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Anxious Patients May Magnify Symptoms

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Friday, Nov 14 (Psych Central) -- Among individuals living with an anxiety disorder, people often experience physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating, irregular breathing, shaking of the hands and muscular tension. According to a new study, the perceived magnitude of the symptoms are often not confirmed upon physical examination.

The discovery stems from research on 83 patients with anxiety disorders at the University of Granada (Spain). Test subjects reported very intense physiological symptoms in surveys and questionnaires, but were hypo-reactive when real measures of symptoms were analyzed by clinical examinations.

The findings held for patients who had been diagnosed with variety of anxiety disorders such as: panic disorder with and without agoraphobia, social anxiety, generalized anxiety and specific phobias.

However, researchers also discovered patients who suffer a less serious anxiety disorder, such as those with specific phobias (excessive and irrational fear of a certain object or situation, such as certain animals, blood or open wounds, heights, storms, closed spaces...) showed high reactivity in physiological tests.

Interestingly, the ability to react physiologically improved the odds of successful therapeutic intervention. In particular, patients with specific phobias received the greatest benefit from cognitive-behavioral treatment.

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent psychological concern in European countries. According to U.S. statistics, the prevalence of specific phobias ranges between 8.8 and 12.5 percent of the general population. Although few of the persons who show specific fears come into the category of phobic, nearly 11 percent of such people have fears serious enough to affect their lives significantly.

Researchers believe the study findings support the use of cognitive-behavioral tests and psycho-physiological tests to improve care for individuals with anxiety.

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