

# Remedies of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

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## INTRODUCTION

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is defined as a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event that has been experienced or witnessed. Symptoms of PTSD may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event. Reliving traumatic experiences uncontrollably is one of the leading cause of suicide. One study examined all suicide deaths from 1994–2006 using the Danish national healthcare and social registries, and found that persons with PTSD had 5.3 times the rate of death from suicide than persons without PTSD, after adjustment for gender, age, marital status, income, and pre-existing depression diagnoses (PTSD Research Quarter. There are currently about 8 million people in the United States living with PTSD (ADAA). This statistic increases ever more with service-members in the Armed Forces, as military personnel and more likely to witness a traumatic event compared to a civilian. In the U.S Armed Forces, an estimated 22 veterans per day commit suicide from PTSD (Veterans Administration). This directly correlates with the number of military engagements the United States has been in post-9/11.

A 2014 study produced by the VA shows the rate of suicide among all Veterans was 35.3 per 100,000. The age-adjusted rate of suicide among U.S. Veterans has increased by 32.2% since 2001. Since the September 11<sup>th</sup> Attacks, the United States has directly engaged itself in major combat operations; openly in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, and more discreetly in nations such as Saudi Arabia, Niger, the Philippines, and other countries. An excerpt from a 2014 article from Psychology Today describes the plight of service-members who are diagnosed with PTSD when they return home:

"The researchers in the current study found that upon returning home, the core of isolation experienced by the combat veterans and ex-POWs was qualitatively different than that experienced by people who had not been through severe ongoing trauma. Rather than primarily emotional or social, the isolation these veterans felt was something the researchers characterized as Experiential Loneliness. They might have had access to deep emotional and social bonds from family and loved ones, but what they lacked—

what they truly yearned for—was to feel understood. They wanted others to truly know what they went through, to feel what they felt as they struggled to reintegrate back into a civilian life. Yet the circumstances and experiences they suffered were so extraordinary, they felt it was practically impossible for anyone who had not been through such an experience themselves to be able to "get it"—to be able to know."

Documenting the effects of PTSD goes even further in human history, particularly during the early Hellenic period. Homer's *Odyssey* highlighted Odysseus' trauma and plight being stuck at sea after a brutal Trojan War, which took twenty years of his life, both physically, mentally, and emotionally. One could argue that it is the first book in modern human history that highlights Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in ancient warriors. In Medieval warfare, all those who fought in battle were required to do penance/renunciation of sins and counseling before a priest for acts of violence and aggression they committed, so that the soldiers and knights wouldn't carry the mental or emotional burden of the traumatic events that changed them [1,2]. The ancient Greeks were one of the first people to focus on different types of therapeutic practices among various militaries in the city-states. They employed drama such as poetry, plays, dance, and music, and used art on pottery as a means to aid afflicted veterans. Sitting near campfires and telling their stories of uncertainty and chaos in the battle field was common among soldiers, to strengthen camaraderie and show their fellow brethren that each one was there for them to face whatever demons they were facing [2]. Ancient Egyptians would use hieroglyphics and wall paintings for communication purposes and telling a story. Many of those paintings included war and its aftereffects on Egyptian society.

A sort of remedy and relaxation has been implemented in modern human history as a form of healing to combat PTSD throughout time. This is known as art therapy. Today, art therapy is used as a form of psychotherapy, but this is not a new practice. It is considered to be one of the valid forms of expressive art, along with dance, drama, and music therapy. The use of therapeutic art as an official discipline and practice didn't become official and recognized until the 1940s, particularly due to the actions of Adrian

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Hill and Edith Kramer. Practitioners noticed this and decided to use expressive art based on emotions as a healing strategy to help overcome traumatic experiences. Adrian Hill wrote 'Art Versus Illness.' He was an artist that suggested using art for patients as a remedy for their traumatic events. Edith Kramer founded the first graduate program of art therapy at New York University in 1973 [3]. Through creativity of expression through therapeutic art, cognitive ability is increased. This in turn helps cope with the symptoms of PTSD, distress, mental issues, disabilities, or disease. Therapeutic art helps individuals cope with the symptoms of PTSD, mental issues, disabilities (autism, dementia), and disease, such as cancer.

Art has always been used as a form of self-expression for communicative purposes, as symbolism, and for ritual purposes, dating back to cave paintings created 40,000 years ago, even dating back to the hieroglyphics of Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. In the 1940's, Adrian Hill, an artist being treated for tuberculosis in a hospital used his art as therapy during his rehabilitation. He held sessions for other patients, which included those with mental disorders. Edward Adamson, a physician, worked with mental patients until 1981 in Britain. His methods were "non-interventionist", in other words, the patients expressed themselves through art, and there was no psychological interpretation. He collected many of their works, roughly about 100,000, and displayed them. To this day these works can be exhibited in Britain.

Clients and patients prefer art therapy over counselling as it requires no artistic ability, just an expression of your thoughts without forced verbal communication. The art is used as a platform to tell the stories of dormant memories, sometimes painful, to relieve the stress and weight of the tragic event that has haunted the client's life. As time moves on through progression of an artistic reflection, a therapist will just observe without interference, as rapport is established. When an artistic piece is finished, the therapist may ask how the art process affected their mental and emotional state, if the art triggered and bad memories, and if the client is ready to open up about said story. To this day victims of sexual assault, trauma, illness such as dementia and cancer. Service-members and

veterans use therapeutic art to cope with PTSD nationwide in VA clinics, as it allows our heroes to express themselves and their feelings of being pressured to integrate back into civilian life [4].

Through researching the origins of art therapy and the practices used throughout human history, we can conclude and state that art therapy is a valid form of mediation and personal therapy for people who deal with traumatic experiences [5-8]. Establishing relations with artists and licensed practitioners who have worked on therapeutic art enhanced the knowledge of the subject and further show that healing of the arts is an essential part of psychotherapy and recover for those who battle with Post-traumatic stress disorder [6,9,10].

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