

## **Toilet Phobia and Agoraphobia**

### ***Chat Room Session on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> June with Professor Karina Lovell***

*Karina Lovell: Professor of Mental Health in the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work at the University of Manchester. Her programme of research has focussed on alternative, accessible and innovative low intensity interventions for common mental health problems. Her main areas of work has been developing guided self help interventions for anxiety and depression, this work has resulted in published systematic reviews, pilot studies and randomised controlled studies. She has developed and tested a range of self help guides for anxiety, depression, OCD and agoraphobia.*

*A further key area is that of telephone delivered low intensity interventions, and studies (currently ongoing and published) include a systematic review, single case studies, cohort studies and randomised controlled trials. In partnership with a national user group a national telephone CBT service was established in 2005.*

*Clinically Karina is a trained and experienced Cognitive Behaviour therapist, and currently delivers low intensity interventions in both primary and secondary care and works as a volunteer therapist for the NPS.*

#### **What is Agoraphobia? How does this fit in with Toilet Phobia?**

Agoraphobia is an anxiety disorder that is characterised by an extreme fear of situations where escape may be impossible. The disorder may or may not include panic attacks. It literally translates from the greek “fear of the market place”. This may be unfamiliar places or public places and in extreme cases a sufferer can be confined to the home.

Toilet phobia links in with Agoraphobia in that people often fear that they are going to have a toilet accident way from their “safe place” and will only go out if they know where all the toilets are. This can be extremely restrictive in that avoidance and other restrictive coping behaviours occur.

“Loofree” echoed this and mentioned that going shopping alone requires no drinking before hand and at least 20 visits to the toilet before venturing out. “Loofree” also mentioned they know where very single toilet in the city is but unable to use them.

#### **Personal Experience**

Karina asked “Loofree” what are the thoughts you experience when you try and use a Toilet when out.

“Loofree” mentioned that they experience panic and the thoughts, “can’t” “can’t” “can’t” come from somewhere. They also mentioned they think it is to do with the feeling that they are doing something wrong and therefore experiencing the feelings of guilt and embarrassment.

Karina asked “Loofree” if it was the embarrassment of other people hearing you. The fear of being heard is a key symptom that a lot of people with Toilet Phobia experience. Another key symptom is the fear of the smell they may leave behind.

“Loofree” mentioned that noise is not involved and it is just being there that is. “Titch” agreed with this and mentioned that they have a difficulty away from home. They added that they can enter cubicle without a problem but can’t do anything when they get there.

Karina suggested this is a common problem with people not being able to go but is not the usual problem. Most importantly Karina mentioned that help is available.

### **How does therapy treat such a complex condition? Is the agoraphobia targeted and then a knock on effect occurs with Toilet Phobia?**

Karina suggested that Agoraphobia and Toilet Phobia go hand in hand and therefore if the Agoraphobia is addressed the Toilet Phobia is addressed and vice versa. Karina mentioned that the only exception to this is OCD where the fear is more generalised to other things and therefore the OCD needs to be addressed first.

### **How does therapy work?**

Karina suggests that a therapeutic approach would be best where they speak to someone to help them gradually build up going in public places i.e. first their own home with someone there and then slowly extend to outside. Karina mentioned that she has done this with a number of people, drinking enough before venturing out and then practicing going to the toilet in public following Karina's lead.

"Loofree" felt that a therapist setting an example would be very helpful. They mentioned that their therapist kept themselves at a distance.

### **What about CBT and CCBT?**

The approach Karina is talking about is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy involving Karina suggested this would be very helpful but as far as she knows there are no CCBT packages that directly address Toilet Phobia. "ypinkladt" mentioned that she has tried CBT and has helped a little, one thing she took away is that the mind is an extremely powerful thing and only herself can make herself better.

### **What about Clinical Hypnotherapy?**

"ypinkladt" mentioned that she has tried this once but it didn't work for them. Karina mentioned the evidence for hypnotherapy is not as strong as CBT but it no knows means mean that it does not work.

### **What other help is there, apart from therapy?**

#### **Rhodiola**



Ang a member of the chat room mentioned that she has been taking Rhodiola, a herbal supplement for stress and had a really positive effect, especially for her delicate stomach. This is a plant that grows in the cold regions of the world. It has been found effective for improving mood and alleviating depression. It has also been shown to have effects in improving physical and mental performance. Most importantly no side effects or interactions with other drugs have been reported. If anyone is interested in herbal remedies this may be one to try. I would however recommend you do speak to your doctor before starting any new supplement or medication.

## **Imodium**

Both Ang and “ypinkladt” mentioned they use Imodium as they both experience intense Toilet Phobia surrounding having an accident in public. Imodium or Loperamide works by slowing down the muscle contractions of the intestines and is used for acute diarrhoea and sometimes Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

Karina mentioned that one problem is people relying on Imodium and take them all the time. Taking a drug such as Imodium is by no means a long term solution for a condition such as Toilet Phobia, it is recommended as with any anxiety disorder that treatment is sought down the therapy route, which addresses the fear head on.

## **But how do I get over the fear?**

“ypinkladt” mentioned that this is all well and good but how do you get over the fear?

Karina mentioned that it is all about taking the risk, mentioning that she has had accidents and although it is not pleasant, it is also not the end of the world. Ang mentioned that of course her sane mind knows it is very very rare but the fear is still so great. Karina mentioned that if you ask most of the population then they have had similar experiences i.e. not making it or having to go somewhere other than the toilet.

## **Further sources of information**

Karina mentioned that she thinks the Toilet Phobia booklet and the DVD the NPS have produced are very good reading.

## **What do we do at Anxiety UK?**

As Karina mentioned one of the therapies that is recommended for specific phobias such as Toilet Phobia is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Through our nationwide network of trained therapists we are able to offer CBT both face to face and over the phone at much reduced rates. If you would like to find out more about the benefits of the society you can visit: <http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/membersservices.php>.

As many of you may already know we have specific funding to help with Toilet Phobia and due to this we offer a monthly specialist chat room with an emphasis on Toilet Phobia and related conditions. We also have a host of other online services including a forum with a specific section dedicated to Toilet Phobia sufferers. To find out more you can visit: <http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/members.php>.

I would strongly recommend you use all of the online service as they are an excellent means of support. Joining the mailing list will enable you to be kept informed about these services and be reminded of further chats and events.

If anyone would like any help or support don't hesitate to call (08444 775 774) or email Anxiety UK ([support@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:support@anxietyuk.org.uk)).

**Written By, Nicholas Todd**

*Online Services Co-ordinator*

moderator@anxietyuk.org.uk