

PTSD Awareness Day recognized across Canada on June 27

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After experiencing a traumatic event not everyone will develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but many that do will suffer silently.

Organizations will be recognizing the mental health disorder nationally on June 27 as part of PTSD Awareness Day to educate the public, increase awareness, and support those affected.

"Recognizing PTSD is really recognizing it as a significant mental health diagnosis," said Tim Smith, program manager at Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Peel Dufferin. "It [PTSD] has a significant impact, for most individuals the impact is across their life. It impacts work, personal relationships, long-term planning and goal setting. Some folks diagnosed find ways of coping and managing quite effectively, but for those that don't it can be pretty debilitating to deal with."

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder involving exposure to a traumatic event which could include crimes, natural disasters, accidents, war or conflict, or other threats to life. A person with PTSD could experience the event themselves or witness it happening to others.

"Trauma is a personal experience," explained Smith. "You might have 10 people that are involved in a car accident and eight people walk away without any symptoms of trauma but two people do because it's based on their personal experience."

According to the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT), in Canada it is estimated that up to 2.3 per cent of the population is dealing with PTSD at any given time.

Individuals working in occupations with increased exposure to traumatic events such as first responders, armed forces personnel, and public safety personnel tend to see PTSD more prevalently. Women, refugees, and Indigenous peoples are also statistically at higher risk.

The CIPSRT said with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, symptoms of PTSD may soon be overwhelming for Public Safety Personnel.

"In terms of the impact of COVID-19 some folks are coping very well and they've not been impacted but for others the trauma of the pandemic has been a challenge," said Smith. "It's really important to recognize that people cope in different ways."

In March, CMHA Ontario released polling data for a survey tracking trends in mental health during the pandemic. Data showed that only a third of Ontarians (35 per cent) consider their current state of mental health as "good" or "excellent" compared to 52 per cent in the first poll.

The survey also showed that almost 80 percent of Ontarian believed we'd be in a serious mental health crisis post-pandemic, a sentiment that is also felt by CMHA.

"As we move into recovery people might realize for themselves that they have been struggling or are struggling," said Sinthusha Panchalingam, clinical director for CMHA Peel Dufferin. "Sometimes when you're in the motion of things or going through something, you don't stop to reflect. As we talk about pandemic recovery, moving to a new normal these anxieties or worries might rise for people."

Panchalingam added that the agency is planning for the recovery stage of the pandemic with a plan around mental health for the community and healthcare workers, which is focused closely on PTSD.

?We're certainly making assumptions on what we suspect, given the increase needs for services that we saw through the pandemic. The lingering effects and the effects of recovery, we're certainly thinking that it will be in line with what happening during the pandemic,? said Panchalingam.

With this year's PTSD Awareness Month and Day, the Canadian Institute for Public Safety Research and Treatment (CIPSRT), is looking at the theme of getting ?Stigma Out and Understanding In?.

The CIPSRT said public safety personnel may feel a stigma from co-workers, organizations or the public due to lack of understanding of PTSD leading to the idea that those struggling with the disorder are weak or unfit. CIPSRT added that it is this stigma that can stop those suffering from seeking help or asking for support.

?It's not about strength versus weakness or it's not about capacity, it's about different people working through issues differently and needing to respect that some people get through it ok and some people are struggling,? said Smith.

?Stigma around mental health is a barrier for some people to access resources in the community so it's an important conversation for everybody. Statistics tell us that one in five Canadians will have a mental health concern at some point in their lifetime, we all know somebody who's dealing with a mental health issue. I can't be burdened with stigma, we need to be open and honest, and help people deal with their mental health issues exactly the same way we help people deal with their physical health issues.?

Resources for mental health services in Dufferin-Caledon can be found on the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative website. CMHA Peel Dufferin also has a general phone number as well as a crisis line, for community members seeking help.

?If you are struggling, reach out for help because you don't have to struggle alone,? said Panchalingham