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## Ramsey County prosecutor now fighting crime's aftershocks, too

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Hearing the story of Scott Ostrom's trauma after he was stabbed at a Rainbow Foods store in St. Paul got John Choi thinking.

Choi, the Ramsey County attorney, read the letter that Ostrom wrote for the July sentencing of his assailant, Russell T. Johnson.

Ostrom, 49, said he had been fired from his job as manager of the Rainbow Foods in the Midway area of St. Paul, where Johnson had stabbed him in the chest. The company alleged "job abandonment." Ostrom believes it was because he had to take frequent breaks during his shifts to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

"I read it, and I was moved by it," Choi said of Ostrom's letter.

He met with Ostrom and keeps in touch with him. He also began to research PTSD.

Choi found a telling statistic: Almost 28 percent of victims of violent crimes experience PTSD, compared with 9.4 percent of victims of other traumatic events, according to data from the National Victim Assistance Academy, which is sponsored by the Office for Victims of Crime in the U.S. Department of Justice.

That percentage was even higher among people whose crimes resulted in injuries, as Ostrom's had: 45 percent of them, compared with 19 percent of those not injured, experienced PTSD, the victims' group website said.

So for Choi, whose office prosecutes all felonies and all juvenile crime in Ramsey County, confronting the issue was important.

"Justice doesn't just happen because there's a

sentencing," he said. "I think

it's critical for people in the system to never, ever forget that."

The Hennepin County attorney's office does not have specific literature on post-traumatic stress disorder for victims.

But victim advocates always assume that PTSD is involved and work with individuals on that basis, the office said.

Choi said recently that his office would specifically address the problem of PTSD in crime victims.

Under his plan, his office will:

-- Send information about the syndrome to Ramsey County crime victims, including a description of symptoms and a list of resources, beginning this month.

-- Conduct training on PTSD in March or April for prosecutors and victim advocates in his office so they can better deal with victims who may be suffering from it.

-- Offer to send a letter on a victim's behalf to his or her employer, explaining that the individual may need more time off work or special consideration in light of his or her trauma.

Choi said he will talk with legislators about expanding the law that bars employer retaliation against crime victims. Crime victims currently must

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receive "reasonable time off from work" to go to court, for instance, the statute says.

"But I also think the Legislature ought to think about expanding that protection for crime victims, especially if they've been a victim of a violent crime, for instance, if you've been stabbed or if you've been shot, and especially if it happened to you while you were working," as it did to Ostrom, Choi said.

Ostrom did not return a call seeking comment.

Milwaukee-based Roundy's Supermarkets Chairman and Chief Executive Robert Mariano said Ostrom's firing from its Rainbow Foods division was justified.

After the termination, the company contested Ostrom's unemployment claim. The Department of Employment and Economic Development ruled in Ostrom's favor, determining that his actions were not employment misconduct.

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## SYMPTOMS OF PTSD

Post-traumatic stress disorder affects not only military combatants but also crime victims and victims of other traumatic events.

Symptoms may include:

- Recurrent, distressing recollections of the event.
- Distressing dreams.
- Intense distress in the face of triggers, such as the anniversary of the event or other reminders
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others.
- Reduced ability to feel emotions.
- Irritability or outbursts of anger.
- Difficulty concentrating or completing tasks.

Source: National Center for Victims of Crime

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