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## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

### Gentle Help With Homeopathy

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An accident, an experience of violence or a war situation can overwhelm the soul so much that it is repeatedly flooded by the impressions experienced. In this case it can be Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that can overshadow life for years. Here, it makes sense to support the processing of events. Homeopathy can also help here, as studies show.

Anyone can get into a life-threatening situation in their life which they cannot process at first, and thus they develop an anxiety and trauma disorder. Particularly such a "disorder" is the so-called PTSD, the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. This trauma disorder, which occurs after experiences of war, combat and terror, among other things, was first diagnosed in veterans of the Vietnam War and was only recognized and classified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.

This recognition was controversial, but in the end was an important addition to psychiatric theory and practice. Thus, for the first time, it was recognized that trauma can be caused by an external causative factor and is not an inherent weakness of the respective patient with the specific symptomatology.<sup>1</sup>

### **Railroad Trauma**

Even though the name and recognition indicate a rather modern mental illness phenomenon, the symptom complex as such had been known for much longer. Seen historically, similar symptoms occurred in travelers at the time of the first steam locomotives and train journeys.

Travelling became louder and faster and the reaction of passengers to the sound of the steam engines, the movements of the carriages, the jerking when starting and braking as well as the dangers of accidents were often perceived as traumatizing by travellers. This specific accumulation of novel symptoms was soon referred to as the "railway spine" and is now comparable to the symptoms of "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder".<sup>2,3</sup>

### **Soldier's Heart**

But even the war returnees of past wars, even if physically unharmed, brought psychologically stressful symptoms of illness back home with them. At that time, the symptom complex was referred to as the "soldier's heart" and, in civilians who had experienced the wars, as "shell shock" or "battle fatigue".<sup>2,3</sup>

Today, PTSD symptoms occur in victims of car accidents, violence, abuse, terrorist attacks, natural disasters and trauma to members of the armed forces who served in the war, among other things.

#### **Examinations of Vietnam War Veterans**

The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study, conducted from 1986 to 1988, concluded, after a representative sample of Vietnam War veterans who showed symptoms of PTSD, that 30.9 percent male and 26.9 percent female veterans suffered from PTSD.<sup>5</sup>

Among veterans of the first Gulf War, a study conducted between 1995 and 1997 found that a proportion of 12.1 percent were diagnosed with PTSD. In a 2008 study, soldiers of the Second Gulf War (Iraq/Afghanistan) found that 13.8 percent of participants suffered from PTSD.<sup>5</sup>

## Increasing Risk

Epidemiological studies conclude that the population is increasingly confronted with potentially traumatizing events.<sup>4</sup> In 1990, the first national comorbidity survey conducted in the U.S. estimated that 7.8 percent of the U.S. population was likely to become ill with PTSD at some point in their lives. The repetition of this survey between 2001 and 2003 yielded similar results.<sup>5</sup>

## Stressful Events

The causative factor of the symptom complex defined as PTSD was identified as exposure to events and incidents that are experienced as “immeasurably distressing”.<sup>6</sup> These events are generally perceived as life-threatening, usually catching people unprepared, with an intensity that shocks and impairs the ability of those affected to respond appropriately. It is not uncommon for those affected by this complex to describe their lives as being impaired and changed in its foundations.

PTSD is characterized as an anxiety disorder and is a complex of symptoms that results from traumatic experiences and the individual's direct response to such stressors. A severe threat to life, a physical assault or an injury and the associated fear, fright and helplessness can trigger post-traumatic traits. Regardless of the causative event or experience, the symptoms of the syndrome are similar in all cases, whether through physical injury, witnessing a terrorist attack, one's own experience of a natural disaster, or active participation in war battles.

## Symptoms of PTSD

PTSD develops from the disturbing memories that can emerge over and over again after a traumatic incident. Experienced as an *“intrusive recollection”* these memories can be painful, frightening, tragic, disgusting, or guilt-ridden, and can be triggered by various conscious or unconscious signals.<sup>6</sup> Troubling thoughts about an event or incident can occur as flashbacks triggered by subtle details that appear in the field of hearing or vision. At the same time, sensory perceptions such as taste, smell or even feelings can trigger the psychological and physical stress known as PTSD. This means that symptoms can occur anytime and anywhere through an active trigger or can occur without any obvious connection to the traumatic experience, even if the affected person is calm and relaxed.

Subtle details in the hearing and visual fields, sensory perceptions such as taste, smell or even feelings can trigger the psychological and physical stress known as PTSD.

Thus, a normal everyday life can be disturbed by phases of excitement that can be triggered by such internal or external provocations. These are indicated by restless sleep or difficulty falling asleep, irritability, outbursts of aggression, difficulty concentrating, excessive caution and alertness or a tendency to be frightened.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that all these factors can subsequently lead to the development of secondary symptomatology. This can be manifested in the form of angina pectoris attacks, hypertension, tachycardia, shortness of breath and sweating among other things. These symptoms can have a decisive impact on the lives of those affected. They may not only try to distance themselves from the memories of the traumatic events, but may block memories that recall aspects related to the incident or event that caused the PTSD. In their attempt to avoid triggers, they can next restrict their immediate environment, their social environment, avoid places and people, suppress feelings and finally become withdrawn and distancing themselves from other people. They may lose the ability to cope in a normal work environment. All this can be seen as "*mental anesthesia*" and lead to the development of a pessimistic outlook for the future with diminished future expectation and planning.<sup>6</sup>

All this can be considered "mental stupor".

Eventually, these symptoms can lead to anxiety, melancholy, and depression. Apart from personality changes, sufferers can change their behavior. Tendencies to impulsive behavior and dependencies are not uncommon, but also the tendency to self-harm or even a predisposition to suicidal moods can occur.

### **Treatment of PTSD**

Traditional medicine uses pharmacological and psychoanalytic approaches to help those suffering from PTSD. In most cases, psychotherapy and appropriate medication are combined in the treatment.<sup>7</sup> However, more and more holistic and complementary medical therapies are being used by patients to alleviate the symptoms of trauma syndromes. There is little research on the effects of complementary and alternative medicine in treatments for PTSD, but testimonials offer promising recommendations for this syndrome. Initial research results on complementary and alternative medical (CAM) treatment with meditation, relaxation and exercise therapy for victims of PTSD are available.<sup>8</sup> Scientifically evaluated therapeutic approaches from the CAM spectrum are TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine), relaxation and meditation therapies<sup>7,8</sup>

The research results warrant further research into CAM treatments for PTSD. However, the researchers emphasize that the limited evidence of efficacy of CAM approaches suggests the use of CAM therapies only as an adjunct to conventional treatment.

Homeopathy can promote the restoration of well-being and the recovery of the individual as a whole.

### Different Forms of PTSD

PTSD is not the natural reaction of tension or stress to danger, accidents, injuries or the like. PTSD is considered a mental illness that prevents people from leading a normal life. Characteristic of these forms of anxiety and trauma disorders are persistent, overwhelming worries and anxiety. These phases can be debilitating and may possibly appear unmanageable. Panic, phobias, compulsions and depression can combine so that those affected are unable to lead a normal life and to cope with their own everyday life. Since the recognition of PTSD, other forms of the syndrome have been categorized, as not all patients suffer with the same intensity or with the same symptoms. In the meantime, a distinction is made between 'uncomplicated PTSD', 'complex PTSD' and 'comorbid PTSD'.

**Uncomplicated PTSD** is generally triggered by a single traumatic experience. Symptoms of this form of stress disorder are, for example, the avoidance of impulses, places but also people who can favor the memories of the trauma, but also flashbacks, nightmares, worries and anxiety. In this form, there are no other mental illnesses that can occur as side effects, such as depression.

**Complex PTSD** is characterized by several causative traumatic events. Repeated aggression in the case of, for example, domestic violence. Abuse or events such as repeated war battles are triggers of this trauma disorder. Although the symptoms are the same as uncomplicated PTSD, uncomplicated and complex PTSD differ in the complexity and intensity of the symptoms. Repeated, long-lasting and therefore chronic traumas often lead to personality changes and disorders, which can be accompanied by behavioral changes and extreme problems such as anger, aggression, panic, phobias, compulsions or impulsivity.

In **Comorbid PTSD**, there is at least one other physical disease that occurs at the same time in addition to PTSD. These can include depression, anxiety disorders, panic or destructive behavior. In this case, treatment is aimed at all diseases and not just PTSD.

## **PTSD and Homeopathy**

Homeopathy has so far received little attention in the treatment of PTSD. There is little research and testimonials are scarce. However, the fact that homeopathy could play a greater role in effectively managing the symptoms of PTSD is evident given the fact that it is a holistic approach to treatment. Homeopathy treats the patient on all levels, the spiritual, the mental/emotional and the physical level – that is, on all the levels on which the symptoms of PTSD manifest and are expressed. The large number of remedies in the Homeopathic Materia Medica, which express specific symptoms in their test pictures that can be attributed to the syndrome of PTSD, virtually predestined homeopathy for the treatment of patients of these symptom complexes.

*Stefan Warken, Elisabeth von Wedel* and others<sup>12</sup> have reported about their experiences in treating PTSD patients with homeopathy in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, that patients with PTSD require special treatment over a longer period of time to solve such deep-seated problems as post-war trauma. They emphasize that homeopathic treatment requires successive prescription and repeated administration of the similimum. They conclude that homeopathic treatment works efficiently, cheaply and quickly.<sup>12</sup>

Two research studies have examined the link between homeopathy and PTSD and conclude that homeopathy may bring benefits to patients with PTSD.<sup>8,9</sup>

*Yasmeen Lankesar*<sup>11</sup> states about homeopathy that "*with such a treatment, the quality of life and physical and mental health can be greatly improved*". In the conclusion of her study, she emphasizes that the symptoms of the syndrome improved overall, as did the quality of life of the patients.

The findings from the case studies of *Kushangi Bhanushali*<sup>10</sup> allow us to conclude that homeopathy is effective in the treatment of anxiety disorders, the group of disorders to which PTSD belongs.

It can be said with certainty that within the Homeopathic Materia Medica it is possible to identify a large number of homeopathic remedies that express in their test pictures specific symptoms that can be classified with the complex of PTSD. It therefore depends on the exact case study of the homeopathic practitioner to identify the appropriate prescription for his patient. Homeopathy can promote the restoration of well-being and the recovery of the individual as a whole. It is part of the holistic CAM therapies whose range of action is urgently recommended for the treatment of PTSD.

## The Author



**Uta Mittelstadt** is a university-educated homeopath and holds a Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Homeopathic Medicine from the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom. She is the founder of 'Clever H – the Mag!', an online journal “by homeopaths, for homeopaths, with the patient in mind”. Uta is a board member of HWC - Homeopathy World Community, a world association for the support of homeopaths and patients, and for the promotion of the homeopathic treatment approach, where she also served as COO for four years.

She studied homeopathy for many years, both in Portugal and the U.K. She holds a BSc (Hons.) in homeopathic medicine and an MSc in homeopathy from the University of Central Lancashire. She runs a blog on all things homeopathic at <http://cleverhomeopathy.wordpress.com/>

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