

Stockholm syndrome: An Understanding

Pradeep Kumar

Stockholm syndrome (SHS) is a condition, psychological response and a coping mechanism in which captives develop a psychological bond with their captors during captivity. (King, 2020). This emotional bond may be formed between captors and captives, during intimate time together (which are generally considered irrational). It develops from a specific set of circumstances and imbalances contained in hostage-taking, kidnapping, and abusive relationships. The syndrome is rare, about 8% of hostage victims show evidence of SHS. SHS has never been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). In the 21st century, psychologists had expanded their understanding of the SHS syndrome from hostages to other groups, including victims of domestic violence, cult members, prisoners of war, procured prostitutes, and abused children. Mental health professionals who are working in the area believe that the bond is initially created when a captor threatens a captive's life, a deliberates, and then chooses not to kill the captive. The captive's relief at the removal of the death threat is transposed into feelings of gratitude toward the captor for giving him or her life.

Historical background: Anna Freud first also described about SHS when she talked about identification with an aggressor or one's attempt to cope with fear by transforming oneself from the threatened person to the threatening one. She considered this to be a defence mechanism that might give one a sense of power in a situation otherwise likely to be terrifying. Mary McElroy (1933) was abducted from her home at age 25 by four men. She defended her kidnappers when she was released and continued to visit her captors while they were in jail. Ronald Fairbairn's (1952) mentioned in the book *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality* about object relations theory of attachment, in which the abuser explains the surprising psychological reality that abused children become deeply attached to their abusers.

Correspondence Address:

Dr Pradeep Kumar, Editor in Chief, Journal of Psychosocial Well being & Consultant, Psychiatric Social Work, State Institute of Mental Health, Pt. BDS, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences, Rohtak, Haryana.
Email: pradeep.pgims@uhsr.nic.in

Received: 02.04. 2022 Revised: 03.05. 2022

Accepted: 01.05. 2022 Published: 05.06. 2022.

ACCESS THIS ARTICLE ONLINE

Website :
www.jpsw.co.in

DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.55242/JPSW.2022.3101>



How to cite: Kumar, P., (2022). Stockholm syndrome: An Understanding. *Journal of Psychosocial Wellbeing*, 3(1):1-4

Suck kinds of dissociative or denial defence mechanism is seen in adults who have suffered a life-threatening trauma. This term (SHS) was first used by the media in 1973 when four hostages were taken during a bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden. The hostages defended their captors after being released and would not agree to testify in court against them. (Adorjan,2012). Patty Hearst (1974) was taken and held hostage by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) an urban guerilla group. She was later seen working with the SLA to rob banks in San Francisco. Nils Bejerot, a another Swedish criminologist and psychiatrist called SHS as the Norrmalmstorg syndrome. Robbins and Anthony (1982) had historically studied a condition similar to SHS known as destructive cult disorder .Hostages Terry Anderson (held 1985–91), Terry Waite (1987–91), and Thomas Sutherland (1985–91) all claimed that they had been treated well by their captors, despite the fact that they had often been held in solitary confinement and chained up in small, unclean cells. Dee Graham (1994) uses the Stockholm syndrome label to describe group or collective responses to trauma and developed a 49 item scale (1995) for use is determining SHS. Lima syndrome (1996) was named after an abduction at the Japanese embassy in Lima, Peru in which abductors develop sympathy for their hostages. An abductor may also have second thoughts or experience empathy towards their victims. Other closely linked psychological conditions include trauma bonding, learned helplessness and battered person syndrome (Cantor C,2007).Similar responses were exhibited by the hostages held at the Japanese embassy (Peru,1996-97) . Namnyak et al. (2008) found that that there is a lot of media coverage of SHS

while there has not been a lot of research into the phenomenon. The DSM-5 (2013) is widely used as the "classification system for psychological disorders,but SHS has not historically appeared in the manual. In 2018, researchers attempted to establish an association between Stockholm syndrome and female sex worker, study described several conditions that have associations with SHS has also been used to describe the reaction of kidnapping victim Elizabeth Smart. Smart was taken from her home in 2002 at the age of 14 and held captive for nine months. Even though it appears that Smart had various opportunities to escape, she never attempted to do so. It is unclear, however, whether she did not try to escape because she developed SHS or due to other reasons, such as her statement that she was terrified of her captors. from female sex workers living in India. The narratives included in the study describe several conditions that have associations with SHS. These include; perceived threats to physical and psychological survival, perceived kindness from the trafficker or client, isolation from the outside world, perceived inability to escape,some of the women expressed that they had, at one time, hoped to start a family with their trafficker or a client etc. Australian journalist Jess Hill (2019) described the syndrome as a "dubious pathology with no diagnostic criteria", and stated that it is "riddled with misogyny and founded on a lie". she also mentioned "most diagnoses of SHS are made by the media, not by psychologists, psychiatric social workers or psychiatrists. In a 2020 study, researchers found evidence suggesting that victims of domestic violence may also experience SHS (Timothy,2020)

expressed that they had, at one time, hoped to Concept of SHS: Many researchers, mental health professionals, criminologists and other professionals do not fully understand to the SHS. However, experts believe that Stockholm syndrome can develop when: (1).The captor treats their victims humanely (2). The captives and captors have significant face-to-face interaction, which provides opportunities to bond with one another (3).The captives feel that law enforcement personnel are not doing their jobs well enough (4). A captive thinks that the police and other authorities do not have their best interests at heart.

Aside from having an attachment or bond with their captor, the victims may also develop different feelings towards outsiders of the situation. They may: :(1)Be unwilling to engage in any behaviours that could assist in their release:(2) Have negative feelings towards their friends or family who may try to rescue them. :(3)Develop negative feelings towards the police, authority figures, or anyone who might be trying to help them get away from their captor:(4)Refuse to cooperate against their captor,

such as during the subsequent investigation or during legal trials. :(5)Refuse to leave their captors even when given opportunity to escape:(6)Believe that the police and other authorities do not have their best interests at heart.

Even after being released from captivity, the person with SHS may continue to have positive feelings towards their captor and may report some of the following symptoms: Confusion, Guilt, Denial, Social withdrawal, Chronic feelings of tension ,Anxiety, Depression, Feeling empty or hopeless, Excessive dependence, Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities,

Embarrassment about their emotions towards the captor, Being unwilling to learn to detach from their captor and heal, Being less loyal to themselves than to their captor.

Components of SHS : SHS is paradoxical because the sympathetic sentiments that captives feel towards their captors. The key Components of SHS:(1) A hostage's development of positive feelings towards the captor and Sympathy for their captors' beliefs and behaviors (ii)No previous relationship between hostage and captor (iii) A refusal by hostages to cooperate with police and other government authorities (iv) Negative feelings toward police or other authority figures (v) A hostage's belief in the humanity of the captor, ceasing to perceive them as a threat, when the victim holds the same values as the aggressor. SHS type action and attitude have also been found in victims of sexual abuse, human trafficking, extremism, terrorism, economic oppression, financial repression, political repression and religious persecution. SHS can also be argued as "another method of coping with the stress and danger. It is similar to some forms of coping in that the participants do not directly address the problem but find a way to cope with the situation by identifying with the aggressor. Such kinds of coping mechanisms can have a large impact on PTSD. Symptoms found similar to post-traumatic stress disorder in SHS are flashbacks, feeling distrustful, irritated, jittery or anxious, Can't relax or enjoy things that he/she previously enjoyed, trouble concentrating etc. It has found that some victims of childhood sexual abuse come to feel a connection with their abuser. (Jülich,2005).

Impact of SHS on Mental Health : Although Stockholm SHS is not listed as a formal mental health diagnosis, people who experience this syndrome seem to have some common symptoms, including: :(a) Positive feelings towards the captor :(b) Support of the captor's behaviour and the reasoning behind it:(c)The victim begins to perceive their captor's humanity and believe they share the same goals and values:(d)

They make little to no effort to escape:(e)A belief in the goodness of the captors:(f)As the victims get rewarded, perhaps with less abuse, or with life itself, the captor's appeasing behaviours are reinforced :(h)Feelings of pity towards the captors, even believing that the captors are the victims themselves :(i)They may have feelings of wanting to 'save' their abuser.

People with SHS may often report symptoms which are similar to those with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as: Being easily startled, Feelings of distrust, Feelings of unreality, Flashbacks, Irritability, Nightmares, Trouble concentrating, Insomnia etc. Whilst not everyone who experiences feelings of SHS will have all the symptoms, or even most of them, they may experience some to varying degrees. Since the existence of Stockholm Syndrome itself is questionable, many may interpret this phenomenon in different ways and have their own ideas about what it is. (Olivia,G,2022),

Treatment from SHS involves "psychiatric or psychological counselling like psychotherapy and medication (if required) in which the patient is helped to realize that their actions and feelings stemmed from inherent human survival techniques. So that Psychotherapy can help patient or a loved one recover and move forward with your life. The process of recovery includes reinstating normalcy into the lives of victims, including helping the victim learn how to decrease their survival-driven behaviours. SHS is a rare psychological reaction to a captive or abusive situation.

Conclusion: SHS is a psychological condition in which people develop positive emotions and associations with someone who is keeping them captive. SHS is not a recognized psychological diagnosis, but rather, an attempt to explain the symptoms appearing in some individuals who are

held captive. This phenomenon can be understood as a survival mechanism. The underlying principles of how it works can be related to different situations" A classic example is domestic violence, when someone has a sense of dependency on their partner and stays with them. But it's not compulsory most people who experience abuse, trauma or captive situations don't develop Stockholm syndrome. SHS is a rare psychological reaction to a captive or abusive situation. Psychotherapy can help in recover and move forward in life

References.

- Adorjan, M., Christensen,T.K, Benjamin.,Pawluch, D (2012).Stockholm Syndrome As Vernacular Resource". The sociological Quartely 53(3).454-474. doi:10.1111/j.1533-8525.2012.01241.
- Cantor C, Price J. (2007). Traumatic entrapment, appeasement and complex post-traumatic stress disorder: evolutionary perspectives of hostage reactions, domestic abuse and the Stockholm syndrome . (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17464728/>) Aust NZ J Psychiatry. 415(5):377-84.
- Jülich S (2005). Stockholm Syndrome and Child Sexual Abuse". Journal of Child Sexual Abuse. 14 (3): 107–129. doi:10.1300/J070v14n03_06. PMID 16203697. S2CID 37132721
- King, David (2020). The Story of Stockholm Syndrome. W.W. Norton. ISBN 978-0-393-63508-9 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_syndrome.
- Olivia Guy-Evans.(2022). What Is Stockholm Syndrome? s i m p l y p s y c h o l o g y . <https://www.simplypsychology.org/Stockholm-syndrome.html> Cited on 06,17,2021.
- TimothyJ.L(2020). What is Stockholm syndrome? . <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/stockholm-syndrome> cited on 06.12,2021.