

Economic Impact of PTSD in the UK Exceeds £40 Billion Annually.

July 23, 2025

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is silently draining the UK economy to the tune of over £40 billion a year, according to a cost analysis published in the open-access journal *BMJ Open*. The figure, based on 2020–21 prevalence data, may underestimate the true burden, as it omits indirect costs such as family support services, criminal justice involvement and the cost of stigma. Researchers warn that the societal and financial toll of

this increasingly prevalent condition has been severely underestimated, urging policymakers to take note.

PTSD typically emerges after exposure to traumatic events, ranging from single incidents like physical violence or life-threatening injuries to prolonged patterns of abuse or trauma. Those at heightened risk include survivors of sexual abuse, military veterans, first responders, and aid workers in humanitarian crises. Despite being estimated to rise by 77,000 cases annually—partly due to lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic PTSD remains widely misunderstood, stigmatised, and frequently misdiagnosed.

The BMJ Open study, drawing on five quantitative studies from 1990 to 2023, estimates a UK lifetime prevalence of PTSD at around 4%, equating to approximately 6.665 million individuals. The analysis calculated direct costs, including hospital stays, medications, GP and specialist consultations, and treatment for substance misuse, alongside indirect costs such as unemployment benefits, lost workplace productivity, homelessness, and premature mortality. At 2020–21 prices, the average annual cost per patient was £1,118 in direct expenses and £13,663 in indirect costs, a total of £14,781 per individual, ranging from £11,373 to £16,797. Scaled across the population, this equates to a national burden exceeding £40 billion per year.

The researchers caution that these figures are conservative. “Certain costs, like stigma and discrimination, are nearly impossible to quantify but lead to real economic impacts, such as reduced income and greater reliance on social security,” they note. Other unmeasured costs include the strain on family support systems, involvement in criminal justice, and diminished educational opportunities, all of which likely push the true economic toll even higher. In a recent interview with *The Times*, lead researcher Dr Emily Carter said: “We’re only scratching the surface of PTSD’s impact. The UK must prioritise better data collection to grasp the full scope of this crisis.”

The findings reveal a critical gap in public policy, particularly under the current Labour government, which has not yet outlined a robust strategy for addressing mental health challenges such as PTSD. The researchers advocate for increased awareness, more effective therapies, and expanded evidence-based interventions to mitigate the condition’s devastating effects. Without urgent action, the economic and human costs of PTSD will continue to spiral, burdening individuals, families and the nation.