

# CHAPTER 1

## What Is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?

### Chapter Review

1. What are the diagnostic criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder?

#### Defining Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

For PTSD, the person has to have been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present:

- A1. The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
- A2. The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. Note: in children, it may be expressed instead by disorganized or agitated behavior.

Exposure to the stressor is followed by a response involving symptoms from each of the following three symptom categories:

- B. *Intrusive recollections*: persistently re-experiencing the trauma (at least one)
- C. *Avoidance/numbing*: avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (at least three)
- D. *Hyperarousal*: persistent symptoms of increased arousal (at least two)

Additionally, these two criteria must be met:

- E. The duration of this response must be more than one month.
- F. The symptoms of PTSD must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

#### SPECIFIERS:

- Specify "acute" if the duration of symptoms has been *less than three months*
- Specify "chronic" if the duration of symptoms has been *three months or more*.
- Specify "delayed onset" if onset occurred *after six months* from exposure to the traumatic stressor.

## Chapter Review Test Questions

1. Which of the following does not represent one of the three categories of diagnostic *symptoms* of PTSD?
  - A. Experiencing an event that involved threatened death
  - B. Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
  - C. Irritability or outbursts of anger
  - D. Recurrent distressing dreams of the event

Answer: A

2. The DSM diagnosis, "Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Acute (309.81)," means that the symptoms of PTSD have been present for how long?
  - A. Less than one month
  - B. More than one month, but less than six months
  - C. More than one month, but less than three months
  - D. More than six months

Answer: C

### Talking Points

Exposure to a traumatic stress is defined diagnostically as experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others, in which the response involves intense fear, helplessness, or horror. *What types of events could meet these criteria?*

- The question invites participants to mention any of several potentially traumatic events. It is important to note that part of what defines an event as traumatic is the individual's response to it. Many people are exposed to such events and do not develop PTSD.
- Examples of *direct experiences* include military combat, violent personal assault (sexual, physical, robbery, mugging), being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.
- Examples of *witnessed events* include observing serious injury or unnatural death due to violent assault, accident, war, or disaster, or unexpectedly witnessing a dead body or body parts.

- Examples of *events experienced by others but learned about* include violent personal assault, serious accident, or serious injury of a family member or close friend; learning about the sudden death of a loved one; or learning that a loved one has a life-threatening disease.

## Chapter Reference

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text revised). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.