

## Stockholm Syndrome

Stockholm Syndrome is a psychological response wherein a captive begins to identify closely with his or her captors, as well as with their agenda and demands.

The name of the syndrome is derived from a botched bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden. In August 1973 four employees of Sveriges Kreditbank were held hostage in the bank's vault for six days. During the standoff, a seemingly incongruous bond developed between captive and captor. One hostage, during a telephone call with Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, stated that she fully trusted her captors but feared that she would die in a police assault on the building.

The most infamous example of Stockholm syndrome may be that involving kidnapped newspaper heiress Patricia Hearst. In 1974, some 10 weeks after being taken hostage by the Symbionese Liberation Army, Hearst helped her kidnappers rob a California bank. But it was during the hostage crisis in Iran (1979–81) that the Stockholm syndrome worked its way into the public imagination. The syndrome was also cited after the 1985 hijacking of TWA flight 847. Although passengers underwent a hostage ordeal that stretched more than two weeks, upon their release some were openly sympathetic to the demands of their kidnappers. Terry Anderson (1985–91), Terry Waite (1987–91), and Thomas Sutherland (1985–91), all of whom had been kidnaped by Islamist militants in Lebanon, claimed that they had been treated well by their captors, despite the fact that they had often been held in solitary confinement and chained up in small, unclean cells. Similar responses were exhibited by the hostages held at the Japanese embassy in Peru in 1996–97.

Psychologists who have studied the syndrome believe that the bond is initially

created when a captor threatens a captive's life, deliberates, and then chooses not to kill the captive. The captive's relief at the removal of the death threat is transposed into feelings of gratitude toward the captor for giving him or her life. As the Stockholm bank robbery incident proves, it takes only a few days for this bond to cement, proving that, early on, the victim's desire to survive trumps the urge to hate the person who created the situation.

The survival instinct is at the heart of the Stockholm syndrome. Victims live in enforced dependence and interpret rare or small acts of kindness in the midst of horrible conditions as good treatment. They often become hypervigilant to the needs and demands of their captors, making psychological links between the captors' happiness and their own. Indeed, the syndrome is marked not only by a positive bond between captive and captor but also by a negative attitude on behalf of the captive toward authorities who threaten the captor-captive relationship. The negative attitude is especially powerful when the hostage is of no use to the captors except as leverage against a third party, as has often been the case with political hostages.

By the 21st century, psychologists had expanded their understanding of the Stockholm syndrome from hostages to other groups, including victims of domestic violence, cult members, prisoners of war, procured prostitutes, and abused children. The American Psychiatric Association does not include Stockholm syndrome in its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

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"Stockholm syndrome." Britannica Academic, Encyclopædia Britannica, 27 Apr. 2018.