



MIND MATTERS

Rotary  Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives
RID 3030 India

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE DISTRICT ACTION GROUP ON MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

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EDITORIAL



"THE PSYCHE AND THE SOMA"

The Psychosomatic disorders constitute an interesting category of mental health illnesses. The 'Psyche' meaning the 'Mind' and the 'Soma' meaning the 'Body', interact in mysterious ways to create illness. Some psychological disorders may have physical symptoms with medical basis, such as asthma, hypertension, joint pains, and some emotional disorders throw up physical symptoms without any medical pathology. Strange! The mind and the body influence each other in the onset, perpetuation, subjective experiences and the cure of the mental illness.

A ten year- old girl refused school for a month, complaining of severe stomach aches, always at school going time and would play happily at home after that. Several rounds of different specialists revealed no organic pathology. Psychological counselling revealed that it was anxiety and stress at school with peers! A 40 year-old well educated engineer obsesses about the fear of having a cardiac arrest when his palpitations increase due to simple anxiety. At other times he fears a brain stroke when he experiences a headache. Any physical symptom can drive him crazy fearing a severe illness and make him run to the doctor for re-assurance. He is physically healthy but mentally upset. He chooses to focus on his physical symptoms rather than his mind. His physical experiences get highly exaggerated in his mind causing anxiety and panic. A grief-stricken mother at the loss of her son in a plane crash loses her vision and suffers a brief episode of blindness. A nun loses her voice under specific circumstances. The variety of 'Somatic Symptom Disorders' (SSD) goes on....

This month we focus on SSD and bring you a peek into its types.

Take good care of your Mind!

Rita Aggarwal

SOMATIC SYMPTOM DISORDERS

PROJECT REPORTS

12 April 2022.

De-addiction Program.

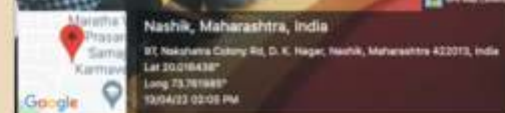
Rotary Club of Nagpur Downtown and District Action Group on Mental Health Initiatives conducted a talk on 'De-addiction and Harmful Effects of Alcohol' at Minex Metallurgical Company Ltd. M. I. D. C. Kalmeshwar, Nagpur. Maitreyee Foundation performed a skit demonstrating how one falls victim to alcoholism. Mr Ravi Padhe and Rtn. Dr Rishikesh Mayee explained about the different type of addicts and how families are destroyed because of the alcohol respectively. Secretary DAGMHI DR Pratiksha Mayee co-ordinated the project. About 60-70 staff members mostly workers and supervisors attended the event.



College Mental Health Program.

DAGMHI District 3030 had organized a personality development training program in MVP's College of Architecture, Nashik. Four sessions were conducted over a period of two months. The topics were Gender Parity, Emotional Regulation, Time Management and Positive Attitude. The faculties were Dr. Rucha Sule, Dr. Shefali Agrawal, Ms. Alka Singh and Dr. Aabha Pimprikar. The sessions were interactive and activity based. Over 90 students were benefitted by this program. DAGMHI 3030 will conduct such sessions in various schools and colleges of the district and has toolkits ready for almost 20 topics. Teachers, parents and educationists are requested to get in touch with DAGMHI 3030 for the same on email- dagmhirid3030@gmail.com

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SOMATIC SYMPTOM DISORDERS

Have you ever come across people who keep on visiting physicians with various bodily complaints, when evaluated cannot be explained clinically? They suffer from a form of mental condition that can cause bodily symptoms called the **Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD)**, which was earlier known as somatization or somatoform disorders. People with this disorder experience real pain and they aren't faking symptoms.

There are a few categories under somatoform disorders, such as, **Illness Anxiety Disorder**, wherein the person is preoccupied with the idea that they have or may acquire a serious medical condition. Such people may show no or mild body symptoms, have a constant worry about their health and even a minor complaint is believed to be a symptom of something dangerous. Illness anxiety disorder affects 1% of the American population. Both males and females are equally prone to it.

Another category that falls into SSD is **Conversion Disorder** where the person experiences loss of movement or senses. The person can experience blindness, experiences paralysis, or the neurological symptoms that cannot be explained by any medical



examination. It is also known as functional neurological symptom disorder. Researchers suggest that the number of patients with ongoing symptoms is 2 to 5 individuals per every 100,000 patients per year.

There are times when a person's medical condition gets worse due to clinically significant psychological factors thereby increasing the risk of death. This makes up

the next category for SSD called the **Psychological Factors Affecting Other Medical Conditions**.

Lastly, it is seen that there are people who fake the symptoms in order to gain attention and fall into another category of SSD called **Factitious Disorder**. Other disorders related to SSD as per 'Diagnostic Statistical Manual-V' include:

- ◆ Brief somatic symptom disorder: Duration is less than 6 months.
- ◆ Brief illness anxiety disorder: Duration of symptoms is less than 6 months.
- ◆ Illness anxiety disorder without excessive health-related behaviours.
- ◆ Pseudocyesis: A false belief of being pregnant that is associated with objective signs and reported symptoms of pregnancy.

For all the somatoform disorders the major cause seems to be psychological stress that a person goes through or neglect/abuse faced during childhood.

Although SSD can affect a person's daily functioning symptoms can always be managed with the help of psychotherapies and proper family support.

-Sakshi Kothari,
M.A, Psychology, Nagpur.

THE MIND-BODY CONNECT

Mrs. Leela, a 36 years old female complained of frequent chest pains, tingling sensations in her arms and legs, exhaustion and constant worry regarding her health. These symptoms made it difficult for her to complete her daily chores and she would lie in her bed most of the day. She had consulted multiple doctors and had been investigated thoroughly, but all her tests would turn out to be normal. She had reluctantly agreed to see a psychiatrist after many doctors suggested the same.

Mr. Akash, a 25 years old IT professional presented with a constant worry about having a major heart disease since the past 6 months. He had repeatedly done his cardiac assessments from various physicians and all his tests always turned out normal. Most doctors had told him he was just being anxious and he should stop worrying. But despite this, he couldn't get the thought out of his mind and his work had started suffering. He had also started losing sleep and was afraid to travel alone.

While, Miss Isha, a 19 years old 1st year B.com student was referred by the neurologist with repeated episodes of abnormal movements of limbs, breathlessness followed by fainting spells which lasted for hours. These had started in the past 2 months and all her investigations were normal. Despite multiple episodes the patient had never suffered any injury, and these episodes never occurred in sleep or when she was alone. On detailed history, it was found that she was dealing with some adjustment issues at college.

All these different presentations are part of a spectrum of disorders called Psychosomatic Disorders. These disorders represent the deep connections between the mind and the body. The diagnosis includes conditions with no medical explanation and conditions where there is some underlying pathology but an exaggerated response. Here, although the physical symptoms experienced by the patient are real, their origin may or may not be in the respective body part but in the different brain areas. When the brain is overwhelmed by stress it

leads to certain changes in the neurotransmitters and the brain circuits which make the mind misread normal bodily sensations or produce abnormal bodily sensations. Since the majority symptoms are physical, patients tend to do multiple medical tests which all turn out to be normal.

Such illnesses are fairly common, affecting almost 7-8% of the population with females being affected almost 10 times more often than males. These occur due to an interplay of bio-psycho-social factors. Genetic & biological vulnerabilities like increased sensitivity to pain and other mental illness in the family. Psychological factors like pessimistic personality traits, decreased awareness about and inappropriate processing of emotions, more importance given to physical pain than mental pain. Thus, making it easier to express in terms of physical symptoms rather than mental conflict. Socially learned behaviours and culturally accepted sick roles which may help the patient get some kind of gain, physically or psychologically also have a role to play.

Treatment includes excluding any major physical illness, identifying the underlying psychological stress and addressing it through therapy. Antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications also help in the acute phase to lessen the severity of symptoms and make patients more responsive to therapy.

Dr. Abha Bang Soni
Consultant Psychiatrist, Nagpur.





SOMATIC SYMPTOM DISORDERS

EFFECT OF STRESS ON SOMATIC DISEASES

It has been known through research that psychological stress is a cause of and trigger of many somatic diseases and can lead to many physical ailments. As a Homeopath and a counselor, I have observed in my practice that the mind plays a vital role in not only the onset of the disease, but also in the **patient's recovery. Psychological stress is a cause for severe aggravations in a patient's disease symptoms.** Let us look at a few such diseases which are aggravated due to psychological stress, but we usually do not pay attention to this fact.

◆ **Polycystic Ovarian Disease/Syndrome** - Lack of 6-7 hours of sleep, stress and emotional upheaval can disrupt the menstrual cycle, cause painful and heavy periods, flare up acne and lead to bloating in most women who are undergoing treatment for PCOD/S. In some cases, even

watching too much aggressive content hampered the treatment.

◆ **Diabetes Mellitus** - Emotional stress and over thinking, are the main psychological cause of unprecedented rise in blood glucose levels, leading to further complaints like rise or fall in blood pressure, palpitations, dizziness and numbness of extremities.

◆ **Asthma** - Anxiety, panic, fear, confrontation have been seen to set off an attack of asthma. These factors also serve as an obstacle to cure even with the best of medical treatment.

◆ **Gastrointestinal diseases** - All diseases related to the G.I. System, whether is hyperacidity, ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome etc., are worsened because of anger issues, emotional stress, secrecy, frustration and a tendency of not sharing

their emotional burden with others.

◆ **Hypertension** - Stress regarding relationships, finances, future prospects, anxiety which carries on for a long time, leads to hypertension and also aggravation in its symptoms.

Medical practitioners are now accepting the role of the mind in medical conditions and are making an effort to give a holistic approach to treatment. By including counseling and therapies, art therapy, music therapy, meditation etc. with medicine, a significant rise in speed and permanence of cure can be seen in patients.

**-Dr Geetanjali Jha,
Homeopath, Counsellor, Raipur.**

ILLNESS ANXIETY DISORDER

Feeling of 'Anxiety' is a natural emotion. Whenever one feels challenged / threatened / worried, it is a normal human response to feel anxious. However, when this anxiety becomes overwhelming to a point of hampering one's daily routine, it becomes a 'Disorder'. There are various types of anxiety disorders. This article discusses one of the very common and interesting type, namely Illness Anxiety Disorder (IAD).

Persons suffering from IAD are excessively preoccupied with the idea of being seriously ill even though there is no medical evidence to support presence of an illness. Even simple aches and pains scare them into thinking that something is seriously wrong with their body. This scary feeling leads them to feel panicky and distraught.

It only goes when a person gets reassured by a doctor, who after evaluating him/her tells that nothing is wrong with his/her health. Unfortunately, this feeling lasts only till the next symptom emerges and this cycle of doctor consultation, investigations and reassurance continues. Frequent doctor shopping [visiting multiple doctors] is a hallmark of this problem.

Ensuing complications like multiple absenteeism, decreasing performance at work or in academics, failure to complete important tasks and responsibilities, add to the person's frustration. Many a times, such persons take help of alcohol or other addicting substances to overcome their anxiety, which in turn ends up complicating the problem even more.

Individuals suffering from IAD, especially the well-educated ones, try to take matters into their own hands by extensively reading about their symptoms on internet, or by consulting various specialists, or trying out various fad diets and therapies with the aim to find that 'illusive' explanation for their symptoms and cure for their malady. However, instead of helping, all these endeavors end up increasing their dread and complicating their problem.

So, how do we go about treating this disorder?

Mental health professionals usually advocate a 'Four-pronged strategy' to address this issue of illness anxiety which includes:



- ◆ Disciplined lifestyle with adequate sleep.
- ◆ Nutritious diet and regular exercise
- ◆ Counseling
- ◆ Medicines [if necessary]

-Disciplined lifestyle with proper nutrition and adequate sleep increases the body's resilience to fight anxiety and stress.

-Nutritious diet removes all the nutritional deficiencies which contribute to various vague symptoms. No fad diet is advocated unless explicitly advised by a trained medical professional.

-Counseling helps one understand one's proclivity to catastrophize simple physical symptoms and ways to deal with it. It includes behavior therapy exercises aimed at achieving relaxation of body and mind.

-In certain situations where the anxiety becomes incapacitating, medicines are required to reduce the anxiety.

**-Dr. Mayur Muthe,
MD (Psychiatry), Jalgaon.**





SOMATIC SYMPTOM DISORDERS

MOUTH - A REFLECTION OF MENTAL HEALTH

Mouth is a window to a view of our general health. Majority of systemic problems (where the whole system is affected) display themselves in mouth (*oral manifestations*). Conditions like stress & anxiety appear on the oral mucous membrane in the form of redness or ulcerations or white colored lesions and are collectively termed as *oral psychosomatic disorders*. Dental practitioners frequently come across such conditions where identification of psychological or emotional disturbance needs deep evaluation for the benefits of patients and they may need counselling as a part of their treatment.

Psychosomatics is defined as physical illness, or other condition caused or aggravated by a mental factor, such as internal conflict or stress that initiates interaction between mind and body. Thus, the psychological factors trigger emotional stress that stimulates certain areas in brain giving rise to functional symptoms that ultimately develop oral conditions.

The oral conditions that develop from emotional or psychological factors, have specific symptoms causing physiological and functional changes in mouth. There are numerous conditions that are included under a group of oral psychosomatic disorders like:

- ◆ Lichen planus - inflammatory condition affecting skin & mucosa
- ◆ Aphthous ulcerations - recurrent sores or ulcers in mouth
- ◆ Orofacial pain - pain in mouth, jaws &/or face
- ◆ Burning mouth syndrome - burning sensation in mouth without cause
- ◆ Glossodynia - pain in tongue
- ◆ Atypical odontalgia - pain in tooth without any obvious cause
- ◆ Phantom bite syndrome - belief of occlusal discrepancies or 'wrong bite'
- ◆ Bruxism - involuntary grinding of teeth
- ◆ Halitophobia - fear of having bad breath.



In Japan, these problems are named as *MUOS* (medically unexplained oral symptoms) and have an incidence of 5-10% among all dental patients. Therefore, if the dental practitioners after careful mouth examination come across such clinical presentation, it may be suggested to the patient to have a consultation from counsellor or psychologist to identify stress related factors.

As stress is increasing in daily life, there are increased chances of patients with such disorders. Hence, one should be familiar with such manifestations and undergo rigorous management/counselling through psychiatrists and psychologists whenever needed along with medical management by dental specialists.

**Dr. Harshkant Gharote MDS (Oral Medicine) and
Dr Aabha Pimprikar, Dentist, President DAGMHI, Nashik.**

PSYCHOGENIC PAIN



We all must have experienced the worsening of feelings due to Pain. But, what when it's the other way round? Yes! Your mind can also cause Pain without a physical source.

In fact, in my journey of 15 years as an acupuncturist and Rehab consultant I have experienced that *more than 60 percent patients develop pain due to some persistent psychological factors. This can be called Psychogenic Pain.*

Stress, tension, worry, grief, melancholy, anxiety,

depression are the mental states which when lasts for longer period, becomes mental conditions. The patient is unable to relate and accept their conditions which may lead to its physical manifestation in the form of pain and muscular spasm. Most commonly it is presented as a headache, a muscle ache, abdominal pain, or back pain. According to traditional medical systems, it is believed that everyone is unique and has a dominant emotional trait/personality. When these emotions lose their equilibrium there is a disease or disorder.

In 1965, Ronald Melzack and Patrick Wall published a paper "The Gate Control Theory of pain". The purpose was to help explain how mental states impact the perception of pain, either reducing or increasing pain sensations. This theory suggests that the spinal cord contains a neurological 'gate' that either blocks Pain signals / messages or allows them to continue to transmit to the brain.

If you expect something to hurt, for instance, it will probably hurt worse. And if you are upset or frightened, pain may seem more intense than it would if you were calm.

A 55 year- old came up with severe Migraine. His symptoms increased with exposure to light. Slowly he started staying in dim light room after his wife's sudden demise. His grief triggered his headache. A few Acupuncture sittings and connecting to family and friends eventually helped.

A young mother aged 32 years complained of worsening of referred pain in hand and neck as soon as she held a book and started reading. Eventually, with the thought of even holding the book triggered her pains. A few sessions of Acupuncture and counselling for stress got her better.

Some simple strategies to reduce psychogenic pain-

1. Focus on something else- Distracting yourself is one way to get the pain gate closed. Stop overthinking.
2. Regular exercise- Take advice from the experts.
3. Relax- Find ways to relax, such as by taking walks in green spaces or curling up on the couch with a good book. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is another option. Relaxation therapy with guided imagery (Guided Meditation) appears to relax and ease pain.
4. Stay optimistic- Work to stay positive and do things that make you happy.
5. Use counter-stimulation techniques- Acupuncture, Massage, heating pad and other such modalities are all techniques that may help inch the gate shut. Make these a part of your self-care routine to help keep pain at bay.

**-Dr Sneha Goyadani
Acupuncture and Pain management consultant.
Occupational Therapist and Rehab consultant.
Yoga and ergonomic Therapist. Nagpur.**