

The miners' strike may soon be over, but the suffering will continue for many years to come. Deep psychological wounds may be exposed once the men return to the pits. Thomson Prentice reports.

The human cost of the coal strike

The human casualties of the miners' strike can be counted already in thousands of men, women and children physically and mentally wounded. But whatever uneasy armistice eventually brings the dispute to a formal end, health experts believe the suffering is certain to continue for months, and possibly years.

In what has been, perhaps above all, a war of nerves, the psychological stress involved has thrust colossal burdens on combatants and non-combatants alike. Often, those burdens have been unbearable, and no solution to the strike will ever lift them. There have been accusations of murder, cases of suicide, and accidental deaths.

The miners, the police, their families, and the families of trade union and management officials and many others have all been scarred by the experience, some permanently. Marriages have been destroyed, careers cut short, entire communities are still bleeding.

Can they recover? Opinions vary, and are sometimes as polarized as the hardliners on either side of the dispute. "I've seen babies in arms shouting 'Scab!' at miners as if it was the first word they'd been taught," says Dr Elizabeth Newson, director of the Child Development Research Unit at Nottingham University.

"It frightens me that children will suffer lasting effects of seeing their parents involved in violent verbal exchanges. They experience bitterness and hatred without understanding it. They

are tomorrow's adults. We have no way of knowing what long-term damage has been inflicted on them."

Family doctors in mining areas talk of strong community spirit, of supportive wives, occasional breakdowns. They, too, are concerned about the future implications.

Dr Hamid Husain, a Rotherham GP, says: "The big problems will be after the strike is over. Families are under tremendous stress now, but the cause sustains them. If the men go back to work frustrated, depressed or defeated, it will be very hard on them."

Dr Julian Tudor Hart, a GP for 23 years in a West Glamorgan mining village, is more optimistic: "It's been painful, but people here haven't cracked up. I hope the spirit of togetherness will persist after the strike is over."

Among patients at Dr Stephen Drew's surgery near Durham are many miners from Eastington Colliery, one of Britain's most militant pits. The men have tended to stay away, he says, reluctant perhaps to admit to illness or strain.

"But just before Christmas some of the women, girls aged from 20 to maybe 27, with two or three kids, were coming to me with panic attacks," he said. "They were having palpitations, crying, wanting to run away."

"I've found that when the family wouldn't have a nice Christmas with the help of sedatives, but what they really wanted was some reassurance



The familiar face of violence: but what of the hidden pressures faced by the front-line troops at home?

that they weren't cracking up. "It used to be that people were always willing to help each other out. Now it's all about who went back to work and who didn't. People will remember this for years. I don't think it will ever be the same again."

It can never be the same again for those families when the pressures of the strike have had tragic consequences.

On New Year's Day, John Green, a 23-year-old fitter at Betchingham Colliery, Kent, said goodbye to his wife Beverly and their 18-month-old son Barry, and drove into the countryside. There he killed himself by inhaling the car's exhaust fumes.

"My son couldn't see an end," his mother, Mrs Maureen Green, said. "He was without hope."

Others had surrendered to despair much earlier. On March 26 last year Ian Turner, a miner who had been called a scab, hanged himself at home in Peterlee, Co. Durham. His fiancée found his body. He was 25.

After 13 weeks on strike James Clay, aged 33, of Stoke-

on-Trent, went back to his pit last July because he was behind in mortgage payments and had other debts.

His wife Ann received two threatening phone calls, one hinting at violence against their 12-year-old daughter. Soon afterwards Mr Clay went into his garage and killed himself.

"He tried to tell the miners of the hardship he was facing," his widow said at the inquest, "but they wouldn't listen."

The stress has devastated the families of policemen as well as miners. On November 28 PC Bob Reynolds, of Cherterson, Cambridgeshire, died from a heart attack while on a police bus returning from picket-line duty in Kent.

"Wives don't know when their man is going to be at home or in hospital," says Paul Middup, national spokesman on the strike for the Police Federation. "They've been living on their nerves for months."

Dr Alan Lees, of South Wales police, is the only such full-time occupational health officer in Britain: "It isn't necessarily the men on picket duty who are

under most pressure. It's often those back at the station whose job is to hold the fort 12 hours a day instead of eight."

There is, he says, a general reluctance among policemen to complain about stress. Some officers now call the attitude of men under extreme pressure trying to hide their problems, the "John Wayne syndrome."

During the strike, some constables have been withdrawn from coalfield confrontations because senior officers feared they would crack up under the strain.

The duration and severity of alter-effects of the strike, mentally and physically on miners and their families, may depend significantly on how the dispute is concluded. Some psychologists and medical officers are divided in their opinions.

Professor Cary L. Cooper, author of about 20 books on occupational stress, and now professor of organizational psychology at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology, says: "I'm concerned that more stress-related illness will begin to surface

as solidarity within the miners is seen to be weakening.

"We know very many marriages have broken down. The longer the dispute continues, the more likely it is that some women will challenge their menfolk by saying 'What's really more important to you - the children and me, or the cause?'"

Dr Vernon Coleman, psychologist, author and broadcaster, says: "If the miners lose I think there will be very deep depression and despair, and a lot of suicides. I think they have been very strong until now, united by the cause, but if they are humiliated it could be very dangerous. It will be like losing the war, and they will suffer tremendously."

Those miners who are returning to work and those who may soon follow them are likely to experience varying degrees of mental and physical difficulty.

Dr Huw Davies, the South Wales area medical officer for the National Coal Board, says: "The main problem will be men coming back and finding themselves apprehensive about going underground after such a long time. They will perhaps have lost their pit sense, which gives them the ability to work in the dark."

"I think this will show itself in reluctance to go underground and some men will look for ways out - early retirement or redundancy. A coal mine is a very dangerous place to work and people who have never had claustrophobia may be vulnerable to it for the first time."

Another doctor in the coal industry, who asked not to be named, says: "I'm hearing stories of men who've gone back to work saying they don't like it any more. They're frightened of going underground. The fear has been lasting for weeks."

Dr Colin Soutar, of the Institute of Occupational Medicine in Edinburgh, believes that miners may often dispute fear of going underground with physical complaints.

However, Mr Ted Horton, deputy director for mining in the coal board's north Derbyshire area, emphatically rejects suggestions of problems among returning miners: "I go underground twice a week and have found no evidence of anything amiss. It is like they've never been away."

Another board medical officer says: "Some men will be glad to get back to work. Physically they will be in good

COMMENT

Wanted: a rush of blood

The current concern about the transmission of AIDS through donations of blood from homosexuals can only increase the need for new blood donors.

Recently the National Blood Transfusion Service made an urgent appeal, warning that supplies were "critically short", particularly in the London area, where donations dropped in two months by 25 per cent. Supplies to hospitals were having to be cut back, and there were donor shortages in other areas.

Among reasons for the decline, it has been suggested, were the introduction of handling charges for blood sent to private-sector hospitals, and the conviction last year of a consultant haematologist for conspiring to steal blood.

There may, however, be a more fundamental cause. At a recent Sunday session, a nurse pointed to the shortage of beds and staff. She said a donor queue could start more than an hour before the session was to begin. Once inside, a wait of half an hour is quite common, however long you time your arrival.

And there are also the factors which cannot be avoided. It is frustrating to wait some time, have your finger pricked and then be told that your blood is unacceptable that day.

Donors might be helped by being given a choice of dates or locations when they are informed about forthcoming sessions. The normal period of notice is about two weeks and, if the appointed day is impossible, it entails waiting until the computer selects your name again. As no one tells if you could not or did not come, it may be six months before you are called again.

Wider publicity would also boost donations. The DHSS currently produces several eye-catching leaflets about being a donor. But these are available only at the sessions.

Surely this is a case of preaching to the blood-letting, bold, resolute and converted. Would not a nationwide advertising campaign or television appeal be better? There must be some celebrity donors prepared to explain how simple and satisfying giving blood can be.

If the Government can spend money on exhorting us not to smoke for our own good, can it not spend a bit more to persuade people to part with a pint of blood for someone else's good?

Jane Soames

HOW THEY'VE COPED ...

Glyn Jones started colliery work as a 14-year-old. Today, at 58, he is vice president of Naodds, the 16,000-strong pit deputies union, whose members' presence is essential at every pit. He has become inured to abusive phone calls to his Cardiff home since the union voted against strike action.

Jennifer Harris's husband Steve has been on strike since last March and she runs the family home at Mastin Moor, near Chesterfield, with the help of supplementary benefit, a food parcel a week from a miners' support group and free school meals for their twin six-year-old daughters.

"They tell me I'm a bastard or a Judas and then they hang up," he says. "I don't like it but I can only be thankful it isn't my wife who picks up the phone."

"We held a ballot and voted to stay at work. Some miners have never forgiven us for crossing the picket lines. I can understand their feelings in a way but we took a democratic vote and we're all supposed to believe in democracy, aren't we?"

"I haven't been easy. I feel the need for a holiday - the whole family does - but we cancelled our fortnight in Tenerife last summer and Christmas was not cheerful. The house is cold because there isn't enough cash to pay the fuel bills."

She and her husband are in agreement about the strike. "We've become used to it. We do without things. The children still say they'd like this or that when the strike ends."

Steve says they both expected it to be worse than it has turned out to be. "We've had a lot of support from neighbours and friends. We've never doubted the strike is worthwhile. I'll be over soon, I'll be earning money again and we can start thinking about a holiday. It might not be Tenerife but even if it's Skagness it's a break, isn't it?"



Under stress: how much have MacGregor and Scargill suffered too?



TOMORROW

How high tech is more than a simple storm in a bra-cup for the fashion industry

He's a dead cert for this award

moreover... Miles Kington

The event of 1985, the More-over Man of the Year Award ceremony, took place at the weekend in the conference suite of the M1 Park Scratching Service Area. Behind closed doors, as it was pretty cold outside, more than 1,000 invited guests took their seats to

tonight, as I have been called on an emergency holiday to Mustique, but I am sure that this video-recording of me, made in a private studio on the paradise

your minds back to 1984, you will recall that in late January of that year I was nominated as man of the year Mr George Orwell, whose shadowy head I am

not of Terry Wogan or Sir Robin Day. One thinks of Terry Wogan or the Rabbi Cohen. One thinks even of President Reagan, who has now abandoned politics and gone over full-time to showbiz and television.

"But there is someone even

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Thomson Prentice.

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