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## Review

# Which factors influence the development of post-traumatic stress disorder in patients with burn injuries? A systematic review of the literature



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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This article aims to discover which variables influence the development of post-traumatic stress disorder in patients with burn injuries. It will also consider whether it is possible to predict which burns patients will develop PTSD.

**Background:** Post-traumatic stress disorder is an important psychopathology for burned patients as it can affect both physical outcomes and quality of life for those affected. Research states that PTSD may be identified in up to 30% of burns patients, making it relatively common.

**Methods:** A systematic review of the literature was carried out using four databases. Eleven articles were identified from these searches, and were then analysed thematically to draw out common ideas.

**Results:** Gender, extraversion and neuroticism, attribution of blame, capacity for forgiveness, the event as a disaster or non-disaster, alcohol consumption and peri-traumatic emotional response were all found to influence burns patients' risk of developing PTSD.

**Conclusion:** While it is possible to identify the factors that put burns patients at greater risk of developing PTSD, it is not possible to accurately predict who will go on to develop PTSD due to the interplay between variables and individual differences. Focus should instead be on screening for PTSD and timely recognition of intrusive symptoms.

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## 1. Introduction

This article is a systematic review of the literature which aims to understand the variables that influence the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in burns patients.

Burn injuries affect a large number of people in the UK, although a relatively small percentage of these require treatment at a specialist burns unit. A burn wound can affect every organ in the body and therefore may have severe consequences for badly burned patients. With the advancement of burn care through research and scientific discovery, severely burned patients are now much more likely to survive their injuries. However, with better physical outcomes, it is now recognised that burn injuries can be associated with poor psychological adjustment, in particular PTSD. This disorder has been shown to affect 8–30% of burned patients, and requires extensive psychological therapy to resolve. The Standards and Strategy for Burn Care (2001) recommend all burns patients should be screened for psychological distress, and the NICE [1]. NICE guidelines (2005) for PTSD suggest cognitive behavioural therapy as the first line treatment for PTSD.

However, what is not known why some patients go on to develop PTSD and others do not, even though they have

experienced the same traumatic event. Furthermore, it is not known whether it is possible to accurately predict which patients will develop PTSD. This systematic review of the literature will attempt to address these points.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Aims

1. To identify literature highlighting the risk factors for burns patients developing post-traumatic stress disorder.
2. To critique the literature using a critical appraisal tool, testing for validity and reliability.
3. To identify new insights from re-analysing existing empirical evidence [2].
4. To identify implications for practice and policy making, as well as suggest areas for further research.

### 2.2. Literature review

A literature review has been chosen as the research methodology for this project as there is existing research available in this topic area which is readily accessible.

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