

# The Psychological Sequelae of Remote Exposure to the September 11th Terrorist Attack in Canadians With and Without Panic

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## INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Psychological implications of remote exposure to trauma, such as those associated with the events of 9-11, have not received much attention within the empirical literature. Further, knowledge regarding the impact that remote exposure to trauma has on populations with existing psychological impairment (e.g., anxiety disorders, depression) is limited.
- ▶ The purpose of this investigation was to examine the psychological impact of remote exposure to events associated with 9-11 and assess what differences, if any, existed between individuals with probable Panic Disorder (PD) and those without.

## METHOD

- ▶ Participants were 122 residents (63 females, mean age = 37.8; SD = 15.3; 61 % (n = 75) with post secondary education; 73% (n = 89) living with spouse or family) of the capital city of the prairie province of Saskatchewan, Canada. They were contacted by telephone in April 2002 and administered a battery of questionnaires by telephone (see Table 1 for questionnaires). The Brief Screen for Panic Disorder (BSPD; Apfeldorf et al., 1994) was used to classify participants into probable PD and non-PD groups.
- ▶ All questionnaires were completed 7 to 8 months post 9-11.

## RESULTS

- ▶ The proportion of all participants reporting definite avoidance (i.e., a score of 4 or more on the FQ-911) was 15%, 4%, 29%, 25%, 42%, 27%, and 18%, for items 1 through 7 (see column 1 of Table 2).
- ▶ Approximately 8% (n = 10) reported symptoms consistent with probable PD. Participants in the probable PD group had significantly higher scores on measures of PTSD, depression, phobic avoidance, and fear of illness/injuries (see Table 1).
- ▶ Individuals with probable PD scored higher than those without on 9 of 17 PTSD symptoms and scored significantly higher on FQ 911 items assessing avoidance of flying, major urban centers, and tall buildings (see Table 2).

## DISCUSSION

- ▶ The results suggest (1) remote viewing of traumatic events can have a significant and lingering impact on psychological well-being and behaviour, and (2) these effects are most pronounced in those with PD.
- ▶ It is possible that heightened anxiety sensitivity (AS) in people with PD (see Taylor, 2000), may have been exacerbated in this case by external threats to their well-being (i.e., future acts of terror). This would imply that, for those with PD, treatments targeting AS should also be effective in alleviating distress and avoidance behaviour associated with traumata (regardless of the source of exposure).
- ▶ Since we did not establish participant's psychological status pre-9-11, those classified with probable PD may have developed their panic symptoms after 9-11 as opposed to before.
- ▶ Further research is needed to clearly delineate the nature and extent of psychological distress, resulting from remote exposure to large-scale traumatic events, in those with and without preexisting anxiety disorders.

Table 1. Depression and fear in probable PD and nonPD groups.

Measures	PD	NonPD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
CESD	18.50 (9.41)	13.38(4.90)	8.31	0.005
ISI	24.00 (8.73)	15.89(8.69)	7.98	0.006
FQ	38.10 (17.16)	34.11 (15.99)	0.56	0.454
Agoraphobia	8.70(7.09)	7.37(6.79)	0.35	0.555
Social phobia	12.85(6.85)	11.70(4.57)	0.29	0.606
Blood and injury phobia	17.70(11.48)	13.90(7.45)	2.16	0.144
FQ-911	23.40(11.18)	10.35(10.71)	16.16	0.000
PCL-C	26.10 (10.88)	20.34(5.01)	9.46	0.003

Note: Standard deviations appear in parentheses; CESD = Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; ISI = Injury/Illness Sensitivity Index; FQ = Fear Questionnaire; PCL-C = PTSD Checklist Civilian Version.

Table 2. Item responses of the Fear Questionnaire 911 (FQ 911) for probable PD and nonPD groups.

Item	PD	NonPD	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
White powders	3.70 (3.30)	1.71 (2.23)	0.452	0.503
Mail in standard forms	5.10 (3.04)	1.21 (1.95)	0.052	0.820
Flying	0.70 (1.06)	0.97 (1.62)	8.901	0.003
Flying in Canada	1.10 (2.18)	1.45 (1.60)	14.519	0.000
Flying in the USA	1.50 (2.51)	1.21 (1.50)	4.900	0.029
Going to a major urban centre	2.30 (2.58)	1.71 (1.93)	6.522	0.012
Tall buildings	0.90 (1.91)	0.54 (1.35)	33.076	0.000