

Attachment styles, identification of feelings and psychiatric symptoms in functional neurological disorders

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Objective: The contribution of psychological and psychiatric symptoms in the development of Functional Neurological Disorders (FND) is unclear [1]. We therefore aimed to investigate the role of different attachment styles (AS) and their relationship with psychiatric symptoms in FND patients as compared with both subjects with neurological disorders (ND) and healthy controls (HC); and the possible differences between patients with functional movement disorders (FMD) and with functional seizures.

Methods: In this case-control study, forty-six patients with FND were compared to 34 with ND and 30 HC, by means of an extensive battery to investigate the presence of alexithymia, depression, anxiety, dissociation and to explore their AS using the Revised Experiences in Close Relationships instrument (ECR-R).

Results: Patients with FND had higher depression and alexithymia as well as an avoidant pattern on the ECR-R than patients with ND. In the FND group, ECR-R avoidance was an independent predictor of psychiatric symptoms and, altogether, ECR-R avoidance, the somatic-affective component of depression and difficulty identifying feelings were independent predictors of FND. Gender, anxiety and difficulty identifying feelings predicted the presence of functional seizures.

Conclusion: The avoidant AS may be an important psychological factor influencing the presence of mood disorders and alexithymia. Their co-occurrence might drive maladaptive responses underlying the presence of FND [2]. Although we demonstrated a large overlap between FND phenotypes [3], patients with functional seizures might have higher alexithymia, which in turn could explain a defensive response less anchored to body reactions and physical symptoms.

References:

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