



International Society
for Traumatic Stress Studies

111 Deer Lake Road, Suite 100
Deerfield, Illinois 60015 USA
Tel +1-847-480-9028
Fax +1-847-480-9282
istss@istss.org
www.istss.org

Media Contact:

Heather Fineman
hfineman@istss.org
1-847-480-9028, ext. 255

Psychological Effects of Marathon Bombing on Boston-Area Veterans with PTSD

DEERFIELD, Ill. — November 6, 2013 — Health care providers should be prepared to offer services not only to those directly impacted by a traumatic event but also to those for whom such an event triggers reminders of a traumatic event experienced in the past, according to a study of 71 Boston-area veterans with a history of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) before and after the Boston marathon bombing.

The study, conducted by researchers at the National Center for PTSD and VA Boston Healthcare System in Boston and the Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM), showed that similarities between aspects of the marathon bombing and the participants' own experiences in the war zone may reactivate trauma memories and exacerbate symptoms of PTSD on an individual level, a study showed. The study was pre-published online in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress* (December 2013, 26, pages 1-5; doi: 10.1002/jts.21865), the journal of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies.

"The effects felt by the veterans were likely due to thematic similarities between the marathon explosions and the veterans' own traumatic combat experiences, especially for those deployed to recent conflicts characterized by attacks involving improvised explosive devices," said Mark Miller, PhD, associate professor at BUSM and a clinical research psychologist in the National Center for PTSD at VA Boston Healthcare System, who is the study's principal investigator.

Examination of change in PTSD symptom severity from a pre-bombing assessment an average of two months earlier to a telephone interview follow-up one week after the marathon bombing suspect's arrest, showed no significant change in symptoms as a group. However, individual assessments reported participants feeling personally affected by the bombings and/or the manhunt that followed, even if they were not in the vicinity when the bombing occurred. The majority of them reported that the bombing reminded them of their own traumas and/or caused other emotional distress.

Based on the post-event assessment, participants were categorized one of four ways: 1) directly affected by bombing (i.e. personally in the vicinity); 2) close friend or relative was in vicinity of bombing; 3) bombing reminiscent of own trauma; or 4) experienced emotional distress related to bombing.



International Society
for Traumatic Stress Studies

111 Deer Lake Road, Suite 100
Deerfield, Illinois 60015 USA
Tel +1-847-480-9028
Fax +1-847-480-9282
istss@istss.org
www.istss.org

Participants in the last category (those that were not personally impacted by the event) reported higher severity of change in PTSD symptoms.

Findings of this study raise awareness of the potential impact of terror attacks, mass shootings, and other manmade or natural catastrophes on the well-being of individuals with histories of trauma and/or pre-existing PTSD. However, health care providers should recognize that there is considerable variability in how these same individuals respond, and that many at-risk individuals show remarkable resilience when confronted with a new traumatic event.

About the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)

The ISTSS is an international, interdisciplinary professional organization that promotes advancement and exchange of knowledge about traumatic stress including understanding the scope and consequences of traumatic exposure; preventing traumatic events and ameliorating their consequences; and advocating for the field of traumatic stress. For more information, visit www.istss.org.

###