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POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER Factsheet

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How is attention related to PTSD?

Attention may be compromised in people with PTSD. Several tasks have been developed to assess attention. The most common task is The Stroop Colour Word Test, which presents colour names printed in an ink congruent to the colour name (e.g. blue), or incongruent to the colour name (e.g. blue). Participants are asked to either read the word or name the ink colour. A Stroop interference index is calculated by subtracting response times in the colour-naming condition from those in the incongruent condition. This serves as a measure of the attentional engagement, with more engagement indicating an attentional bias. The emotional Stroop task replaces colour-words with neutral and emotionally loaded stimuli (e.g., the word “violence” painted in blue compared to a neutral word in the same colour). Other tasks include the Continuous Performance Test that uses both visual and auditory stimuli and requires participants to respond to targets and ignore distractors. Also, the Trail Making Test requires participants to connect, in order, letters and/or numbers as quickly as possible.

What is the evidence for attention in people with PTSD?

Moderate to high quality evidence finds medium-sized effects of poorer attention in people with PTSD than in healthy controls (people not exposed to trauma and without PTSD). Similar findings were apparent in both children and adults.

People with PTSD had greater attentional interference with PTSD-relevant stimuli and with emotionally positive stimuli than with emotionally neutral stimuli.

In sexual victimisation survivors with or without PTSD, a small effect showed more attentional bias for sexual threat stimuli in those with PTSD.

For more information see the technical table



NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia) is one of the largest independent medical and clinical research institutes in Australia and an international leader in neurological research.

Diseases of the brain and nervous system pose the greatest health, economic and social burden of any disease group because they are chronic, debilitating and have no known cures.

Medical research is the cornerstone of efforts to advance the health and wellbeing of families and the community. Our dedicated scientists are focussed on transforming their research into significant and practical benefits for all patients.

While we hope you find this information useful, it is always important to discuss any questions about PTSD and its treatment with your doctor or other health care provider.

HOW YOUR SUPPORT HELPS

We are able to make significant advances due to the generosity of countless people. Your donation allows us to continue to work towards transforming lives. For information on how you can support our research, phone **1300 888 019** or make a secure donation at neura.edu.au/donate