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Interoception and attachment patterns within patients with psychosomatic concerns

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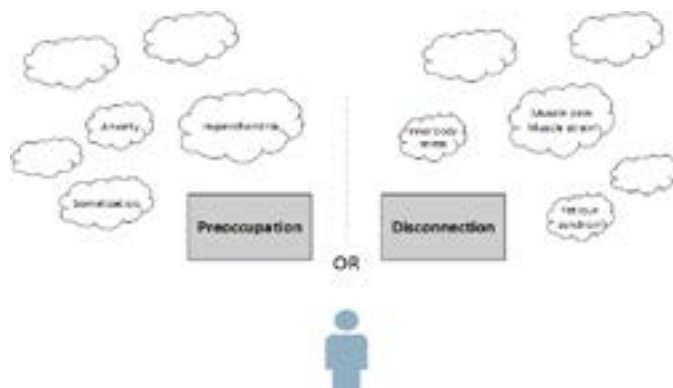
Background: In my clinical work as a physiotherapist, I often find patients with psychosomatic concerns disconnect their bodies and expose themselves to major inner stress or other patients can be preoccupied over bodily sensations and often have anxiety concerning physical problems.

Aim: The aim of this quantitative study was to explore if there were any differences in attachment patterns and inner bodily awareness (interoception) among patients with psychosomatic problems compared to a healthy population and to examine if there were a relation between attachment pattern and interoception.

Method: The examined group consisted of 40 consecutive patients seeking help from a psychosomatic educated physiotherapist and a control group consisted of 34 persons without psychosomatic problems. Three questionnaires were used. Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA), a new survey, Attachment Scale Questionnaire (ASQ) and Descriptive system of health-related quality of life states (EQ-5D).

Result: 60% of the patients had an insecure attachment compared to 5% in the control group. There was a statistic significance ($p < 0.05$) between the two groups regarding six of eight subscales in MAIA. The largest differences appeared on subscale “not worry” over pain or discomfort and “reliance” that the body is safe and reliable. There was a correlation between attachment pattern and interoception.

Conclusion: The examined group had difficulty with interoception and to separate physical discomfort from psychic discomfort. Insecure attachment can have importance in patient’s ability to seek and receive help within the therapeutic alliance. MAIA could be of value for diagnostic purpose to examine maladaptive body awareness and to choose different physiotherapeutic techniques like: Techniques to stimulate bodily presence; Techniques to regulate the autonomous nerve system; and methods to explore affects and their coherence.



Biography

Viveka Nyman works clinically with patients seeking help for their psychosomatic symptoms. She is working with an affect-focused body psychotherapy as a Physiotherapist and a Psychotherapist. This study was a part of her education to become a psychotherapist on master-level. Her preunderstanding of psychosomatic medicine as a concept is complex. The core in psychosomatics is that human being is seen as a whole and indivisible and that makes illness as physis or psychic uninterested. In this study, psychosomatics is used as an “umbrella” or “the field of psychosomatics” where different concepts and definitions are subordinated.

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