

90 percent of firefighters exhibit symptoms of PTSD: researchers

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A new study on the prevalence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among firefighters in Israel indicates that approximately 90 percent show some form of full or partial symptoms.

According to the study by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev's Dr. Marc Lougassi, a firefighter himself, 24 percent of active firefighters in Israel suffer from full PTSD, 67 percent display partial PTSD while only nine percent showed no symptoms.

PTSD can occur after exposure to serious injury to oneself or another, or another's death and then result in recurring [stress symptoms](#) such as nightmares, trouble sleeping and other difficulties for over a month.

According to Dr. Lougassi, "Professional firefighters are frequently exposed to [extreme stress](#) during their work in emergency situations. In addition to the physical challenges of firefighting, they must evacuate burned and injured victims or bodies. Their involvement in traumatic events exposes them not only to the pressures stemming from the traumatic event itself, but also to post-traumatic [emotional expressions](#) that result in secondary traumatization."

"As far as Israeli firefighters are concerned, there has been no documented evidence of PTSD prevalence, despite the fact that they are exposed to additional traumas such as war and terror strikes," says Lougassi about the first of its kind study.

Approximately 342 active firefighters were recruited for this study, from all age groups, marital statuses (single, married, divorced), educational backgrounds, seniority levels (over two years), roles (firefighter, crew leader, officer, service commander, etc.). Firefighters with a psychiatric background, head injuries ([loss of consciousness](#) and neurological disturbances), in psychiatric and/or [psychological treatment](#), with [chronic diseases](#) and those taking medications on a regular basis were excluded from the sample.

An additional 42 firefighters from flight firefighting services at Ben-Gurion Airport constituted the control group, since firefighters are not exposed to similar events. Only five percent of the control group showed signs of PTSD.

"These results support the hypothesis that increased exposure to recurring traumatizing events is a significant factor contributing to PTSD development," according to Lougassi.

"The findings of this study can help researchers and the Israeli Firefighting Service improve the firefighters' abilities to cope with extended exposure to traumatizing events through professional intervention programs," he suggests.

"Moreover, these results can help the Israeli Firefighting Services develop appropriate screening tools to be used during the recruiting process of new firefighters, in order to assure their future psychological safety."

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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