

Traumatic Stress Management in Calabar, Nigeria – The Psychosocial View

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INTRODUCTION

Concept of Trauma:

According to the English Dictionary, it is any serious injury to the body resulting from violence or an accident. It is also an emotional wound leading to psychological injury. Trauma is a deeply disturbing experience. It is also an event that causes great distress e.g. a personal trauma like the death of one's child. And when a human being is being distressed, it means, there is physical or emotional discomfort, suffering or alarm particularly of a more acute nature.

- There is a cause of such discomfort.
- There is also serious danger
- This calls for psychotherapeutic measures (management) which is an aversive state of distress to which a person cannot fully adapt.
- This is similar to a seizing of property without a legal process – to force payment of a debt. Furthermore, distress is a thing taken by distaining, that which is seized to procure satisfaction. There is need to look at stress at this point.

Concept of Stress:

It is a physical, chemical, infective agent aggressing an organism (biological perspective). It is an aggression toward a organism resulting in a response in an attempt to restore previous conditions. It is an internal distribution of force across a small boundary per unit area, of that boundary (pressure) within a body. It causes strain or deformation. Stress is also like a force externally applied to a body which causes internal stress within the body.

It is an emotional pressure suffered by a human being or other animals. Thus, goes common expressions such as: go easy with him, he's being under a lot of stress lately.

Stress can also be seen as a "suprasegmental" feature of a language, to have additional attention raised to a sound, word by means of loudness, duration or pitch, to have **phonological prominence**. It is and emphasis placed on a particular point.

Nigeria and people of the world over are experiencing some traumatic stress as we look at the literature below:

According to Atunka Patrick Ogar (2018), **mental health book**, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists alike observed that more Nigerians go mad across the country as the nation's economic recession deepens. This is because Nigerians are so traumatized and pushed to the edge of mental distress and breakdown by the economic hardship (Orija & Makanju (1997). This also contributes a precipitating factor to hemp smoking and other forms of maladaptive behaviours among many just to console themselves. Consequently, the nation is said to be the loser as the worst hit are those within the labour force age bracket youth whose ages fall

between 18 and 45 years. The economic depression has also laid bare or even destroyed family ties in many homes in our society today which hitherto were the pride of Nigerians. It has therefore become necessary for us to look more inward on the problem of traumatic stress management medically among Nigerians. For there seems to be many Nigerians with difficulty in concentration and a decline in school or work performance as many workers cannot afford to go to work as appropriate in a week. We also have **other causes of mental illness** such as: metabolism and nutritional disorders due to lack of basic food nutrients e.g. vitamin deficiency which can cause korsakoff psychosis due to (excess alcohol use), Wernick's encephalopathy, infections, renal failure, liver failure, degenerative disorders e.g. senile dementia, Alzheimer diseases which are endogenous. And the situation become worsened as someone grows older. They will begin to suffer problems of old age faster with none or minimal psychiatric (geriatric) assessments. There is poor psychopathological assessment in older people across some parts of Nigeria. A public interview was conducted in Calabar, the Cross River State capital, in some streets randomly, on traumatic stress among the inhabitants of the area. Results showed 85% of those interviewed (300) adults of both genders responded and admitted that there is hardship and are traumatized. Perhaps it could be one reason why the government plans to step in with palliative measures (the home grown school feeding programme).

The traumatic stress management: from the psychosocial perspective. While every hospital operates differently, the map provided is a general guide for trauma team members to follow.

The primary survey, airway, breathing, circulation, disability, exposure environmental control, the secondary survey – definitive care.

The priority in managing traumatic injuries in treating life threatening injuries first is by therefore assessing the patients' airway, breathing, circulation, resuscitation measures are paramount. Breathing should be adequate to resuscitate circulation. 5 principles of trauma management are: safety, trustworthiness and transparency, empowerment, voice and choice and cultural issues. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - Is divided into 4 phases: **the impact phase, the rescue phase, the intermediate recovery phase and the long term reconstruction phase.** How do Nigerians plan their own long term phase of stress considering what is happening today in Nigeria. Three (3) pillars of trauma: when you see someone being affected by it are - **(1) Safety** e.g. physical and emotional safety. **(2) Connections** e.g. building social bonds, caring adults, schools and teachers. **(3) Coping** e.g. learn to safely manage emotions.

5 domains of trauma (PTSD) are: new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life. We can as well manage "stress" in **5 ways: avoiding, altering, adapting, accepting and being an active stress manager** means to reduce the negative impacts caused by traumatic stress and to improve the person's physical and mental wellbeing. **Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by difficult situation which can also cause death.** We have **7 ways we can manage stress:** set limits, tap into your support system, make one's health related to more commitment, manage your devices, enhance your sleep quality and seek additional help.

Causes of stress are: (a) when we experience something new or unexpected e.g. the removal of fuel subsidy, that threatens our sense of self or when we feel we have little control over a situation like what we go through now.

Types of stress are: (a) physical stress (b) mental stress – common and easy to recognize (c) behavioural stress – this can be more difficult to self diagnose (d) emotional stress – it is tough to diagnose.

Signs and symptoms of traumatic stress disorders are: (a) irritability, anger, impatient or wound up (b) over burdened or overwhelmed, anxious, nervous or afraid (c) like your thoughts are racing and you cannot switch off. (d) unable to enjoy yourself (e) depressed, uninterested in life and low libido (f) like you have lost your sense of humor.

Traumatic stress management: It consist of a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress especially chronic stress, for the purpose of improving the human everyday functioning. **How can we stop traumatic stress?** (a) get active in any form of physical activity (b) eat a healthy diet (In Nigeria?) (c) avoid unhealthy habits (d) meditate (e) laugh more (with hunger in Nigeria?) (f) get connected with others (h) assert yourself (i) try yoga

10 ways we can manage traumatic stress disorder from the psychosocial perspective are: exercise, relax, deep breathing, eat well, slow down, take a break, make time for hobbies, and talk about your problems. **Can traumatic stress make us sick?** Certainly yes, it can have a negative impact on a person's immune system and physical health. When you are constantly under stress – you will begin to experience some physical symptoms such as chest pain, headaches, an upset stomach, trouble sleeping (insomnia) or high blood pressure (BP).

Best medicine for stress from the psychopharmacological perspective include: Tranquilizers, beta blockers, and selective serotonin, reuptake inhibitors. **4 best ways to fight traumatic stress disorder are:** Have at least 7 hours of sleep per day, eat, predominantly plant based diet, do exercise regularly, meditate and stay socially connected. **Stress warning signs include:** Frequent headache, jaw clenching, gritting, grinding teeth, stuttering or stammering, tremors of trembling lips and hands, neck ache, back pain or muscles spasm, light headache, faintness or dizziness, ringing, buzzing or popping sounds, frequent blushing or sweating etc. Stress is not normally considered a mental health problem, but it is connected to our mental health in several ways. Stress can cause mental health problems. And it can make existing problems worse. **Teas that can reduce stress are:** Lemon balm, greet tea, ginger tea, senna tea, honey lavender blend, herbal blend tea, chamomile tea, rosemary tea etc.

CONCLUSION

Victims of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) should seek professional medical advice. Policies that affect people or are stress inducing should not be hurried into. From findings, women suffer stress most because some work full-time, and have children under the age of 13 years to care for. Stress is a normal and healthy response to life's challenges, but if it is too much just as we are facing in Nigeria can cause problems. Long-term stress can cause stress – induced sickness e.g. heart attack or heart failure. For instance on 26th of August, 2023, an incident occurred in Calabar, Cross River State, there was traumatic stress manifestation that led to death. For both emotional and physical health, it is important to find ways to reduce stress and manage traumatic stress disorders. There is no quick-fix cure for stress and no single method will work for everyone. However, there are simple things you can do to change the common life problems that can cause stress or make trauma a problem. They include; relaxation techniques, exercise, and taking the issues through. Stress effects are on the human body and can move through the tension angle which includes our shoulders, head, jaw. Stress can trigger tension headache, tightness in the neck and jaw and knots and spasm in our neck and shoulders.

From the psychopharmacological viewpoint antidepressants e.g. citalopram (celexa) have been found to be helpful. Psychologically, we can manage stress without drugs – by keeping a positive attitude, accept that there are events that you cannot control. Be assertive instead of aggressive. This paper recommends thus.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ultimate goal is a balanced life with time for work, relationships, relaxation, fun and the resilience to hold up under pressure. Traumatic stress management for example – practicing relaxation technique such as deep breathing, yoga, meditation, tai chi, exercise and prayer and improving your personal relationships, should go along with favourable government policies that are not traumatizing to the citizenry. By planning ahead, deciding which task to do first, preparing for stressful events. Some stress is hard to avoid, but find ways to manage by noticing when you feel stressed up, taking time to relax, getting active and eating healthy, finding solutions to problems you are having and by talking to friends and family (good rapport) to reduce our worries, anger, irritability, depression, lacking focus due to how our bodies react to challenges. Lastly, job creation and employment for the unemployed, especially, our teeming youths in Nigeria becomes necessary. And the redirection of attention especially to agriculture, education and health in line with our steady population growth in this country (Nigeria) could free us from traumatic stress conditions that we are undergoing at the moment, as we want everyone to be alright.

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