

Somatic Symptom and Related Disorders

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Introduction

Somatic Symptom Disorder (SSD) is a kind of mental disease that causes one or more physiological symptoms, such as discomfort. The symptoms may or may not be linked to a physical cause, such as general medical problems, mental diseases, or substance misuse. Regardless, they create disproportionately high amounts of suffering.

Somatic symptom disorder is diagnosed when a person's attention on bodily sensations, such as pain, weakness, or shortness of breath, becomes so intense that it causes considerable discomfort and/or impairs their ability to function. Excessive thoughts, sentiments, and behaviours are associated with the physical symptoms. Physical symptoms may or may not be linked to a documented medical disease, but the individual is experiencing them and feels they are sick (that is, not faking the illness).

A person isn't diagnosed with somatic symptom disorder only because a medical cause for a physical symptom can't be found. The focus is on how excessive or out of proportion the thoughts, feelings, and actions associated to the condition are.

One or more organs and bodily systems may be involved in the symptoms, such as:

- Pain
- Neurologic problems
- Gastrointestinal complaints
- Sexual symptoms
- Anxiety disorders are common in those who have SSD

SSD sufferers aren't exaggerating their symptoms. Whether or not a medical cause can be identified, the pain and other difficulties people are experiencing are genuine. Moreover, the anguish caused by symptoms has a major impact on everyday functioning.

Before diagnosing SSD, doctors must do many tests to rule out other probable reasons.

Patients may experience a great deal of stress and frustration after receiving a diagnosis of SSD. If there is no other physical reason for their symptoms or if they are informed their degree of suffering regarding a physical condition is excessive, they may be dissatisfied.

Disorders Related to Somatic Symptom Disorder

Psychiatry has recently identified a number of disorders linked to SSD. These are some of them.

Illness anxiety disorder (formerly called hypochondriasis)

This personality type is obsessed with the fear of contracting a serious illness. They may mistakenly feel that mild ailments are symptoms of more significant medical issues. They could assume, for example, that a typical headache is an indication of a brain tumour.

Conversion disorder (also called functional neurological symptom disorder)

People with neurological symptoms that can't be linked to a medical cause are diagnosed with this illness. Patients may have symptoms such as:

- Weakness or immobility
- Movements that are unusual (such as tremor, unsteady gait, or seizures)
- Blindness
- Hearing loss is a common problem
- Numbness or loss of feeling
- Convulsions (called nonepileptic seizures and pseudoseizures)

Conversion disorder symptoms are generally exacerbated by stress.

Other Disorders have Specific Somatic Symptoms. This category includes situations in which somatic symptoms last less than six months or involve a condition known as pseudocyesis, which is a false belief that a woman is pregnant that is accompanied by other outward signs of pregnancy, such as an expanding abdomen, labour pains, nausea, foetal movement, breast changes, and menstrual period cessation.

Diagnosis

- One or more physical symptoms that are bothersome or interfere with daily activities
- Excessive thoughts, feelings, or actions associated with at least one of the following physical symptoms or health concerns
- Thoughts that are out of proportion to the severity of the symptoms
- Anxiety about health or symptoms that persists
- Spending an excessive amount of attention and focus on symptoms or health issues
- At least one symptom is present all of the time, while other symptoms may appear and disappear.

Rather of seeing a psychiatrist or other mental health professional, people with somatic symptom disorder usually go to their primary care physician. People who suffer from somatic symptom disorder may find it difficult to recognise that their concerns about their symptoms are excessive. Even if they are presented proof that they do not have a dangerous ailment, they may remain afraid and anxious. Pain is the most common symptom for some people. By the age of 30, most people have developed a somatic symptom condition.

Treatment

The goal of somatic symptom disorder treatment is to help people manage their symptoms and operate as normally as possible.

Regular consultations with a trusted health care expert are usually part of the treatment for somatic symptom disorder. The doctor can provide comfort and reassurance, keep track of your health and symptoms, and help you avoid unneeded tests and treatments. Psychotherapy (talk therapy) can help people modify their minds and behaviours, as well as discover new methods to cope with pain and other symptoms, manage stress, and enhance their overall functioning.

If the person is also suffering from depression or anxiety, antidepressant or anti-anxiety medicines may be beneficial.

Related Disorders

The term "hypochondriasis" was once used to describe illness anxiety condition. The individual is fixated with having or being sick, and they are continuously concerned about their health. They may look for indications of sickness regularly and take extraordinary efforts to minimise health dangers. Unlike somatic symptom disorder, illness anxiety disorder is characterised by the absence of symptoms. Conversion disorder (also known as functional neurological symptom disorder) is a condition in which a person's perception, feeling, or movement are affected by symptoms that have no medical explanation. Numbness, blindness, or difficulty walking are all possible symptoms.

The symptoms usually appear out of nowhere. Symptoms may last for a long period or fade rapidly. Conversion disorder is commonly associated with depression or anxiety problems. People with factitious disorder make or fake physical or mental disease when they are not unwell, or purposely make a minor sickness worse. A person with factitious disorder may also inflict disease or harm on another person (factitious condition imposed on another), for example, by feigning the symptoms of a kid in their care. The individual may or may not appear to gain from the circumstances they create (such as getting out of school or work).