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Psychometric properties of disability measures among patients with social anxiety disorder[☆]

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Abstract

Background: Although recognition of the importance of disability as a construct has increased in recent years, there has been little examination of the reliability and validity of disability measures. **Methods:** This study examined three disability measures, the Liebowitz Self-Rated Disability Scale (LSRDS), the clinician-rated Disability Profile (DP), and the Sheehan Disability Scale (SDS) among patients with a primary diagnosis of social anxiety disorder. **Results:** The disability measures correlated strongly with each other, as well as with measures of social anxiety, depressive symptoms, and patients' subjectively-evaluated quality of life. The LSRDS and DP were more internally consistent than the SDS Total Score. All measures discriminated between patients with generalized and non-generalized social anxiety disorder. However, the LSRDS and DP also showed greater sensitivity to ecological indicators of distress than the SDS. Social anxiety symptoms accounted for significant variance in disability, above and beyond that accounted for by depressive symptoms. **Conclusions:** Overall, the LSRDS, DP, and SDS appear to be valid tools in the study of disability in social anxiety disorder, although the

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LSRDS and the DP appear to be somewhat more sensitive to the experiences of socially anxious patients.

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As a construct, disability bridges the gap between the deeply personal impact a disorder has on an individual and its effect on his or her ability to fulfill roles as student, worker, spouse, or parent. Disability is certainly related to the presence and severity of symptoms, and the level of disability changes in relation to symptom remission (Olfson et al., 1997). However, disability may also vary among individuals with the same type and intensity of symptoms (Schneier et al., 1994). Rather than emphasizing the personal experience of various symptoms, disability assessment focuses on how a disorder interferes with the individual's ability to act in the world. Disability is one of the critical diagnostic criteria for most psychiatric disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994), and it is an important determinant of a patient's need for service (Goering, Lin, Campbell, Boyle, & Offord, 1996). Disability measures also provide an important index of the effectiveness of treatment (Goering et al., 1996; Schneier et al., 1994). Surprisingly, although disability is so important to our understanding of the impact of a disorder and our success in treating it, the measures used to examine disability have rarely been compared and their psychometric properties have rarely been investigated.

Social anxiety disorder provides a good example of the need to assess disability in addition to symptom severity. Symptomatically, individuals with social anxiety disorder experience fear in one or more social situations. With regard to disability arising from such symptoms, impairment in the domain of social relationships would be expected to be common. Indeed, Turner, Beidel, Dancu, and Keys (1986) found that 69% of individuals with social anxiety disorder reported impairment in general social relationships, and half of the unmarried individuals in the study reported impairment in their relationships with persons of the opposite sex. In an epidemiological sample, Wittchen, Fuetsch, Sonntag, Muller, and Liebowitz (1999) found that significantly more individuals with social anxiety disorder were never married or were divorced than those without the disorder. A study of psychiatric disorders and relationships found that individuals with social anxiety disorder had fewer friends than persons without mental disorder and reported that they had trouble getting along with the friends they had (Whisman, Sheldon, & Goering, 2000).

However, when measuring disability associated with social anxiety disorder, the focus must go beyond disrupted social relationships. Symptoms of social anxiety disorder may have a direct negative impact on occupational functioning, such as when a person fails to obtain employment for fear of job interviews, when

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