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Analysis of anxiety symptoms and disease severity in children and adolescents with Crohn's disease

Laura C Reigada
Brooklyn College, USA

Objectives: Children and adolescents diagnosed with Crohn's disease (CD), a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), have increased vulnerability for anxiety symptoms that may be related to disease-related processes. The aims of this paper are threefold: 1) to report the proportion of pediatric CD patients whose self-reported anxiety symptoms are indicative of distress; to describe the constellation of anxiety symptoms; and to examine the relationship between anxiety and disease symptoms.

Methods: Retrospective medical chart review was performed for 93 youths with CD (ages 9-18) who had completed the Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED) during their gastroenterology visit. Medical records were reviewed for demographic and disease characteristics. Harvey Bradshaw Index (HBI) was used as a measure of CD activity.

Results: Thirty percent of the youths reported experiencing elevated anxiety symptoms (SCARED score >20) and 50% had scored above cutoff in one or more anxiety domains, with school anxiety, general anxiety, and separation anxiety symptoms reported most frequently. Youth rated with moderate/severe disease activity on the HBI ($n=4$) self-reported more anxiety symptoms compared to youth with inactive disease ($n=78$; $p=0.03$). Greater school anxiety was significantly associated with decreased well-being ($p=0.003$), more abdominal pain ($p<0.001$), and the number of loose stools ($p=0.01$). Having extraintestinal symptoms was significantly associated with higher somatic/panic anxiety ($p=0.01$).

Conclusions: Implementing a brief anxiety screen in tertiary pediatric settings may be one approach to identify young patients with CD in distress. Health providers should consider periodic assessment of school anxiety among youth with CD.

Biography

Laura C Reigada is an Associate Professor at the City University of New York at Brooklyn College and Faculty in the Health Psychology and Clinical Science doctoral program at the Graduate Center. She is a licensed clinical Psychologist and an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Her research focuses on early identification and treatment of medical patients who are at increased risk for comorbid psychological problems, with emphasis on the dynamic interplay between psychological and disease processes. Her research aims to increase multidisciplinary collaboration within the medical setting to enhance detection and treatment.

lreigada@brooklyn.cuny.edu

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