

ABSTRACT

The following paper discusses an important issue concerning stress, which accompanies every human being in various traumatic situations in both private and professional life. There are professions which are particularly exposed to traumatic situations. Such events may result in certain clinical symptoms which are known in literature as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD. The problem concerns medical professions who are engaged in life saving situations that is, fireman, emergency services, police officers and especially paramedics and medical emergency units, being one of the reasons why this particular profession was chosen as a study field.

The aim of the study was to assess the prevalence and symptoms intensity of the posttraumatic stress disorder in a population of paramedics from the Subcarpathian Region. The factors subjected to analysis were: dependencies between the strategies of dealing with stress, self-efficacy and particular socio-demographic variables (age, sex, job seniority and intensification of posttraumatic changes).

The study included 304 paramedics employed in State Medical Emergency Units, specialist and basic paramedic teams and hospital emergency units in the Subcarpathian region.

Four diagnostic tools were used. The intensification of stress symptoms was evaluated with a Revised Impact of Events Scale (IES-R). The assessment of coping with stress strategies was performed with a Mini-COPE inventory. Self-efficacy was determined by a General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES). Socio-demographic data as well as information concerning the frequency and type of the traumatic situations experience were obtained with the use of an original questionnaire.

The study shows that 88.8% of the paramedics employed in the Subcarpathian Region have experienced traumatic events while at work. 22.0% experienced one such event, 66.8%, however, participated in a few such situations. The study confirmed that paramedics are exposed to many traumatic and stressful situations. The most common

traumatizing event as recalled by the paramedics in the Subcarpathian region was the presence of the victims children at the site (53.3%), casualties (53%) as well as life endangering situations of various intensity (37.4%).

PTSD symptoms in a moderate stage were observed in 34.8% of the paramedics in study. When more restrictive criteria was applied (>1.5 pts. in all of the scale areas) the symptoms were observed in 20% of the respondents. When intensification of particular PTSD symptoms is concerned, intrusion was observed in 29.6% of the respondents, agitation in 30.4% and avoidance in 44.8% of the paramedics in study.

The research has shown that the situations which carry the risk of subsequent PTSD are: life/health threatening situations ($p=0.0268$), presence of the victim's children at the site ($p=0.0491$) and helping the victims of natural disasters ($p=0.0381$) as well as participating in so-called other situations, as enumerated by the respondents ($p=0.0121$).

The research has proved that the people who have been diagnosed with PTSD on the basis of IES-R test, were more likely to present avoidance strategies, including: abreaction ($R=0.44$; $p=0.0000$), denial ($R=0.37$; $p=0.0000$), engaging in other activities ($R=0.37$; $p=0.0000$) as well as strategies expressing helplessness, including withdrawal ($R=0.39$; $p=0.0000$) and blaming oneself ($R=0.36$; $p=0.0000$). The remaining strategies, including active coping strategies, emotional strategies, acceptance, turning to religion and sense of humor correlate positively with the intensification of PTSD symptoms. However, those dependencies are of a minor meaning.

The study has shown that the majority (56.7%) of paramedics have a high level of self-efficacy. 24.8% presents an average one whereas 13.7% a low level. There was a negative correlation observed between the sense of self-efficacy and the intensification of PTSD symptoms ($R=-0.16$; $p=0.0088$).

The results confirmed a significant dependency between the age of the respondents and the intensification of the PTSD symptoms ($p=0.0447$). No statistically significant dependency was noted between sex or the remaining variables such as education, place of residence, marital status and PTSD prevalence.

The results suggest that the increase in PTSD symptoms intensification was connected with job seniority (paramedics of at least 20 year-long work experience) ($p=0.0151$). However, in case of the paramedics with their job seniority shorter than 20 years, the intensification of PTSD symptoms was decreasing.

This original study confirms the claims of other authors discussing the negative consequences the traumatic events have on PTSD prevalence among emergency services. The results may be of inspiration for further in-depth research concerning PTSD prevalence among paramedics. This may also be used in course planning processes, various paramedic trainings, prophylaxis and psychological advisory as to how to cope when being affected by traumatic situations.

Key words: traumatic events, traumatic stress, posttraumatic disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, coping with stress strategies, general self-efficacy scale, paramedic