

## ... Hostages

families would handle the crisis, but data now are being collected through mailed surveys by the Michigan Department of Mental Health. "Our initial motivation for the research was to obtain information from past hostages in order to help families of the Iranian hostages," says special assistant to the director Rick Spates. The survey has been endorsed by the State Department, the American Psychiatric Association task force on terrorism and other organizations. Of the three hostage groups sent surveys, responses have been received so far from Hanafi and Entebbe victims. The 41 percent response rate is fairly low, and Spates says many ex-hostages refuse to reply because they want to forget about the experience. The significance of these preliminary findings has not been established, but there are indications among the respondents that high levels of stress during captivity were related to an increased incidence of blaming authorities for post-captivity problems. A major drawback to research, says Spates, is that hostages are not part of a broad population phenomenon. There is no random distribution of ex-hostages, which limits the potential to make generalizations from research results. "It will take a few years and a few more hostage situations before any definitive statements can be made," he adds.

Investigators studying children's responses to captivity also are looking to the future. Children may differ in important ways from adults in their reactions to hostage experiences (SN: 1/24/81, p. 54). Lenore Terr, who studied children kidnapped while riding a school bus in Chowchilla, Calif., stresses the need for further research on the effects of trauma at different developmental stages.

Research on captivity is going through its own developmental stages, but most investigators insist that treatment options exist. Of prime importance is building a sensitivity among professionals and family members to the subtle needs of victims who often experience a "second injury" after their initial ordeal. Keeping medical and psychological services available without implying that the ex-victim is "sick" or "mentally scarred" is necessary also. But making predictions about individual responses to captivity is another matter. Julius Segal, director of Scientific and Public Information at the National Institute of Mental Health and a member of the medical team that met the 52 Americans released by Iran, puts the matter in perspective in the Feb. 20 ADAMHA NEWS. "Despite the fact that common threads may exist, we cannot make predictions about individuals," he says. "We should not fall prey to the assumption that the returnees are like blank tablets being written on for the first time, that captivity had no context, that their lives previously were neuter and that whatever happens is a consequence of captivity." □

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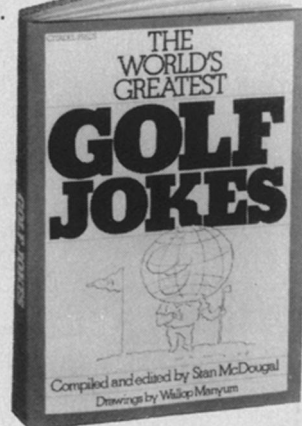
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