

# Behind the Curtain: The Prevalence and Impact of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Critical Care Nursing

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## Background



Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that afflicts those who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event<sup>1</sup>

Symptoms include<sup>1</sup>:

- Intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience
- Flashbacks or nightmares
- Intense feelings of sadness, fear, or anger
- Detachment or estrangement from others
- Situational avoidance to traumatic triggers

## PTSD

Rate of Occurrence<sup>5</sup>:



8% - 10%

General Public



14%

General Care Nurses



20% - 33%

Critical Care Nurses

Job-Specific Contributing Factors:

- Workplace bullying<sup>3</sup>
- Awareness of violent acts against children<sup>2</sup>
- Exposure to indirect and/or direct traumatic situations while caring for vulnerable patient populations<sup>6</sup>
- Poor relationships with coworkers and supervisors<sup>2</sup>
- Repeated exposure to patients and families who are experiencing traumatic events<sup>6</sup>

## Why This Matters

- PTSD has been shown to be correlated with early telomere erosion which leads to accelerated cellular aging<sup>4</sup>
- PTSD can have a negative impact on a person's quality of life and job performance<sup>5</sup>
- PTSD can lead to burnout syndrome and high turnover rates in nursing<sup>5</sup>
- Nurses who develop PTSD and burnout syndrome reportedly work 11.6 years less on average than those who do not report symptoms of PTSD and burnout<sup>5</sup>

## Objective

Critical care nurses are often subjected to high levels of stress, traumatic events, and repeated exposure to stressors.

The purpose of this literature review was to gain a deeper understanding of the prevalence and implications of posttraumatic stress disorder in the critical care nurse population.

## Discussion

Due to the increased rate of probability for the development of PTSD in critical care nursing, it is suggested that a larger comprehensive study be conducted to gather a broader analysis of the psychological implications traumatic stress has on critical care nurses in the United States. More must be done to prevent the incidence of PTSD among critical care nurses.