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# Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Changing Soldiers Lives Forever

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### Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Changing Soldiers Lives Forever

For most soldiers when they sign up for the armed forces they understand that they could be killed in combat. They understand that once they leave to go off to war that they may never come back. Thankfully for many people they do end up returning home to their families to continue their lives. Yet for many soldiers, such as Chaplain (Major) Carlos C. Huerta, life was not the same when they got home. "Even though I was home, I never left the battle field." (Huerta). These freedom fighters are left fighting memories of traumatic experiences and horrific events that can never be erased from their minds. Many soldiers experience this because they have developed posttraumatic stress disorder, more commonly known as PTSD.

PTSD has become a better known disorder due to the number of American soldiers who develop it after being involved in a war. However, many people do not fully understand what this disorder is. PTSD is: "A pattern of adverse reactions following a traumatic event, commonly involving reexperiencing the event through nightmares or vivid memories" (Bernstein). In other words PTSD is a disorder that can cause people to relive horrific events in their life, impacting the person's ability to function.

There are a number of symptoms to this disorder; however, the symptoms can usually be grouped into types. "Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms are generally grouped into three types: intrusive memories, avoidance and emotional numbing, and increased anxiety or emotional arousal (hyperarousal)" (Staff). Intrusive memories would include things such as

flashbacks or dreams about the traumatic events. “When I close my eyes at night, sometimes I still see myself picking up the body parts of my Soldiers” (Huerta). Huerta’s nightmares about his fallen soldiers are a good example of intrusive memories. Now as stated before another symptom is avoidance and emotional numbing. Avoidance refers to a soldier avoiding anything that could remind them of the traumatic event they went through. It could be anything from a picture of the event to a scent that reminds them of it. Emotional numbing refers to a soldier blocking out their emotions and the pain. Trying to hold back and hide the pains that they feel from their varying experiences. Also the third symptom of PTSD is increased anxiety or emotional arousal. In other words, it is easier for a soldier to become angered, stressed, sad, or any other negative emotion. Intrusive memories, avoidance and emotional numbing, and increased anxiety or emotional arousal are the main symptoms in soldiers with PTSD.

The symptoms of PTSD can have various impacts on different aspects of a soldiers’ life. “PTSD causes severe distress or impairment in relationships, at work, or in other areas of life” (Soldier 2). PTSD often times can cause soldiers to develop other disorders such as depression. If one is depressed it is going to affect their life at work and their relationships. At work one would be less willing to do their job and may feel that their work is never good enough. With their other relationships, such as friends, they often are impacted negatively. One with PTSD would be less willing to want to spend time with their friends. Also, they may lose enjoyment in activities that they used to enjoy doing with their friends. PTSD many times can have a negative effect on soldiers’ friendships and work life.

Another aspect of soldiers with PTSD lives that is affected is their family life. “I did not want to get close to my babies for fear I may get deployed again” (Huerta). Huerta’s PTSD, I am sure, played a part in him feeling this way. I can imagine his fellow soldiers that he got close

with while over in Iraq meant a lot to him. Some of these soldiers were probably some that he saw lose their lives. He could have wanted to avoid the pain of seeing someone, whom he cared so much about, for the last time. Just as any man would do, he probably wants to be able to do what is best for his family. Maybe he thought it would be best to keep his kids away from the pain of losing somebody close to them, like he did, even though the children would be missing their father. "...I ended up being a burden to the most important people in my life, my wife and children" (Huerta). He understands that by not trying to get help from the beginning that he ended up hurting his family. He was so worried about not admitting to himself or others that he had PTSD so that he would not receive an honorable discharge. By not getting help, his various symptoms changed his life with his family. For example, as stated before, how he did not want to get close to his kids. PTSD affects the lives of many people involved in that soldiers' life.

Many parts of soldiers' lives may be hurt or harmed due to PTSD, but thankfully there is treatment for this serious disorder. For PTSD most soldiers receive a combination of medication and therapy. "Was prescribed some psychotropic medication to help with the anxiety in order to help me function" (Huerta). As we see with Huerta, he received medication so that he would be able to "function." That is something that a lot of soldiers suffering from PTSD need so they can be themselves and live their lives free of their traumatic experiences. The medication does not cause the symptoms of PTSD to go away. The medication is used to make the symptoms manageable for the soldiers so that they are able to continue on with their day to day lives without them being constantly interrupted by their disorder. However, often times medication alone cannot help soldiers to manage their pain to a point where they are able to live their lives without the huge emotional and physical pain that PTSD can bring. Psychiatric therapy often times assists in helping with this. Through this therapy soldiers are able to come to the fact that

the things they experienced are not their fault as well as to help them to try to deal with the traumatic event they experienced.

PTSD is a serious disorder that everyone should be aware. The people who fight for the freedom of Americans are often the ones who suffer from this disorder. Whether you agree or disagree with war these people put their lives on the line so that others do not have to. Through this disorder they can develop any number of symptoms that can change their life. Not only can a soldier get any combination of these symptoms but often times this disorder leads to the development of other disorders, such as depression. In this disorder not only is the individual affected but the people around them as well. Whether at work or at home with their family the soldiers' life is changed. PTSD may impact a soldier negatively but it does not have to be this way for the rest of their life; there is treatment for this disorder. Medication as well as therapy can help soldiers to be able to function normally and manage the affects of their disorder. PTSD is a disorder that changes a number of soldiers' lives for the worse by not allowing them to shake off traumatic events.

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