

Sociological Approaches to Mental Illness

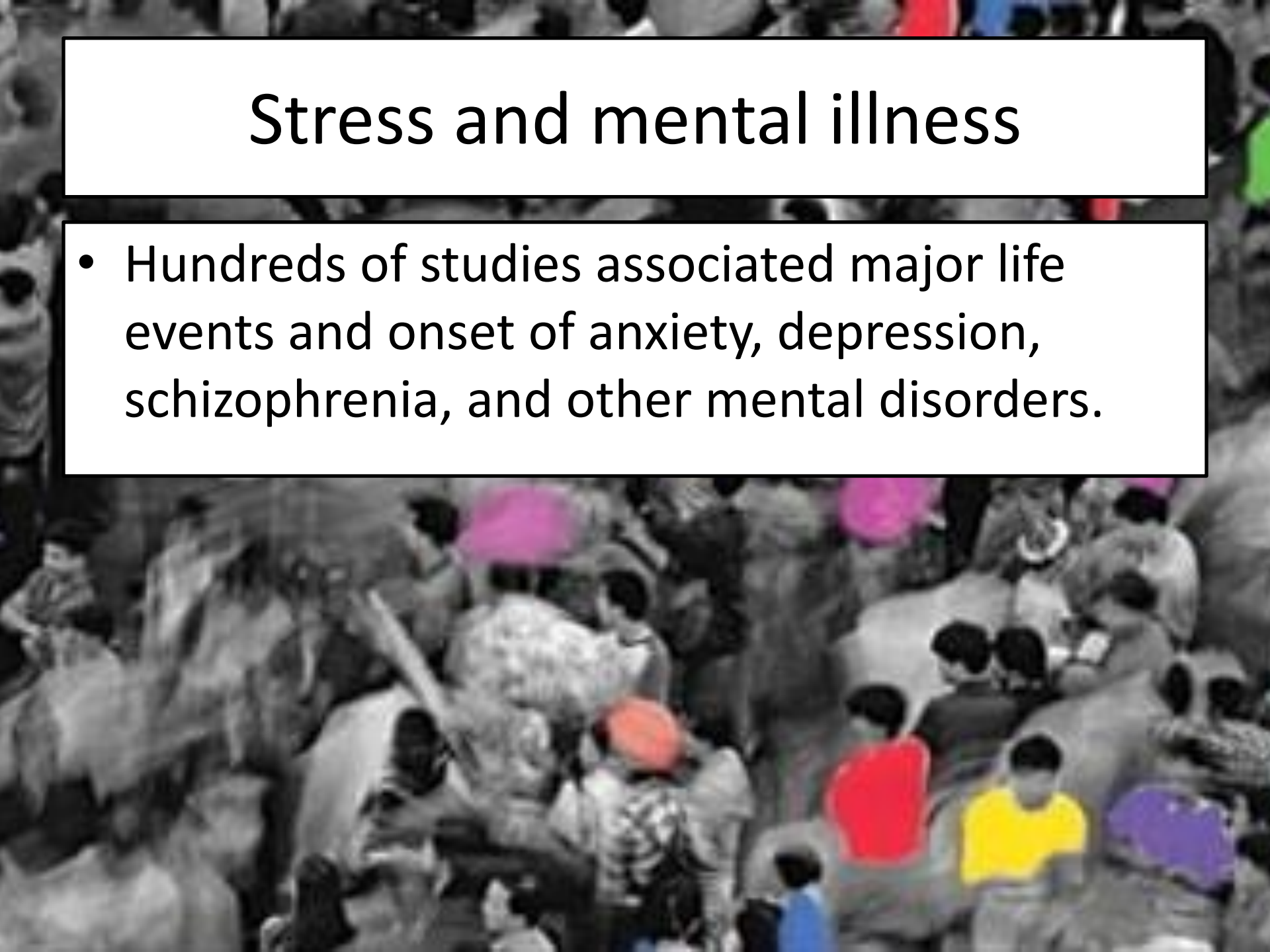
Focus on the External Environment

Three approaches to mental illness

- Biological:
 - Determinants of mental illness are internal (physical body)
- Psychological
 - Determinants of mental illness are internal (in the mind)
- Sociological
 - Determinants of mental illness are external (in environment or person's social situation)

Stress and mental illness

- Hundreds of studies associated major life events and onset of anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and other mental disorders.



Stress and mental illness

- Brown and Harris (1978) found major negative life events make people vulnerable to clinical depression.
- Other researchers found that certain types of life events are more likely to be associated with development of mental disorders than others—events that are “nonnormative, unexpected, uncontrollable, clustered in time.”

What is coping?

- Using coping resources to handle stressful demands
 - Social resources (social networks—family and friends)
 - Personal resources (self-esteem and sense of control or mastery over life)
- Using coping strategies
 - Behavioral or cognitive attempts to manage stressful demands

Some groups are more vulnerable to stress than others

- Negative life events and chronic strains are unequally distributed in the population.
- Some groups have fewer resources and are thus more vulnerable (the elderly, the very young, unmarried people, people of low socioeconomic status).

Treatment/prevention implications of stress theory:

- Change environment
 - Eliminate/reduce stressors
- Teach coping
 - Increase social support
 - Raise self-esteem
 - Give a stronger sense of control (empower)

Structural Strain Theory Assumptions:

- Society's organization puts some groups at an economic disadvantage
- Economic disadvantage is a strain that leads to higher rates of psychological breakdown



Labeling Theory

- Assumption: people who are labeled as deviant become deviant
- People who are so labeled as mentally ill are then stereotyped as unpredictable, dangerous, likely to behave in bizarre ways



Labeling Theory

- Labeled people are:
 - Treated as irresponsible
 - Denied access to normal activities
 - Forced to spend time with other deviants
 - Get socialized into mental patient culture, adopting mental patient worldview
 - Take on identity of a mental patient