

## Anxiety Disorders

### Features of Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety is a normal human emotion – everyone feels anxiety at some point and it is essential in some cases for survival. Anxiety disorders are characterized by:

- Intensity of anxious reactions
- Wrong timing of anxious reactions – in situations where people typically would not feel anxious
- Avoidance behaviour, which may lead to interference with life

### Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

- Key feature: uncontrollable worry that the patient feels unable to deal with, which often leads to distress.
- Involves physical symptoms such as sleep loss.
- Roemer and colleagues found that people with GAD worry about the same topics that non-sufferers worry about, but usually to a greater degree.
- GAD sufferers tend to worry about minor, routine issues rather than greater issues such as success/failure or the future that non-sufferers tend to worry about.
- Craske and colleagues found significant differences in the sense of control, realism and ability to stop worrying – those with GAD felt they could not control their worry, found it difficult to stop worrying and believed that their worry was more likely to come true compared to those without GAD.

### Panic Disorder

- Key feature: panic attacks – a sudden rush of extreme anxiety and distress.
- Physical symptoms include palpitations, dizziness, chest pain, numbness and tingling, breathlessness; extreme cognitive symptoms such as fears of going crazy, losing control, fear of dying.
- Usually a very brief, contained episode lasting between 5 and 15 minutes.
- People with panic disorder worry about future panic attacks and tend to have multiple, repeated attacks that come out of the blue.
- Rapee and colleagues found that panic attacks occurred an average of 1.5 times a week and lasted about 12.6 minutes each time. Sufferers experienced an average of 7.3 symptoms in each attack and 43% of attacks occurred in stressful situations.
- 'Pure' panic disorder where people experience and worry about panic attacks.
- More commonly, people tend to avoid situations because they fear experiencing a panic attack. When avoidance becomes extreme, it is known as agoraphobia.
- Agoraphobics fear a range of situations where they believe they cannot access help or safety in the case of a panic attack – commonly avoid shops, public transport, theatres, elevators, crowds, tunnels – places where they feel enclosed.
- Sinnott and colleagues found that agoraphobic situations were easier when the individual was accompanied by a sympathetic other, close to home, in familiar territory and only for short durations.

### Social Phobia

- Key feature: fear of negative evaluation.
- Worry about situations where they are the centre of attention or subject to observation or scrutiny and tend to avoid these situations e.g. meeting new people, talking to authorities.
- Has high impact on life as it interferes with social interaction, which can lead to distress.
- Social anxiety exists on a continuum – from shyness to generalised social phobia up to avoidant personality disorder.

### Specific phobias

- Tend not to interfere with people's lives greatly, thus there is argument over whether they should be considered anxiety disorders.
- Within the DSM-IV there are several subtypes of specific phobias: animal types, natural environment phobias, blood-injection-injury types, situational phobias or other types.

### Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- Characterised by obsessions and/or compulsions.
- Obsessions are mental phenomena – repeated fixations on the same thing or image.
- Compulsions are behaviours – repetitive, rigid behaviours occurring in response to an obsession.
- Often manifested in a way that is quite superstitious – behaviours occur a certain number of times in a certain way, often ritualistic.
- People with OCD often have insight into the peculiarity of their behaviour, but when distressed, this insight disappears.
- Butwicki and colleagues looked at the frequency of obsessions in OCD patients – aggression, contamination and requirement for symmetry were most common.
- Most common compulsions included cleaning and washing, repeated rituals, ordering and counting.

### Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

- Trauma – a life-threatening event e.g. war, natural disaster, physical assault, accidents.
- PTSD may occur after personal experience or witnessing a trauma.
- Symptoms include re-experiencing the event through intrusive images, avoiding stimuli related to the trauma, numbness, increased arousal, hyper-alertness and trouble with sleep.
- Creamer and colleagues found that 65% of men and 50% of women in the Australian population had experienced or witnessed some kind of trauma in their lifetime.
- Women more likely to experience interpersonal trauma e.g. rape, molestation while men are more likely to experience attack type trauma e.g. physical attack, life threatening accident, threat with weapons.

### Separation Anxiety Disorder

- Typically evident in childhood.

- Characterised by extreme worry of separation from a significant figure, and fear that harm will come to that person or self during separation.
- Leads to avoidance of situations that lead to separation e.g. going to school.