

## Terrorist Threats in the Basque Country: its Impact on the Psychosocial Sphere of Victims

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### Abstract

The ceasefire of armed activities announced by ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) in 2011 has fostered a debate about the violence and the victims of the terrorist organization. During those years, the violence perpetrated by ETA was characterized by bomb attacks and assassinations. In addition to this blatant violent behavior, a low-intensity violence was also taking place in the Basque Country, consisting of terrorist threats against their targets. There is, however, a lack of evidence-based research into this phenomenon. This investigation studies the impact of terrorist threats on the psychosocial functioning of people threatened by ETA in the Basque Country. Seventy-six people targeted by ETA completed self-reported survey. Terrorist threats and their derived psychosocial consequences were assessed by this way. The findings point out a relationship between terrorist threats and their psychosocial effects, which greatly affected the immediate environment of the targets too. The implications of these findings are discussed.

### Key words

ETA; psychosocial consequences; psychosocial functioning; terrorism; terrorist threats

### Resumen

El cese de la actividad armada anunciado por ETA (Euskadi ta Askatasuna – Euskadi y Libertad) en 2011 ha promovido un debate sobre la violencia y las víctimas de la organización terrorista. Durante esos años, la violencia perpetrada por ETA se caracterizó por ataques con bombas y asesinatos. Además de este comportamiento

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claramente violento, en el País Vasco también se estaba produciendo una violencia de baja intensidad, consistente en amenazas terroristas contra sus objetivos. Sin embargo, no hay una investigación basada en la evidencia sobre este fenómeno. Esta investigación estudia el impacto de las amenazas terroristas en el funcionamiento psicosocial de las personas amenazadas por ETA en el País Vasco. Setenta y seis personas amenazadas por ETA completaron una encuesta de autoevaluación. Se evaluaron de esta forma las amenazas terroristas y sus consecuencias psicosociales derivadas. Los resultados indicaron una relación entre las amenazas terroristas y sus efectos psicosociales, que también afectó, en gran medida, al entorno inmediato de los amenazados. Se debaten las implicaciones de estos descubrimientos.

**Palabras clave**

ETA; consecuencias psicosociales; funcionamiento psicosocial; terrorismo; amenazas terroristas

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## 1. Introduction

The first systematic study of ETA's victims pointed out how this terrorist group killed 857 people, 67.21% of them alone in the Basque Country (Alonso *et al.* 2010). However, ETA has also used other forms of low-intensity violence to instill fear in Basque society as part of its strategy.

*Gesto por la Paz*<sup>1</sup> called this strategy of low-intensity violence "the violence of persecution", defined as "a systematic use of street violence, harassment, threats, aggression or other strategies including murder aimed at identifying, persecuting, harassing and isolating certain people for defending ideologies contrary to that of ETA in public, for representing those citizens or for exercising their profession freely" (Gesto por la Paz 2000, p. 2). This low-intensity violence has only taken place in the Basque Country and Navarra, where ETA has had active supporters and collaborators. In a first approach made by the peace association, they identified several levels of threat and pressure, from simple verbal harassment to assassination. In addition to this, *Gesto por la Paz* pointed out some side effects suffered by the victims, such as persecution, isolation or vulnerability.

Nevertheless, this phenomenon has not attracted much attention from academics. For instance, it was not until 2011 that the figure of a person under threat was legally recognized as a victim (BOE 2011). This study is specifically focused on victims of low-intensity violence of ETA in the Basque Country. The paper is an exploratory study aimed at examining terrorist threats and their psychosocial effects as part of the terrorist strategy perpetrated by ETA. For this purpose, the sample is made up of threatened people from the Basque Country.

## 2. Main features of terrorist violence

Violence perpetrated by ETA is usually defined as political violence and within this category as terrorism or terrorist violence. Throughout history, terrorism has been used by states, sub-states or non-state organizations with the objective of affecting the structure and distribution of power within a given society or on a wider scale (Reinares 2002). However, there is a lack of consensus about its limits because all sorts of actions and situations have also been called terrorism (Letschert and Staiger 2009, Weinberg *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, despite the lack of agreement, recent scientific studies have attempted to define and outline the concept of terrorism, highlighting the following (Schmid 2011, p. 86): "*Terrorism refers to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and noncombatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflicting parties*". In this sense, terrorist violence is often characterized by deliberate acts or a series of acts (e.g., perpetrating or threatening physical violence) with the purpose of causing psychological effects (such as extreme fear or terror disproportionate to its physical result) (Schmid 2011). Similarly, terrorist violence is understood by Gearson (2002) as an asymmetrical response to a highest force, in which the exploitation of terror and consequently, the generation of fear, may be designed to have psychological repercussions beyond the immediate target. Unlike other acts of violence, the direct victim is not the ultimate target of the violence but rather is an instrument used as an amplifier to send a message to a wider audience (Schmid 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning *Gesture for Peace*, an association for Peace in the Basque Country.

### 3. Evolution of ETA violent strategy and victim's selection

ETA has used its violence to discourage a response against them in the Basque Country (De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2004). Figure 1 has been created in order to show a brief history and chronological evolution of ETA's violent strategy.

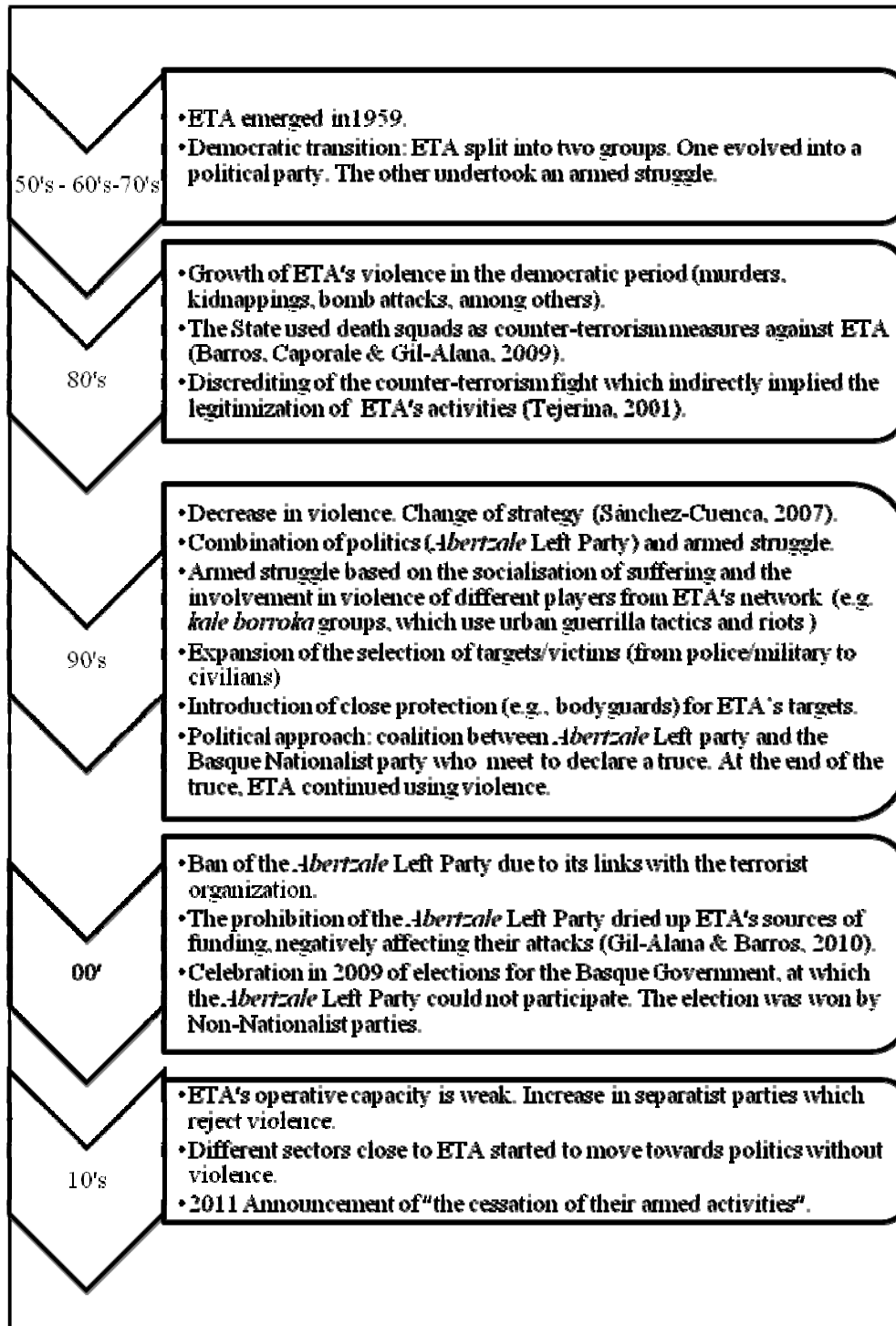


Figure 1. Brief history and chronological evolution of ETA.

Source: Prepared by the authors

According to Mata (2005), ETA was placed at the top of a group of organizations known as the 'Basque National Liberation Movement' (MLNV). Consequently, the violence of ETA was supported through a network with different levels of

involvement in their activities, from assassinations and street violence to politics (Muro 2008). Regarding this, it is necessary to differentiate between the MLNV and those who share their political goals but reject violence as a means to achieve them.

Inside the Basque Country, ETA designed a two-level strategy of violence. On the first level, its cells were to assassinate through bomb attacks or target killing (i.e., target killing with firearms). The second one consisted of low-intensity violence which according to De la Calle (2007) was mainly carried out by the youth wing of the movement, well organized with planned actions. This youth action was commonly known as street violence, street fighting or '*kale borroka*', and was a type of violence only perpetrated in the Basque Country and Navarra as a show of support to ETA. These groups have usually attacked government, law enforcement agencies' and political parties' buildings, bank offices or public transport systems, among others (European Police Office, 2009, 2013, Van den Broek 2004). This violent behavior often included acts of aggression, sabotage, extortion, threats and intimidation.

A new context of target selection started in the mid 1990's (De la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2004). The main purpose was to widen the impact of their terrorist acts by attacking non-nationalist politicians, state representatives or officials, which had a great impact on public opinion, which until then considered their attacks to be solely aimed against the security forces.

ETA targeted their victims in the Basque Country for three main reasons: for their opposing political ideology, for being critical of the terrorist group and for their profession. There is a broad typology of victims, and the Institutional Report for Victims of Terrorism (Varona 2009) published by The Basque Ombudsman explains different typologies of victims, which may be summarized into direct and indirect victims. Varona (2009) argued that the Basque Country presented a relevant case of multiple victimization, as is showed in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of victimization (Varona 2009)

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People who have survived several attacks

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People who have survived an attack and have to be escorted by a bodyguard.

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People whose father, husband, wife or other relative had been murdered by ETA years ago. These were or had been city councilors or members of organization that defended the rights of the victims or were simply critical of ETA and they too have to be escorted by bodyguards.

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People who have received threatening and offensive calls or graffiti just a few hours or days after ETA murdered a relative.

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People who have simultaneously and consecutively been insulted, attacked and threatened, and sometimes, have survived a murder attempt.

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Regarding the victims and the violent strategy of ETA, we can observe a continuum of aggressive strategies that some victims have suffered. Thus, besides physical violence (e.g. murder, bomb attacks, arson), terrorist threats in the form of psychological violence (e.g. death threats, intimidation, humiliation) were also perpetrated (Martín-Peña *et al.* 2010). Larizgoitia *et al.*, (2011b) found that of 33 primary victims, 18 survived the murder of a close relative, 10 suffered aggressions with severe consequences and 5 received reiterated threats and extortion.

#### 4. Terrorist threats and psychosocial functioning

The study of threatening and intimidating behavior is often framed in the context of harassment (e.g., stalking) or organized crime and terrorism (Schmid 2011, Nijdam *et al.* 2008b, Spitzberg 2002). Nijdam *et al.*, (2008b) described instrumental threats as aggressive behavior in which the perpetrator (i.e., specific group or specific social environment) seeks to extort a concrete result from the victim. In opposition to physical violence, terrorist threats do not belong to the past, as an isolated act of violence. They entail a potential risk omnipresent in the victim's life, his/her past and point to an uncertain future (Nijdam *et al.* 2008b, Spitzberg 2002). Acute stress disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have often been studied on victims of terrorism due to their relevance to the question (Danieli *et al.* 2004).

However, the disorders these victims of chronic violence present are not fully understood. Pedersen (2002) argued that "trauma" has almost become synonymous with PTSD for both the public and the scientific community. This is in line with Vázquez (2005), who highlights that research into the consequences of terrorism has not paid much attention to psychosocial functioning in trauma contexts. Alexander (2005) suggests that the psychosocial effects are response patterns of violence and traumatic events, which can include emotional, cognitive, social and physical reactions. These behaviors seem to impact on the individual and his/her surroundings or close environment, such as on the spouse or other relatives. Nijdam *et al.*, (2008b) discussed how the nature of different threats might impact on psychosocial functioning, such as professional practice, private life, safety and health.

As regards the Basque context, terrorist threats may be understood as actions of psychological violence, mainly perpetrated by ETA's network, with the purpose of spreading terror and fear. A first attempt at understanding and denouncing terrorist threats and their effects was carried out by *Gesto por la Paz* (2000, p.1), who pointed out that violence comprised different types of terrorist threats through "a premeditated strategy of harassment and persecution of certain people" (*Gesto por la Paz* 2000, p. 1). This strategy included verbal or written threats (notes, letters), insults, shipments of parcels with several objects, insulting pictures, names on diverse lists of targets, threatening and insulting phone calls to the targeted victims or sometimes their relative (Carmena *et al.* 2013, Echeburúa 2004, Pereira 2004, Santos 2008).

Varona (2009) interviewed sixteen people threatened by ETA and organized a discussion group in order to widen and improve the quality of results. The analysis of the extracts showed chronic and anticipatory victimization, lack of freedom and the impact of violence on almost all aspects of the victim's life. Also, Saéz de la Fuente (2012) analyzed some compilations of different victimization experiences. The answers and testimonies of the interviewees mainly dealt with the impact of the violence, of threats to the family and the person's professional environment. In addition, the victims reported how their daily lives were affected at all levels.

The studies based on victims' testimonies proposed two taxonomies in order to contribute to a better understanding of this complex and under-researched phenomenon. In the first place, a taxonomy of terrorist threats perpetrated in the context of ETA's violence (Martín-Peña, *et al.* 2010). In the second, a taxonomy of the effects on the victim's psychosocial functioning (Martín-Peña *et al.* 2011). Following similar previous studies (Escartín *et al.* 2010), both taxonomies used a psychosocial approach, classifying their respective categories according to the individual's context and emotional, cognitive and behavioral domains.

Two main types of abusive behavior compose the taxonomy of terrorist threats: indirect and direct strategies. The former are aimed at contextual aspects and seek to isolate the person from society. These include obtaining information about the

routines of the potential target, which may be used to perpetrate an attack and economic extortion, which is a very specific behavior mainly directed at businessmen/women in the Basque Country and Navarra. The latter include violent actions aimed at emotional, cognitive and behavioral components. There are acts characterized by their emotional component, and specially designed to intimidate and humiliate the individual and there are others related to a cognitive component and designed to point at or name the person in public. One example of this public threat is the drawing of a target with the name of the person inside. Finally, there are acts related to the behavioral component and designed to harass the person in different places or spaces by actions meant to restrict his/her freedom. Indirect and direct terrorist threats encompass aggressive behavior, which can be labeled as terrorist threats due to the predominance of acts based on intimidation, coercion, or death threats that were often reported by threatened people.

The fact of being under continuous threat may impact on and disrupt several psychosocial domains. To explain this aspect, the second taxonomy was developed from a deductive content analysis of the testimonies of threatened interviewees. Below, there is a description of this study aimed at widening knowledge of terrorist threats and their psychosocial functioning (Martín-Peña *et al.* 2011). The taxonomy was formed with four groups or domains of psychosocial consequences in which terrorist threats may impact: (1) contextual, (2) emotional, (3) cognitive and (4) behavioral. The contextual psychosocial domain includes several possible consequences related to the individual's context or surroundings. They include distancing from significant social relations, disorder in family relations, disorder in social activities and daily routine, necessity of changing address, need for protection and security measures. The emotional domain involves issues related to feelings, such as anxiety, fear, indignation or anger, sadness or self-isolation. The cognitive domain involves thoughts and perception issues, such as perception of stigma, vulnerability, distrust, or thoughts of death. Finally, the behavioral domain may involve compulsive acts, such as taking medication and alcohol or other drug abuse.

#### *4.1. Aim of the research*

The extant theory suggests that threats may have a great impact not only on an individual but also on his/her environment and the affective surroundings of the person, such as spouses, partners, family members and friends (Nijdam *et al.*, 2008b). However, little empirical research has been conducted, especially into the victims of ETA's violence in the Basque Country or those threatened by it. Moreover, research has adopted a qualitative approach rather than quantitative methods. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyze exploratory patterns and the relationship between terrorist threats in the Basque Country and the psychosocial effects suffered by people under threat. The study intends to answer the following research questions: What is the impact (if it exists) between terrorist threats and the psychosocial functioning of people who suffer them? How do terrorist threats affect the victim's intimate surroundings or their close environment?

## **5. Method**

### *5.1. Participants and procedure*

We collected data in 2009 as part of a larger study on victims of terrorism in the Basque Country. The study consisted of several phases. First, we contacted victims of terrorist organizations, who in some cases provided key informants. Key informants in research are often selected for their knowledge and role in a setting and their ability to communicate with the members of the studied group or organization (Poggie 1972). In our case, key informants were individuals selected because of a) their experience of a violent context or b) their knowledge of the



victims of ETA (e.g., activism in the victim's or peace associations) in the Basque Country as a result of their close and frequent contact with victims of ETA.

As Varona (2009) argued in the Report of the Basque Ombudsman, the victims of terrorism in the Basque Country evidenced a hidden victimization. Therefore, a convenient sampling technique such as the snow-ball method was used because of its appropriateness for identifying and contacting hidden populations and even in an ongoing conflict situation, such as the case studied here (Atkinson and Flint 2001, Cohen and Arieli 2011). As Vogt (2005, p. 300) discussed, the snow-ball sampling is "a technique for finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on".

Before conducting the survey, we interviewed key informants (N = 18), 14 in the Basque Country and 4 outside this community. The purpose of the interviews was to explain the research in order to obtain their collaboration in disseminating the survey, and to ascertain their experiences with violence. The key informants were twelve men and six women. They all had either suffered threats by ETA or were under threat with close protection, or had relatives under threat. On the other hand, they were also members of or were closely related to associations of ETA victims and had a wide knowledge of ETA's terrorism and victims. It is worth highlighting that these key informants' experience was instrumental in refining the survey.

With the information provided by the key informants, we e-mailed people under threat requesting their collaboration to help us gather information about their experiences. The document sent explained the aim of the research, the importance of their collaboration, and guaranteed their safety and confidentiality. Despite the decrease in violence carried out by ETA, the level described in this study persists and has resulted in several deaths. A website address was included in the document to guarantee the anonymity of their contribution. We received their data electronically through a web-based survey (Questionpro). A description of participants is listed in Table 2. All participants (N = 76) had suffered some kind of violence or threats, and were targets of ETA. The variable "years under threat" had five missing responses. As described in the previous page, non-probabilistic sampling was used to contact them due to the sensitivity and safety requirements of the situation.

Table 2. Features of the participants (N = 76)

	N	%
Gender		
Male	57	75
Female	19	25
Age		
Less than 40 years	18	23,7
From 40 to 49 years	31	40,8
50 or more years	27	35,5
Years under threat (N = 71)		
< 10	39	51,3
> 10	32	42,1

5.2. Instruments

Two self-reported surveys (Tourangeau *et al.* 2000) were developed to assess terrorist threats and their psychosocial effects. Both aspects were based on previous studies developed by Martín-Peña *et al.*, (2010) and Martín-Peña *et al.* (2011) on terrorist threats and psychosocial consequences, respectively. The first survey aimed to assess people’s experience of terrorist threat strategies. Participants were asked to indicate if they had experienced any type of terrorist threats on a scale of 0 (nothing) to 4 (extreme). The second survey aimed to assess the derived psychosocial effects: that is, how their daily lives were affected. Participants were asked to indicate the changes they had experienced in their social relations and routines, the effects on their emotions, cognitive perception and behavior. They had to indicate the intensity or degree to which they experienced each of the situations, ranging from 0 (nothing) to 4 (extreme). Furthermore, participants were asked to answer the degree of impact on their immediate environment, ranging from 0 (nothing) to 4 (totally).

We used correlations and hierarchical regression analysis to explore the possible association between terrorist threats (independent or predictor variable) and psychosocial effects and the alteration to their environment (dependent or response variable). The analysis of the results was conducted by PAWS-18 software.

6. Results

Results show the impact of terrorist threats on psychosocial functioning domains, the consequences for the immediate environment and the relationship to their daily lives. First, they showed that exposure to terrorist threats, especially “Direct threats” ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), was significantly associated with psychosocial effects on victims (Table 3). However, Indirect threats ( $M = 1.41$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) showed no significant relationship to effects.

Table 3. Regression for impact on psychosocial functioning

Variable	Psychosocial effects			
	Context	Emotional	Cognitive	Behavioral
	b	b	b	b
Model: Enter				
Indirect threats	-.004	-.07	-.03	-.11
Direct threats	.39**	.44**	.32**	.23*
R <sup>2</sup>	.18	.18	.15	.19
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.13**	.13**	.10**	.14*

Note. Control Variables gender, and years under threat are not included as they did not show significant association. \* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

The highest impact on the model is reported by Direct threats on Emotional and Context domains, which explain approximately 13% of the variance on the above-mentioned categories. The ‘b’ values show a positive relationship between terrorist threats and their impact on psychosocial domains. Hence, as direct threats increase, so do the effects on psychosocial domains.

With regard to the Context domain, these results suggest that family and other significant relations, social activities such as daily routines and following safety measures, are affected by these violent behaviors. Disruption to the person's social world and his/her immediate environment usually happens when they become a selected target. Moreover, in some cases, threatened people need to keep their own safety measures (e.g., looking under their car looking for a limpet bomb, taking care when opening the mail box or with the mail itself, being especially vigilant when entering or leaving their homes) or even having close protection (e.g., bodyguard). The following is an excerpt of a participant regarding this psychosocial effect:

"My family relationships have suffered deeply, and nothing is the same, even with my partner. It has caused indirect but harmful separation ... you're always aware that this situation is damaging for a couple".

"I am a woman (...) and I work as a city councilor (...) in the Basque Country (...). Being a public employee means I am another victim on ETA's list, not only me, but also my family. I am married and have children. I still take the youngest one to school, and this means that I have to go on a daily basis to his school with my two bodyguards and I have to constantly change the route we take, as I do when I go shopping, go to the doctor, visit members of my family, etc. I have had to give up going for walks, going to the beach or the swimming pool... and now have to plan everything. Everything I do must be controlled, from the mere habit of opening the mail box or using the family car, to the way I stand when in a public place (always facing the front door)."

The Emotional domain is affected by several reactions. One of them is fear, which can adopt several forms: feeling stigmatized, avoiding certain places, sadness or self-isolation, among others. For example, this excerpt shows self-isolation as a result of the situation: "Paradoxically, inside the four walls of my home is where I feel most free". In addition, anxiety and aversive reactions explain this psychosocial effect characterized by the impact on the individual's feelings.

The Cognitive domain is comprised by perception of stigma and vulnerability, distrust, or thoughts of death. The situation of violence may foster negative thoughts, such as that of death, that is, to think one may be the next target. This is exemplified by the next extract:

"It is impossible to express what it means having to live every day "on death row", where you might kiss your family, wife, parents or children goodbye in the morning and not see them again. It is like the sword of Damocles, always hanging over you: it might or might not fall."

Direct threats showed a lesser impact on the Behavioral domain. This is composed of sensitive questions related to compulsive behaviors (e.g., taking medication or consumption of alcohol or other drugs) as a reaction to violence.

The psychosocial effects of the Context domain not only affect the direct victim, but his/her immediate environment, too. A regression analysis (see Table 4) showed that the Direct threats variable was a significant positive predictor in all the spheres of the close environment. It explained 17%, 14% and 10% of the variance of the Spouse, Relatives and Children, respectively. "Friendship" showed a lower level of relation.

Table 4. Regression for impact on close environment

Variable	Impact on close environment			
	Spouse	Children	Relatives	Friendship
	b	b	b	b
Model: Enter				
Indirect threats	.03	.17	-.06	.004
Direct threats	.51***	.41**	.51***	.31*
R <sup>2</sup>	.21	.15	.19	.14
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	.17***	.10**	.14***	.09*

Note. Control Variables gender, and years under threat are not included as they did not show significant association.

\*p ≤ .05. \*\*p ≤ .01. \*\*\*p ≤ .001

The results also highlight the influence between the psychosocial domains and the impact on the immediate environment (see Table 5). With respect to the psychosocial domains, there is a high relation between the Contextual, Emotional and Cognitive domains. This means that a pervasive circle may occur, in which the impact on the person’s context influences his/her emotional reactions and thoughts in a negative perspective, and vice versa. For example, when a threatened individual perceives the impact of the threats on his/her close environment, they may have disruptive feelings and thoughts as a result of the terror which has been instilled in them.

The impact on the immediate environment is the core of the social support among those under threat. The impact on the Spouse is related to the Contextual domain. The impact on the Relatives mainly correlates to the Contextual and Cognitive domains. One example might be that of the fear of being stigmatized, and the fear of being attacked also affects the immediate environment. The close circles of support seem to be the most affected. Finally, friendship shows a lower correlation to the Contextual and Cognitive domains.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics and correlations between impact on close environment and PS effects

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean	SD
1. Impact on the spouse	.45**	.48**	.31**	.46**	.24*	0.22	0.1	2.42	1.44
2. Impact on children	1	0.07	0.04	.25*	0.2	0.22	0.02	1.86	1.51
3. Impact on the family		1	.59**	.32**	.30**	.33**	0.21	2.05	1.28
4. Impact on friendship			1	.27*	0.2	.25*	0.2	1.96	1.07
5. Contextual PS effects				1	.75**	.79**	.40**	2.30	1.04
6. Emotional PS effects					1	.86**	.68**	1.70	1.13
7. Cognitive PS effects						1	.52**	1.81	0.96
8. Behavioral PS effects							1	0.50	0.83

Note. N = 76. \*\* p < ,01 (bilateral); \* p < ,05 (bilateral). PS = Psychosocial effects

## 7. Discussion

This exploratory study reflects the impact of terrorist threats on psychosocial functioning, mainly on the social environment of those threatened by ETA in the Basque Country. This violence includes a wide variety of aggressive acts, from terrorist threats within a strategy of low-intensity violence, to the most extreme aggressive behavior such as assassinations. They are all perpetrated in a context of harassment or, as *Gesto por la Paz* (2000) points out, one of "violence of persecution" of those who are targeted because of their ideology and opposition to ETA. The field of study of people under threat has been characterized by a lack of academic and scientific research, as Varona (2009) points out. Some of the possible reasons may be that terrorist violence has lasted until 2011. The threat and fear extends to society as a whole, as do threats to some members of the Basque academic community and an attitude of distrust on the victims' side as a consequence of the continuous threats and the use of safety measures.

Results highlight the power of Direct terrorist threats, which are predominantly meant to intimidate the psychosocial functioning of the targets. Therefore, this violence has consequences on all the psychosocial aspects of the individual, such as his/her social context, and his/her emotional, cognitive and behavioral domains. These domains are related to research on "threat of victimization" (Rader 2004). The impact on the social context affects a wide spectrum of indirect victims, such as family, children and friends. Similarly, the experience gathered from threatened people in the Basque Country corroborates these findings. Qualitative studies have shown how non-physical violence such as terrorist threats has played a relevant role in maintaining terror (Sáez de la Fuente 2011, Varona 2009). The daily lives of the victims have been seriously affected at all levels; their personal aims have been frustrated, creating a re-victimization circle (Sáez de la Fuente 2011). Cognitive processes may be also influenced by terrorist threats, changing how people see their lives and/or increasing uncertainty. The victims' need to adapt to the stress violence causes becomes visible in what Nijdam *et al.*, (2008a) call "circles of vulnerability" which mainly include the direct victim, family members and friends. In agreement with our findings, Nijdam *et al.*, (2008a) noted how the cumulative stress that develops as a consequence of the ongoing threat puts in danger the balance of the family system. This continued violence has led in some cases to people under threat abandoning their homes (Carmena *et al.* 2013). In addition, Larizgoitia *et al.*, (2011a) show how the characteristics of violence, its severity, duration and repetition will influence victims' health.

Thus, the phenomenon of terrorist threats and their effects, which has formed part of a terrorist strategy in the Basque Country, has fostered fear among the collective targets. In line with this, Walter (1969) argues that the process of terror plays a relevant role in terrorism and is composed of certain key aspects. Therefore, this author highlights some key elements in terrorism, such as violence or threat of more violence, emotional reaction, social effects and control of targets through violence and fear, destroying those aspects of the target's lives in order to instill terror in others. This is coherent with some basic assumptions of terrorism delimitation. Echeburúa (2004) highlights how terrorist violence acts like a shockwave. It affects the direct victims but may also extend to the indirect victims (e.g., family and friends) and subsequently society as a whole. Following Echeburúa's simile, we may say that these circles act similarly to a stone thrown into a pond. Terrorist violence uses insidious forms of violence, taking advantage of a few acts of violence in order to create a wider effect on the victims and the rest of society. This then transcends the impact of intra-personal and inter-personal issues, due to the exemplary effect that terrorist violence has on society as a witness.

The chronic violence, as Martín-Peña, Opatow and Rodríguez-Carballeira (2011) point out, has meant that those people selected by ETA as targets are excluded

from the scope of justice or else are morally excluded, which often implies a certain normalization of violence. Selective targeting may imply a less visible and insidious forms of violence (such as terrorist threats), which may promote the distancing and indifference of society towards victims because of the derived psychosocial consequences and the extension of fear. This may facilitate the loss of social support (Larizgoitia *et al.*, 2011a). When someone is previously targeted and threatened, people may prefer not to be near the target, since they are afraid of being in danger or even becoming the target themselves (Nijdam *et al.* 2008b). In the Basque case, a sociological report showed that some people do not want to have people threatened by ETA as neighbors (*Observatorio Vasco de la Juventud* 2011). It is not easy to assess the social effect of terrorism in society but some sociological studies have pointed out how it affects to talk about politics in the Basque Country (Euskobarometro 2014). This fact has also been mentioned by the victims of ETA in their testimonies.

In addition, terrorist violence and especially low-intensity violence often require social support to be accomplished. In this sense, the discourses of the legitimation of violence are mainly addressed to the supporters of the terrorist organization (Van den Broek 2004) and the construction of a negative image of the adversary by the terrorist group is one of its most important components. It can be done by attributing to them characteristics which generate social rejection (Sabucedo *et al.* 2002, Varela-Rey *et al.* 2013).

Finally, regarding the present study, it is necessary to point out some of the limitations of the research and analysis. This research includes hard-to-reach samples of participants, and they are not a representative sample from a statistical point of view. Therefore, the generalization of the results should be taken with caution.

Additionally, this paper presents a contribution to a socially relevant topic such as victims of terrorism, and especially people under threat in the Basque Country, within an evidence-based approach. After the cessation of armed activity announced by ETA in 2011, recommendations and implications may be oriented towards fostering memory and recognition. Experience of victims and systematic research may be complementary contributions to gaining insight into memory and the recognition of those who suffered this violence in the Basque Country. As Opatow (2011) argued, commemorative sites such as museums, educational centers and their interpretive strategies, may be resources for increasing people's knowledge of the past, and for the memory and recognition of victims. In this sense, commemorative sites (i.e., a museum or virtual museum) may be useful also for victims of low intensity violence. The aim should be to show the experience of victims of all types of terrorist violence (through writings and/or media resources), which may be a good instrument for social recognition and social awareness. For instance, The Observatory on the infringement of Human Rights by terrorist violence (Zoomrights 2014) is a website that contributes through testimonies from victims of terrorism in the Basque Country, including extracts from threatened people. Specific examples of virtual museums have been developed, for instance, in the Peruvian context (Mohme Seminario 2012, Yale Macmillan Center 2008). Further research may be aimed at analyzing specifically different collectives that were under threat, such as politicians, extorted businessmen/women, journalists, professors and others.

Different instruments may be used to give a voice to these victims and to better reveal their experiences. The forms of violence that go beyond blatant terrorism presented here have not always been rejected sufficiently. As Sáez de la Fuente (2012, p. 25) pointed out in her research, "While the reaction against death has gradually increased, the reaction against intimidation and threats has not crossed the line of political correctness. Basque society is not aware of the ethical and civic cost or that freedom has been restricted in certain sectors; it has also been

restricted for the entire civil fabric, because it directly affects the exercise of democratic pluralism”.

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