An increasing amount of research is now taking place regarding PTSD epidemiology, but many questions still remain unanswered.

The only British study to date is related to disaster survivors, as highlighted by the Disasters Working Party Report commissioned by the Home Office in 1991. Results of this study showed that following a major disaster:

- 40-70% experience distress in the first month
- 20-40% experience distress after the first year
- 15-20% experience chronic levels of anxiety which remain high for longer than 2 years

(Raphael, 1986, cited HMSO, 1991)

Other studies, mainly conducted in the USA, have looked at the prevalence of PTSD according to the type of traumatic event, and have produced the following figures:

- Shipwreck survivors: 75%
- Bomb survivors: 50%
- Hijack survivors: 37%
- Burn injuries: 30-40%
- Combat veterans: 22-50%
- Sexual assault: 24%
- Assault: 23%
- Rape survivors: 21%
- Experience of sudden unexpected death of a loved one: 14%
- Childs life threatening illness: 10%

Risk factors identified included:

- Childhood trauma (sexual assault, parental split before the age of 10)
- Adverse life events prior to trauma
- Prior psychological disorder
- Family history of psychiatric illness


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