

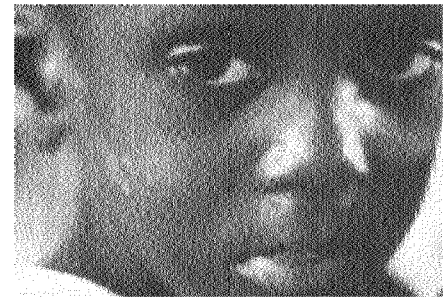
***Emotional:***

- Feeling overwhelmed and/or detached
- Hopelessness and/or helplessness
- Fear and/or avoidance of similar situations
- Irritability
- Anger and/or hostility
- Grief
- Questioning of one's religious values



***Behavioral:***

- Hyperarousal
- Social withdrawal
- Sleep disturbances
- Change in eating habits
- Loss of interest in previously pleasurable activities
- Substance use
- Absent-mindedness and being prone to accidents



Finally, exposure to a traumatic stressor may result in post-traumatic stress syndromes which are characterized by three clusters of signs and symptoms and which do not meet the diagnostic criteria for a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Below is a list of the three clusters of signs and symptoms.

***Re-experiencing:***

- Recurrent, intrusive and distressing recollections of the event
- Recurrent and distressing dreams about the event
- A sense of reliving the experience
- Illusions
- Hallucinations

- Dissociative flashback episodes
- Intense physiological and psychological distress on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble the traumatic event in any way

### *Hyperarousal:*

- Restlessness
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Racing thoughts
- Inability to concentrate
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response



### *Avoidance:*

- Avoidance of thoughts, feelings or conversations associated with the trauma
- Avoidance of activities, places or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
- Feelings of detachment or estrangement from others—social withdrawal
- Restricted range of feelings—numbing
- Sense of a foreshortened future

If unmanaged, approximately 22% of persons who experience critical incident stress will still be symptomatic for 6 - 12 months after the event and approximately 4% will be at risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## What are some of the possible psychological and behavioral syndromes associated with traumatic events?

- Denial and/or indifference
- Resistance to evacuation
- Excessive substance use
- Despair and “paralysis”
- Panic
- Survival guilt
- Post-incident dependence



## What are some of the possible psychiatric disorders which may be associated with exposure to a traumatic event?

- Acute stress disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)
- Panic disorder
- Adjustment disorders
- Major depression
- Substance-related disorders
- Brief psychotic disorder
- Somatoform disorders
- Dissociative disorders
- Personality disorders



## What is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a formally recognized psychiatric disorder which may result from exposure to a traumatic event, where a traumatic event is any event which would be markedly distressing to almost anyone and which often produces intense fear, terror or helplessness (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). *However, recent research in this field has placed greater emphasis on a person's subjective response to the trauma than on the severity of the trauma itself.*

The lifetime prevalence of PTSD is 1%-3% in the general population, 15%-20% in emergency response personnel and 26%-30% in Vietnam War Veterans.

Despite these high figures, it is still believed that the prevalence of PTSD is significantly under-reported. With respect to emergency response personnel it is even further under-reported for the following reasons:

1. The destruction of the personal illusion of invulnerability,
2. The fear of alienation by peers, and
3. The fear that concerns will be raised about the possibility of a previously undiagnosed or undisclosed weakness.

J.L. Herman (1992) has described a variant of PTSD referred to as "*Complex*" PTSD which may result from chronic traumatization or repeated bouts of acute traumatization.

PTSD is characterized by impaired functioning and three clusters of symptoms that follow a psychologically distressing event which is considered outside of the range of ordinary human experience:

1. Re-experiencing,
2. Hyperarousal, and
3. Avoidance.

### **What factors increase one's vulnerability to developing post-traumatic stress disorder?**

1. Exposure to severe injury or abuse;
2. Associated feelings of intense fear, horror or helplessness;
3. Socioeconomic background;
4. Background levels of stress;
5. Genetic - constitutional vulnerability;
6. Dysfunctional personality traits, cognitions or behaviors;
7. Perception of an external locus of control;
8. A history of childhood trauma;
9. Inadequate social support or family dysfunction;
10. Associated fatigue, starvation, dehydration or extremes of temperature;
11. Exposure to various substances, e.g., recent excessive alcohol use;