

## **In your opinion, is trauma or the stress response an underlying cause of catatonia?**

### **Dr. Caroff:**

That's something that actually has not been discussed or studied as much as it probably ought to be. In some guidelines, they do list acute stress responses or trauma, things like that, as a possible cause, because we've looked at this.

There are studies in the literature of a series of patients with catatonia and what were the underlying conditions. Mostly it's psychiatric conditions like schizophrenia or mood disorders, and then there are medical disorders. And there's many for whom an underlying disorder can't be identified, but they've looked less at the context, the stress of the patient.

There are some studies that show some people had psychological trauma, psychological stress as a possible cause of catatonia. So I think that's something that needs to be studied more, frankly, as a cause, but some people may have just a predisposition to repeated episodes that present primarily as catatonia. This was studied over 100 years ago by Kahlbaum. You've probably heard his name. He thought that catatonia was a disorder of its own, that it wasn't related to anything else. And it was catatonia.

He may have had a point. As I said, in some patients we've seen who come into the hospital with catatonia over repeated periods of time, that seems to be the primary presentation of the disorder. And even DSM now — after Andy Francis, Max Fink and Mickey Taylor — has a category of catatonia that's undefined or not classified with anything else. It's like a grab bag for people who have catatonia and the underlying disorder has not been identified yet. But that's also a diagnosis that could be used for people for whom we don't yet know what caused it.

Now, some of those people may have had trauma or stress that caused it. But there is a group of people for whom we don't yet know what the cause of the catatonia was. It's an interesting problem.