# Chapter 26 Distress

G. Matthews

University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA

# Abstract

This chapter reviews the assessment of distress, the roles of situational factors and personality in generating distress, and its psychological significance, including clinical implications. Distress is typically defined as unpleasant subjective stress responses such as anxiety and depression. It may be measured using a variety of general and context-linked scales. States of distress reflect psychobiological, cognitive, and social influences, but should be understood as the outcome of dynamic self-regulation as the person confronts external threats and pressures. Individuals differ considerably in their vulnerability to distress. Traits including neuroticism, dispositional anxiety, and metacognitive style increase vulnerability, whereas traits such as hardiness, grit, and emotional intelligence support resilience. Distress is associated with abnormalities in information-processing, including attentional impairment and cognitive bias. Distress is also a key symptom in a range of emotional disorders.