



PERGAMON

Personality and Individual Differences 35 (2003) 519–524

PERSONALITY AND
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Fantasy proneness and thought suppression as predictors of the Medical Student Syndrome

Ingrid Candel*, Harald Merckelbach

Department of Experimental Psychology, Maastricht University, PO Box 616, 6200 MD, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Received 7 February 2002; received in revised form 25 June 2002; accepted 23 July 2002

Abstract

This study examined individual differences correlates of the Medical Student Syndrome (MSS). A sample of 215 medical students completed a questionnaire measuring health complaints that had to do with their study as well as self-report scales tapping fantasy proneness, and habitual thought suppression attempts. Thirty percent ($n=65$) of the respondents reported MSS complaints related to a wide variety of diseases. Fantasy proneness and thought suppression were found to be independent predictors of these complaints. © 2003 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Medical Student Syndrome; Fantasy proneness; Thought suppression

1. Introduction

The Medical Student Syndrome (MSS), or the Medical Student Disease (MSD; Woods, Naterson, & Silverman, 1966) as it is sometimes called, refers to health complaints that are the results of medical expertise rather than genuine pathology. According to Ferguson (1996), MSS “points to the important role played by factual medical knowledge in the interpretation of physiological signs and symptoms” (p. 315). By this view, some medical students would have a tendency to interpret vague bodily symptoms in terms of the latest disease they have learnt about. This tendency would become stronger as medical knowledge grows (Ferguson, 1996). Although both medical teaching staff and medical students are well aware of this phenomenon (Woods et al., 1966), little systematic research has been done on MSS. One exception is the older study of Woods and colleagues (1966) that was carried out to determine the incidence and various manifestations of MSS. These authors noted that 79% of the respondents in their sample of medical

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31-43-388-1963; fax: +31-43-388-4196.

E-mail address: i.candel@psychology.unimaas.nl (I. Candel).

students ($n = 33$) had experienced MSS complaints at some point during their medical education. Interestingly, MSS seems not to be specific for medical students. Hardy and Calhoun (1997) studied worries about mental health in a sample of undergraduates who followed a course in abnormal psychology. Students who planned to major in psychology reported more worries about their psychological health than those planning to major in another discipline. However, it was also the case that the process of learning about various psychiatric diseases decreased students' worries about their mental health, which is quite the opposite of the MSS phenomenon.

The purpose of the current study was two-fold. Given the fact that so far only small-scale studies have been conducted in this domain, our first aim was to examine the prevalence of MSS complaints in a reasonably large sample of medical students. Secondly, we explored whether certain individual difference variables are related to MSS. In previous studies, MSS has been portrayed as a form of hypochondrias (Woods et al., 1966), but factors that may mediate this condition have not been studied so far. On the basis of our earlier work, we speculated that fantasy proneness and thought suppression might be interesting candidates in this respect. Individuals high on fantasy proneness spend a large part of their time fantasizing and daydreaming and they have a strong ability to experience intense sensations. For example, Wilson and Barber (1983) noted that individuals high on fantasy proneness often develop physical symptoms (e.g. pain or thermal sensations) that are directly related to fantasies and thoughts about illness or specific medical conditions. A case in point is pseudocystis (false pregnancy), a phenomenon that seems to have a raised incidence among fantasy prone people.

Habitual thought suppression refers to chronic attempts to dispel certain thoughts from the stream of consciousness (e.g. Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987). There are good reasons to believe that thought suppression is a counterproductive strategy in that it renders the to-be-suppressed topic hyperaccessible, an effect that has been dubbed "the white bear effect" (Wegner et al., 1987; see review by Rassin, Merckelbach, & Muris, 2000). On a related note, suppressing thoughts about pain has been found to delay rather than precipitate pain recovery (Cioffi & Holloway, 1993). With these considerations in mind, we conducted a survey among medical students. We asked them whether they ever had experienced MSS complaints during their medical study. They also completed self-report measures of fantasy proneness and thought suppression. We speculated that raised scores on these measures would be related to MSS complaints.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

All third and fourth year medical students at Maastricht University ($n = 419$) received a booklet containing questionnaires and a cover letter that invited them to participate in a study on medical complaints. Participants received a small financial compensation in return for completing the questionnaires. Two-hundred and fifteen participants (158 women) completed and returned the questionnaires (response rate 51%). Mean age of the sample was 22 years ($SD = 1,74$; range = 19–32 years). About half of the participants ($n = 106$; 3 missing) were third year students.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات