The Third International Anxiety Congress
Shefa Neuroscience Research Center, Tehran, Iran, 23-24 November, 2016
The Neuroscience Journal of Shefaye khatam
Volume 4, No. 3, Suppl 1

Oral Presentation

Autobiographical Memory, Trauma, and the Development of Memory Interventions

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Published: ***23-24 November, 2016***

Abstract

Autobiographical memory, that is, our memory for personal life experiences, is integral to our sense of self. However, the experience of trauma can create distortions in how our memories are bought to mind. In particular, trauma can produce an overgeneral memory style, which relates to the development of both PTSD and depression. However, theory states that immediately following a traumatic event, overgeneral memory may actually be an adaptive coping style, and that it may only become maladaptive if it persists over time and becomes chronic in use (Williams et al., 2007). We completed a longitudinal examination of the trajectory of overgeneral memory in children and how this related to psychopathology immediately following trauma. We assessed symptoms of PTSD and depression, overgeneral memory and other cognitive processes at one month, three months, and six months following a traumatic event. Results showed no relationship between overgeneral memory and PTSD at one or three months post-trauma, but that overgeneral memory was protective against PTSD at six months post-trauma. We suggest that the flexibility of autobiographical memory retrieval strategies is important in the course of PTSD, and this presentation will briefly introduce a memory flexibility training programme for PTSD which we will assess with our collaborators in Iran in 2017.

Keywords: Memory, Trauma, Posttraumatic stress disorder

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