

DO COLOUR AND PERSONALITY INFLUENCE TREATMENT SEEKING BEHAVIOUR IN WOMEN WITH LOWER URINARY TRACT DYSFUNCTION?

Aims of study

Many more people suffer with lower urinary tract symptoms than present for treatment. Factors which influence treatment seeking behaviour are complex. Demographic variables and psychological characteristics such as personality, coping strategies, optimism, psychological morbidity and distress are known to affect treatment seeking behaviour. Demographic and psychological factors influence the perceived severity of illness, perceived barriers to, and benefits of seeking treatment.

The influence of personality on an individual's decision to seek help for LUTS remains poorly understood. The aim of this study was to identify personality traits which may influence women's decision to seek treatment for LUTS using an innovative personality test. Standard personality questionnaires are lengthy, and people frequently mark desirable responses rather than accurate descriptions of themselves. Colour preference is a subconscious expression of individuality and is a mode of communication in everyday life. The Luscher colour test [1] is a simple, transparent, easily administered test which identifies conscious and subconscious characteristics and motivations of a person, through their choice and rejection of colours.

Study design, materials and methods

This was a prospective case control study. Women attending outpatient urogynaecology and urodynamics clinics were asked to complete a short LUTS screening questionnaire [2], the hospital anxiety and depression scale (HAD) [3], the perception of bladder condition questionnaire [4] and the short Luscher colour test. Using the Luscher colour plates, women were asked to indicate the colour which best described how they felt about their bladder and their treatment (if they were receiving care).

Controls were recruited from members of staff working in the hospital who identified themselves as asymptomatic and were not receiving care for a bladder condition. Ethical approval was granted by the local research ethics committee. All women consented to take part in the study.

Results

151 women took part in the study consisting 72 treatment seekers (47%) and 79 female controls (non treatment seekers) (53%). Of the controls, 29 women were completely asymptomatic, and 50 women had LUTS based on the results of the screening questionnaire for which they had not sought treatment.

Treatment seekers reported higher PBC scores than symptomatic non treatment seekers (table 1). Asymptomatic women reported no or very minor problems. Treatment seekers and symptomatic non treatment seekers showed a higher frequency of clinical anxiety and depression than asymptomatic women as measured using the HAD scale (table 2).

Using the Luscher colour test, common traits of all treatment seekers included a desire for change and escape from problems. They showed an ambivalent attitude varying between optimistic desire for fulfilment and gloomy pessimism.

Overactive bladder patients were impatient, restless and dissatisfied, feeling under stress from a demanding situation or trying to unwind after a stressful period. Stress incontinent women showed signs of helplessness with a need for reassurance from others. Patients with mixed urinary symptoms tended to be impatient, authoritative and determined. All controls/ non treatment seekers tend to be daydreamers and need reassurance, support and understanding from others.

Symptomatic women from the non treatment group were egocentric and impatient, and feel compelled to make the most of an existing situation. Personality traits of asymptomatic non treatment seekers suggested sensitive people with strong ideals who desire their own way. Participants in this group did not show signs of psychological stress or tension.

When women were asked to select a colour that would represent how they felt about their bladder or treatment, there was no correlation between the chosen colours and the PBC score for all groups.

Interpretation of results

Results from the colour test suggest that there may be personality trait differences between women who seek treatment for LUTS and non-treatment seekers. Treatment seekers are likely to desire and instigate change to overcome problems; nevertheless they may feel pessimistic about the outcome. Symptomatic women who do not seek help for LUTS may feel that they have to persevere and optimise an existing situation. Overall, treatment seekers reported more bothersome symptoms and achieved higher anxiety and depression scores than symptomatic non treatment seekers. These findings may be in keeping with non-treatment seeking women perceiving their symptoms to be less bothersome than those women presenting for help.

The low correlation between the PBC scores and the colour reflecting how women feel about their bladder and treatment suggests that the perception of symptom severity and bother are not associated with a particular colour in any patient group.

Concluding message

There are personality differences between women who seek treatment for LUTS compared with non-treatment seekers using the Luscher colour test which may influence a woman's decision to seek help for LUTS.

References

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3. Zigmond AS, Snaith RP. The hospital anxiety and depression scale. Acta Psychiatr Scand. 1983 Jun;67(6):361-70.
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Table 1 - Results of the PBC questionnaire.

		Treatment Seekers			Non treatment seekers	
		Overactive bladder	Stress incontinence	Mixed symptoms	Asymptomatic	Symptomatic
PBC	No problems	1	2	1	27	17
	Very minor problems	4	1	0	2	23
	Minor problems	3	2	6	0	7
	Moderate problems	7	12	4	0	3
	Severe problems	6	2	5	0	0
	Many severe problems	2	1	1	0	0

Table 2 - Results of the HAD questionnaire.

	Symptoms	Clinical anxiety (%)	Clinical depression (%)
Treatment seekers	Symptomatic	21% (15)	14% (10)
Non treatment seekers (controls)	Asymptomatic	0%	0%
	Symptomatic	12%(6)	8%(4)

FUNDING: NONE

DISCLOSURES: NONE

HUMAN SUBJECTS: This study was approved by the Guys & St Thomas ethics committee and followed the Declaration of Helsinki Informed consent was obtained from the patients.