

## **PRESS RELEASE**

Croatian Medical Journal  
Zagreb University School of Medicine  
Šalata 3b  
10000 Zagreb  
Croatia

Phone: ++385-1-4590-286

Fax: ++385-1-4590-222

Mail: [dario.sambunjak@mef.hr](mailto:dario.sambunjak@mef.hr)

All articles published in the Croatian Medical Journal  
are freely available at [www.cmj.hr](http://www.cmj.hr)

### **Long-term group psychotherapy only partially effective in the treatment of PTSD**

ZAGREB – Long-term group psychotherapy alleviated the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in Croatian war veterans, but other neurotic symptoms did not change even after five years of treatment, shows a study published in the Croatian Medical Journal.

The study included 59 veterans treated in the Psychiatric Department of Split University Hospital between 1997 and 2003. The groups met once a week for 90 minutes and forty-two veterans finished the program. The intensity of PTSD and other neurotic symptoms, as well as the ego's mechanisms of defense were assessed in all participants at the beginning of psychotherapy, after the second and after the fifth year of treatment.

The results showed that psychotherapy reduced the intensity of PTSD, especially the symptoms of reenactment of traumatic experience and increased excitation. The symptoms of avoidance and emotional rigidity were mostly unchanged after five years of treatment. Veterans suffered from other neurotic symptoms such as anxiety, phobia, obsession, somatization, depression and hysterias. Psychotherapy did not have an effect on them also. Predominant defense mechanisms were projection and displacement, and they did not change significantly after two or five years of treatment. The number of major depressive episodes and hospitalizations increased after the second year of psychotherapy, but decreased by the end of treatment.

The limitations of this study were a small sample size and high dropout rate. Furthermore, there was no control group, so it is not possible to ascertain whether the changes in the symptoms of PTSD were the result of psychotherapy or the natural course of illness.

Authors conclude that changes in the personality of veterans with PTSD are deeply rooted and that rigid defense mechanisms cannot be easily influenced by group psychotherapy. However, this method can reduce the intensity of PTSD symptoms and this increase the veterans' quality of life and improve their adaptation to family and society.

**Correspondence to:**

Dolores Britvić  
Split University Hospital  
Šoltanska 1  
21000 Split, Croatia  
*dbritvic@globalnet.hr*