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## Post 9/11 fears out of sync with reality

Americans wildly overestimated the risk of terrorism after the shock of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, according to a nationwide "emotion experiment."

In surveys conducted after the attacks, people estimated there was a 20 per cent chance they would be directly affected by a terrorist attack in the next year and said the "average American" faces a 48 per cent risk, said researchers examining the links between emotions, policy and reality.

"There was an overwhelming overestimation of risk," said **Jennifer Lerner**, an assistant professor of social and decision sciences at Carnegie Mellon University. For even the 20 per cent estimate to be accurate, there would have had to have been a Sept. 11 "every day and then some," she said.

**Lerner** and her colleagues also found people who watched media reports that made them fearful - - such as a piece on bioterrorism -- were likely to make higher risk assessments, while people who got news that made them angry, such as a report of some Arabs celebrating the attacks, perceived relatively less risk. Both groups, however, greatly overestimated the actual risk of attacks.

**Lerner's** paper, published in the journal *Psychological Science*, also found women tended to respond with more fear, while men tended to respond with more anger.