



INTERACTION OF MEMORY AND EMOTIONS: MEMORY DISORDERS UNDER STRESS AND TRAUMA

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 14 th March 2026 Accepted: 11 th April, 2026	This article analyzes the psychological and neuropsychological aspects of the relationship between memory and emotions. In particular, the impact of stressful and traumatic situations on human memory processes is elucidated based on scientific and theoretical sources. The study examines the effects of emotional tension on short-term and long-term memory activity, as well as memory changes associated with amnesia, hypermnnesia, and post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from traumatic experiences. Furthermore, the influence of stress hormones, especially cortisol, on brain activity and its role in memory consolidation are scientifically substantiated. The article also analyzes the protective mechanisms of the human psyche under trauma and their relation to memory disorders.
Keywords: Memory, emotion, stress, trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, amnesia, cortisol, hippocampus, emotional memory, psychological defense	

INTRODUCTION. Among the complex processes of the human psyche, memory and emotions hold special significance, as they are crucial factors determining an individual's personal experience, social adaptation, and mental stability. In psychology, memory is interpreted not only as the process of encoding, storing, and retrieving information but also as a psychological phenomenon intrinsically linked to a person's emotional experience. Emotions, expressing an individual's subjective reaction to external and internal stimuli, directly influence the effectiveness of memory function.

Recent scientific research on the impact of stressful and traumatic situations on the human psyche indicates that intense emotional tension significantly alters memory processes. In some cases, traumatic experiences are stored in memory with exceptional vividness for a long time, while in others, forgetting certain events or fragmented recall is observed. This demonstrates the existence of complex neuropsychological mechanisms underlying the interaction between memory and emotions.

Memory disorders associated with stress and trauma are pressing issues not only for psychology but also for neurobiology, psychiatry, and medicine. Such conditions negatively affect a person's daily activities, social adaptation, and mental health. Conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), dissociative amnesia, and emotional blockage particularly demonstrate the profound impact of traumatic experience on the memory system.

The purpose of this article is to scientifically analyze the psychological and neurophysiological mechanisms of memory disorders occurring under stress and trauma.

Memory and emotions are deeply interconnected components of human psychology. Events that are emotionally significant are usually remembered more strongly and for a longer duration than neutral information — a phenomenon known as the "emotional memory effect."

According to psychological research:

Positive emotions enhance motivation,

Negative emotions lead to a narrowing of attention,

Severe stress can disrupt memory consolidation.

The connection between emotions and memory is linked to the activity of the brain's limbic system, particularly:

The hippocampus – transfers information to long-term memory,

The amygdala – processes emotional experiences.

During traumatic events, amygdala activity increases, while hippocampal function may be disrupted. Consequently, the event is remembered in fragments or becomes completely blocked.

Stress represents the body's physiological and psychological response to external threats. During stress, the body releases cortisol and adrenaline. Moderate stress can sometimes activate memory, as the organism attempts to quickly remember dangerous situations. However, chronic stress leads to decreased attention, forgetfulness, and difficulty in retrieving information. High cortisol levels negatively affect hippocampal neurons, causing memory impairment.

Trauma is an emotional shock with a strong negative impact on the human psyche. Traumatic events can be related to violence, war, natural disasters, loss of a loved one, car accidents, etc. In traumatic situations, the following memory disorders are observed:

1. **Dissociative Amnesia:** The individual partially or completely cannot recall the traumatic event. This occurs as a psychological defense mechanism.
2. **Hypermnnesia:** Certain traumatic events are recalled excessively vividly and repeatedly.
3. **Fragmented Memory:** Events are remembered inconsistently, as isolated fragments.
4. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** In PTSD, the individual re-experiences the traumatic event, has nightmares, and feels intense anxiety. This condition can become a pathological form of emotional memory.

Psychological Defense Mechanisms and Memory. According to the psychoanalytic approach, during trauma, the psyche activates various mechanisms to protect itself: repression, denial, dissociation, sublimation. The mechanism of repression, in particular, serves to push traumatic experiences into the subconscious. As a result, the individual cannot consciously recall the event, but the emotional tension persists.

CONCLUSION. The interaction between memory and emotions is one of the central problems of modern psychology, neurobiology, and psychiatry. Emotional state, especially at the level of stress and trauma, can have a dual – both disruptive and reinforcing – effect on the encoding, consolidation, and retrieval stages of mnemonic processes. On a neuroanatomical basis, this effect occurs through complex functional connections primarily between the hippocampus (declarative memory, context), the amygdala (assigning emotional significance), and the prefrontal cortex. Acute or chronic stress leads to a sharp increase in glucocorticoid (cortisol) levels. In the short term, amygdala activity intensifies, leading to preferential encoding of emotionally charged information. However, under chronic or excessively strong traumatic stimuli, the overactivation of glucocorticoid receptors in the hippocampus suppresses the Long-Term Potentiation (LTP) mechanism, causing fragmentation of declarative memory and loss of temporal and spatial context. As a result, the following clinical phenomena occur:

1. **Dissociative Amnesia** – complete forgetting of a traumatic episode, primarily as a psychological defense mechanism.
2. **Fragmented Memories** – sensorimotor and affective elements of the traumatic event, deprived of hippocampal indexing, are unconsciously re-experienced as "flashbacks."
3. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** – characterized by intrusive memories, avoidance, negative changes in cognition and mood, and hyperarousal.

Research conclusively shows that while low to moderate emotional arousal enhances memory performance, high-intensity emotional strain (e.g., a threat exceeding coping resources) leads to two paradoxical outcomes: some information becomes lost (amnesia), while certain traumatic stimuli are stored with unnatural vividness, repetition, and decontextualization. This paradox is explained by the adverse combination of psychological defense mechanisms (repression, dissociation) and evolutionarily reinforced biological responses (an imbalance between the amygdala's "fast pathway" and the hippocampus's "slow pathway").

In-depth study of this problem is of direct importance not only for fundamental science but also for clinical practice. Understanding the mechanisms of disrupted interaction between memory and emotions allows for improvement in:

Psychological diagnostics – differential assessment of dissociative amnesia and non-organic (functional) memory disorders.

Psychotherapy – development of neurobiologically grounded protocols for EMDR, cognitive restructuring, and exposure therapy.

Rehabilitation – supporting the reintegration of traumatic experiences and adaptive pathways of memory consolidation.

Thus, memory is not a passive archive but a complex psychological function intimately connected with emotions, plastic under stress, and at the intersection of protective and adaptive mechanisms. Future research in this area should focus on neuromodulation (e.g., blocking memory reconsolidation using propranolol) and factors of individual resilience.

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