

THE IMPACT OF PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS ON QUALITY OF LIFE

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Abstract: Psychosomatic disorders are conditions where psychological factors contribute to the development or worsening of physical symptoms. These disorders often develop into chronic conditions that impair emotional stability, social relationships, and work capacity, significantly reducing quality of life. This paper examines the causes and mechanisms of psychosomatic disorders, with a particular focus on factors contributing to their development, such as chronic stress, anxiety, depression, or repressed emotions. The impact of these disorders on overall psycho-physical well-being, daily activities, professional functioning, and interpersonal relationships is also analyzed. A holistic approach combining psychological and medical strategies proves essential for symptom reduction and overall well-being improvement. Understanding the mind-body connection provides a foundation for developing effective support methods and preventive measures, thereby enhancing the quality of life for individuals dealing with these disorders. The importance of timely diagnosis, integrative treatment through psychotherapy and medical interventions is crucial for symptom reduction and improving the living standards.

Key words: psychosomatic disorders, psychological factors, stress, quality of life, well-being, support.

1. INTRODUCTION

Emotions of high intensity, or psychological excitements known as affects, play a decisive role in the development of psychosomatic reactions in the body. These emotions may be of a transient nature, but if intense emotions have a long-lasting and chronic effect, they can lead to morphological changes in certain tissues, which is the pathway for the development of psychosomatic diseases [1]. Psychosomatics, as the connection between the mind and body in the causation of diseases, has been the subject of intensive research, confirming the premises of many scientists regarding healing through influencing the course of illnesses by acting on brain activity, mood, or perception. The art of healing is realized by utilizing the mind-body connection, specifically the relationship between physical illnesses and mental orientation [2]. An analysis of 25 studies on this topic confirmed the significance of psychosomatics in explaining the relationship between stress, depression, emotions, mood disorders, and diseases such as neurological, cardiovascular, and endocrine disorders. To understand the impact of emotions and psychology on the body, a holistic approach is necessary for treating various illnesses rooted in psychological factors.

Psychosomatic disorders result from the complex interaction between psychological factors and physical symptoms; stress, anxiety, depression, and repressed emotions, or prolonged negative emotional states, can exacerbate or cause relapses of these conditions. The interconnection between the mind and body reflects on an individual's quality of life, influencing emotional stability, social relationships, professional functioning, and overall psychophysical status. Understanding the mechanisms through which psychological factors affect physical health is crucial for developing effective prevention and treatment strategies. Research has shown that stress can worsen the symptoms of existing physical illnesses, turning them into chronic conditions, thereby adding further strain and reducing the quality of life of those affected. This impacts their daily functioning and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, lower levels of social interaction can lead to isolation and decreased life satisfaction. Professional performance and efficiency are also compromised due to reduced work productivity and increased absenteeism. Regardless of an individual's current health

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status, it is important for them to continuously enhance their ability and capacity to ensure that the experience of illness does not dictate their way of life. To achieve this, it is essential to consistently work on promoting health within society [3].

2. A BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS

Psychosomatic disorders represent a complex yet often overlooked area of medical and psychological research, despite their significant impact on an individual's quality of life. These disorders may manifest as physical symptoms, but they can be seen as a kind of illusion—these issues reflect deeper psychological and emotional conflicts that are their cause or consequence. They often disrupt daily functioning, professional efficiency, and interpersonal relationships. As some studies suggest, chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and other psychological factors are frequently the primary triggers of somatic symptoms and the deterioration of an individual's overall health status [4].

A significant challenge in understanding psychosomatic disorders lies in their "invisibility"—although physical symptoms may be present, the underlying cause often remains unrecognized, assumed, or, in some cases, insufficiently treated due to these reasons. This not only prolongs the discomfort and suffering of patients but also increases pressure on healthcare systems, particularly in societies where stigma surrounding mental health further complicates access to adequate medical and systemic support. Such circumstances call for a paradigm shift in approaches to treatment and health promotion, emphasizing integrative and holistic strategies rather than treating the physical and psychological aspects of illness separately. Psychosomatic illnesses refer to somatic dysfunctions of psychogenic origin—this underscores the crucial role psychological factors play in the etiology of somatic diseases. In this context, it is essential to distinguish between transient adaptive reactions, neurotic states that can become a permanent pattern of functioning, deep psychological disorders that accompany somatic illness, and comorbidity, that is, the coexistence of two independent somatic and psychological disorders [5]. This not only prolongs the suffering and discomfort of patients but also increases the burden on healthcare systems, particularly in societies where stigma surrounding mental health further complicates access to adequate medical and systemic support. Such a situation calls for a paradigm shift in the approach to treatment and health promotion, emphasizing integrative and holistic methods rather than the separate treatment of physical and psychological aspects of illness.

A particularly extensive and significant area of study is the impact of stress on the development of psychosomatic disorders, analyzed and interpreted from two perspectives: the effect of daily stress stimuli and the cumulative impact of stress over a longer period, which can lead to chronic conditions. Daily stress, acting through microstressors, involves seemingly minor but frequent challenges and frustrations that individuals encounter throughout the day. These range widely—from the most trivial, such as traffic jams, tight deadlines at work, conflicts with colleagues or family members, technical issues like breakdowns, unplanned expenses, or other disruptions to routine. While this type of stressor may appear trivial and insignificant compared to major life (crisis) events, it must be emphasized that their constant presence significantly affects an individual's psychosomatic state, overall psychophysical status, and health. In this regard, professional and scientific opinions are divided—on one side are those who believe the focus should be on major life stressors, while on the other are perspectives that prioritize everyday hassles.

Just as cardiologists qualitatively assess the intensity of heart murmurs, psychologists and psychiatrists use various schemes to evaluate stress. The situation is further complicated by the fact that information about the distress is a subjective complaint based on the patient's self-assessment or on generally accepted rules about how stressful a certain event is for most people [6].

The psychological attitude toward one's health refers to how an individual perceives, evaluates, and manages their physical and mental well-being. It includes their thoughts, beliefs, and emotional responses related to their health. This attitude encompasses how they interpret symptoms, their confidence in handling health challenges, and their motivation to take actions that support or enhance their overall well-being. These factors collectively shape a person's psychological approach to their health [7].

Considering that psychosomatic medicine deals with the impact and significance of illnesses, as well as the psychological and social factors that play a significant role in the predisposition, onset, and progression of diseases [8], the context can be expanded to include the "typology" of personalities prone to psychosomatic disorders. In this sense, it refers to individuals who find it difficult to verbalize their emotions, whose imagination and creativity are limited, who exhibit conventional and restrained behavior, and who possess a specific way of thinking and problem-solving [9]. Regarding gender differences in the expression of anxiety patterns, a domestic study found that women more frequently exhibit psychosomatic problems. This aligns with findings from developmental psychopathology, which indicate that girls are generally more prone to anxiety than boys [10].

The results of a study conducted on a sample of hospitalized patients with depression in China highlight the importance of the role of so-called health anxiety in the relationship between functional somatic symptoms and health behaviors in patients with depression and somatic symptoms. The study emphasizes the need for appropriate assessment and intervention regarding health anxiety, particularly in older patients [8].

2.1. Emotions and Psychosomatics

When examining the origins of psychosomatic disorders, it is essential to start with a key point: emotional factors play the most crucial role. Continuous emotional engagement involves the sustained activation of the autonomic nervous system and the endocrine system, as well as increased activity of internal organs. All of this leads to the deterioration of these organs and the destabilization of the immune system. Therefore, it can be easily concluded from the above that the root of psychosomatic issues lies in emotional disturbances—most often in prolonged (chronic) affective disorders, which frequently become embedded in the personality itself. The optimal state of the human organism is one of adaptability, and any disruption of this balance is accompanied by emotional involvement that overburdens bodily systems, ultimately resulting in illness [11].

Author Milovanović identifies four types of emotional disturbances that underlie psychosomatic illnesses [10]:

- Alexithymia – most commonly found in individuals who are unaware of their emotions, unable to recognize, describe, or express them, or who exhibit strong, generalized emotional reactions that cause a "storm" in the body through excessive physical responses, leading to organ dysfunction.
- Suppression of emotional reactions – prolonged repression of emotions results in their prolongation, maladaptive behavior, and overstrain of organs associated with those emotions.
- Tendency toward excessive emotional reactions – in affective personality types who chronically react with excessive and inappropriate feelings, intense physical reactions develop, ultimately causing organ damage.
- Prolonged emotional states – chronic feelings and moods place a strain on the body, disrupt immune and nervous mechanisms, and lead to psychosomatic illness. The most harmful emotions include prolonged sadness, anxiety, depressive moods, worry, inferiority, loneliness, and feeling unloved.

It is crucial to emphasize here that both conscious and unconscious negative emotions and states have the same detrimental effects on the body.

Milovanović [11] states that the specific organ affected depends on the individual's personality type, the nature of their emotions, and the constitutional weakness of the organ. Accordingly, there are typical reactions and disorders associated with specific organ systems: the most common skin disorders are itching and scratching, dermatitis (skin inflammation), and urticaria (hives); in the respiratory system, asthma is the most prevalent condition; coronary diseases (heart conditions) and hypertension (high blood pressure) are the most common disorders of the cardiovascular system; the digestive system is most frequently affected by gastritis and ulcers (inflammation and ulcers of the stomach and duodenum), as well as colitis (inflammation of the intestines); the genital and urinary tract are most commonly affected by bladder inflammation (cystitis), frequent urination, kidney diseases, and disorders of the reproductive organs; endocrine system disorders are characterized by

conditions such as diabetes (sugar disease) and thyroid gland disorders; the nervous system can be affected by pain without visible organic causes, nerve inflammation, and psychogenic headaches. All of the above, in their own way and to varying degrees, contribute to a general decline in immunity and reduced resistance of the body to various diseases [11].

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can assist in recognizing and managing emotions that trigger physical symptoms. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and breathing exercises can reduce stress levels, while regular physical activity alleviates stress and positively impacts emotional health. In more complex cases, adhering to a doctor's advice, including pharmacotherapy, is necessary. Understanding the mind-body connection is crucial for developing effective support methods and preventive measures that can enhance the quality of life for individuals facing psychosomatic disorders. Timely diagnosis, combined with integrative treatment that includes psychotherapy and medical interventions, plays a key role in reducing symptoms and improving the standard of living for those affected.

The study, prevention, and treatment of these disorders call for the integration of psychological and emotional dimensions to gain a deeper understanding of health and disease. In a broader sense, psychosomatic disorders are not confined to individual organ systems but are viewed as systemic responses to prolonged psychological stress. Chronic emotional disturbances, such as anxiety, depression, or unresolved trauma, can lead to persistent activation of the autonomic nervous system and endocrine pathways, disrupting homeostasis, overloading physiological systems, and weakening immune function, ultimately resulting in the onset and progression of physical illnesses. Furthermore, the analysis of psychosomatic disorders must consider sociocultural and environmental factors, such as lifestyle, social support, and stressors related to work, family, and interpersonal relationships, as these influences shape an individual's psychological resilience and physiological vulnerability. Understanding psychosomatic disorders requires a holistic approach that accounts not only for the individual's emotional states but also for the broader social and environmental context in which they occur. By adopting this integrative perspective, healthcare professionals can better grasp the multifaceted nature of psychosomatic disorders, combining medical treatments with psychological interventions to promote overall well-being and resilience.

3. CONCLUSION

Psychosomatic disorders highlight the profound and inseparable connection between psychological and physical health, paving the way for new research and the development of integrative treatment approaches. These disorders require a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that includes medical intervention, psychotherapy, and lifestyle changes to ensure not only symptom reduction but also sustainable improvement in the quality of life for those affected. Given the significant impact psychosomatic disorders have on the social and functional aspects of life, it is essential to raise awareness about the importance of mental health, both among healthcare professionals and within the broader societal context. Additionally, efforts to develop preventive strategies and to recognize these disorders early can significantly mitigate their negative effects on individuals and communities. The development of personalized therapeutic plans tailored to the individual needs of patients, supported by education and research, is crucial for future progress in this field. Further exploration of the role of stress and emotional regulation is particularly important, not only in the treatment but also in the prevention of psychosomatic disorders. In this way, it becomes possible not only to improve therapeutic outcomes but also to empower individuals to take an active role in maintaining their health.

A holistic treatment approach that integrates psychological and medical strategies has proven to be vital for reducing symptoms and enhancing overall well-being. Psychotherapy, combined with appropriate medical treatments, can significantly contribute to symptom reduction and an improved quality of life for individuals with psychosomatic disorders. Considering all these aspects, it is important to develop effective support and prevention methods that will enhance the quality of life for those dealing with psychosomatic disorders. Timely diagnosis and integrative treatment are key to

successfully reducing symptoms and improving the living standards of these patients. Ultimately, understanding and accepting the connection between the mind and body is not just a matter of individual well-being but a crucial step toward building a society where mental and physical health is regarded as equally valuable aspects of human life.

4. REFERENCES

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