

Hello, class. So in discussing other types of mental disorders, we've noticed the importance of physical as well as biological causes on our mental states and our mental disorders. For example, things like brain trauma can cause physical harm, as well as drug use and the genetic side of things, which can also influence things. But considering how important a part the brain plays in things like our perception of the environment, so in other words inside looking out, can it also work the other way, where our brain influences or even creates the physical problems within our body? Well, that's what we're going to talk about today.

So a somatoform disorder is a category of mental disorders where a person has or at least says that they have physical symptoms of some kinds of problems without any kind of physical cause. So in other words, it's all in your head, which is to say your brain is causing you to feel like you have these physical symptoms, so a person actually believes that they have these physical problems. Now, this is an important difference from other types of disorders. The people with a somatoform disorder are not faking it.

This is unlike something like Munchausen Syndrome, where a person fakes a medical problem to get attention from others. So this person honestly believes that this physical problem is occurring to them. And for all intents and purposes, these are real symptoms to that person.

Somatoform disorders can take different forms in different kinds of people. So we'll look at a few of the most common ones today. Probably the most widely used and recognized is what's called hypochondriasis, which is a somatoform disorder where a person interprets small, generally normal bodily functions as a symptom of some more serious illness that they think that they have. We call somebody a hypochondriac, which comes from this disorder hypochondriasis, if they exaggerate their physical symptoms and say that they're worse than they really are. So for example, we'd say a hypochondriac is somebody who bumps their knee and then really says that they're in a lot of pain.

However, that's the common usage of this term. As a mental disorder, this means that a person is absolutely sure of the truth that they have a physical illness, even though they don't actually have it. So oftentimes a hypochondriac will visit the doctor frequently. And they'll be constantly anxious and concerned about their well-being. So this hypochondriasis is caused by a heightened awareness that a person has of their body. So they're constantly examining themselves and seeing any kinds of disturbances in their physical function or abilities.

So similarly, a somatization disorder is when a person complains about multiple physical and mental processes without any kind of physical cause. Oftentimes, they'll visit the doctor, like a hypochondriac. And they'll have a constant feeling of being sick.

So this is something that's generally long term. And it's pervasive. And it displays itself in a variety of symptoms, things like pain in multiple places throughout their body, gastrointestinal problems, like they might have nausea. They have difficulty swallowing. Or they might have painful menstruation in women, as well as sexual dysfunction and mental problems, as well.

So somatization disorder sort of covers a wide range of problems that a person says they have. The important thing is just like any somatoform disorder, again it doesn't have a physical cause. It's all a mental cause.

Another disorder to examine is pain disorder, where a person experiences chronic and oftentimes serious and even debilitating pain in one or more places throughout their bodies. And it has a psychological origin to it, not a physical one. So in other words, there's not something that's actually causing us harm. There isn't any kind of wounds or damage to their bodies. It's something that's coming entirely from their minds.

And a pain disorder can last anywhere from a period of hours all the way up to years. And it can be something a person lives with for a significant portion of their lives. Now pain disorders often result from some kind of accident or an illness that a person has.

So in other words, they think that they should be feeling some kind of physical pain. But it actually isn't caused by that accident or illness. And people think that this is a result of some kind of significant stress, especially from these stressful events where the person is taking that psychological harm or stress and converting it physically into some kind of symptom,

Now, pain disorders are more likely to appear in collectivistic cultures, for example countries in Asia or in Mexico as well, where people are more focused on the groups and on the people around them. And oftentimes, expressing some kind of psychological disorder is looked down upon in certain ways.

Finally in terms of somatoform disorders, we have conversion disorder, which is a type of somatoform disorder where a person converts, or in other words changes, the anxiety or severe emotional problems that they have into some kind of physical symptoms. Now, this can often take the form of some kind of sensory or physical disability.

For example, a person with a conversion disorder might say that they're unable to move their limbs. And they literally cannot do so, even when asked or forced to do so. Or the person can suddenly become deaf or blind or dumb, in other words, they can't speak anymore. So you can see how it all of a sudden expresses itself in a completely different physical way.

Now, a lot of times a person with a conversion disorder has a lack of concern for this physical problem itself. For example, they suddenly become blind. But they aren't incredibly worried about the fact that they are blind. However, they might become very defensive or they might be very concerned about those underlying

psychological harms that caused this conversion disorder to occur.

Now in terms of all of these somatoform disorders, treatment of them may involve the use of drugs or medical treatments. However, without any kind of physical problems, most of the times these medical treatments are ineffective. So one of the most effective ways of treating somatoform disorders is the use of psychotherapy, where the person learns to recognize these unhealthy thought patterns they have, as well as unhealthy ways of coping with their stresses through types of therapy like cognitive behavioral therapy, which has proven to be very effective in the treatment of these disorders.