How do personal characteristics impact on risk for PTSD?

Personal characteristics, such as age, can influence one’s degree of risk for developing PTSD. How such personal characteristics may affect the development of PTSD would be influenced by other personal characteristics as well as differences in the trauma experience itself.

What is the evidence for effects of age on risk for PTSD?

Moderate to high quality evidence found small associations between younger age and more PTSD symptoms in women following childbirth, and in professionals indirectly exposed to trauma through their therapeutic work with trauma victims.

Moderate quality evidence found small associations between older age and more PTSD symptoms following burn injuries, and following earthquakes. There was a medium-sized effect of more PTSD symptoms in older adults (>60-65 years) than younger adults (<60 years) following exposure to any natural disaster. However, there was also a medium-sized effect of less severe PTSD symptoms in older adults following exposure to any man-made disaster. Review authors suggest the disparity in findings between natural and human-induced disasters may be explained by older adults being less likely to receive advanced warnings or to evacuate during a natural disaster, and therefore may experience greater disruption or perceived loss, while previous experiences may better prepare older people to cope with man-made disasters.

There were no effects of age on risk of PTSD after a fall in elderly people (age 65 to 90 compared to over 90 years), following a traumatic brain injury at any age, and in combat-exposed military personnel and veterans.

For more information see the technical table