Impact of Trauma Exposure: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Co-Morbidity

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Health and economic effects associated with exposure to trauma such as extreme stressors, including war, sexual victimization, disasters, and serious accidents are extremely costly in terms of the impact upon victims and their families and upon society [1,2].

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is only one possible psychiatric condition that can arise in traumatized individuals. Psychiatric comorbidity is high in patients with PTSD. The National Comorbidity Survey data suggests that 16% have one coexisting psychiatric disorder, 17% have two psychiatric disorders, and 50% have three or more [3]. Depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse are two to four times more prevalent in patients with PTSD; substance abuse is often due to the patient’s attempts to self-medicate symptoms.

Individuals with one or more PTSD symptoms are more likely to experience occupational problems, have poorer social supports, and have more disability than controls [4]. PTSD may increase the risk for attempted suicide [5,6]. Individuals with PTSD also have higher rates of problems in intimate relationships, including marital difficulties, compared to people without PTSD [4,7].

Individuals who experienced most of their trauma in childhood e.g. physical and sexual abuse often show greater difficulty with affect regulation e.g. unmodulated anger, and often demonstrate more dissociation, somatization, self-destructive behavior, and suicidal behaviour [8].

Hence the ability to identify at-risk trauma exposed individuals early, prevent or mitigate the development of psychiatric morbidity through early intervention and treatment is important.

This special issue on Posttraumatic Stress Disorders highlights important findings of screening and early intervention in road traffic accident victims and their families, understanding the impact of childhood trauma history and juvenile offending and the need for trauma-related psychiatric services, providing therapies such as Eye Movement Reprocessing and Desensitization (EMDR) and Hypnosis.

References

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