

POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

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Hello, this is Jose Parappully, Salesian priest and clinical psychologist at Sumedha Centre for Psychospiritual Wellbeing at Jeolikote, Uttarakhand, with another edition of Psyche & Soul.

In this edition I shall explore Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, commonly known as PTSD.

What Is PTSD?

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a serious mental condition that can develop after a person has experienced or witnessed an intensely traumatic or terrifying event in which there was serious physical or emotional harm or threat, accompanied by intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Such events include sexual or physical assault, the unexpected death of a loved one, an accident, or natural disaster.

Most people who experience a traumatic event will have reactions that may include shock, anger, nervousness, fear, and even guilt. These reactions keep the person suffering from it from going about their life in a normal expected way.

When a person goes through something traumatic, his or her brain triggers a “flight-or-fight” which raises the stress levels in the body. Most people recover on their own after a while, but some remain in hyper-aroused state and develop posttraumatic stress disorder.

PTSD Symptoms

The Symptoms of PTSD often are grouped into four main categories:

Reliving: This is the most common symptom of PTSD. People with PTSD repeatedly relive the traumatic ordeal in a very vivid and distressing way. Anything that reminds them of the event triggers intense distress and physiological reactions. This includes *flashbacks* where the person acts or feels as if the event were recurring in the here-and-now; nightmares about the event; and repetitive and distressing intrusive images or other sensory impressions from the event.

Avoidance: The person with PTSD may avoid people, places, thoughts, or situations that may remind them of the trauma. They often try hard, sometimes desperately, to push memories of the event out of their mind but these memories tend to intrude into consciousness unbidden.

On the other hand, many ruminate excessively about the event, questioning about why the event happened to them, about how it could have been prevented, or about how they could take revenge.

Hyperarousal: PTSD sufferers also experience symptoms of **hyperarousal** including hypervigilance for threat, exaggerated startle responses, irritability, and outbursts of anger or crying, and difficulty

concentrating, and sleep problems. They can be "jumpy" or easily startled. The person may also suffer physical symptoms, such as increased blood pressure and heart rate, rapid breathing, muscle tension, nausea, and diarrhea.

Emotional Numbing: This includes lack of ability to experience feelings, feeling detached from other people, giving up previously significant activities, and amnesia for significant parts of the event. Since it is hard for the person only to numb only a particular distressing signal, they tend to numb all feelings and show themselves to be somewhat feelings. Nothing touches them emotionally. They are characterised by what is known as flat affect.

Variations in Risk

Everyone reacts to traumatic events differently. Each person is unique in their ability to manage fear, stress and the threat posed by a traumatic event or situation. For that reason, not everyone who experiences a trauma will develop PTSD. Also, the type of help and support a person receives from friends, family members, and professionals following the trauma may impact the development of PTSD or the severity of symptoms.

A person is more likely to develop PTSD after a traumatic event if he or she has a history of other mental health problems, has blood relatives with mental health problems, or has a history of alcohol or drug abuse.

Symptoms of PTSD often develop immediately after the traumatic event but in some the onset of symptoms may be delayed. Women are more likely to develop PTSD than men. This may be due to the fact that women are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, abuse, and rape, all of which are very traumatic and quite frequent in our society.

PTSD is a treatable disorder even when problems present many years after the traumatic event.

PTSD Treatment

The goal of PTSD treatment is to reduce the emotional and physical symptoms, to improve daily functioning, and to help the person better manage the consequences of the event that triggered the disorder. Treatment for PTSD may involve medication, psychotherapy or both.

Medication

Doctors use certain *antidepressant medications* to treat PTSD -- to control the feelings of anxiety and its associated symptoms. Certain *blood pressure medicines* are also sometimes used to control particular symptoms

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy for PTSD involves helping the person learn skills to manage symptoms and develop ways of coping. Therapy also aims to teach the person and their family about the disorder, and help the person work through the fears associated with the traumatic event. A variety of psychotherapy approaches are used to treat people with PTSD, including:

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy**, which involves learning to recognize and change thought patterns that lead to troublesome emotions, feelings, and behavior.
- **Exposure therapy**, a type of behavioral therapy that involves having the person relive the traumatic event, or exposing the person to objects or situations that cause anxiety. This is done in a well-

controlled and safe environment. Exposure therapy helps the person confront the fear of dealing with the event or approaching the situation and gradually become more comfortable with events and situations that are frightening and causing anxiety.

- ***Psychodynamic therapy*** focuses on helping the person examine personal values and the emotional conflicts caused by the traumatic event.
- ***Family therapy*** is useful because the behaviour of the person with PTSD can have an effect on other family members.
- ***Group therapy*** helps by providing the person a trusting environment to share thoughts, fears, and feelings with other people who have experienced traumatic events.
- ***Eye Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)*** is an effective form of psychotherapy that is designed to alleviate distress associated with traumatic memories and other symptoms of PTSD.

PTSD Complications

PTSD can cause problems in every aspect of one's life, including one's job, relationships, health, and everyday activities. It may also make a person more likely to develop other mental health problems, such as: Depression and anxiety; drug or alcohol abuse; eating disorders, and suicidal thoughts and actions.

PTSD Recovery Outlook

Recovery from PTSD is a gradual and ongoing process. Symptoms of PTSD seldom disappear completely, but they can be controlled. Treatment can lead to fewer and less intense symptoms, as well as a greater ability to manage feelings related to the trauma. Treatment can help people learn to manage it more effectively.

Introspection and Prayer

PTSD can cause, as we saw above, much distress to those afflicted with the illness and their dear ones, friends and colleagues.

We could stay for a while with whatever the information provided in this podcast and our own experiences related to the disorder evoke in us, and turn to our compassionate God who has our health and wellbeing at heart, and pray for healing for ourselves and others, as well as for wisdom and guidance to deal with situations that the illness creates. We could alternately just sit silently before God in the awareness of the traumas we carry and allow God to heal and transform us.

Have pleasant weekend. Be safe. Be healthy. Be blessed.

Thank you for listening/reading.

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