**JPPS 2007; 4(1): 37–43 ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND RELATED FACTORS FOLLOWING ORTHOPEDIC TRAUMAS

**Mohammad Reza Fayyazi Bordbar, Ali Reza Hootkani, Ali Akbar Samari**

# ABSTRACT

**Objective**: The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder among patients visited following an orthopedic traumatic injury and to identify changes in vital signs and demographic variables associated with the disorder.

**Design:** Descriptive study.

**Place and duration of study:** The study was done on one hundred patients admitted to outpatient orthopedic clinic in Imam Reza Hospital (Mashhad, IRAN). The study was carried out during spring and summer of 2006.

**Subjects and Methods**: Upon admission, demographic information, pain intensity according to patient’s sense, pulse rate, blood pressure were assessed and General Health Questionnaire-28 was filled for the patients. Then symptoms of PTSD were evaluated on the beginning and after one and three months follow up based on DSM-IV criteria. The initial data from the patients developing PTSD after one and three months were compared with those without the disease.

**Results**: After one month, 5 patients (8.3%) and after three months 6 patients (12.8%) had complete PTSD criteria and 10 patients (16.7%) after one month and 6 patients (12.8%) after three months developed subsyndromal PTSD. Presence of high pulse rate (P=0.000), high intensity of the tolerated pain (p=0.000), more somatization symptoms (p=0.041) and more anxiety symptoms (p=0.039) predicted the development of PTSD after one month and presence of high pulse rate (P=0.000), high intensity of the tolerated pain (P=0.000), high maximum blood pressure (P=0.047), more somatization symptoms (P=0.019) and more anxiety symptoms (P=0.024) predicted the development of PTSD after three months.

**Conclusion:** High Blood Pressure, pulse rate and pain as well as more anxiety and somatization symptoms upon experience of trauma may increase rate of PTSD in sever orthopedic patients.

**Key words:** PTSD, Orthopedic Trauma, GHQ-28, Blood Pressure, Pulse Rate, Pain.

# INTRODUCTION

Psychiatric disorders following accidents are very common1-4. Such disorders are not restricted to severe calamities like earthquake and accidents. One of the most common disorders of this kind is post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)5.

In PTSD the patients reexperience the event in vari- ous ways. This could take the form of disturbing repeti- tive thoughts, recurrent nightmares of the accident or flashbacks of the accident, all of which are bothering for the patient. The patient attempts to avoid any matter,

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object or individual reminding the related event. Some- times the patient feels detachment from the community and inability to adapt and experiences emotional numb- ing. More important, the patient experiences hyperarousal that may show off with signs such as excitability, insom- nia and changes in sleep cycle. These symptoms must at least have duration of one month for the diagnosis of PTSD.

Although the prevalence of PTSD after orthopedic traumas in different studies has been reported high, there is diversity in various statistics from different areas6-13. In a study in Los Angeles 25 percent of the patients experi- enced PTSD10. In another study in Germany 12 percent of the patients experienced PTSD after six months. Also 11 percent of the patients experienced symptoms of PTSD although they did not show full disease criteria2. In another study in the United States on 580 patients with orthopedic traumas, 51 percents fulfilled the criteria of PTSD9. Also in another four month follow up of the or- thopedic patients, the prevalence of PTSD was reported to be 23 percent8.

PTSD in orthopedic patients causes specific prob- lems for them that may be more destructive than their orthopedic trauma. It can also affect their orthopedic treat- ment so that the patient has no courage and incentive to maintain healing and take part in the therapy.9 Several reviews have been reported about the factors related to PTSD in such patients6-9,11,12,14-16. In the Los Angeles study the frequency of PTSD was reported to be higher in women, elderly patients, the unemployed and single patients and those with recent mental problems10. Also in a study in Germany on 56 accident victims there was a direct relationship between PTSD and trauma intensity and work related problems9. But in the London study there was no relationship between trauma intensity and frequency of PTSD8.

In view of the lack of data on this disorder in Iran, the authors decided to evaluate the incidence of PTSD in severe orthopedic patients in a three month period and find the association with the various likely factors involved.

# SUBJECTS AND METHODS

In a descriptive study with ex-post-facto design, one hundred patients admitted to the outpatient trauma clinic in Imam Reza hospital in Mashhad who fulfilled the study criteria were involved. Inclusion criteria were:

1. Severe orthopedic trauma (e.g.: bone fracture, dis- location, or ligament rupture).
2. Age between 15 and 50 years.
3. No history of previous anxiety disorder.
4. No history of severe orthopedic trauma.
5. No decrease in level of consciousness after trauma.
6. Mental and personal ability and willingness to take part in the study.

Patients taking part in the study were first exam- ined and were given orthopedic therapy and were asked to fill a demographic questionnaire. Their pulse rate and blood pressure were also recorded. The intensity of the pain was evaluated using a scoring system from 1 to 5 according to the patient’s sense of pain.

The patients were then visited in the psychiatry clinic and a General Health questionnaire-28 (GHQ-28) was completed. Within the next month the patients un- derwent orthopedic therapy and then were evaluated psychiatrically and the GHQ-28 was filled for them. The presence of PTSD was checked for them using psychi- atric interview based on DSM-IV-TR. Their pain intensity, blood pressure and pulse rate was again recorded.

Unfortunately forty patients withdrew from the study and only 60 patients were left. Two months later (three months post trauma) only 47 patients yielded to the study and were subject to psychiatric interview for PTSD diag- nosis. In each psychiatric interview symptoms of reex- perience, avoidance, and numbing and hyperarousal were evaluated individually.

Finally, demographic data, pain experience, pri- mary blood pressure, primary heart rate and symptoms of depression, anxiety, somatization and dysfunction ac- cording to GHQ-28 were compared between PTSD pa- tients and those without this disorder using t-test, ANOVA and x square tests (Fig. 1).

Patients with orthopedic trauma

having inclusion criteria

Orthopedic treatment monitoring

**Psychiatric clinic:**

GHQ-28

Patients with orthopedic trauma meeting inclusion criteria

**Orthopedic Clinic:** Demographic Variables BP

PR

Pain

Beginning Orthopedic treatment

2 months

Second Psychiatric evaluation for PTSD

First Psychiatric evaluation for PTSD

1Month

Statistical analysis of patients with and without PTSD

Fig. 1: Diagram of the study method

# RESULTS

Out of sixty patients studied, 48 were men (80%), 38 were married (64.4%), 27 had junior high school di- ploma (45%), 41 were employed (69.5%) (Table 1). The average age of patients was 37.25 years with a standard deviation of 14.63 years.

In the beginning of survey, the mean of maximum blood pressure of the patients was 128.67 mmHg and the mean of minimum blood pressure was 84.16 mmHg. The pain experienced in a 1 to 5 scale was reported to be 3.166 for patients. The heart rate of the patients was on average 86.9 bits per second. Evaluation of the gen- eral health according to GHQ-28 in four dimensions showed that 13 patients (21.6%) meetinf the criteria for

somatization, 10 patients (16.6%) suffering from anxiety, 13 patients (21.6%) in dysfunction and 14 patients (23.3%) in depression had scores higher than the cut off point.

After one month post trauma, the mean of maximum blood pressure was 121.25 mmHg and the mean of minimum blood pressure was 79.67 mmHg. The pain experienced was scored 2.2 by the patients. The heart rate was 81.5 on average. The statistical analysis of the above changes according to the t-test showed significant changes in all parameters. Also the scores of GHQ test showed significant decline within one month in all dimensions except depression (Table 2).

**Table 1**

**Demographic data of the patients with orthopedic trauma**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameter** |  | **Number n=60** | **Percent %** |
| **Sex** | Male | 48 | 80 |
| Female | 12 | 20 |
| Marital status | Single | 16 | 27.1 |
| Married | 38 | 64.4 |
| Divorcee | 5 | 8.5 |
| Occupation | Employed | 41 | 69.5 |
| Unemployed | 8 | 13.6 |
| Housewife | 10 | 16.9 |
| Illiterate | 2 | 3.3 |
| Education | Junior high school | 27 | 45 |
| High school | 25 | 41.7 |
| University degree | 6 | 10 |

**Table 2**

**Variations of blood pressure, heart rate, pain experienced and GHQ-28 scores one month after the traumatic experience**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameter** | **Upon admission** | | **1 month post trauma** | | **t** | **P** |
| **Average** | **Standard deviation** | **Average** | **Standard deviation** |
| Maximum blood pressure | 128.67 | 8.43 | 121.25 | 7.74 | 5.91 | 0.000 |
| Minimum blood pressure | 84.17 | 7.20 | 79.67 | 7.47 | 3.68 | 0.001 |
| Heart rate | 86.90 | 11.34 | 81.48 | 8.42 | 2.30 | 0.000 |
| Pain experienced | 3.17 | 0.92 | 2.2 | 0.80 | 8.88 | 0.000 |
| GHQ somatization score | 5.63 | 3.84 | 4.03 | 2.90 | 3.79 | 0.000 |
| GHQ anxiety score | 5.03 | 3.49 | 3.90 | 3.13 | 2.77 | 0.007 |
| GHQ dysfunction score | 6.05 | 4.02 | 4.32 | 3.62 | 3.80 | 0.000 |
| GHQ depression score | 4.85 | 4.63 | 4.02 | 4.15 | 1.82 | 0.073 |

After one month, 5 patients (8.3%) out of 60 had complete PTSD criteria and their number increased to 6 (12.8%) out of 47 after three months (thirteen patients had withdrawn from the study group and their data was unavailable). Although 10 (16.7%) of the patients had some symptoms of PTSD after one month, and 6 pa- tients (12.8%) after three months, but they did not meet all criteria (subsyndromal PTSD). Table 3 shows PTSD symptoms after one month and after three months in patients.

Patients having PTSD or subsyndromal PTSD af- ter one month were compared with control group in de- mographic data, blood pressure, heart rate, level of pain experienced and general health according to GHQ-28 upon admission using ANOVA and X square tests. Based on this comparison the heart rate (P=0.000), level of pain experienced (P=0.000), somatization symptoms

(P=0.041) and anxiety (P=0.039) according to GHQ-28 at the time of accident showed significant relation to emergence of PTSD symptoms one month later. The higher the value of these parameters was at the time of accident the higher the possibility of PTSD. Assessment of those experiencing PTSD symptoms three months post trauma showed that the maximum blood pressure (P=0.047), heart rate (P=0.000), pain experienced (P=0.000), somatization symptoms (P=0.019), and anxi- ety (P=0.024) according to GHQ-28 at the time of acci- dent had a significant relationship with PTSD symptoms three months later (P<0.05). The higher was the value of these parameters, the higher the possibility of PTSD. Factors such as age, sex, education, occupation, mini- mum blood pressure, depression, and dysfunction based on GHQ-28 had no significant relationship with emer- gence of PTSD (Table 4). This comparison was made for the presence of individual PTSD symptoms and its rela-

**Table 3**

**Prevalence of PTSD symptoms in patients with orthopedic trauma after one month and after three months**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Symptoms of PTSD** | **One month** | | **Three months** | |
| **Number** | **Percent** | **Number** | **Percent** |
| Without symptoms | 45 | 75 | 35 | 58.13 |
| Reexperience | 10 | 16.7 | 9 | 15 |
| Avoidance or Numbing | 6 | 10 | 8 | 13.3 |
| Hyperarousal | 16 | 26.7 | 12 | 20 |
| Subsyndromal PTSD | 10 | 16.7 | 6 | 10 |
| PTSD | 5 | 8.3 | 6 | 10 |

**Table 4**

**Comparison of demographic data, cardiac parameters, pain experienced and GHQ in patients experiencing PTSD after 1 and 3 months with control group**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **PTSD after three months** | | | **PTSD after one month** | | |
| **F** | **Chi-square** | **P** | **F** | **Chi– square** | **P** |
| Age | 0.351 | — | 0.705 | 1.723 | — | 0.190 |
| Sex | — | 4.917 | 0.86 | — | 0.876 | 0.645 |
| Marital status | — | 0.916 | 0.633 | — | 0.924 | 0.630 |
| Occupation | — | 2.056 | 0.358 | — | 0.277 | 0.870 |
| Education | — | 0.270 | 0.987 | — | 2.498 | 0.287 |
| Maximum blood pressure | 0.507 | — | 0.605 | 3.286 | — | 0.047 |
| Minimum blood pressure | 1.111 | — | 0.336 | 1.789 | — | 0.179 |
| Heart rate | 30.051 | — | 0.000 | 22.452 | — | 0.000 |
| Pain | 12.201 | — | 0.000 | 13.790 | — | 0.000 |
| Somatization (GHQ) | 3.379 | — | 0.041 | 4.361 | — | 0.019 |
| Anxiety (GHQ) | 3.446 | — | 0.039 | 4.055 | — | 0.024 |
| Dysfunction (GHQ) | 1.663 | — | 0.199 | 1.724 | — | 0.190 |
| Depression (GHQ) | 3.078 | — | 0.054 | 2.694 | — | 0.079 |

**Table 5**

**Comparison of parameters according to presence or absence of reexperience and avoidance or hyperarousal, one and three months after trauma**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameters** | **Significant level of relation between variables & PTSD symptoms** | | | | | |
| **One month after trauma** | | | **Three months after trauma** | | |
| **Reexperience** | **Avoidant** | **Hyper- arousal** | **Reexperience** | **Avoidant** | **Hyper- arousal** |
| Age | P=0.788 | P=0.571 | P=0.723 | P=0.594 | P=0.777 | P=0.127 |
| Sex | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P=0.043 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 |
| Marital status |  | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 |
| Occupation | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 |
| Education | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 | P>0.05 |
| Maximum blood pressure | P=0.636 | P=0.170 | P=0.640 | P=0.424 | P=0.187 | P=0.932 |
| Minimum blood pressure | P=0.650 | P=0.374 | P=0.462 | P=0.260 | P=0.370 | P=0.078 |
| Heart rate | P=0.000 | P=0.004 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 |
| Pain | P=0.000 | P=0.001 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 | P=0.000 |
| Somatization (GHQ) |  | P=0.0891 | P=0.022 | P=0.007 | P=0.129 | P=0.005 |
| Anxiety (GHQ) | P=0.030 | P=0.341 | P=0.004 | P=0.131 | P=0.188 | P=0.008 |
| Dysfunction (GHQ) | P=0.214 | P=0.144 | P=0.039 | P=0.056 | P=0.223 | P=0.079 |
| Depression (GHQ) | P=0.014 | P=0.431 | P=0.024 | P=0.086 | P=0.527 | P=0.034 |

tionship with the mentioned criteria at the time of acci- dent and the results are presented in Table 5.

# DISCUSSION

In this study we attempted to evaluate the incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder following severe ortho- pedic traumas in a population of Iranian patients from the city of Mashhad. We also tried to determine the rela- tionship between demographic data, some physiologi- cal symptoms like blood pressure, heart rate and pain intensity, and psychiatric symptoms such as anxiety and depression, somatization and dysfunction (according to GHQ-28) with PTSD incidence.

Our study showed that after one month, 8.3 per- cent of patients experienced full-criteria PTSD and 14.7 percent showed subsyndromal disorder. On the whole 25 percent of the patients experienced this disorder. Gen- eral incidence of PTSD symptoms three months post- trauma did not show considerable change (25.5%) al- though the number of patients experiencing full PTSD criteria had increased within three months (12.7%). Our

study showed that there was no relationship between demographic data and PTSD. Some physiological symp- toms such as patient’s heart rate upon admission to the clinic (after one and three months) and maximum blood pressure at the time of admission (after three months) have a significant relationship with PTSD. Also the pain intensity experienced by the patient at the time of trauma can predict emergence of PTSD.

Based on the general health questionnaire, the in- tensity of anxiety and somatization symptoms following accident can also predict occurrence of PTSD symptoms especially reexperience and hyperarousal one and three months after the accident while depression and dysfunc- tion can not predict PTSD.

Incidence of PTSD following orthopedic traumas has been measured in various studies. In a study in Kenya

13.3 percent of the patients experienced PTSD following traumas following car accidents according to DSM-IV criteria.17 While in a study in Turkey the incidence of this disorder following car clashes was estimated to be 30 percent. This study reported incidence of PTSD 17 per-

cent after six months18. Also in a study in Israel involving 74 car accident patients, 32 percent of them were re- ported to experience PTSD according to DSM-IV classi- fication system after one year19.

Some Western countries have also reported the incidence of PTSD after orthopedic traumas in the same range. For example, a study in Germany examining 179 patients with trauma from car accidents after six months of follow up showed that 18.4% had PTSD according to interviews based on DSM-III-R20. But in a study in Taiwan on 64 patients the high incidence of 82.8% based on Post-traumatic stress disorder reaction Index was re- ported after one and a half months21. Also in a study in the United States up to 51 percent of 580 patients with orthopedic traumas based on the civilian Mississippi Scale for posttraumatic stress disorder questionnaire experienced PTSD9.

The reasons for this big difference in the reports of PTSD are related to a number of factors. Maybe the most important reason is the way this disorder has been evalu- ated (e.g. using questionnaire or clinical interview). Also the time of survey and the country and its culture could be important.

One of the factors related to the presence of PTSD in orthopedic traumatic patients that can be used to predict this disorder is vital signs especially heart rate7,14-16,22. In our study it was shown that the heart rate of patients upon admission has a significant relationship with PTSD symptoms after one and three months. Other studies have also been conducted in this regard. In one of the studies performed on 86 patients in Israel it was found that the heart rate upon admission (95.5±13.9 against 83.3±10.9, p<0.001, t=4.4) and after one week (77.8±11.9 against 72.0±9.5, p<0.03, t=2.25) can have a significant relationship with PTSD, although heart rate after one month and after four months in patients with PTSD had no difference with control group7. Two studies on children and adolescents have also shown the link between heart rate and potential PTSD incidence follow- ing orthopedic trauma. In one study 82 youngsters were evaluated whose primary heart rate had a significant re- lation with PTSD six weeks and two months later22. In another study 190 youth were examined in whom higher heart rate upon admission (109.6 against 99.7) could predict PTSD16.

It seems that severe physiologic response to trauma signals anxiety symptoms to be presented as PTSD in future. Our study especially showed that more intense pain experienced by the patient can increase the likelihood of PTSD. It appears that emotional problems cause more difficulties than physical problems9. Patients with PTSD face much more trouble than other patients. A study indicated that the duration of stay of patients with orthopedic trauma in hospital was longer for PTSD patients than other patients20.

A number of studies have indicated that the pres- ence of previous psychopathology or psychiatric symp-

toms such as anxiety and depression in patient early in the accident may increase the likelihood of PTSD19-21. Our study only found a significant relation between anxiety and somatization symptoms with PTSD early in the trauma, while some studies have reported depression as a sign predicting PTSD symptoms. In our study the presence of depression after one month with p=0.054 and after three months with p=0.079 showed the rela- tionship. It may be due to the number of samples, and future studies may prove this relationship as significant.

The relationship between demographic factors and PTSD incidence following orthopedic traumas has also been investigated. In a study it was indicated that most of PTSD patients (442.9%) were young17, while our study showed no significant relation between PTSD and age. Although in our study the relation of sex with PTSD could not be evaluated due to the low number of women, it has been shown in various studies that women have more susceptibility to PTSD following orthopedic traumas17,23.

Due to small sample size and withdrawal of fifty percent of the subjects the results of this study can not be generalized to the whole society and those with or- thopedic traumas. Our monitoring period was three months and this caused exclusion of those experiencing PTSD symptoms after this period of time (delayed PTSD). In our study only patients with severe orthopedic trau- mas were involved and we ignored the results of patients with milder traumas. Some studies have not mentioned any difference in PTSD incidence in patients with trau- mas of different intensities17 while the results can be gen- eralized to those with milder traumas admitted to the hospital. We must note that some orthopedic patients are not referred to hospitals and are treated outpatient and there may be a difference between these two groups in PTSD incidence.24 We propose a more comprehen- sive study with larger sample size involving a range of orthopedic patients and monitoring them for a longer pe- riod of time.

**Acknowledgement:** We must acknowledge the kind at- tention of the personnel of accident clinic and trauma ward of Imam Reza Hospital who collaborated in our re- search.

**Research Fund:** This research has done with financial support of the Vice Chancellor of Research of Mashhad University of Medical Sciences.

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