



Operation Freedom: The Emotional Toll

War, rape, abuse: Each of these situations are psychologically and emotionally traumatic to the person experiencing it. Such events take a massive toll on everyone involved, whether or not physical damage resulted.

Emotional trauma occurs following unexpected situations when someone was not prepared and there was nothing possible to prevent the event from happening. One's emotional reaction to this situation determines whether or not the event was traumatic. This results in Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The lasting effect of trauma on one's overall functioning, lives and personal relationships is different than that following a routine stress situation. How can you tell if you're experiencing psychological trauma and not stress? Answer the following questions honestly.

1. How frequently are these feelings triggered?
2. How intensely threatening are these feelings?
3. How quickly do these feelings appear?
4. How long do these feelings endure?
5. How long does it take to regain composure?

Generally stress can be alleviated by talking with friends or other trusted individuals, while trauma takes control of a person, leaving one unable to escape their feelings. A person suffering from emotional trauma include eating and sleep disturbances, reduced energy, sexual dysfunction, chronic and unexplainable pain, irritability, resentment, numbness and anger, compulsive or obsessive activities, anxiety, withdrawal from the usual routine, separation from normal relationships, spontaneous crying and depression, a general feeling of hopelessness and lack of control. Those experiencing emotional trauma may also find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions as they previously would, feel distracted and have memory lapses.

This person will have severe emotions around the event including flashbacks and nightmares. They may be inundated with unexpected images and feelings about the event. These reactions may occur immediately or may be delayed. They may become numb and suffer from heightened arousal including jumpiness and overreactions. When left untreated, emotional trauma can lead to negative behavior patterns like substance abuse and shame. They may become compulsive about certain things.

But professional treatment can help one manage these feelings so they gradually subside. It can strengthen one's coping ability and improve interpersonal relationships. Some treatment options include therapy, biofeedback and Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT)

If you or someone you care about would like more information about PTSD, the following resources should prove helpful:

- National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), <http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/>
- PTSD Links, <http://www.vietnamveteranministers.org/ptsd.htm>
- Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses , <http://www.gulflink.osd.mil/>
- Cooperative Online Dictionary of Trauma , <http://www.codt.org/>
- New Scientist, 25 August 2005, "Trauma of war hits troops years later", <http://www.newscientist.com/article.ns?id=mg18725143.800>
- PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within Blog, <http://ptsdcombat.blogspot.com/>
- Trauma Information Pages, <http://www.trauma-pages.com/>

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