

# Who Gets PTSD?<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone develops PTSD, even when exposed to the most horrific traumas. There are several variables that predict who gets PTSD following exposure to a traumatic event and who does not. The following variables have been shown to predict the development of PTSD following motor vehicle accidents.<sup>2</sup> Most of these variables also predict PTSD following other types of trauma.

- **Female Gender** – Women are more likely to develop PTSD than are men.
- **Previous Trauma Exposure** - Individuals who have previously been exposed to any of a wide variety of stressors (MVA, death of loved one, financial crisis, childhood abuse, assault, life-threatening exposure to natural disasters) are subsequently at greater risk for developing PTSD following a second trauma.
- **Previous History of Mental Health Problems** – Previous mental health problems, particularly previous depression, predicts PTSD from a subsequent MVA
- **Dissociative Reactions** - Dissociative reactions (e.g., derealization, depersonalization) soon after a trauma predict later PTSD.
- **Coping Style, Attitudes, and Beliefs** - The extent to which the MVA survivor attributes responsibility for the traumatic event to another party predicts PTSD. Individuals who use avoidant methods of coping with stress (e.g., distraction, thought suppression) are also more likely to develop PTSD. Negative interpretations of intrusive thoughts about the trauma or related events (e.g., “I am permanently changed for the worse”, “This means I am not a worthy or competent person” predict the development of PTSD. Rumination about the trauma or its consequences (financial or social losses) predicts PTSD. Finally, angry thoughts about the trauma predict PTSD.
- **Recovery from Physical Injuries** - Chronicity of physical injuries and related pain predicts PTSD.
- **Financial Stressors** - Severity of financial stressors post-MVA predicts PTSD status following MVAs.
- **Litigation or Compensation Status** - Some studies suggest that litigation/compensation status is related to PTSD symptom severity. However, at this time only a small number of studies have investigated this relationship carefully. As well, compensation-seeking MVA-PTSD cases appear to show symptomatic improvement despite being in litigation.

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<sup>2</sup> A detailed discussion of this research can be found in Douglas, K.S. & Koch, W.J. (June, 2000). *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder arising from motor vehicle accidents: A critical review of predictive factors*. Working Paper for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia.