



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH & NEURO SCIENCES

Institute of National Importance

Bengaluru

Department of Mental Health Education

In collaboration with

Community Psychiatry Unit

DISSOCIATIVE DISORDERS



PHOBIC ANXIETY DISORDERS

Nidhi was an 18-year-old teenager hospitalized for episodes of violent behaviour and apparent memory lapses about these episodes. Medical check-up by Physicians and Neurologists ruled out any serious neurological/physical causes for her symptoms. With further investigation, it was found that Nidhi had Dissociative Amnesia, a state wherein the person is unable to recall certain important information about themselves. Nidhi was soon referred to treatment, where it was revealed that she was under a lot of stress as a result of her family problems. Her doctor put her on medication and recommended therapy. Nidhi was said to be feeling better after a few months, and her memory issues had also resolved.

Similar cases report feeling numb, memory loss without any medical cause, trance like states, mutism, and very rarely two or more identities in one person

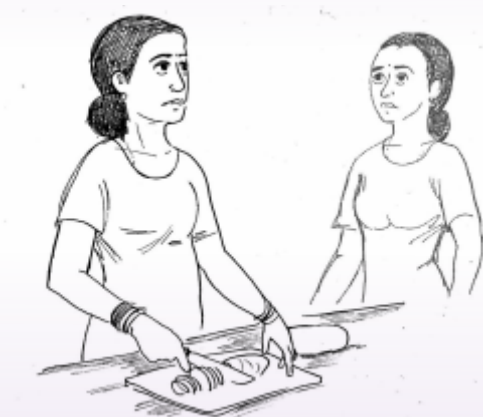


INTRODUCTION

When someone is faced with extreme stress such as traumatic event (psychological mainly), the distress it causes can become too much for the person's mind to take in. At times the mind handles such instances by switching to a different way of thinking and feeling. This is called as Dissociation. It is a way of managing extreme feelings. It can happen automatically, without a person meaning to dissociate. People from all age groups and racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds can experience a dissociative disorder.

SYMPTOMS:

- Significant memory loss of specific times, people and events
- Out-of-body experiences, where one feels as if watching oneself from a distance
- Mental Health problems such as depression, anxiety and thoughts of suicide
- A sense of detachment from your emotions or emotional numbness
- A lack of Sense of Self-identity



HOW SOMEONE CAN EXPERIENCE DISSOCIATION?

Dissociation can be experienced in lots of ways. They have been grouped and named, so that it helps in diagnosis of specific dissociative disorder.

Some dissociative experiences include	Technical Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Not being able to remember information about oneself or about the things that happened in one's life▪ Having gaps in one's life where one can't remember anything that happened	Dissociative Amnesia
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Travelling to a different location and taking on a new identity for a short time (without remembering one's identity)	Dissociative fugue
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Feeling as though the world around is unreal▪ Seeing objects change in size, shape or colour▪ Feeling as if people are robots (even though the person knows they are not)▪ Seeing the world as lifeless or foggy	Derealisation

Some dissociative experiences include	Technical Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feeling as though one is watching oneself in a film or looking at oneself from the outside ▪ Feeling disconnected from parts of one's body or emotions ▪ Feeling as if one is floating away 	Depersonalisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Complete change in the entire identity or personality. ▪ Speaking in different voice or using different name. 	Dissociative identity disorder

CAUSES

- Dissociative disorders usually develop as a way of dealing with stressors and trauma.
- Examples of trauma which can lead to dissociative disorder are
 - *Overwhelming stress*
 - *Traumatic experiences (like war, natural disasters)*
 - *Children exposed to physical, sexual or emotional abuse*
 - *Genetics*

However, not everyone who experiences trauma will have a dissociative disorder. The following are some experiences of trauma which make dissociative disorders more likely:



- *Abuse or neglect that begins at an early age*
 - *Abuse or neglect that is painful and makes you scared*
 - *Stressors which are severe and persistent over a period of time*
 - *Early childhood trauma and difficulties with attachment and parental unavailability*
- Dissociative disorders also most often form in children exposed to long-term physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
 - Natural disasters and wars can also cause dissociative disorders.

FAMILY ROLE

Parental empathy, support, and warmth have been found to help children and adolescents cope effectively with many types of adversities. However, when there are family arguments, parental separation/divorce, emotional neglect and



other stressors in the family, it can lead to patterns of behaviour in the children which eventually which may show up as different forms of dissociation.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of dissociative disorder is based on clinical assessment by a trained mental health professional. It is done after ruling out the other causes which can explain the experiences of dissociation like

- ***Any physical cause of dissociation (organicity)***
- ***Any drugs/medication which can sometimes cause dissociation.***
- ***Any cultural or religious practices that may explain these experiences.***

Seek professional medical help if you or your family member have significant, unexplained memory loss, a chronic sense that your identity or the world around you is blurry or unreal, and you experience a major change in behaviour when under stress.



CO-MORBIDITY

Many people with dissociative disorders have other mental health problems too. These may include

- Depression
- Anxiety and panic disorder
- Borderline personality disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder

TREATMENT

Medications - The treating doctor would diagnose the condition and prescribe appropriate medications.



Therapy- Therapy helps the person to safely express and process painful memories, develop new coping and life skills, restore functioning, and improve relationships. Psycho-therapy is designed to encourage communication of conflicts and increase awareness into problems. CBT changes dysfunctional thinking pattern and the resulting feelings and behaviour.

Family Therapy - is recommended to help educate the family about Dissociative Disorders and its causes, to understand the changes that can take place as the personality is being unified, as well as help family members recognize symptoms of recurrence.



RELAPSE

Relapse in Dissociative Disorders can occur due to lack of family support, inability to continue with therapy and stopping of medication without doctor's knowledge. You should continue the medications, as it will help in reducing the symptoms and distress. Some people may experience few side effects with medication. If you or someone you know are going through the side effects, you can talk to your doctor about it.

WHERE TO FIND THIS BROCHURE?



NIMHANS Arogya Jagruti Kendra,
G-5 ground floor, OPD block,
NIMHANS.

Contact us at:
nimarogyajagruti@gmail.com

Mentalhealtheeducationnimhans.org

Mind space initiative:
<https://nimhans.ac.in/mind-space/>

Developed with support from Swacchta
Action Plan 2020-21 under the
Kayakalp scheme, MOHFW, GOI