

Psychological Trauma, Physical Health and Somatisation[†]

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Abstract

The aim of this review is to examine the relationship between trauma, physical health and somatisation. A search was made on the Pro-cite Database at the Department of Psychiatry at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences for research articles with the following key words: posttraumatic stress disorder, somatisation, trauma (the Pro-cite Database holds more than 15,000 articles related to trauma and disaster). A review of the current research findings show a link between prior exposure to traumatic events (such as war, disaster, motor vehicles and industrial accidents, crime and sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse) and subsequent physical health and medical care utilisation. Possible mechanisms and conceptualisations which may explain the association between trauma and physical health, such as high-risk health behaviours, neurobiology, alexithymia and culture are discussed. Because traumatised persons show high medical utilisation, good screening, thorough assessment, empirically-based treatment and appropriate referral of such patients are essential.

Ann Acad Med Singapore 2000; 29:658-64

Key words: Abuse, Alexithymia, Disaster, Illness, Medical utilisation, Neurobiology, Posttraumatic stress disorder

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[†] The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, the US Department of Defense or the Department of Psychology at the Institute of Mental Health.