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Shock and Sadness, but No Panic

By Alexandra Odynova

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Muted Russian reaction to the suicide bombing at Domodedovo Airport suggests people are not easily shocked by terrorist attacks after decades of violence — but some psychologists say mental scars still run deep.

“I felt no shock,” said Artyom Kachkovsky, a passenger who flew into Domodedovo on Monday minutes after the bomb went off in the arrival zone, killing 35. “But I feel really bad for the people who were waiting there.”

“Most people didn't realize what was going on. They didn't panic but looked sad,” Kachkovsky said by telephone Tuesday.

Darya Yeliseyeva, a Muscovite, drove her Suzuki sedan to the airport after the blast, seeking to help people who needed a ride to the city as gypsy cab drivers mercilessly hiked fares. She said the first people she saw wanted to leave the airport as quickly as possible but were not panicky.

“They didn't look like they realized what had happened,” she said by telephone.

She said the initial crowd dispersed eventually, and passengers who arrived later that evening were only irritated because they had to wait in a long line to go through the sole metal detector installed at the exit.

Kachkovsky, 37, a Russian-born U.S. citizen, said his Russian experience changed his perception of violence.

“In 1993, I saw a dead man in the street for the first time, and it was a shock,” he said.

But such scenes are “no longer shocking,” he said.

A failed coup in October 1993 left 123 people dead in clashes on Moscow's streets.

Russians have also witnessed about two dozen major terrorist attacks since armed conflict first flared in the North Caucasus in the early 1990s. The last Moscow attack occurred only 10 months ago, when a double suicide bombing killed 40 in the metro.

In extreme situations, “Russians seem much calmer and more practical” than Westerners, Kachkovsky said.

Psychologists were split in evaluating the effect of the latest attack on the public's mental health.

People develop “selective perception” to terrorist attacks, choosing to focus on some and to ignore others, said Madrudin Magomed-Eminov, who heads the department for extreme psychology and psychological assistance at Moscow State University.

The number of Russians capable of ignoring attacks has been growing since the 1990s, he said by telephone.

But Anna Portnova, head of the Serbsky Institute's department for psychological assistance in extreme situations, said “no human being can get used to such events, even in the world's crisis spots.”

She conceded that a certain “vaccination to violence” was taking place, but also said “the level of anxiety is growing.”

“Quite a lot of people” apply for psychological assistance with the institute, which is providing free counseling in connection with the attack, Portnova said. Among the patients are “secondary victims” who were shocked by last year's metro bombings and are now undergoing new panic attacks.

Portnova said television news coverage does a lot to scar the public because they have aired disturbing footage after Monday's attack, including “burned body parts.”

Television may also cause psychological harm in other ways, she said, noting that the national channels were slow to react to the blast at first and did not bother to alter their programming, running soap operas between news broadcasts describing the bloody aftermath of the

explosion. State-run Channel One television scheduled “United 93” — a U.S.-British production about a plane hijacked by terrorists during the 9/11 attacks — to air early Wednesday.

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