



The Emotional Baggage We Refuse To Talk About

by Elizabeth Sindelar-Loy
October 15 2019 4:20 PM





October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, a cause that is extremely personal to me. I could share my own story, although it's really no different from the thousands that have been swept under the rug.

Therefore, I rather dedicate this column to a terrible bi-product of domestic violence that survivors don't openly discuss. Instead, it's often masked by legal/illegal drugs, alcohol or any other vice that takes the focus away from the root cause. The medical profession gives it names like chronic pain syndrome, unnamed autoimmune disease, fibromyalgia, and PTSD. Yet, with those who have experienced sexual trauma, the common dominator is the same – unresolved emotional baggage in the form of pain throughout the body.

Every single one of us resides in a truly amazing and awe-inspiring complex machine that is the human body. Within the body, there is an interconnected system of complex communication transmitters that help us achieve everyday tasks and most importantly allow us to sense danger for self-preservation. Unfortunately, just as the body creates nerve and muscle memory to aid us, it can also hang onto events and trigger responses without our brains ever understanding why. This is why the immediate pain of sexual trauma can be held into the body's memory for years or even decades after the event has occurred.

Making recovery from trauma incredibly complex. The pain, therefore, is not just something you can "get over" or "move on" from until fully processing the event that has occurred. And just when you think you are on a path to recovery – a sight, smell, sound, the feeling can trigger your body without warning. Sometimes the brain can immediately connect the dots but other times, as research is discovering, it can begin as an unexplained pain response that spreads throughout the body like wildfire.

According to multiple studies on trauma, any tissue in the body can hold emotional energy. For women, there is one organ more prolifically affected by trauma than any other organ in the body – the vagina. This is due to the fact that sexual trauma isn't the only kind of trauma that can be held within that area. Any event in which a woman's brain or vagina wasn't comfortable in can result in "emotional baggage" that is stored in the form of pain. It can be as simple as the first use of a tampon, something routine like a gynecological exam or develop after child birth, sexual abuse, painful intercourse or even more complex issues such as patriarchy and anger.

We live in an era where unfortunately a majority of people still are unaware of their own boundaries when it comes to the body. Women especially. Even with the Me Too Movement, more often than not, women continue to endure a touch that doesn't feel ok due to a lack of vocabulary or confidence to say no. Or as much as they want to react, the nervous system puts them into a position where they can't verbally respond. Over time, minor or major experiences that result in discomfort, shame, uncertainty, violence, and so on, can become trapped within the vagina and develop into vaginismus.

Since vaginal pain is often tied to shame and isolation, experts really don't know the true prevalence of vaginismus. The stigma and shame surrounding this painful condition keep those affected from reaching out for medical assistance – or when they reached out for help they were misdiagnosed or told the pain is not serious. Yet, the emotional toll that it has on those who suffer from it is typically equal to, if not more intense than, the physical symptoms. The vagina is vital to a woman's existence and identity – it creates human life. Therefore, vaginismus is often a physical manifestation of past emotional trauma on this organ.

Even with my training in trauma awareness and years of therapy, it still cost me an awful lot of money in testing to accept that the pain I was experiencing was from parts of my life I wanted desperately to forget. To those reading this article, if you or someone you know is experiencing this type of hidden pain, please know there are amazing medical professionals who can help you get your life back. Allowing yourself to heal doesn't mean the damage never existed, it means the damage no longer controls your life.

Opinions expressed in this section are solely those of the individual authors and do not represent the views of RiverBender.com or its affiliates. We provide a platform for community voices, but the responsibility for opinions rests with their authors.