

Psychological Reactions to Terrorist Attacks: Findings from the National Study of Americans' Reactions to September 11

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The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and commercial civilian aircraft on September 11, 2001, represent an unprecedented exposure to trauma in the United States. Research was needed to determine the psychological symptom levels of people in the United States following the events of September 11 as well as the association between post-attack symptoms and a variety of indices of exposure to the events. Such indices included physical proximity to the crash sites, personally witnessing the crashes/collapses or evidence of the building collapses, involvement of family members in the events of September 11, and indirect exposure via television viewing.

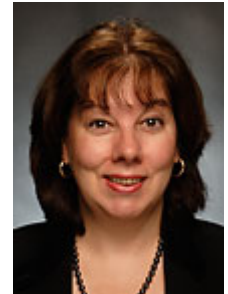
The National Study of Americans' Reactions to September 11 (NSARS), a Web-based descriptive epidemiological study based on a national cross-sectional sample of adults, collected data from 2,273 adults to estimate prevalence of symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress disorder (PTSD) and clinically significant, nonspecific psychological distress in the second month after the attacks occurred. The NSARS sample was drawn from the Knowledge Networks Web-enabled panel, a probability-based standing research panel that is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The sample included an oversample in both the New York, NY, and Washington, DC, metropolitan areas, an oversample of other major metropolitan areas that were not attacked, and a sample that represented the rest of the country. Symptoms were assessed using screening instruments whose relationship to clinical diagnosis is well documented.

This paper provides information about how a trauma of this magnitude affected Americans one to two months following the events of September 11. Data from this study indicate that the prevalence of probable PTSD was associated with direct exposure to the terrorist attacks among adults, and the prevalence in the New York City metropolitan area was substantially higher than elsewhere in the country. However, overall distress levels in the country were within normal ranges.

Link: <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/288/5/581>



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