

Inability to cry in patients with Sjogrens syndrome affect emotional and mental well-being

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Patients with Sjogren's syndrome, a systemic immune disease which affects the production of tears and saliva, reported worse mental well-being and more difficulty in identifying feelings than the healthy population, according to results presented today at the EULAR 2011 Annual Congress.

The results of a Dutch study of 300 patients demonstrated that 22% of patients with Sjögren's syndrome were classified as clinically 'alexithymic' (experiencing difficulty identifying and describing emotions) compared to 12% of healthy controls. Subsequent results of the study showed that higher levels of alexithymia were moderately correlated with worse mental wellbeing in both groups (Pearson's correlation* ($r \geq 0.32$, p

"Patients with Sjögren's syndrome experience chronic dryness of the eyes and mouth as well as other parts of the body, and thus have a hampered ability to cry. This may affect their ability to express their emotions and they often have to rely on words and facial expressions instead of tears as a result" said Ms. Ninke Van Leeuwen from Utrecht University. "We hope that the results of our study will drive further research to examine different psychological interventions that can benefit patients with Sjögren's syndrome who have emotional processing problems."

Validated questionnaires were used to assess the emotional processing, regulation and mental wellbeing of 300 patients with primary Sjögren's syndrome in the Netherlands area and 100 demographically matched healthy controls (mean age 56.8 years, 93% female). The questionnaires evaluated responses on the emotional processing styles including affect intensity (the strength of the emotions with which individuals respond to certain stimulus), alexithymia, cognitive reappraisal (the use of coping strategies for dealing with negative thoughts and feelings), expression and suppression of emotions and mental wellbeing.

Provided by European League Against Rheumatism

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