

## Stress Disorders

### Stress

- Stressor: an event that creates a demand on our bodies
- Stress response:
  - Sympathetic Nervous System activated
    - Fight or Flight!
  - HPA axis activated
    - Releases cortisol, a stress hormone

**Traumatic stress:** involves actual or threatened death or serious injury to self or others

- Creates intense feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror

### Traumatic Stress and Stress Disorders

- During and immediately after a trauma, we may temporarily experience levels of arousal, anxiety, and depression
  - For some, symptoms persist well after the trauma
- The situations that cause these disorders would be traumatic to *anyone* (unlike other anxiety disorders)

### Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

#### Criteria for disorder:

- Having experienced, witnessed, or been confronted by a traumatic stressor
- The person's reaction to this stressor consist of intense fear, horror, and helplessness.

#### Symptom Clusters of PTSD: Re-experiencing

- Reliving the traumatic event
- Intrusive thoughts
- Dreams or nightmares
- Intense distress

### Symptom Clusters of PTSD: Emotional Numbing/Detachment

- Avoiding thoughts, feelings, or conversations
- Avoiding activities, places, or people
- Trouble recalling aspects of event
- Loss of interest
- Feelings of detachment
- Restriction of feelings
- Future feels bleak

### Symptom Clusters of PTSD: Hypervigilance/Chronic Arousal

- Sleep difficulties
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated startle response

### More criteria for disorder:

- Symptoms occur for at least 1 month after stressor
- Disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
- Acute Stress Disorder
  - Traumatic event (like PTSD)
  - Symptoms begin within 4 weeks, last less than 1 month
  - **Dissociative symptoms:** depersonalization, derealization, or dissociative amnesia
  - Epidemiology of Stress Disorders
- Avg. age of onset: late teens and early 20s
- Lifetime prevalence of PTSD in the general population is 7-9%

- Twice as common in women compared to men (post-trauma, 20% of women and 8% of men)
- High comorbidity with depression, other anxiety disorders, substance abuse

#### Factors contributing to PTSD and ASD

- Question: How is classical conditioning related to the development of PTSD?
- "Intensity" of conditioned relationship will depend on a number of variables that may differ among various individuals.

#### Biological

- Biological consequences of a stress disorder that may perpetuate symptoms:
  - Abnormal levels of cortisol and norepinephrine
  - Dysfunctional activity of the amygdala and hippocampus

#### Personality

- More likely to develop a stress disorder if person...
  - Feels a lack of control over negative events
  - Is less able to find positive outcomes from an unpleasant situation (find the "silver lining")
  - Personal History

#### Family History

#### Childhood Experience

Pre-trauma history of Anxiety Disorder, Depression or other psychiatric symptoms

#### Current age

#### Trauma-Specific Reactions

- Intensity of perceived danger
- Losing touch with reality during trauma

#### Post-trauma characteristics