflict can also be a victim of it? What makes you feel the way you do?

Across communities, the majority of respondents felt that people who have been perpetrators in the conflict could be construed as victims as well, at least in some contexts. Some people felt this way due to their sense that perpetrators have also been affected by the violence.

"Now, am I a victim? You know, if it hadn't been for the attacks on the people I was seeing…being killed, I would never have gotten involved in what I got involved in. I would never have been sent to prison. My family would never have suffered the way that they've suffered. So, I would argue very strongly." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"I do know for a fact that there are many who have since suffered psychological consequences of their actions, in terms of flashbacks, nightmares, whatever else. So 'perpetrators' yes, because they've carried out the acts, and 'victims' yes, because they have suffered as a result of their experience." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"Many men and women, after years of involvement, realised that they were mistaken and that the killings/violence need not have happened. They can never be rid of what they did. Now they may have changed attitudes and thus are left with deep seated anguish, regret and self loathing." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"Yes, because in the same way as someone uninvolved in the conflict becomes a 'victim,' I feel that perpetrators can become victims through circumstances." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

"History, family grievances, injustices, have and will always impel some to choose the armed struggle. They may die or be severely injured in the process. I can accept that they too are victims of the conflict, the same conflict that took my son. I would of course condemn their tactics and methods, but not their political aspirations." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"Yes. Based on those stories I have heard. E.g. how can someone who was involved in with cleaning guns at age 12 be anything other than a victim." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Others argued that they would include perpetrators in their general idea of victimhood, however, they think of them in a different context from those who did not engage in violence. Many of the respondents who felt this way referred to the motivations that perpetrators probably had.

"Generally, I think that people who join up are victims of circumstance… People, I would imagine, joined up because they have a sense of injustice, or received some kind of terrible pain of their own or saw their communities suffer and they decided that the only way to change it was to join an organisation." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"Yes, I believe that perpetrators of paramilitary violence are also casualties of the present conflict owing to community pressure and a sense of loyalty to whatever community they may come from." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

"The Nationalists felt very much that they were treated as second class citizens and that they had to fight for their equality and for their say in the community they lived in. And so, they might have gone about it the wrong way, you know, by shooting people and bombing and all that, but they were victims. They were victims. The people also who suffered as a result of the bombings and the shootings, they are also victims. There are victims on both sides. So I think that if you're a perpetrator, you can also be a victim." [*Works in support group*]

"But if you say, 'can somebody who shot another person in cold blood be both a victim and a perpetrator?' I have a hard time with that… You can still reframe somebody and see them as more than an act of violence. And have some humility and recognise that you could have done the same thing, but still be able to assign moral responsibility for actions… We do so for the sake of compassion…the minute we stop looking at causes, we start dismissing people from the moral community and then the conversation dies…you know, they no longer seem human." [*An American researcher*]

"I think they're a victim of some other circumstance, but they're not the victim as declared by themselves… The people who were involved in political violence can never be described as the victim. The perpetrator, they're a victim of circumstances, they're a victim of history, they're a victim of all that when you use the word victim… But that's slightly different than people who've been victimised because they've been hurt and injured and lost loved ones as a result of that so-called victimisation of everyone else." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

"In my case the simple fact that my son walked the streets of Derry [as a soldier] made him, in the eyes of many, a perpetrator…he then became a victim. So the answer to the question is, I suppose, yes. But there is a degree to which the victim can contribute to his/her victimhood. Whether this contribution diminishes his/her sense of victimhood is debatable. I believe it does. 'If you don't like the rules, don't play the game.'" [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

A few argued that the spectrum of being a perpetrator or an innocent victim is very undefined – there are many shades of grey.

"Because in many shades of life, you can be a victim of paramilitary threat. And you can be a perpetrator the moment you get caught in domestic violence – physically abusing your kids. So you can be a perpetrator of victimhood – you're creating victims, and be a victim at the same time… There are varying degrees of being a victim and a perpetrator at the same time. But there's no solid position, there's not a perpetrator, the source of all evil versus the good people. That's where some of the definitions come from, like 'an innocent who has been…' Who's innocent? How do you define what innocent is?" [*Community worker*]

A significant minority of respondents, about one-fifth, felt that people who have perpetrated violent crimes should not also be construed as victims of the conflict. This sentiment emerged primarily from people who did not have strong Republican or Loyalist ties.

"No – No – No – Sorry I feel we didn't deserve what they inflicted on us and the community." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

"It doesn't come across well. It would be a very hard pill to swallow. Because I know that this is something that has been talked about… But if you choose to take up arms to hurt people, then you can't really call yourself a victim." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"Some who would be called reformed terrorists, they would say that they are victims… But from my point of view, I don't see them as victims and I don't see them as casualties. I see them as being the author of their own misfortune. If they were thrown in the slammer because they were engaged in terrorist activity, my view is that well, so you were engaged in the activity. If they happen to be shot as a result of carrying out terrorist acts, I say 'so be it.' If they were blowing people up and they were shot as a result of that, I say 'so be it.' It seems quite simplistic, but that's the way I view it. I think ordinary decent people would corroborate my views and they would feel the same way as me. And if you're speaking to anyone out there from whatever religious background, who have not been directly involved in the conflict, I think they would say the same thing." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"No, we feel that they cause most of it, be they IRA etc or state forces." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

"But for perpetrators, I do find it very hard to understand how anyone can go out and decide it's time to kill. The IRA or UDA or UVF or whatever organisation. I have no time for the person who wants to kill someone. But, yes, they're entitled to say they're sorry. They're entitled to do their time. They're entitled to say, "What I did was wrong." But, you know, I will judge them on what I probably see. But at the end of the day, they will be their own judges." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"I do not accept the concept of terrorists as victims. They are not the same as those who have been butchered. The establishment recognises perpetrators as equally victims. This appals, angers and frustrates me, as it is done for purely political reasons. It defies any use of English; it prostitutes the English language. As far as the paramilitary members being victims of circumstance, I feel that they often self-define. There is an element of truth to their argument, but not much." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

"Yes, a family member may have been killed or injured, but I find it difficult to see the perpetrator as a victim if he is killed or injured on a paramilitary operation." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

One ex-prisoner explained how he could understand such feelings, but did not agree with them.

"I can understand that argument, but I don't believe that it's an honest or a valid sort of statement. It may be valid for the individual people who have lost loved ones and seeing someone that has killed a loved one or injured a loved one as a victim. But that, in my experience, is because there's a distance and no meeting of the two and no understanding of the motivations. There's also the political sort of aspect, where it suits their political targets to raise that issue. And a lot of victims who I have spoken to...they cannot agree or condone what you're involved in, they can understand how you got there. But in some sense there's a betrayal of the injured family member too. So, there's a whole sort of area around that." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

The consideration of the force of circumstance and politics upon people who became perpetrators resonated with many respondents. People from all of the communities questioned expressed this sentiment. People with Nationalist backgrounds were, however, more likely to describe particular grievances that people may have had with contemporary politics and society.

"Many became involved only because of [the] overall political situation. So they were victimised twice - by their own enforced actions and by the actions visited on them." [*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term*]

"I believe that many people who did become involved did so at a young age, believing that they were doing something really genuine and good for their community. While I do not doubt that a small number became involved because they wanted to use violence and kill for the sheer pleasure of it." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others.*

"Definitely, because of: history, political stance, perceptions of justice, peer pressure, resentment to house searches, deprivation, reaction to events like the curfew and Bloody Sunday, unemployment, heavy-fisted operations by security forces. At the same time, large numbers did not get involved." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"God love those little kids because if they're being brought up in that way then they're victims also... [Referring to a young man who died from a failed pipe bomb:] But he was a victim, because he was 15 years of age. He didn't make that thing, somebody put it in his hand. But the 4 year old who was blowing that whistle - is he going to grow up to be the 17 year old who's throwing the pipe bomb? If that is going to be instilled in him, then there's something extremely sad. Obviously it has to come from somewhere." [*A priest*]

"I have listened to stories of people who have been involved in conflict and they have talked about their sense of being victims of the conflict as well, and quite a lot of people appeared to have got involved because of something that has happened in their family, not just the circumstances of places they grew up in or community pressure, but more about individual experiences." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

Within this group, a number of people argued that it is important to consider social responsibility for the conflict, including that of people who did not actually engage in violence.

In the absence of dialogue, the chances or the opportunities for people to resort to purely physical reactions to events [increase]… If there is no agreed overall political understanding, then violence will occur." [*A community worker*]

"Everyone has to take responsibility. Bystanders can be just as guilty as others. We have to address the causes of violence everywhere… The middle class professions have been spectators, but we have silently collude by not trying to address the causes, such as prejudice and stereotyping." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]

"The responsibility of those who pulled the triggers or planted the bombs should be placed within a wider spiral of responsibility, including those who formulated the policies, gave the orders, and those who actively or passively supported the violent actions… We should resist a too easy criminalisation of the characters of those responsible for political violence. This kind of stigmatisation may not only amount to a denial of shared responsibility, but also makes it very difficult for political prisoners to feel part of the community again." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

One respondent pointed out that to attribute someone's involvement solely to 'individual choice' would limit the possibility for increased understanding.

"In many ways, the definition is dependent on whether one views the N.I. "Troubles" as a civil conflict/civil war or a prolonged … bout of criminality… Any attempt to impose the 'individual choice' option (as opposed to discussing it) would almost certainly foreclose any further debate." [*Former member of the IRA*]

Others felt that while those who became involved did so because of legitimate causes and motivations, they have since 'lost their way' in violence.

"I can see young men and women being caught up in political or violent situations because of the place they come from and are drawn into it. They become victims…some of them went in for the right reason… But I had the sense to know [not to join the UDA]. A lot of people have thought that but have not had the courage to walk away unfortunately. You have to live with that. That's the type of think I think you could be a victim of. You go in for a genuine cause." [*A Minister and a councillor*]

"Yes, they were carried along on the tide – had to belong and in belonging lost themselves. I hope they find their way back." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

A number of ex-prisoners told their own stories of becoming involved. Most of these were based on their personal experiences rather than an overarching sense of history or politics.

"I can remember a very, very close friend of mine. The IRA came to his door and shot him dead. And I remember saying to myself, 'what is the point? Why am I in this? Why am I in the security forces?' I became involved in paramilitaries because the security forces' hands were tied. The government policy was failing. It was nothing to do with historical, cultural reasons within Northern Ireland. It was nothing to do with that. It was pure and simple revenge. It was, so many of my friends had been killed and maimed, I felt I had to do something." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"Well, from a personal perspective, my family was a Republican family. And there seemed to be a lot of that in Northern Ireland – the tradition of Republicanism in families. There was a split in the Republican movement in 1970 and that was the birth of the Provisionals. I was very young at the time and I was in the youth wing of the Republican movement. I was lucky enough to have people around me who advised me and led me to stay with the Official movement. I am grateful to them for that because otherwise I would have taken a more overtly sectarian direction through this." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"For me personally, it was a choice. I saw my friends in the security forces get killed and I joined the UVF because I thought that not enough was being done." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

"Those of us involved were pressured by violence directed at us." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

Some of the people who have been directly involved in conflict felt that the degree of pressure and the force of circumstances are not well understood by people outside high intensity conflict areas.

"There's no real perception of what it was really like… A lot of people outside the working class areas that were in the midst of this conflict wouldn't have caught on to what was going on. They wouldn't have experienced the same experiences. It would have been removed. As far as they were concerned, they wanted to get on with their lives and weren't interested really in what was happening on the ground." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"When the community hassled me and my mates we gave back. They will never agree with this." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

Respondents in relatively rural areas often felt that the debate regarding community pressure was less relevant to them and their communities.

"Community pressure is not really a factor in rural areas like ours. No one in my group, to my knowledge, has paramilitary ties." [*A person who would like to see peace in my day, working in a victim support group*]

"I have heard this a lot. It's hard for people in this part of the world to make that distinction, because this is a rural community. There are no interface areas… We have housing estates that are not terribly good, but there just never would be the same peer pressure or fear. I think there would be peer pressure such that certain people might join an organisation. But I don't think there's the same pressure for them to take up arms within that organisation." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

Still others felt that while the circumstances and community pressure should be remembered, responsibility ultimately lies with the individual.

"My position is that as a human being, I am personally responsible for my actions, however young I was at the time… My involvement came from a purely human response to what was going on in that community… If you can look outside of yourself and blame everyone else and find justification that makes you feel better. But once you work through that, you come to a point where you acknowledge your personal responsibility. And there's no escaping that. And that's painful.

There's a sense that you're betraying who you are. And when all, or a lot, of the values or beliefs that you've held are completely wrong, there's a sense of bewilderment and finding yourself in a wilderness." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

"If you get a group of young people, children, growing up with little or no education, all of a sudden to become a hero in the community, to have status in the community for being a UVF man or an IRA man, it's very appealing. But the other side of me says of course it's down to individual choice as well. Because I grew up in an estate like that. But I didn't decide to go down that road. I do have big issues with people, prisoners and people like that, who would say, 'you have to understand my life. When I was this age this happened to me and then this happened to me, so I joined up and this is why.' And of course, I understand that there's a truth in that, but there's nobody saying, 'I decided to do this, and what I did was wrong.' That means a lot to me, to hear people say that. And I don't see it. I just see people hiding behind words like 'conflict' and 'victim.'" [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"I don't accept that. I was brought up the same as anyone in a working class background; you don't fight, shoot or kill. That is not the way forward; there is a political means of protesting…not taking somebody's life because you feel downtrodden." [*A Minister and a councillor*]

"I believe in personal responsibility and free will. The idea that in order to defend one's community one has to go across the Irish Sea and plant bombs in litter bins and hotels and shops and pubs is an untenable one. I would defend my home against direct attack only if all else failed. By that I mean a total breakdown of the social law and order." [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

"Some people have the will/faith/morals to resist such external pressure; sadly, others do not and embrace with blind obedience the imperative to use illegitimate force." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"It certainly does apply. The family one grows up in, peer pressure, community pressure, individual events etc influence the choice an individual makes. However, this can never condone or excuse the taking of life." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

A very few rejected the probability of community pressure or political circumstances being a significant force in many peoples' decisions to become involved.

"Why debate? They wanted the ego. Well, maybe a small number gave in to pressures, but most enjoyed what they were doing. No we can't agree, [that force of circumstances was a significant factor in involvement] they never took responsibility. Look at Sinn Fein and others now, still fighting. It's the same thinking." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

Some people mentioned personal responsibility, yet also seemed to believe that many of the motivations which led to involvement were legitimate. These types of answers illustrate the degree to which many people recognise the complexities and ambiguities of such questions.

"You know, we can blame a lot of things on the past, but we have to move from the past… I think Irish people are inclined to stay in the past and blame everything else on what happened in the past…I don't want to see people who are saying, 'Oh, such and such person was killed. I should go out and take somebody else's life…' They would say Republican paramilitaries aren't victims because they knew what they were doing. But I feel sorry for their families.

33

They went down that road of taking peoples' lives, you know we all get caught up in the minute and I just don't want to see any more victims." [*An SDLP councillor*]

A substantial sense emerged that regardless of whether the term of 'victim' is used, pain and suffering is widespread. Many people felt that this suffering should be addressed, regardless of the individuals' background and whether or not he or she might be termed a victim.

"To ignore the pain of some people because they have been in part responsible, I don't think that would be healthy as we're trying to work towards peace." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"Trauma is trauma no matter who has suffered it; and often the symptoms and effects are the same. If you look at Vietnam veterans, if you look at Gulf War veterans and Second World War veterans, the police or army who have served here, Republican paramilitaries, Loyalist paramilitaries, those who are suffering from traumatic stress often have all similar symptoms." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"Someone who has been a perpetrator has needs which deserve to be met, needs opportunities for healing and for their story to be heard in a safe way, just as those starting as victims. I believe that no one takes up violence unless they have experienced pain or are victims of external pressure. I believe all victims and perpetrators have lost some of their humanity and all are human beings who deserve their humanity back." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

Self-perception & Recognition

As significant as the more general, philosophical debate is, we also feel that it is important to ground the issues in actual life events. With this motivation in mind, we asked respondents a series of questions about perceptions of victimhood as it might apply to themselves and to their communities.

Considering the range of definitions and meanings, victim, survivor, casualty, or none of these, how would you characterise yourself or your community? What parts of definitions, if any, do you find applicable?

If you use such words to describe yourself or your community, what particular incidents or issues are significant reasons for why you do so?

Do you believe that other people and groups throughout Northern Ireland might agree with the way you describe yourself? In what ways might they agree or disagree?

Some respondents adamantly expressed the sentiment that they felt they were victims. Mostly, they felt they became victims due to the loss of a close family member.

"I feel like a victim. A priceless son was taken from me arbitrarily, unjustly and callously. I can conceive of no other description for my son, my wife and my other children and I apart from 'victim.'" [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"I am definitely a victim... My father was a serving RUC officer. He was shot while attending a set up so called car accident – the cowards never claimed it...and now they are out walking their streets in their community and my family had no choice but to move to the States to save my mother and her sanity." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

Some respondents felt that they, or the groups they work with, would not apply the word 'victim' to themselves, as they had not been physically harmed, even though they had suffered.

"I don't think they would actually, unless something specific happened to them, I don't think they would consider themselves victims... But I think it would be good for everyone to think about this question themselves and how it has affected them." [*Works in support group*]

"See, I never felt a victim. I mean I have never been physically hurt. I've been mentally scarred by the things that have happened to the family. But I've never been physically hurt." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

"I mean, I would be referred to as a victim, but I don't see myself as a victim. I don't really see myself as a survivor either." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

A sizeable number of respondents preferred not to 'label' themselves, or felt that the members of the group they work with would not do so.

"I don't think they would use a word, what they would do is they would agree that they have suffered consequences, but they haven't been able to define it to a greater extent. They know that their life chances have been affected by their involvement in the conflict over the years. But they couldn't pull into any real terminology such as victimhood or survivor." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"On a very personal basis, my husband was murdered by the IRA. I don't see myself labelled as a victim, I don't see my family labelled as victims. But I know that they are victims, if you see what I mean. But I don't see them labelled that way." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"We have suffered and inflicted pain. New words are needed. But we have 'survived.'" [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

Some people preferred to talk about personal healing or a 'journey' they have been on.

"In some respects I would be a victim of the Troubles. But I would see myself more as having survived an attack on me. And I'm not really a victim... For myself, I suppose I saw myself as being a victim in that I was injured, but not really as a victim that should lie down and just take it. For me it was a case of sink or swim, so I thought I don't fancy sinking, so I decided to swim. And I just got on with my life." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"I would now characterise myself as having moved on from being a victim or casualty and am now a survivor of the conflict – and in so doing have learnt more understanding...feeling that I have moved on from 'victimhood,' I would try and encourage my community not to seem as someone to feel sorry for." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

"My truth is that I started as a victim but I am now on a journey of healing." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

A number of people who have served in security forces felt that as they had suffered as a result of their job, they would not choose to describe themselves as 'victims.' One woman felt that paramilitary members would feel similarly – that they had been soldiers.

"I think they [her group] would avoid labelling. I think they would more see themselves as people who did a job and are hoping to move on." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"I believe that I myself could be considered a casualty of the present conflict." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

"I would go with whatever they feel [Republican paramilitary members' feelings about being victims]. But at one time I would have thought of them as victims and then someone pointed out to me one day that they are not. That they are soldiers." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

"With the project that we've got, the soldiers probably won't come to us as victims... I think the difficulty is that however you define all of those words, you are never going to find something that describes everybody who has been affected." [*An Englishwoman whose father was killed by an IRA bomb in England*]

People spoke of being victimised for a variety of reasons in addition to the death or injury of a family member. A large number of people with a Nationalist background felt victimised by past and present discrimination by the government and society.

"What we have to do is recognise, you know the governments did do things wrong. They did put people down. Nationalists were treated like second-class citizens." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"So there is this general feeling that those who come from West Belfast - Republican, Nationalist, Catholic, whatever you want to call it - that you are responsible in some way for everything that has happened, everything that has gone wrong in the North of Ireland through history. So you're constantly being patronised to… You know, we're the ones who've been treated as second-class citizens for so long. We're the ones who didn't have our civil rights." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

One man with a Unionist background argued that such suffering was not one-sided.

"When I talk to Roman Catholics, I would say to them, 'tell me what have I got that you haven't got? Anything that I have I worked for it, nobody has given me anything…Don't get me wrong, I know that the Unionist party didn't treat you, or the working class Protestants any different. We were treated the same. We had no things in our houses, the same as anybody else…' I'm not saying there was not discrimination but there is always discrimination on both sides, within places, areas, jobs etc. That still goes on." [*A Minister and a councillor*]

Others, particularly from Nationalist or Republican communities, spoke about the violence their communities endured.

"The level of state violence and Loyalist violence directed at us – the level of deaths of people in our community. We also recognise the pain we have caused." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"Multiple killings, including sectarian ones, internal feuds, constant house searches and body searches, The Falls Curfew, large numbers in prison, no social life, no access to jobs." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

Some respondents, from a wide variety of backgrounds, described the suffering or victimisation they experienced from their own community or through their loss of community.

"My community, as I say, the working class background that I came from. I lived in a Loyalist area in Belfast and things were relatively ok within my immediate community, up until 1985, at the time of that Anglo-Irish Agreement signing… Loyalist paramilitaries took out their venom on the RUC, it was they saw us as supporting that Agreement, where in fact all we were doing was holding the line between peace and anarchy… That's why my mother and father ended up being forced out of their home in '85. And now they live in another part of Northern Ireland, away from where they were born and reared and grew up." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"One point may be that as I don't class myself as belonging to that community, I receive negative attitudes – behaviours because (of the perception) that I'm not loyal to all the principles, that I'm wishy-washy, and/or middle class (a perception) and removed from the worst of the conflict." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"Because I have been a victim, my family are still victims of the Troubles, I've had paint attacks on my house. We have had a gun attack in 1993, a bomb attack in 1994, being threatened by people in our own community because I refuse to let them put flags up." [*An SDLP councillor*]

"While not forced to move through bomb or bullet, I was [victimised] via my children being bullied out of my community, by my community. So my community became a victim of its own attitude to people like me... They certainly wouldn't feel they had any responsibility for my situation." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

A large number of people, from all communities, felt that their suffering and victimisation had not been sufficiently acknowledged and supported. Most felt that it is very important that society address this issue. Some argued that this failure was the result of government policy or funding needs.

"An example of that would be a woman...who has two very, very small children... The husband gets arrested and sent to prison. That girl didn't know anything her husband had been involved in; she didn't know what he had been up to. He got life in prison for murder. She was left, she lost her job, she lost her husband, the children lost their father, she practically lost her home, she lost all of her friends in the neighbourhood, because she became victimised... But under the definition that the European funders would be laying down, she would not be classed as a victim. Her family would not be classed as victims. Our group would get very angry at that." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"It's really strange that whenever they changed our name from the UDR to the Royal Irish Regiment...it's like the UDR had become forgotten... They [her group] feel forgotten about and that the work they did is being derided... I think some people probably feel that society has labelled them as government thugs or something like that, you know... It's very hard to deal with. I mean there are more men like that old gentleman that you met than there are any real thugs." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

[Speaking about the change from the RUC to the PSNI] "The whole uniform has changed, which is a bit sad. I wore it for 25 years, it really stuck in my throat when I saw the change coming about. Of course the other argument that was put forward by the victims, the widows and the orphan kids, was 'my dad died for this uniform, died in this uniform, why are they taking it away?' And it's a good question, and it's one that I can't answer." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

Some people felt unsupported by their own community.

"But certainly, with the line of work that I did, from that body that was responsible for my work situation, the pain wasn't recognised... Because I have never been contacted by the welfare department that I worked for, even after I'd left. I mean, they still know where I live." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

"They [my community] made me the casualty... The community only sees what is done to them, not what they do to others. They allowed me to be shot and exiled for 2 years... They would describe me as a thug/criminal scum." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

"We are casualties due to the actions of the IRA and our sons. Much of our community fears 'hoods,' Police and the IRA. So we are casualties of circumstance...we were not directly involved in incidents but the actions of others have put us in difficult positions." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

Others felt that society as a whole, or people from communities other than theirs, were not interested or willing to understand their situation.

[*Do you believe that other people and groups throughout Northern Ireland might agree with the way you describe yourself?*]
"Definitely disagree, they would find it difficult to accept our suffering, probably see us as the offender."
[*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term*]

"No, we feel they would see us as deserving violence against us – we would be seen as the 'enemy,' legal target." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"Certainly some would disagree regarding ex-prisoners [as being victims], but in some ways those who have been involved on the Nationalist side would have a better understanding of why we got involved. The middle Unionists tend to be the least understanding." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

"Initially what I'm saying is, the people that I've disclosed to haven't really asked. Ex-paramilitaries from the Nationalist side haven't really asked how I've suffered. Although they know that I'm an ex-member of the security forces." [*I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker*]

"Some probably wouldn't [agree with the way I describe my community] because everyone wants to be a bigger victim than others." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"I think there would be a big perception, certainly from one side of the community, that the victims here wouldn't be innocent or as important as the ones that are in Northern Ireland... I think some people would have some difficulty in recognising British victims on this island because there are less of them and they haven't lived through the difficulties that the people in Northern Ireland have lived through." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"Unionists and Loyalists would agree with the way I describe myself but the IRA and probably Sinn Fein would not see my son as a victim." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

A number described a process of "re-victimisation" as a result of not being acknowledged and supported.

"I felt more victimised by the system that was there, designed to help me. That they said that I wasn't didn't fit the criteria for an award." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"However, we know these debates easily become very politicised, which increase the risk of secondary victimisation amongst those who feel their suffering is trampled by political posturing." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

"There are so many ways to describe one's experience in the conflict. Again depending on the particular group applying the definition I might have several definitions attached to me...My late son being a soldier who was killed in NI, I was called 'the father of a perpetrator.' That robs me of my identity as it did my son." [*An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland*]

"So, there are continuous attitudes, you know, that we're not real victims. It's a constant battle, and really secondary trauma that you're going through." [*Mother of a murdered teenager*]

A couple of respondents described the different experiences for those who are outside of Northern Ireland.

"I think peoples' perception of being a victim here would be very different to what I have experienced and heard in Northern Ireland, even though its part of our constitutional United Kingdom map…We get caught up in it whether it's brought over here or our people over there who have been hit…people very much see themselves as victims of something that has gone on across the water, which has nothing to do with them…. it's very much the perception that 'our boys' were sent in to try and help and they are ending up being victims of this." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"Personally I have 'survived' the last 30 years by avoiding areas central to the conflict. Here in the RoI I am very aware that I had that luxury. I would characterise my community as having turned our backs on a community on our own doorstep… Many people in the RoI would view the northern situation as being of the peoples' own making. They (here) would see many of those in the North as intransigent and that therefore there was no point discussing issues of peace and reconciliation with them." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

A few respondents felt that they their victimhood is widely acknowledged by society.

"We have a Benevolent Fund, obviously, which is supported greatly by the people of Northern Ireland. The fund is most important for our dependants, for our widows, for our orphan kids and the Benevolent fund has supported us well, and the people of Northern Ireland have supported the Benevolent fund very generously over the years. And that's from both sections of the community… The Nationalist community would have been behind the scenes supportive, but they can never openly support, because if they did the IRA would either intimidate them or persecute them." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"I would be extremely surprised if people in NI disagreed with my definition of what I am. Even the most embittered paramilitary would, I think, regard my son and my family as victims." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

One prominent man described the complexities of the high degree of social awareness of his suffering.

"One evening my Sister was blown off the sofa and my Mother tossed down the hall. My Sister cannot take loud noises now. But she's a silent victim. Someone would look at my family and think if there was anything to do with the Troubles, [I am] the one who suffered the most in the family. Yet, my Sister is anonymous. .. To turn it on its head, she can suffer her victimhood privately without the glare of the media or the public. Whereas anything I do is seen by everybody… If I go last night and go to say a prayer and support a family last night. And you've got to be ever so careful that your presence doesn't detract from the reason that you're actually there. Because people were coming over to shake hands with you. And say it's lovely that you've come. But there's no difference me being there than you being there… The time that the Omagh bomb went off, I had been there helping afterwards in the immediate trauma. But I went down a few days later one Sunday evening to quietly just say a prayer. And I'm standing over in the corner and some people recognise me, and they came over and they said 'would you engage us in a prayer.' And I [wanted to say] this was a quiet time for me. But because you're caught up in these situations you end up in almost a leadership role thrust upon you." [*A priest*]

Within the context of social recognition and support, the position of ex-prisoners in society was discussed by a number of people. Some people from victim/survivor support groups, whose membership did not include any ex-prisoners, expressed the opinion that Northern Irish society provides greater support and funding to ex-prisoner support groups.

"Victims and survivors should not be treated as second-class citizens, in many cases they are. Many of them are living in extreme poverty and have suffered greatly from their losses. Not only have they lost loved ones, but also income, family structure, and the chance for education. One the other hand, ex-prisoner groups are getting more extensive funding. While it is important to bring them back into society, they should not be getting significantly greater funding than other groups." [*A person who would like to see peace in my day, working in a victim support group*]

"People with paramilitary backgrounds are given more recognition and resources than the innocent victims sector for political reasons. It's demeaning and belittling when perpetrators are regarded as on par with my group. Very limited opportunity existed for victims to express their concerns previous to the formation of victims groups, following the Good Friday Agreement. In many cases, people haven't listened, which is tremendously frustrating." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

Some ex-prisoners felt that they and others had continued to suffer following their release.

"There's a multitude of issues, from ex-prisoners coming out of prison, marital breakdown, unable to find work, unable to access mainstream employments, particularly public sector employment. They can't travel as freely as others. There are issues around alcoholism and even drugs now coming a little bit. They're all consequences of what happened to them... When we became established as a prisoner group and began talking to Loyalist ex-prisoners, and passing what we were told down to our own ex-prisoners. There's now a realisation that there's a commonality of consequence and commonality of need. We've got the same issues." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"One grievance is the way we have been treated after getting out of prison. Being imprisoned didn't victimise us, as we were paying our dues. But after that [we] should not be perpetually re-punished." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

One man who worked in an ex-prisoners' support group argued that one of the reasons that groups like his have been relatively well funded is that in many cases they are better organised than some victims' groups.

"I have heard the argument and the whole victim argument – victim versus victim, victim versus prisoners' groups, ex-prisoners getting more money. It mainly came from the politicians. The politicians, for political reasons, and in most cases for their own political gain made this whole argument and hyped it up and created a terrible situation. Projects should be thought out, they should have participants, they should have their targets, they should have a program of events that they're going to run. And if that has been on a funding application and put in front of a panel, the panel should be looking at the criteria that has been set if that group meets it, and if it's a good project. They shouldn't be saying, 'Is it an ex-prisoners project, is it a Loyalist project, is it a Republican project or is it a victims project?' They should be looking at it as a project and ask does it target the people it's meant to be, does it meet the criteria as a good program. If it's a good program, fund it. The reason the victims groups didn't receive as much money is they didn't put the programs together... The group that isn't organised, isn't sorted out, isn't going to be able to use the money." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

One woman with a security force background described similar reasons why some ex-prisoner groups may be better funded than groups like hers.

41

"There's a great sense of them being left out. They have been left out, but also they have been left out from the point of view that they haven't formed groups and tried to go and ask. You have to be a constitutioned group to form and do a piece of work. The thing that put groups like mine off was that there was talk of ex-prisoner groups got 6.5 million from the NIVT... He [a leader in their group] was told, 'we're not going to apply for money from those people because they support ex-prisoners.' And he stood up and told everybody... 'If they're going to give money to ex-prisoners, that's not the road for respectable people to go down.' And none of them went down except [one man]." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

A few people, particularly those who worked in cross-community groups, simply described the complexities that they had encountered when people from different backgrounds worked together. Nearly all of these felt that it is important, however, that they try to do so.

"[Particular program] is a great place for Protestants and Catholics to listen. Because they come together there and they don't even know who they're with... But you have to have some kind of a process so that people can understand each other. Otherwise the whole thing of hating each other and hurting continues. That's why there's so much need for programs...to heal people. Otherwise the hatred is going to continue. And they don't see each other as people who are victims and who have suffered. They don't see both sides." [*Works in support group*]

"While I personally have worked with ex-prisoner groups and just get along with a particular [person], working with each other. I find that I can work with them and they can work with me. But when I took my group and he took his group and we met, it would totally different... One tiny wee step, but it's a step. For my group to ever work with either Protestant or Republican paramilitaries would be very far down the road." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"And it's also difficult for people who lost loved ones and have been physically hurt or emotionally or psychologically damaged, to want to get involved in work that also involves, as they see it, perpetrators, because they don't see an honesty. And many people who were involved in the conflict who went to prison are reluctant to get involved with those who lost loved ones because they see it as people who want to blame them for everything, the whole conflict. And they don't see much value in becoming just a punch bag for people's emotions. So there's a huge amount of work that needs to be done." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

Relevance

To conclude, we felt it necessary to gather respondents' feelings about the nature and value of these questions and the debate surrounding them. Indeed, while we suspected that the questions raised are quite relevant, the research aimed, in part, to discover whether many people agree with this sentiment. After all, if most people feel that these questions do not hold value, meaning or could even harm, it is questionable whether such a debate should continue. With the following questions we hoped to address this overarching issue of relevance:

Have you always felt the way that you do about the issues raised in this questionnaire? If your feelings have changed, what caused this change?

What might be a useful result from a discussion such as this?

What kind of questions in this survey have been useful to you?

A substantial minority of people responded that they had not thought or talked about these issues very much in the past. In many cases they expressed appreciation for the opportunity to do so.

"[We have] never really thought about it, even though the words are being thrown about a lot recently…all [questions] have made use become more aware that the 'victims' issue needs honest debate." [*A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause'*]

"[The questionnaire] made me consider things I had never really thought about." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"[We] just started to think about it… All [questions] have made us think and talk for the first time." [*3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons*]

Some people felt that their general values and feelings about the issues raised have remained similar over the years.

"I hope I have been consistent over the years." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"My current general views have remained similar over the past thirty years, although there have been some refinements and modifications." [*Works in group for innocent victims of paramilitary terrorism*]

"I know who I am and where I am going and my sense of what is right and wrong, just and unjust, is as strong as it ever was. What happened to me hasn't changed that, other than making me more aware of injustice, less blasé about what happens to my fellow man." [*English with Irish ancestry*]

"My feelings have not changed." [*Former member of the IRA*]

A large number of people, including nearly all of the English respondents, described the way that personal interactions have increased their understanding of victimhood in Northern Ireland.

"No, not always [have I felt as I do now.] Before meeting many Irish victims (north and south of the border,) I saw my victimhood as far worse than, say, that of the parents of a dead paramilitary etc. But, painfully, I have come to revise my views." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"So, my views have changed a lot. I suppose it's just dealing with people, you see… I would be more aware that, generally speaking, anybody who lived through the Troubles, I don't think I would call them victims, but they have suffered. They have carried a lot. So I would be very open to anybody." [*Works in support group*]

"I think my views on this have changed over the last few years since I have been involved in work with Northern Ireland issues. Particularly after hearing stories from peoples from all sides of this conflict. A few years ago, I would probably have been pretty ignorant about the different experiences of people in relation to this conflict." [*Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims*]

"[My feelings have] changed through close contact with those affected by the Troubles." [*A health and social care professional, ethnic minority*]
"My feelings and attitudes towards paramilitaries have changed through hearing their stories. This has challenged me to examine my own motivations and actions… The more stories we hear about how individuals became involved in the conflict the more this will add to our understanding…" [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Others spoke of the way that personal interaction has succeeded in their work.

"It's an extraordinary thing what happens. They just say, 'I don't believe that' or 'I don't believe that you felt like that…' They really get an understanding that both sides are suffering, were suffering the same thing. The very same thing. They're going through the very same pain." [*Works in support group*]

"Being together as a group has helped many through the healing process." [*A person who would like to see peace in my day, working in a victim support group*]

[Describing his interaction with victims' support groups:] "When you talk a little bit about your story and how you became involved, what were the motivating factors. And if that's done in a way where it's not justifying what you were involved in, but it's trying to explain, to throw some light on what actually was going on in Northern Ireland during the conflict. It creates more of a grey area for them, where they're less sure [they] know about what really was going on." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

Others' feelings have changed or evolved over time as they have had the time, opportunity and maturity to think through these issues further.

"I have probably always felt this way, but I would not have thought about it as much before I was imprisoned." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner*]

"My feelings have changed very much over the last three years, since being actively involved in a peace and reconciliation programme – my feelings are much more positive now." [*English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme*]

"My views on paramilitaries and the pressures/events that caused them to become involved have moderated following meeting with former paramilitaries and reading books/articles about them. This has not however changed my view that there is no reason/excuse for taking a life." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland*]

A few people described the way that the questionnaire had promoted personal consideration.

"[The questions are] generally useful for thought." [*A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others*]

"It was helpful in promoting reflection." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"I would not have thought about the issues at all. But telling my story has opened a debate in my mind." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

At least one respondent was not as sure about the value of the questions.

"I'm not sure that these questions have been useful to me." [*Former member of the IRA*]

A very large majority of respondents expressed the sentiment that, in general, the issues raised by the questionnaire are valuable. (It should be remembered, of course, that the people who chose to answer the questionnaire or to make time for an interview would be more likely to feel that its substance mattered, than those who did not do so.) Differences exist among the reasons that people were likely to feel that the questions are useful. Virtually all respondents, however, said or implied that their general motivation is to move Northern Ireland away from conflict and closer to peace.

Some people, when asked - *what might be a useful result from a discussion such as this?* **- expressed the hope that the issues and opinions raised would increase understanding for themselves and others.**

"I think there needs to be that recognition [that perpetrators have been victimised as well] for society to move forward. Whenever one person sees the other part as different, then nobody's going to move forward. They just have to see them as human beings who are suffering. Then once their differences are reconciled that way then progress can be made." [*A former police officer, injured in the Troubles*]

"An appreciation of the harm done to people. A help to remorse and regret for deeds done. A greater understanding of where 'the state side' are coming from." [*A clergyman who has been engaged pastorally throughout the Troubles – in prison, in situations of violence with victims and their families*]

"That I and others would find understanding of each other…to help us heal our wounds [and] hurt. A more positive and purposeful description that would lift us mentally into higher plan of thought [and] action… I need to open my mind to more understanding about where they are coming from." [*Unionist/Protestant who was forced to emigrate from Northern Ireland*]

"Mutual respect and recognition of the widespread and deep pain caused to so many by this awful protracted conflict. The more 'victims' meet, listen and understand, the better the prospects for a lasting and just peace." [*An Englishman whose son was killed by an IRA bomb*]

"[A] questionnaire like this could be useful to start the healing process in this divided society." [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

"Greater understanding of the debate which hopefully would lead to greater sensitivity towards those going through trauma... That it might help the debate around hierarchy of victims become less contentious." [*I co-ordinate an extremely inclusive programme for victim/survivors, training as a psychologist*]

Others spoke of a need to strive for greater inclusivity as the debate progresses.

"The last question is going to remain difficult - that is the difference being made between ex-combatants and ex-prisoners and the rest of society. But if this society is to heal itself, to move on, become a decent place for all of us to live, then we're going to have to accept forced diversity; and we're going to have to accept that we all have things to talk about the past, the conflict; and we've got to accept each others stories and move on... I know that it's going to be a difficult process, in itself to some extent traumatising. But I think that it's something that we have to go through and we have to look to all post conflict societies, to see how they've done it. Learn from the things that they've done right and the things that they've done wrong and move on that way, slowly, but positively forward." [*Official Republican background, now community worker*]

"Agreeing to disagree. The acceptance that people from various traditions have an equal legitimacy to hold various positions and viewpoints regarding their allegiance and identity." [*A community worker*]

"There are victims groups that are very choosy who their victims are. Their definition doesn't fit into anybody else's definition... And that's what causing part of the problem... What it comes down to is the politics within individual groups. How they can put a form of words together that either keep that group the way they want it or can expand it to include others. I suppose it's something that will be debated for years." [*Works in Loyalist ex-prisoner support group*]

"Challenging those who want to hold on to a narrow, exclusive, introspective understanding of their own victimhood. The debate could also be valuable when attention is drawn to the need to move beyond a fixed, passive conception of 'victim,' or when the debate is used to stress the human costs of what happened during the conflict. If the debate is intended to help open the eyes of those responsible to the impact of their actions, then again I have no problem... The discussion stimulated by this questionnaire would hopefully contribute to the recovery of a healthy ambiguity as we strive to overcome the Troubles, thus disrupting the destructive 'war-thinking' that often characterise conceptions of victimhood and perpetrator-hood in post-conflict situations. I would furthermore hope that making room for the suffering of those who are typically denied victimhood would help to nurture culture of mercy and compassion, which is desperately needed." [*A white South African peace worker, living in Dublin*]

Some people, across communities, described their hope that questions and answers such as these would lead to greater support and possibilities for healing for victims.

[What might be a useful result…?]

"'Awareness of victims' place and importance in peace process and need for resources to make journey of healing possible." *[A group of 16 people with Nationalist/Republican backgrounds, all of whom have, in some way, been, involved in or supported the Republican 'cause']*

"Words to heal." *[3 Catholic mothers of exiled sons]*

"I think there needs to be a lot more reminiscence done of the Troubles, with different sections of the community. Because it's only then that people are going to start expressing how they feel and their angers won't be held. And once you let go of that anger then it's easier to deal with." *[I was a victim, then a service person and now a community worker]*

"That specific issues facing those traumatised become more apparent and that a structured and strategic action plan can be put together either to highlight these to other organisations that need to hear it." *[A perceived Catholic/Nationalist background; still identifies with many aspects, but has difficulties with others]*

"I just hope that through all this that someone can start coming to terms with the victims and what they need. There's a lot of counselling needed out there. There's a lot of anger out there and that anger needs to be dealt with in a positive way." *[An SDLP councillor]*

"I think for people to be able to define themselves rather than being labelled. I'd like to see victims very involved in debate of this issue rather than it being decided for them. I'd like to see some of the negative connotations taken away from the word victim, so people can feel comfortable with seeing themselves this way, and that it gives them an opportunity to start a process of healing and recovery." *[Englishwoman, no religion, community worker with victims]*

"Hopefully it will enable others to move at their own pace." *[English, victimised by a bomb planted in England, now involved in a peace programme]*

"[A] more thoughtful way to understand and help those affected by the Troubles." *[A health and social care professional, ethnic minority]*

Similarly, a few people felt that recognition of their personal suffering and feelings is a valuable outcome of the questionnaire.

[What might be a useful result…?]
"The chance to tell the way I feel." *[A young Catholic man from North Belfast]*

"Other than giving people like me 'the ghosts of the conflict, those you think you can see and hear but are afraid to admit exist' a chance to speak I can see no useful result." *[An Englishman with Irish ancestry whose son served as a soldier and was murdered in Northern Ireland]*

"Yes, I've always felt this way, but this is the first time I've had to face my feelings. It's too early yet to change how I feel, it has taken 27 years for someone to ask me to reply… All questions [have been valuable, as] they gave me the opportunity to vent my pain [and] anger." *[Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father]*

A couple of people hoped that dialogue about victims would result in greater admissions of responsibility by others.

[What might be a useful result…?]
"The IRA etc admitting they made victims." [*A young Catholic man from North Belfast*]

"People facing up to the fact that they and no one else caused/created victims." [*Unionist, working class, emigrated following murder of RUC father*]

Not everyone responded completely positively however. A few were worried about the way that this discussion and others can become politicised.

"There's no harm in asking the questions. But I'm more concerned about the outcome of the research. Is it going to be the case as a result of your survey for example, that some government agency or body is going to say, 'well, we have this survey and we see here that fifty percent of the people who have answered the questions you have given them has said that Republican paramilitaries should be construed as victims.' That would worry me… There's no harm in asking the questions." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

"[We hope for] non-political, honest discussion at community level with people, not groups who feel they own the arena." [*A group of eight Sinn Fein voters, some new, some long-term*]

A few people, particularly with security force backgrounds, were concerned about the possible outcome of the questions regarding perpetrators as victims.

[Describing how her group would respond to the questionnaire:] "I think some of them would be very interested. And some would be more put off… I don't know…to a certain degree, I think they would be uncomfortable with this question about the paramilitary groups." [*A woman who has served in the security forces and now works in a support group*]

"The only thing that would concern me is that some way down the line we will have a situation where…because of the situation in Northern Ireland and the way things have a habit of turning against the tide of ordinary common decency, that the paramilitaries will be seen to be the victims here, but the decent people will be left out in the cold. That worries me." [*A serving RUC, now PSNI officer*]

One respondent worried about under-representation of British victims, as well as the actual utility of the questionnaire's results.

"Although this survey is useful, I doubt it will cause any views to change in Northern Ireland. I doubt if many replies will come from Great Britain, where there are also many victims, due to there being no contact with most victims there… Although the authors have attempted to reach people in Great Britain, the results will illustrate the under-representation of views from there and hopefully future surveys will endeavour to reach more of these people… I also doubt whether results will get much attention from the media or politicians." [*English mother of a British soldier killed on duty in Northern Ireland.*]

Another respondent felt that deciding upon what it means to be a victim would be impossible.

"Well, no, it's probably a pointless exercise when I think about it. Because it's not meaningful. I mean even when I try to talk about the victims, the people who've been killed, we'll talk about the people who've been killed as the victims. For those who've been killed, even those who've been killed will not agree with the interpretation of this. And they are entitled to their own belief." [*Victim/survivor support group worker*]

Some people simply pointed out the difficulties of such dialogue.

"Again, it's about where we actually want to go and what the whole idea of acknowledging the impact of what we went through is about. Is it about setting the record straight and saying, 'these are the people who suffered?' Or is it about recognising what everybody's needs are to move on, and actually have everybody move on. If it's just acknowledging that this is what happened to people, I'm not sure, particularly for the community, what benefit that is. It's only going to be a benefit to people if they move on from that position." [*Community worker*]

"It's important not to push people too far forward too fast." [*A victim/survivor group facilitator*]

[Describing his interaction with people who have lost loved ones in the Troubles:] "But as time moves on and they begin to want to understand, begin to want to find answers… And that's a really lonely, painful journey. Where people begin to feel that they're betraying who they are as well as betraying their loved ones. And also [betraying] other members of their family. And then they begin to realise, and that is what they would say to me, that it's something within themselves that needs to do this. And that's disturbing for them, because they don't know why that is. Why do I need to do this? And they don't know even what it is they expect to get out of it. But it's that desire to know and to try and understand why. It's perfectly human." [*A Loyalist ex-prisoner who now works in the community*]

A large number of people simply expressed the need to keep talking – that dialogue is always valuable.

"I think that the various viewpoints expressed on this whole question will have to be addressed and addressed in a meaningful and honest manner. And if that means ex-prisoner groups, victims groups and others, engaging in dialogue together, then that can only be for the benefit of all concerned eventually. If people adopt a rigid stance on questions, then meaningful debate gets pushed to the side… More debate between all those involved still needs to take place, because some of the wounds are very raw still to say the least. And it will take time for those to heal. Some of them may never heal. But at least the process would be underway." [*A community worker*]

"I think that it is healthy to have that debate and to have people think about these things, because I think we more enable people to define themselves." [*Works in a support group for victims/survivors*]

"It is always healthy to engage in dialogue" [*A member of the public service who works on behalf of society whose colleagues have been murdered by both paramilitary groups*]

Concluding Thoughts

When we first began this project, we hoped to produce a document that would increase access to and further understanding of a wide spectrum of opinions and perceptions regarding victimhood in the context of the Northern Ireland conflict. It continues to be our hope that this report will help to do so. We imagine that as you read through the opinions provided, there will be some that seem to parallel your own, some that may differ and intrigue you, others may be frustrating or even angering, there may be some thoughts or insights that are new or surprising. Hopefully as you read through this report you will consider it thoughtfully.

How would you answer the questions presented? Are they questions that you have previously considered? Do you feel that some respondents have expressed opinions that are similar to yours? What groups of people or individuals are likely to do so? In what ways do they differ? What arguments do they make to support these opinions? Are these arguments compelling to you? How would you respond to these arguments?

What, if anything, has been surprising? What issues do you feel need further clarification or discussion? What types of issues do you believe aren't pertinent or useful? Do you think these might be valuable to other people?

Would you feel comfortable contributing your voice to this debate? What format would you find most useful and meaningful? Are there any standards of conduct that should be considered for those who participate in it? Or is the debate already limited by establishing such standards?

We recognise that there are a number of challenges as the debate continues. Is it possible to find a language that is acceptable to everyone? We hope that if the debate is conducted in a meaningful manner, the meanings associated with the words used will change and evolve in a useful way.

Moreover, it will be a challenge to continue to access as many opinions as possible, as well as to reach those whose voices have not yet been heard. Within this consideration, we hope that the thoughts of those people who do not feel that such a debate is valuable will continue to be included. While a number of respondents have spoken about 'inclusivity,' others have expressed the sentiment that the nature of such inclusivity may make them uncomfortable or indeed undermine their position. What steps can we take to address such a dichotomy and to continue to include all voices?

Two undeniably strong themes have emerged from the respondents' words – the degree of hurt that is so strongly felt and the hope that so many feel. How can society, particularly those of us who are working in the field, better support those who are hurting? And move in a way that increases the possibility for hope and indeed makes such hopes real?

Victim/Survivor/Casualty Questionnaire

We recognise that it can be difficult to create meaningful and accurate general definitions of a "victim." The following are examples of some that have been suggested in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. (All definitions have been quoted anonymously.)

Those who have been physically or psychologically injured from violent, conflict related incidents and the close relatives or partners who care for them, along the those who mourn their dead or injured loved ones.

All those who have been affected by the cumulative effects of three decades of violence in Northern Ireland.

An innocent, who has been killed, injured or harmed through no fault of their own, rather by the unjustified actions of another.

One whose life has been significantly and negatively affected by violent, political conflict. This effect may be, but is not limited to: personal death or injury, death or injury of a loved one, emotional trauma, loss of a sense of security, displacement, loss of educational or job opportunities, discrimination or substantively lowered quality of life."

1. How do you feel about such definitions? What parts of them do you find valuable or not?

2. What kind of definitions do you find more meaningful and accurate?

3. A number of people have suggested the words "survivor" or "casualty" rather than "victim." How do you feel about these terms? Are there any other words that you feel are more useful?

4. Do you find the debate surrounding the use of these words and their meanings valuable? Why or why not?

5. Considering the range of definitions and meanings, victim, survivor, casualty, or none of these, how would you characterise yourself or your community? What parts of the definitions, if any, do you find applicable?

6. If you use such words to describe yourself or your community, what particular incidents or issues are significant reasons for why you do so?

7. Do you believe that other people and groups throughout Northern Ireland might agree with the way you describe yourself? In what ways might they agree or disagree?

8. There has been significant debate about the degree to which people become involved in violent community conflict due to the force of circumstance/community pressure as opposed to individual choice and responsibility. How do you feel such a debate could apply to Northern Ireland?

9. Do you feel that someone who has been a perpetrator in the conflict can also be a victim of it? What makes you feel the way you do?

The following people or groups of people have been described by themselves or others as victims of the Troubles. In some cases, many people disagree with such a characterisation.

Please consider the list and mark the degree to which you believe that the person/group is a victim.
1 – Strongly Agree, 2 – Somewhat Agree, 3 – Undecided/Don't Know, 4 – Somewhat Disagree, 5 – Strongly Disagree

Please also mark whether you feel that the person/group would agree with your opinion.
A – They would probably agree with me, B – Undecided/Don't Know, C – They would probably disagree with me

1. A member of the public who has been physically or psychologically injured or killed?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
2. The friends and family of a member of the public who has been injured or killed?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
3. A member of the public whose home or property have been damaged?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
4. A member of a security force/prison service who has been physically or psychologically injured or killed?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
5. The friends and family of security force personnel who have been injured killed?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
6. A member of a security force whose home or property have been damaged?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
7. Someone who joined a security force due to community pressure?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
8. Someone who joined security force due to economic necessity?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
9. Someone who was once a member of a security force, but chose to leave?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
10. Someone who continues to belong to and support a security force?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
11. A republican paramilitary member who has been physically or psychologically injured?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
12. The friends and family of a republican paramilitary member who has been injured?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
13. A republican paramilitary member who has been imprisoned?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
14. The family of an imprisoned republican paramilitary member?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
15. A republican paramilitary member whose home or property have been damaged?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
16. An individual who joined a republican paramilitary group due to community pressure?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
17. Someone who was once a member of a republican paramilitary group, but chose to leave?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
18. Someone who continues to belong to and support a republican paramilitary group?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
19. A loyalist paramilitary member who has been physically or psychologically injured?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C

	1 2 3 4 5

	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
20. The friends and family of a loyalist paramilitary member who has been injured?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
21. A loyalist paramilitary member who has been imprisoned?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
22. The family of an imprisoned loyalist paramilitary member?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
23. A loyalist paramilitary member whose home or property have been damaged?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
24. An individual who joined a loyalist paramilitary group due to community pressure?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
25. Someone who was once a member of a loyalist paramilitary group, but chose to leave?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
26. Someone who continues to belong to and support a loyalist paramilitary group?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
27. An emergency service worker, such as fire-fighters, nurses or doctors, who has been injured or traumatised?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
28. An emergency service worker whose job has become substantively more difficult and horrific as a result of the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
29. Someone who has witnessed a violent or horrific incident related to the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
30. Someone whose way of life has been substantively changed as a result of the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
31. Someone whose educational or career opportunities have been limited as a result of the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
32. Someone whose sense of personal security has been lessened?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
33. Someone who moved or emigrated as a result of the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
34. Someone whose quality of life has been negatively impacted in anyway as a result of the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
35. Someone who does not support the Good Friday Agreement?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
36. Someone who does support the Good Friday Agreement?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
37. Someone who feels excluded from the current political climate?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
38. Someone who has been given a punishment beating/shooting?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
39. Children or young people who have grown up anywhere in Northern Ireland during the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
40. Children or young people who have grown up in high intensity conflict areas during the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
41. Children or young people who have grown up separated from a parent due to death or imprisonment?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
42. Children or young people who have become socialised or used to violent conflict within society?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C
43. Religious leaders who have needed to provide greater support for individuals and communities stricken by conflict and violence?	1 2 3 4 5 A B C

44. Everyone who has lived in Northern Ireland during the Troubles?	1 2 3 4 5
	A B C

10.   Are there groups of people on this list that you believe are not victims? What makes you feel the way you do?

11.   Do you think that such groups would identify themselves as victims? Why would they do so?

12.   Are there any particular groups of people that stand out in your mind as having been left off this list?

13.   Do you have any further comments about this list or the people included on it?

14.   There has been some debate about how broad the definition of a victim should be. For example, should everyone who thinks of himself or herself as a victim be considered that way by society?

15.   How do you feel about the suggestion that there could be a hierarchy or different levels of victims? (i.e. some would say that those who have been injured without cause are more "truly" victims than those who may have provoked the actions that led to their injury.) What are your thoughts on this issue?

16.   How do you feel about the argument that labelling someone as a victim (or a survivor or casualty) perpetuates that identity? Could one's identification as a victim either enhance or detract from the process of healing?

17.   Have you always felt the way that you do about the issues raised in this questionnaire? If your feelings have changed, what caused this change?

18.   What might be a useful result from a discussion such as this?

19.   What kind of questions in this survey have been useful to you?

20.   Would you describe your background for the purposes of further understanding your answers? Please describe yourself in a way that you would feel comfortable being made public. (While the results of the survey will be published, all information will be kept confidential.)

21.   What further comments do you have?

Feedback form:

In order to further explore the issues arising from this research we invite you to submit your views by completing the following and returning it to the Conflict Trauma Resource Centre by way of the address or fax number provided on the back cover of this booklet.

Some questions we would like you to consider are:

- What are your reactions to the information, attitudes etc. contained within this research document?

- Why do you think this research document has elicited the above views/reaction from you or the people you represent or are representative of?

- Would you and/or your organization be prepared to further explore the implications of the research findings with the CTRC?

  Yes/No   Please circle appropriate response.

  If yes above, please provide contact details:

  Name:

  Organisation:

  Tel:

- Are there any areas, geographical or thematic, that you would like to see further research taking place on in conjunction with local activists, who we would provide support and technical assistance to in the course thereof.

- Any other comments?

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