

Terrorist attacks provoke surge in alcohol and drug use

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Nearly one in 12 people exposed to terrorism report increased use and misuse of alcohol, according to researchers at Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and the University of Michigan. In a study published in the June issue of the journal *Addiction*, investigators combined data from 31 studies conducted in the aftermath of such incidents as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Oklahoma City Bombings of 1995, and the Intifada uprisings in Israel.

The researchers used this data to look at the prevalence of addictive behavior after terrorist incidents and to assess the likelihood of an increase of [addictive behavior](#) in the general population following a terrorist attack.

Initial results indicated that nearly 10% of the general population surveyed in those settings reported more or problematic [alcohol consumption](#). After adjusting for the type of terrorist attack, the type of population surveyed (survivors, responders, or the general population), and the time following the incident when the survey was conducted, the estimate of the isolated effect of terrorism dropped to 7.3%. However, by using certain research methodologies, investigators were able to estimate that there was a one-in-four chance that the rate could be double that figure. The study found similar reported rates of increased drug and cigarette use.

Most of the studies the authors analyzed were conducted in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (77%), looked at alcohol

use and misuse as an endpoint (68%), and were based on general population estimates (55%). Although not statistically significant, reports of increased substance use and misuse declined over time and the effects were stronger for studies that looked at survivors and first responders than they were for general population samples. The authors note their results are consistent with research that indicates persons who experience trauma may use substances to cope with stress and self-medicate for anxiety-related symptoms.

Investigators caution that there was much variability in their findings, but according to

Charles DiMaggio, PhD, assistant clinical professor of Epidemiology at the Mailman School of Public Health and lead author, "These kinds of numbers indicate the potentially pervasive behavioral health effects of man-made disasters like terrorism. We hope our results can help direct interventions following terrorist incidents."

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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