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Half of the people suffering from head injuries fake to receive financial help

This release is available in Spanish.

How can it be proved that a patient is lying when they say that they have a cognitive problem, such as memory or concentration problems or anxiety? There are many people who exaggerate their injuries and even feign them in order to receive more money from insurance companies or obtain a sick leave, according to a pioneering research in Spain. This research was carried out in the **Department of Personality, Assessment and Psychological Treatment** University of Granada by Doctor **Raquel Vilar López**. The conclusions of her study, which focused on patients who suffered from head injuries, speak for themselves: nearly half of the people who go to court feign psycho-cognitive disorders with the objective of profiting from this in some way. They are not hypochondriacs or overanxious or obsessive patients, they just lie in order to receive some sort of compensation, as for example money. They are the so called 'simulators'.

Until now, in Spain no reliable system existed to detect if a person was faking their symptoms. For this reason the study by Vilar López coordinated by Manuel Gómez Río and Miguel Pérez García is so important: for the first time, Spanish health professionals have a set of reliable tools to prove empirically if a patient is lying when they declare, for example, that their memory problems renders them unfit for work.

Validated Evidence

The work by this researcher has validated a series of 'tests' which, when used on patients without them being aware of it, detect which patients are simulators and which are not. These neuropsychological tests were included in a three-hour-long battery of neuropsychological tests which assesses other cognitive aspects of the patient in order to disguise the actual tests and in this way obtain the desired information.

Raquel Vilar López explains that in her research she adapted a series of tests that were already known in the United States – a country with a long history of work in the field of neuropsychology – to the Spanish context, because "the neuropsychological tests cannot be extrapolated without adjustments from a context to another". The percentage of patients who suffer from head injuries that feign symptoms is nearly the same as that obtained by the American researchers.

The study carried out in the UGR also included a method which has become very popular recently due to several television programs: the lie detector, an instrument which registers the physiological responses of blood pressure, heart beat, breathing rate and galvanic skin response. Vilar López used this equipment with a group of 80 Psychology students as the "analogous group", that is, as no patient would admit being a simulator, a group of people without any disorders were asked to fake them in order to confirm the validity of the test. Furthermore, 54 actual patients were analyzed by the doctor. These patients belonged to different departments of the University Hospital Virgen de las Nieves in Granada.

The researcher explains that "although the lie detector itself has no scientific rigor, it could be an efficient instrument if combined with other tools, as for example the tests that we have validated". Part of the results of her research were presented at the last 'International Neuropsychological Society' and 'National Academy of Neuropsychology' conferences – the two most important organizations in the field of neuropsychology in the world – and in the prestigious scientific journal 'Archives of Clinical Neuropsychology'.

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