

Unveiling the relationships between cyberchondria and psychopathological symptoms

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Introduction

- Cyberchondria consists in excessive and repetitive online health-related searches.
- It is associated with health anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and intolerance of uncertainty [1].
- Links between cyberchondria and depressive or somatic symptoms are unclear [2].
- The role of general anxiety versus health related anxiety in cyberchondria is unclear.

Aims:

- This study investigates the individual and comparative effects of the aforementioned constructs on the severity of cyberchondria.

Methods

- Participants were recruited online and completed self-report measures to assess the severity of cyberchondria [3] and of the variables [table 1].
- Multiple regression analyses were run before and after controlling for age, education, and sex.
- When all measures were included in the analysis, all but general anxiety were significant predictors of cyberchondria levels. Health anxiety made the strongest contribution [Table 2].
- When health anxiety measure was excluded from the analysis, general anxiety was also a significant independent predictor.

Table 1: Selected demographic and clinical characteristics of the participants (median and range for continuous variables and percentage for categorical variables are reported)

Sample characteristics	N=749
Age	34 (18-75)
Education	
- Not completed high school education (12 years)	2.6
- Completed vocational training	6.9
- Completed high school education (12 years)	28.9
- Any university level education (not necessarily completed)	61.5
Sex (female)	67.6
SHAI	16.0 (0-54)
PHQ-9	6.0 (0-27)
PROMIS	17.0 (7-35)
IUS-SF	31.0 (12-60)
OCI-R	12.0 (0-72)
PHQ-15	7.0 (0-28)
CSS	68 (37-153)

SHAI: Short Health Anxiety Inventory, PHQ-9: Patient Health Questionnaire – 9, PROMIS: Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System Emotional Distress (General Distress), IUS-SF: Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale, OCI-R: Obsessive-Compulsive Inventory Revised, PHQ-15: Patient Health Questionnaire – 15 Somatic Symptom Severity Scale, CSS: Cyberchondria Severity Scale.

Results

Table 2: Results of standard multiple regression ^{a)}

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.	Collinearity Statistics
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t		
1 (Constant)	33.36	2.09	-	15.94	<0.001	-
SHAI	1.14	0.09	0.42	13.09	<0.001	1.76
PHQ-9	-0.70	0.14	-0.19	-4.90	<0.001	2.72
PROMIS	0.22	0.14	0.06	1.57	0.12	2.91
IUS-SF	0.21	0.07	0.10	2.86	0.004	1.92
OCI-R	0.61	0.06	0.37	11.06	<0.001	1.97
PHQ-15	0.54	0.17	0.12	3.27	0.001	2.32

a) with CSS total score as dependent variable and SHAI, PHQ-9, PROMIS, IUS-SF, OCI-R

and PHQ-15 as predictors

Conclusion

- Health anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms and intolerance of uncertainty are associated with cyberchondria severity.
- Health anxiety makes the strongest unique contribution, over general anxiety.
- Depression and somatic symptoms were also related to cyberchondria severity.

References

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For more details:

On the concept of cyberchondria :

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