

June 2020 EAP Notes: Emotional Aftermath of Civil Unrest



Whether someone is in the frontlines of a protest, an innocent bystander, or watching from a phone or TV, witnessing these tense situations can evoke traumatic feelings.

Although there's not a significant amount of research surrounding protests and trauma, we have some empirical data from recent years to show us that violent protests have resulted in high levels of distress for people.

After the protests in Ferguson, MO from the Michael Brown killing, journalists from *The Conversation* website studied the aftermath of these protests. Specifically, "the study involved both the community and police officers and wanted to examine how the proximity to community violence would have an impact on mental health, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive symptoms as well as anger. While it seems that community members reported more symptoms than police officers, the overall finding was that exposure to such violence led to high levels of distress among those directly exposed."

It's hard to determine who may or may not be emotionally impacted by these situations, but those who are emotionally vulnerable, or who have struggled with mental health issues in the past, are more likely to suffer from emotional trauma.

What is Psychological Trauma (PT)?

From HelpGuide.org, PT defined as "the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won't go away. It can also leave you unable to trust other people."

For those directly involved or impacted:

Acute Stress Disorder could arise in response to exposure to a traumatic event such as threatened or actual violence. Typically, the person feels anxious and relives the event through involuntary memories, dreams or flashbacks which are experienced as intrusive and distressing.

For those indirectly involved/exposed, i.e. watching protests on TV or via social media:

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) refers to the indirect trauma that can occur when we are exposed to difficult or disturbing images. This can occur by viewing graphic news reports, gruesome or frightening television shows.

It's likely that most everyone is experiencing pretty strong feelings about the heightened social and civil unrest we're witnessing and have been witnessing for a while now. Maybe you are feeling anxious and want to talk to someone. Our clinicians at Best Care EAP are here to help support you, your family and co-workers during times when you need us the most. If you see someone you work with or in your family struggling, recommend EAP.

The Best Care Emotional Response hotline (800) 801-4182 is FREE and available 24/7. Sessions are available via telehealth and are completely confidential.