

Sept. 11 terrorism continues to impact mental health of Americans

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Long after Sept. 11, 2001, Americans' terrorism-related thoughts and fears are associated with increased depression, anxiety, hostility, posttraumatic stress and drinking, University of Illinois at Chicago researchers have found.

UIC researchers examined the extent to which the strength of people's post-Sept. 11 beliefs and fears, as assessed in 2003, predicted a range of psychological distress and alcohol abuse in 2005. Data were derived from a mail survey, which began before Sept. 11 and continued in 2005.

The study, led by Judith Richman, professor of epidemiology in psychiatry, is published in the February issue of the *Journal of the American Public Health Association*.

Richman and her colleagues measured the effect of larger, macro-level sociological stressors -- rather than personal or micro-level events, such as a death in the family or financial difficulties -- on mental health.

The terrorist events of Sept. 11 signaled a significant change in the socio-political outlook of many Americans and in their feelings of safety and well-being.

Richman and others have shown that the events of Sept. 11 have been associated with feelings of distress and anxiety, and these feelings have led to problematic drinking. However, previous research focused on distress at the time of the traumatic event, and predictions about future

negative behaviors were hard to assess.

In the new study, 30 percent of participants reported feeling very or extremely more pessimistic about world peace, and 27.6 percent reported they had less faith in the government's ability to protect them.

"Our research showed that, four years after 9/11, terrorism fears and beliefs predicted distress and escape motives for drinking similarly in both men and women, with only men showing an increase in deleterious drinking levels," Richman said. She also indicated that macro socio-political events such as acts of terrorism and large-scale disasters and their effects on distress levels should be considered in future research.

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago

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