Altered memory functioning is a key feature of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition to intrusive re-experiencing of the trauma (e.g., intrusions of memories of a car accident or a violent attack), theoretical models emphasize the fragmented and disorganized recollection of the trauma. Beyond that, neuropsychological studies have found evidence for general impairments of memory functions in patients with PTSD. Our group carried out several empirical studies in which we not only replicated findings of memory impairment in PTSD (trauma-specific and general) but also extended these findings in relation to several important aspects that have not previously been routinely examined, such as the stimulus specificity of deficits (visual vs. verbal material) and the recall of sequences (sequence memory; Behrendt & Moritz, 2005; Jelinek et al., 2009a; Jelinek et al., 2006; Jelinek et al., 2008). Other research projects focused on visual false memories (Hauschildt et al., 2011; Jelinek et al., 2009a), memories of the worst moment of the traumatic event (Jelinek et al., 2010b), attentional biases for trauma-relevant stimuli (e.g., Hauschildt et al., 2013; Wittekind et al., 2010; Wittekind et al., 2015b), tendencies toward automatic avoidance of trauma-relevant stimuli (Wittekind et al., 2015b; Wittekind et al., 2017), as well as neuropsychological (Jelinek et al., 2013b), metacognitive (Jelinek et al., 2013a), and psychophysiological abnormalities (Hauschildt et al., 2011b). In addition to paradigms that we have developed (including an assessment of visual and scenic false memories), our studies have used modified forms of classical paradigms (e.g., the emotional Stroop paradigm, the spatial cueing task, and the approach-avoidance task).

Other studies have investigated cognitive processing during the trauma (Jelinek et al., 2007), the risk estimation of hazardous situations (Volkert et al., 2013), and the role of imagery vividness in the development of intrusions (Jelinek et al., 2010a). Furthermore, we have examined the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences during forced displacement of adults at the end of World War II both for those directly affected and their offspring (Jelinek et al., 2013a, 2013b; Muhtz et al., 2011; Wittekind, 2014; Wittekind et al., 2010).

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