



The Recovery **Process** **Part 2**

**(For Facilitators and Self-Help
Group Members)**

What Causes Hearing Voices?

There are many different levels as to which the question, “What causes hearing voices”, can be answered. For example, from the level of the voice hearer who recognises the voice, or from the level of scientists who want to know what kind of brain problem is responsible for the experience of hearing voices etc.

The most preferred level is through a combination of epidemiological (medical research into the incidence of illness and disease) and qualitative research into the experience of voice hearers themselves.

Epidemiological research (2005) has concluded – *Symptoms considered indicative of psychosis and schizophrenia, particularly hallucinations, are at least as strongly related to childhood abuse and neglect as many other mental health problems.*

Qualitative research has concluded – *That voices are expressing, by what they say and how they interact with the voice hearer, what has happened in the life of the voice hearer.*

From these two levels of research it appears to become clear that traumatic experiences play an important casual part in people developing voice-hearing experiences.

From the book – “**Living with Voices – 50 stories of Recovery**”, the following traumatic experiences are covered (in order of frequency)

1. Sexual Abuse (18 plus 3 combined with emotional and 3 combined with physical neglect)

Some people start hearing voices as soon as the abuse starts and experience the relationship between their voices and the sexual abuse from the beginning. Others start to hear a voice later, and recognise it as that of the abuser. With others, voice hearing starts much later, with some trigger reminding the person of the abuse.

Helen (a voice hearer) tells:

I suffered severe abuse throughout my childhood and have always known my voices to be related to this. I am very clear about the nature and origin of my voices. I see them as post-traumatic after-effects of the abuse; natural and normal in the circumstances.

2. Emotional neglect (11 plus 3 combined with sexual abuse)

The term “emotional neglect” is used for quite different experiences, but the consequences of these experiences are the same.

People who suffer emotional neglect experience difficulty in coping with emotions, because expressing emotion has been forbidden, or frowned upon, or even dangerous.

Ami (a voice hearer) tells:

In my family there was a message for living; “Keep your emotions to yourself. Cry only in bed. Behave at all times, be restrained”. I learnt to be still and be as quiet as a mouse.

3. Adolescent Problems (6)

Antje (a voice hearer) tells:

I was 17 when I started to hear three voices. I had just started living on my own. I went to a special science school where we concentrated on mathematics and physics. I had real difficulties with mathematics, I had never had that problem before. I had been sitting at my desk for three hours, not knowing where to start, getting very agitated, when I heard a very clear voice saying “Are you Stupid?”

4. High levels of stress (4)

Mieke (a voice hearer) tells:

I start to hear voices when I am in a situation that threatens my existence, like my divorce and, six years later, buying a house on my own. The voices express my emotional struggle with wanting to face my problem as well as wanting to fly away.

5. Being Bullied (2)

Johnny (a voice hearer) tells:

I had been extensively bullied at school due to dyslexia and a slight speech impediment. The typical themes for the voices are that I am stupid, ugly and worthless. The bullying seemed to be carried on by the voices, although I didn't connect the two things at first.

6. Physical Abuse (2 plus 3 combined with sexual abuse)

Daan (a voice hearer tells)

I thought I was bad because the voices called me all sorts of names. Later, I realised that the voices were related to the physical abuse, because they have the characteristics of those who abused me.

7. Not Clear (7)

Conclusion

Most voice hearers that have recovered are quite clear about the casual relationship between their voices and their traumatic experiences.

However, the voices express what has happened to the voice hearer in different ways: by their characteristics; by what they say - in metaphors, or directly; by the triggers that set them off and so on.

It is very important to explore the links between the voices, the trauma and the involved emotions that lie at the roots of the voice-hearing experience.

To learn to cope with these emotions is more relevant for the recovery process than learning to cope with the voices alone.

To get more control over the voices, however, opens the gateway to getting at the social-emotional problems that are at the roots.

Voices serve as a defence mechanism, avoiding confrontation with those problems and the emotions involved.

Coping with these problems and emotions is needed to lead a full life of one's own.

(Reference – The contents and quotes included in this document were extracted from the book: “Living with Voices – 50 Stories of Recovery,” by Romme, Escher, Dillon, Morris and Corstens)
