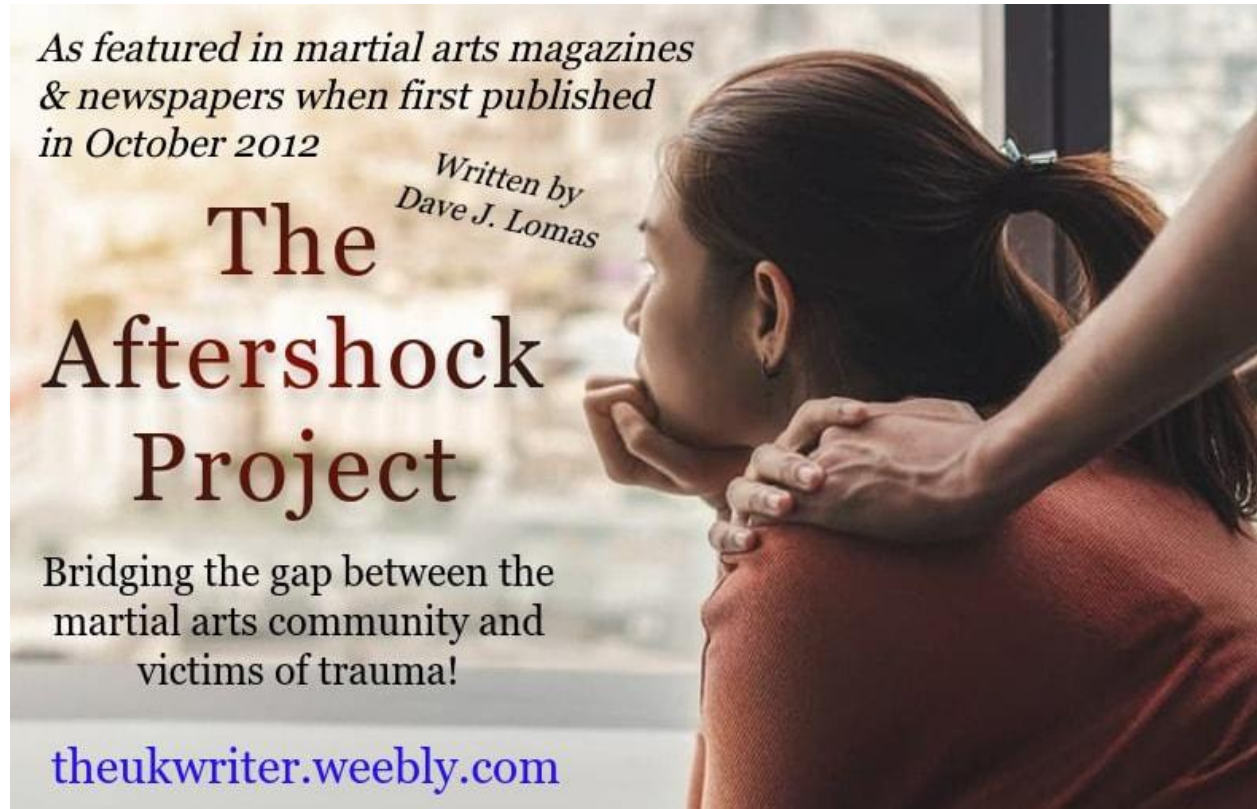


## The Aftershock Project

(Special Project Article)



**Originally** called The Aftershock Awareness Project, back in 2012, this information based special project was, and still is, aimed at those in the martial arts industry along with those who provide vital support to victims of criminal violence, rape and other forms of physical trauma.

Born from a need to bridge the gap between the world-wide martial arts community and the aftercare support services that deal with trauma victims of violent crime, rape and many other physical and emotional situations the Aftershock Awareness Project was created to provide such a link.

The following is aimed at educating the martial arts community worldwide of the need to provide not only information on prevention and physical training, in the form of self defense courses and martial art classes, but also the need to make students and teachers aware of the consequences to those who are victims of such events and how best to provide support to family members and the victims themselves.

Trauma is not just something a person will go through as a result of being violently attacked, it could also be due to any form of horrific event.

Many people each year will go through traumatic events around the world including someone dying within the family, an accident or as a result of war. Each of these things are very much a traumatic thing in their own right and the memories of such things will stay in the person's mind in just the same way for a long time to come.

Listening to someone explain how they were sadistically and repeatedly beaten and raped, (and not for the first time had I gone through this situation with someone), I yet again found myself feeling helpless to do anything.

My martial art training and teaching skills for the last 40 plus years had no true value whatsoever in a situation of this kind until I started to realize that the martial arts was, and still is, all about giving advice on avoidance, prevention, preparation for a fight, and of course, fighting techniques, but it never covered what to do after the fight was over.

Writing a short article on the subject of emotional aftershock called 'Fighting Aftershock', (which means how to fight the after-effects of emotional trauma), the idea of an awareness campaign came to mind and the Aftershock Awareness Project was born.

What to expect after a traumatic event or disaster .....

Disasters or traumatic events can affect all of us - they are dramatic and intense experiences that can cause major interruptions in the natural flow of life. Knowing the kind of feelings and reactions that may occur following such events can assist in putting feelings in perspective and can help you make the transition from victim to survivor.

The emotional effects of these events may show up immediately or may appear weeks or even months later. The signs and symptoms of emotional aftershock may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months and occasionally longer.

Sometimes, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance from a counselor may be necessary. This does not imply insanity or weakness, but rather, that the particular event was just too powerful for the person to manage alone.

Common Reactions to Stressful or Traumatic Situations .....

It is very common and quite normal to experience reactions after passing through a horrible event. Some reactions are emotional, some are physical and some are cognitive thought processes. The following are common emotional and cognitive reactions:

Anger - Self-pity - Disbelief - Preoccupation - Panic - Tearfulness - Stunned - Confusion - Fatigue - Nightmares - Remorse - Isolation - Memory problems - Intrusive thoughts or images - Hopelessness - Numbness - Inability to cope - Grief - Sadness - Guilt - Feeling overwhelmed - Irritability - Self-blame - Fear - Loneliness - Flashbacks of events - Relationship problems - Difficulty concentrating - Desire to avoid situations.

## Common Physical Reactions .....

Some people tend to express their reactions through physical symptoms including:

Headaches - Aches and pains - Overeating - Loss of appetite - Gastrointestinal disorders - Sleep disorders - Vomiting - Decreased performance levels. Increased ailments over the next 6-18 months, (e.g., colds, hypertension)

## Trauma and a Sense of Loss .....

People traumatized by events or disasters often experience a pervasive sense of loss.

Loss of feeling safe - Loss of friends - Loss of hope - Loss of personal power - Loss of identity/future - Loss of trust in others - Loss of home/belongings. Grief is a normal and natural response to loss and anyone can experience grief and loss.

Individual reactions to grief and loss can vary widely, and the person may experience different reactions to a sense of loss over time.

## Recovering from Trauma, Loss and Disasters .....

Experiencing and accepting the natural responses described above represents an important part of the recovery process. Try to remember you are having a normal reaction to an abnormal event!

Here are some additional tips for dealing with your reactions .....

Talk openly about your feelings and symptoms - Pay attention to a healthy diet - Engage in physical activity - Maintain contact with friends and support.

Share memories - Tell stories - Rehearse safety measures to be taken in the future - Meditate - Try deep breathing and other relaxation techniques - Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol - Maintain as normal a schedule as possible - Keep a journal - Do things that feel good to you - Don't make any big life changes.

### Family Members and Friends

Sometimes it is difficult to know what to do or say to somebody who has just survived a traumatic event. Supporting a person following such an event can be stressful for the helper.

In general, it is important to be available to the survivor and to let the person know that you care. Spending time with the traumatized person is also a basic but important way to help. Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.

Talking is the most healing medicine. Try to be patient if the person tells the same story over and over again; this is normal and can also be healing.

Here are some more suggestions for helping:

Listen carefully - Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, helping with the children - Give them some private time - Don't take their anger or other feelings personally - Don't minimize the loss - Avoid giving easy answers - Don't tell them that they are 'lucky' (that it could be worse, that they have another daughter, etc.), traumatized people do not feel consoled by these types of statements.

Be patient - Avoid judgemental statements - Avoid telling them how they feel - Help them find and utilize outside resource,(books, support groups, professionals, government aid, workshops, other friend)

In our quest to help the survivors, we must not forget that we cannot take care of others if we are not taking care of ourselves. You may need the opportunity to express your emotions and to turn to other friends or family members for support.

If problems persist or if you have questions about your reactions, when these or other symptoms persist, increase in number or degree of severity to the point of interfering with personal functioning and/or are subjectively distressing then professional counseling or joining a support group may be helpful.

If you are not sure whether you would benefit from additional assistance it is better to consult a mental health professional than to do nothing or to guess. Counseling can help you address and understand your feelings, help you identify normal reactions to crisis situations, and help you look at how your life and relationships have been impacted. It can also help you learn stress management techniques and sharpen your coping skills.

Support groups can help you feel less isolated since group members share similar experiences. Group members can often support and understand each other in special ways because of their common experiences. They share information about recovery and special ways of coping. Finding support in general can help you feel like a survivor rather than a victim.

Note: Never give or offer to give legal advice to a crime victim. In all situations seek a legal expert at all times.

Most, if not all, people who do martial arts often fail to understand that those who are the victims, or the losers, of a physical conflict may need more than just medical treatment as a result of being in a street fight, or after being attacked in a more prolonged way, and that being armed with the correct understanding of what to do with a trauma victim is vital if more harm than good can be avoided.

For example, what would you do if a female student came to you and told you that she had been raped? You may have 50 years experience in teaching the martial arts and have trained the police, army and security people, but what do you say to a female student who has been beaten and raped and is crying from the shock of it all?

Do you - Advise her what she did wrong and what to do next time? - tell her to see her Doctor? or give her a big hug? If you said yes to any of the above then you need to be aftershock aware far more than you realize.

Preparation - Action - Consequences'

The martial arts have always been based on two out of the main three factors - preparation and action but the third 'consequences' is totally neglected.

The martial arts are very much focused on prevention, which of course is better than cure, and you will find a remarkable amount of advice on how to avoid or defend against being attacked, plus of course instruction on all the various fighting methods, however this is of no practical value at all to those who have gone through such a traumatic event already and are feeling suicidal or are going through emotional hell.

Telling someone after they have been beaten or raped that they should have done various things to avoid or defend themselves at the time in fact would only make the trauma victim feel worse as they will feel additional guilt for not taking such actions at the time.

The martial arts community is excellent at giving advice on prevention, avoidance and how to prepare to fight someone, and when it comes to teaching fighting techniques the martial arts community is the best place to go, however - ask someone who teaches the fighting arts what practical advice they can give to a trauma victim who is lying in a hospital bed suffering from mental scars and all you will get is a blank look and their eyes blinking away with nothing to say.

Aftershock means the emotional after-effects of being in a traumatic physical conflict that can cover anything from domestic violence, a street fight, rape or even soldiers returning home from a war zone.

How often do we read, hear or see news items every single day of someone being raped, gang raped, beaten, sadistically tortured or a combination of all these things on a regular basis?



Although we come into contact with such events through the news media every single day, including seeing soldiers on the news returning home from war zones with limbs missing etc., such events have no true effect on our minds due to being desensitized to such things over a long period of time, however, if it was to happen to a loved one then this of course would have devastating and very long lasting effects.

The world of martial arts is all about being prepared for combat and how to use various fighting skills during a fight, but just like the soldier returning home from duty, or a rape victim, the after-effects of any physical conflict are more dangerous and long lasting to the mind than surviving the trauma itself.

The emotional aftershock of such a devastating situation is not dealt with by the martial arts community in general, only the physical aspects of combat in the main, therefore highlighting the need to be aware of such a devastating situation should be made far more aware to those that teach any of the fighting arts so that they can in turn highlight this specific aspect within training and class sessions.

Remember - To help a trauma victim who is suffering as a result of a criminal attack or violent rape you need to arm yourself with knowledge in just the same way as a martial artist needs to arm themselves with fighting techniques.

Unfortunately the general public and many, if not all, involved in the martial arts have no true understanding of what is really involved when it comes to providing care for a trauma sufferer within the family, or maybe a student, who has been involved in a serious attack.

People often think that such care is all about showing love and understanding, however, thinking that all you need is understanding and showing that you care on its own falls very short of what is truly involved and without being fully informed of what is needed the carer can often do more harm than good in the long term.

Aftershock is not only a devastating condition that the victim will go through but also for the people who are close to the victim in a personal way like a parent, partner or close family member.

Called 'Secondary Aftershock' the person who is told by a loved one, or close family member, the intimate details of a violent attack or rape will in most cases form their own picture of events in their mind, and in turn, will live those memories many times over and become a sufferer of 'Secondary Aftershock' themselves for a very long time to come. Therefore it is often wise to seek help yourself if you find this becomes a long term problem.

Rape is not about sex - it's about violence.

Many victims of rape, unlike straight-forward crime based violence, suffer additionally because they want to know why they were selected. The reason for this in the main is that they feel they were the cause of the appalling events in the first place for various reasons.

Rape is not about sex it's about a violent act of control by those who have a need to control an easy target and it is not the victim's fault. It is also worth noting that rape is not gender specific. Violent and sexual abuse against men and boys is often overlooked for various reasons but this also is more widespread than people realise.

Every single day thousands of people are getting killed in war zones around the world.

Most of them do not even know why the fighting started  
or why the killing goes on. But it does.

If more people found it possible to trust each other and if more people would stop killing others due to a conflict of ideas, beliefs and faiths then maybe we would not need to spend all our time in making it worse by learning how to kill. But we are 'human' and as such it will never end.

Maybe if more time was given in thought to those victims of violence and not thinking up new ways of killing someone then maybe we would not need an unsung army of carers, support workers and trauma nurses to pick up the pieces all day long?

It may come as a bit of a shock to you, BUT, not all martial art experts win a street fight, in fact some end up in hospital despite their best efforts to survive a street attack.

So before you carry on promoting your events or shouting about how great the martial arts are - just take a moment to think about those who have been traumatized by a good beating. Although their near fatal wounds may heal in time, their memories of such a devastating event are still on automatic playback in their minds every single day.

Maybe they were never trained in the martial arts, maybe it's just a regular guy in the street - but in any event they are all still victims of a condition called 'Aftershock'.

Maybe such a subject is of no interest to you whatsoever - but what if it was your wife, parent or family member that was going through such a traumatic ordeal?

Being enlightened or a master of Zen is of no true value whatsoever to a person in that situation, so if you think of yourself as a true martial artist, with high moral and ethical values and believe in the martial art code - then prove it by taking a few minutes of your time to find out what you can do for FREE to help others who are not so lucky.

How ironic that the gift of recall is what helps us to define who we are, to a degree, and that without the ability to remember past events it would leave us walking around aimlessly. But that very ability that helps us to remember joy is also a curse for those who have experienced the loss of a loved one, for example, or someone who has been through a war zone and lived to tell the tale.

Aftershock is all about those bad traumatic memories that often stay with people all of their lives - therefore is it the wounds that makes a victim of violent crime, or rape, want to commit suicide, or at the very least, they become mentally ill and wish to self harm themselves? - the answer to that of course is no, it's the memories of the trauma that remains within their head for the rest of their lives that makes them turn to drugs, booze and medication in the vain hope of forgetting what was done to them.

Maybe it's time the amount of focus that is placed on the law and prevention is shifted to the victims and their never-ending hell that they are going through for a change? Maybe if school education included what victims go through then maybe more people will walk away from crime in the first place after seeing such things at a younger age?

People will always deal with the effects of trauma in their own specific way. Some will recover over a very short period of time while others will fight the effects of their experience for many years to come.

Victims will often go through various stages of emotion that can range from sorrow to blind anger but some will find that humor is also a good way of dealing with the situation. Making someone smile can help at times.

Most, if not all, self defense scenarios' are based upon someone, (or several people), standing in front of you and moving forward to attack you in various ways. In some situations this could also involve being attacked from behind of course. However there are times when the victim is not only overpowered by total surprise but also beaten while being restrained or strapped down. In that situation, which could and often does also involve rape, the victim could be subject to a prolonged beating over a long period of time.

Being martial art trained, or not, being ready for anything all the time, and knowing what to do when under such a dramatic situation, is just not possible in some situations.

Knowing what to expect from a trauma victim and how to help and deal with it yourself is vital if you do not wish to do more harm than good.

Written by Dave J. Lomas

