

Secondary Traumatization: Effects on Family



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Background & Overview

- Those with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
 - Considerable social & emotional difficulties
 - Difficulties affect family
 - Expected to provide all or most of support
 - Witness variety of negative behaviors & emotions

Background & Overview

- How behaviors & emotions affect relationships
 - Low frustration threshold
 - Lack of patience with children
 - Inability to carry on family role
 - Verbal & physical aggression



Close, long-term contact with an emotionally disturbed person can cause chronic stress.

Family members &/or SO's of those with PTSD can develop

Secondary Traumatization



Secondary Traumatization

- Natural emotional reaction to trauma of SO
- Stress caused by:
 - Providing help
 - Offering emotional support to traumatized person
- Almost identical to PTSD – except indirect exposure to trauma through close contact with person with PTSD - symptoms are mirrored

Problems in Relationships

- Severe & pervasive negative effects on:
 - Marital adjustment
 - General family functioning
 - Mental health of partners
- Result in such problems as:
 - Compromised parenting
 - Family violence
 - Divorce
 - Sexual problems
 - Aggression
 - Caregiver burden



Psychological Indicators

- Self-isolation
- Cynicism
- Loss of interest
- Changes in self perception and that of others
- Prolonged grief
- Problems with concentration

Emotional Indicators

- Inappropriate anger/irritability
- Sadness/depression
- Generalized anxiety/worry
- Mood swings
- Emotional exhaustion



Physical Indicators

- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Susceptibility to infections
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco
- Lethargy/chronic fatigue
- Insomnia



Other Indicators

Anger

- Common response to caring for person with PTSD
- Person with PTSD not the same
- Need outlet for processing strong anger feelings

Depression

- Feel sorry for experiences/suffering
- No longer want to do activities together



Other Indicators cont.

Sleep Problems

- “On alert”
- Worry or negative thoughts
- Drugs or alcohol
- Bad dreams or nightmares



Avoidance

- Natural to avoid thinking or feeling about PTSD
- Types:
 - Hold back or disregard
 - Denial or negativity
 - Behavioral
- Reminders/triggers
- “Walking on eggshells”

Recognition of Warning Signs

- Food, drug or alcohol abuse
- Anger
- Over-working
- Depression
- Exhaustion
- Sleep disturbance
- Frequent somatic complaints
- Hopelessness
- Inability to balance objectivity & empathy
- Low self-esteem

Coping Strategies

- **Positive**
 - Expression of feelings
 - Emotional support
 - Humor
 - Good physical health
 - Hobbies
 - Seeks peer support
 - Spiritual activities
- **Negative**
 - Alcohol
 - Drugs
 - Disengagement
 - Denial

Prevention & Intervention

- Education, awareness, identification
- Stringent observation for early warning signs
- Management of stress, anxiety & pervasive negative attitudes
- Awareness of detrimental personal consequences:
 - Detachment from person with PTSD
 - Decreased empathy
 - Lack of interaction with family & peers

Treatment Options

- Psychoeducation for family/SOs
 - Impact on person with PTSD
 - Impact on family
- Teach coping strategies
- Support groups
- Individual treatment – for either or both
- Couple or family therapy



Discussion:

What is it like for families during incarceration?

What about reuniting after incarceration?

What are we doing and what else can be done?
