



084 124

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# THE IMPACT OF HOUSE ROBBERIES ON VICTIMS & FAMILIES

Are you wondering how to help a house robbery victim who is struggling to cope emotionally or are you having difficulty understanding the change in their emotions? Henning Jacobs, trauma support co-ordinator at ER24, said the best thing to do is be there as support and help with their needs the best you can. “House robbery is by far the most common traumatic incident people face in South Africa, especially in Gauteng. As a trauma counselling team, about 50 percent of the calls we attend to each month are house robberies,” he said. Explaining the emotions victims of a house robbery experience, Jacobs said, “They feel violated. A home is a place where you should feel safe. People who have been robbed while in their homes feel their personal space has been invaded.” Reactions and feelings change as time goes by. “The trauma usually hits people the hardest the next day. People usually only then start to realise what really happened and what could have happened.

“Feelings then come in phases of anger, fear, frustration, hopelessness and irritation. People are unique and can experience these emotions in different forms and phases. Feelings need to be dealt with,” said Jacobs.

When counsellors arrive on scene, victims are debriefed. Counsellors help victims organise their immediate situation and put measures in place to help them cope. “People are usually not counselled on scene due to them being in such shock. Victims on scene have not really come to terms with what has happened yet. “They are grateful for any help they receive. They are almost totally dependent on others to help them at the time. In theory, people have to be counselled 72 hours after a house robbery,” said Jacobs. Counsellors are then able to assess the extent of the trauma experienced by the victim to help them appropriately. He added that victims of house robberies never forget the incident. However, with coping skills, they learn how to deal with their emotions and it becomes easier as time goes by. After any kind of trauma, people go into shock and this causes difficulty sleeping and concentrating for at least a week after the incident. Their mood can also change. “Some people want to be alone after a house robbery while others do not. It depends on the person’s personality. People also become paranoid. They usually immediately upgrade their security. Victims start hearing noises at night and make

sure multiple times that all the doors and gates are locked,” said Jacobs. They also usually blame themselves and believe they should have done something to prevent the incident. “We work hard to make sure people do not blame themselves. It is not their fault. They need to understand that a robbery is the robber’s choice and not theirs. “Family life is affected due to the emotions victims experience. You might find that family members fight with each other due to the shock. It can however also draw family members closer. They start to appreciate each other more. After a few months family life usually goes back to normal,” said Jacobs. What to do during a house robbery Jacobs said a victim of a house robbery should comply with what the robbers want. “Robbers want to take goods from people. Most of the time, if people comply with what the robbers want, nobody gets hurt. If a victim fights back, they are usually either shot, stabbed or badly beaten. The best and only way to keep you and your family safe is to comply with what they want. Victims should remember these people are armed and they will shoot if they have to,” he said. Phone ER24 on 084 124 for trauma counselling.