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Post Traumatic Stress and Addiction

By Ted W.

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The consequences of Child Maltreatment: "early use of drugs/alcohol and substance abuse/dependences"*

Despite my parent's attendance at church, my home environment was not godly. There was a war between Mom and Dad and I became a casualty. One morning when I was 5 years old, my younger brother and I were playing with wooden blocks in our bedroom. Mom and Dad had been fighting. Dad went to work and we continued playing. Mom came into the bedroom screaming, "I told you kids not to play with those blocks". My brother said, "run" and we both ran into different parts of the house. Mom cornered him in the service porch and I heard the screams as she beat him. Then she came flying into the living room in a rage "Now, its your turn" she said.

She held me tight with one arm and hit me with full force as I looked into her face. And it was a look of hatred I saw there. The beating seemed like it lasted forever. Every time she hit me my hate started to grow .Her face was burned into my memory with hate. Finally, it was over and I crumpled to the ground.

That evening Dad came home. Mom met him at the door and said: "The children have been really bad today". Dad pointed to my bedroom and shouted," Go to your room". In my room I thought of the injustice and I was filled with a consuming hatred toward my father.In one day Mom had introduced me to injustice, corrupted me with a spirit of hate, and turned me against my father.

These traumas change a persons life. This is not blame but an understanding of causes. The traumas were repressed out of my conscious mind in order to cope.In later years the drugs would obliterate all memory.

I was 15 when I first started using drugs. It was weekends first and got progressively worse. At age 18 one judge said to me," I don't know where you're going but your getting there fast"

On reflection I think the traumatic incidents in my life, especially the root trauma with my mother, set me up for the addiction/acoholism.I explain it like this: If you have a burnt finger and place it in a cool glass of water it feels "good". Similarly, my conscience had been burned by hate and felt "good" when

immersed in the chemical high of drugs and alcohol.

My drug use eventually led to heroin. I was arrested and sentenced to a 7 year civil commitment to the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco, California.

While there I wrote an autobiography. I could only see that my desire for acceptance was the cause of my addiction. The early traumas were completely buried in my subconscious. Psychology calls this repression. I believe the incidents were so traumatic, especially the root trauma, that I coped by blocking it out of my conscious mind.

After release I started using drugs again and was sent to another program: the Family Program at the Tarzana Psychiatric Hospital (Therapeutic Community). I was shocked when I arrived. My first view of the "Family" was in the cafeteria and it looked like a line of carnival sideshow freaks. The men had shaved heads and wore dresses. The women were wearing men's clothes. Some were wearing paper

bags over their heads. All were wearing cardboard sandwich signs with crayon marked messages on them. It was a weird menagerie of bizarre design.

It is amazing what can be done to human beings in the name of "Therapy" The first therapy was to stand on the wall. If you were ever punished with your face against the wall then you understand. Sometimes it was for 10 minutes, sometimes 20 hours. This is cruelty and not therapy. Honestly, I don't know if this goes on at Tarzana now, but it certainly did then. Sleep deprivation, shaving heads, wearing dresses for men, standing in uncomfortable stress positions: all this was considered "therapy". If you are wondering what all this had to do as "treatment" for drug Addiction, you are not alone. 30 years later I'm still wondering

I left Tarzana as soon as I could. I tried to stay clean but could not. Everyone believed I was hopeless. I returned to CRC for another year. During that time I attended both AA and NA.

For me resolving all this has taken a long time and a seemingly endless series of realizations, many painful. Even when I remembered the abuse I was not conscious of the feelings of hatred. On a conscious level I experienced an attraction to women like my mother. This "programming" caused me untold misery. This phenomenon of repression is not unknown to psychiatry. Although during my time in treatment programs I learned nothing of this.

Alcoholics Anonymous does make this statement:

There are those too with grave mental and emotional problems. Some of these do recover if they have the capacity to be honest.—Chapter 5, The Big Book.

This is as close as I can find in Recovery type literature referring to problems like mine. To this day it amazes me that I could walk around for 45 years with feelings of hatred and not be conscious of them. And it took over 20 years of being off drugs for the hatred to surface. A very good spiritual counselor advised me to confront my mother with what she had done. I did confront her with the abuse and when I did I was surprised to find feelings of resentment surfacing. Although I had not yet truly forgiven my mother, she broke down into tears when confronted.

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" I hope this wasn't the reason you were on drugs," she told me.

And her cruelty was the reason. Now the reader may be thinking , "Maybe that's true of you, but not everybody was abused by their mother". But my experience in recovery (28 years) is that most alcoholics or drug addicts have been traumatized.I suggest that the thing that they all have in common is that they have been corrupted by their parents or parent substitutes to hate.

And perhaps all this suggests what the real cure for all this is. Is it not forgiveness for those who have harmed us, realizing that they too were once innocent children who were equally traumatized?

It is difficult for me to explain how the mystery of forgiveness happened to me. After the feelings of hatred surfaced in my life, I did not know how to deal with them. I remember driving around alone in my car cursing my mother out in the hopes that somehow that would eventually relieve me of the hate..

Another day I had a counseling session with a minister and confessed many of my sins including the hate. Afterwards, I felt clean.The traumas no longer seemed important..Now, is it any surprise to anyone that forgiveness is the means by which childhood post-traumatic stress is cured along with all

the myriad of problems (including addiction and alcoholism) which grow out of it. After all, what could be more Christian or Spiritual than that?.

*The Consequences of Child Maltreatment: A Reference Guide for Health Practitioners,Health Canada

Ted W. is a long time member of Alcoholics Anonymous and he write on recovery related issues at <http://Christianrecovery.blogspot.com>

Dealing With Post–Traumatic Stress Disorder

By Trevor Dumbleton

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For those who experience it, post–traumatic stress disorder can be an incredibly debilitating disease that can prevent you from living a full life. This disorder can bring back moments of severe stress so clearly that it is almost as though you are reliving the moment all over again.

First diagnosed in war veterans, post–traumatic stress disorder was initially named "shell shock" then "battle fatigue". However, by the time of the conflict in Vietnam, it was given the name "post–traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD) in order to give a clearer idea of what exactly is at work. As well, it is not only found in war veterans. In fact, it can be seen in people who were abused as children, rape victims, people who have to clean up after disaster, or anyone else who has undergone severe stress at any point in their lives.

Unfortunately, the treatment of post–traumatic stress disorder is still in its infancy. Psychologists, psychiatrists, and neurologists are still coming to grips with the disease and its causes and effects, but they are learning new things constantly.

In a strictly biochemical sense, PTSD has its root causes at the moment of stress itself. It seems that at moments of extreme stress, the biochemical system in charge of adjusting to stress is reset, like a

computer. It is as though the system is so overloaded that it has to shut itself down and restart. Unfortunately, this also causes the mind to quickly return to that moment when it had to start and stop, which can cause flashbacks to the moments when the shock occurred.

The other results of post-traumatic stress disorder include anger, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, memory problems including amnesia, or any of a host of other mental disorders. Unfortunately, many of these disorders are treated individually without concern for the root cause. This is particularly worrisome because approximately 3.6% of adults between the ages of 18 and 54 are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and the vast majority of them go undiagnosed and untreated. As well, women are twice as likely as men to experience PTSD after a sudden shock.

For those who have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, there are some ways to treat it. The most common form of treatment is through psychotherapy. A therapist has several tools at his or her disposal and can work with the sufferer to root out the causes of the disorder and help cure it. As well, a psychiatrist is the best person to talk to in order to actually diagnose PTSD in the first place, helping the sufferer to at least understand what is happening. Knowing what is wrong is the first step to curing it, after all.

Group treatment is also effective, as it allows people to talk about their feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, or depression with others who feel the same way. This allows people to get comfortable with one another and talk about their feelings openly and honestly. By getting the issues out in the open, it almost spreads it out and allows the trauma to dissipate by opening it up to other people.

However, there are some medications that can be used to help treat post-traumatic stress disorder.

Mostly, these drugs are used to treat some of the symptoms of PTSD, such as depression or anxiety, allowing the sufferer to at least alleviate the condition. Most of these drugs take some time to work before they actually show results so, if you have been put onto medication for PTSD, give it a few weeks before you start expecting relief.

However, studies have shown that the best way to treat post-traumatic stress disorder is to nip it in the bud shortly after the trauma has occurred. The usual method is to sit down with someone who has suffered a trauma about 3–10 days after the trauma occurred. This will allow the feelings to be fresh, while it also helps people relieve the trauma by bringing it out before it hides itself in the mind. There has been some success with this sort of treatment, though it does require the trauma to be recognized early.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is a surprisingly common disorder that often goes unnoticed and untreated. However, with improvements in therapy and medication, there is new hope for those who suffer from this debilitating disorder.

Trevor Dumbleton is the owner of <http://www.LowerYourStress.com/> a categorized resource directory for everything to do with stress.



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