

Stress disorder 'is fashionable part of victim culture'

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POST traumatic stress disorder has become a "fashionable diagnosis" that is far too liberally used, says a trauma expert who treated victims of the King's Cross Tube fire.

Dr James Thompson, a trauma psychologist, made the comments on BBC's *Panorama* programme investigating the growing army of sufferers.

The programme claims that the NHS now treats an estimated 220,000 people a year suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder, a diagnosis once reserved for those returning from war zones.

The disorder is adding to the multi-billion-pound personal accident industry business, it said.

Those being diagnosed include people who have had a minor traffic accident, bullying in the workplace, even in the schoolyard.

In the programme, titled *The Trauma Industry*, Dr Thompson suggested it was part of the growing "victim culture".

"It has become a fashionable diagnosis because it has the key feature that is about what the world did to you," he told

the programme. "And that is always attractive to all of us. Now you can teach yourself PTSD on the internet within five minutes."

Soldiers, policemen, ambulance workers and firemen are among those most likely to end up suffering from the disorder, along with members of the public who are attacked, involved in a car crash or affected by a tragedy.

Symptoms of the disorder may emerge months or even years after a traumatic experience, and victims may find themselves suffering from flashbacks and nightmares, disturbed sleep, aggressive behaviour, an inability to concentrate and a tendency to panic easily.

After the 1987 King's Cross Tube fire, in which 31 people died, mental health professionals drew up a list of 670 people who were at risk from PTSD, of whom only 100 had been directly involved. The rest were emergency staff and railway officials who had witnessed horrific scenes in the burning station as well as relatives of those who died.

Panorama: The Trauma Industry is broadcast on BBC One tonight at 8.30pm.

