

Are We Experiencing \*PTSD?  
-Shauna L. Smith, MSW, MFT

Can we civilians at home dare say we are experiencing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder when our military men and women, true wearers of the designation, learn the language of murder and mayhem every day while we in our armchairs or kitchens or at rallies practice just the challenge of inconveniences and the assimilation of horror tales from afar?

Do the symptoms of PTSD such as shock, fearfulness, nightmares, avoidance, despondency and loss of faith apply to some degree to us, the bystanders, the observers, the ones who watch in disbelief, feeling helpless to effect change?

We who are not having our nerve tested daily by shattered bullets and dry sand nonetheless feel the fine particles in our nightmares, infiltrating our food and drink, our daily bread.

We nonetheless feel the chaos and pathos of our world as we know it crumbling in a maze of contradictions and secrecies and lies.

We are painfully aware of the exigencies of the hungry and impoverished, the despair of the needlessly dying and ill.

We are appalled by the desecration of our forests and rivers, the polluting of our air and sky.

We live in fear of an unchecked military, the loss of civil rights, corporate abuses and contempt for the common good.

We agonize about the future for our children and grandchildren to whom we cannot find words to explain genocide and torture.

We who are not having our nerve tested daily by shattered bullets and dry sand nonetheless read history and hear news reports of daily madness and aggression, are sickened by our own part in the insanity, and find ourselves unable to stop the flashbacks and flashforwards and the intrusive, plaintive cries calling to us, screaming at us from across the globe.

And so maybe we do fall on the continuum of PTSD, not at the high end of the scale as do the soldiers returning from Iraq, or the soldiers returned from Vietnam and Korea and the two wars to end all wars did, but somewhere nonetheless because we also cannot return ourselves to a pre-crisis state of functioning on our own.

And perhaps the most authentic and constructive help we can offer each other is to listen, deeply and without judgment and validate perceptions and uncertainties, outrage, guilt and fear.

And in so doing we may be able to comfort and strengthen each other at least well enough to work in tandem for peace and justice, integrity and sustainability, in the hope that the mad events of the present will not shatter us individually and collectively and turn the world we live in to dust.

\* 309.81 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, DSM-IV-TR

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