

We need more awareness about events that trigger PTSD

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Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is more likely to be recognised in those suffering military combat trauma than in rape and accident victims, according to new research.

Carried out by Dr Ian Tharp, Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich, the study was led by Chris Merritt, a Greenwich psychology graduate who is currently studying for a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology at King's College London.

During the research, nearly 3,000 participants were shown a description of an individual experiencing identical PTSD symptoms, such as flashbacks, in relation to either military combat, a serious industrial accident or sexual assault, in particular rape.

In comparison to those shown the military scenario, participants were much less likely to recognise the symptoms as PTSD, or even consider them a [mental health problem](#), when associated with either an [industrial accident](#) or serious sexual assault.

Dr Tharp says: "The association between PTSD and military combat experience is frequently portrayed in film and television, and the current research supports the pervasive 'traumatised veteran' stereotype.

"However, PTSD can arise from a variety of traumatic experiences, including road traffic accidents, physical or [sexual assault](#), and natural disasters. Across the wider population, these non-military traumas are

much more common.

"Furthermore, the likelihood of experiencing and subsequently developing PTSD following these type of events can be much greater than that for military combat."

Dr Tharp concludes: "The implications are that many people who develop PTSD following non-military combat traumas – particularly rape – are less likely to have it recognised by those around them, and are also less likely to seek help for their difficulties."

The study, carried out alongside a third researcher, Professor Adrian Furnham of University College London, was published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

Chris Merritt adds: "The results show that greater awareness of the key symptoms of trauma is needed within the community in order to identify possible cases of PTSD. This enhanced understanding would also help support services, such as charities, guide individuals towards professional treatments."

More information: Christopher J. Merritt, Ian J. Tharp, Adrian Furnham, "Trauma type affects recognition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among online respondents in the UK and Ireland," *Journal of Affective Disorders*, Volume 164, 1 August 2014, Pages 123-129, ISSN 0165-0327, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.04.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2014.04.013).

Provided by University of Greenwich

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