THE IMPACT OF TRAUMA

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Trauma

- Physical injury
- Sexual violation
- Sudden death of a loved one
- Occupational exposure

- Experienced, witnessed, learned of traumatic experience

American Psychiatric Association, 2013
Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

1. Arousal
   - Hypervigilance
2. Negative alterations in mood and cognitions
   - Loss of interest
3. Intrusions
   - Nightmares
4. Avoidance
   - Avoid external reminders

- Sleep problems
- Feeling isolated
- Unwanted Memories
- Avoid thoughts or feelings
PTSD Prevalence and Consequences

Trauma Exposure: 89.7%
- Unexpected death/injury of loved one
- Physical/Sexual Assault

PTSD: 8.3%
- Chronic
- Impairing
- Costly: $69 Billion Annually
- Highly comorbid

Kilpatrick, Resnick, Milanak, Miller, Keyes, & Friedman, 2013; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016
Reactivity in PTSD

- Dissociation
- Hyperarousal
Memory in PTSD

- Not all memories are the same…
Memory in PTSD

  - Difference between inability to remember the trauma and:
    - Everyday forgetfulness
    - Reluctance to disclose
    - Inability to remember some details
    - Not thinking about it for a long time
  - People who have been exposed to trauma often remember the trauma “too well.”
Bias toward threat learning

PTSD

No PTSD

Fani et al., 2012
Bias against safety learning

Fani et al., 2012
Biased information processing during the trauma

Wald et al., 2011
Threat avoidance → PTSD

Wald et al., 2011
Cognitive impairment in PTSD*

- General memory challenges
- Working memory challenges
- Processing speed challenges

*Might be attributable to comorbid conditions, such as substance use disorders, depression, or other anxiety disorders

Barrett et al., 1996; Burriss et al., 2007; Twamley et al., 2009; Burri et al., 2013;
Attentional deficits in PTSD

“Cognitive slowing seen in PTSD may be attributable to reduced attention due to a need to allocate resources to cope with psychological distress or unpleasant internal experiences.”

–Twamley et al., 2009
Attention challenges

“...attentional problems in PTSD are related to slowed central processing when response inhibition is required, and to an impaired ability to screen irrelevant information...attentional impairments in PTSD are not confined to trauma-related stimuli. Heightened arousal appears to enhance the attentional dysregulation seen in PTSD.”

Shucard et al., 2008
PTSD vs. trauma

Individuals with PTSD more likely to show deficits in cognitive performance than individuals with trauma-exposure alone

Qureshi et al., 2011
Interviewing for facts & clarification

- Avoid blaming language
- Try to “understand the thought process”
- Keep in mind “police report” versions of a narrative
- Sensory cues can elicit
  --more detail
  --more emotion
- Ask open-ended questions
- Presumption of not responsible
Emotional support and information gathered

• In children, providing support enhances emotional expression in a way that is helpful for eliciting more information (Karni-Visel et al., 2019)

• In general, harmful interviewer reactions (Patterson et al., 2009; Ullman, 2010):
  • Emotional withdrawal
  • Disbelief
  • Blaming
  • Distraction
  • Attempts to control
  • Questioning motives
  • Denying the significance
Biases about sexual violence

• Rape is rare
• Some people secretly want to be raped
• Some people are asking to be raped
• Rape is harmless
• Rape is a result of uncontrollable passion
• All rapists have mental illness
• Only certain kinds of people are raped
• A heterosexual man cannot be raped

(Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010)