Relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and the course of whiplash complaints

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IMPORTANT BACKGROUND:

Hyperarousal = anxiety, sleep problems, irritability, inability to concentrate, unusually intense startle response, hypervigilance (watchfulness), and physical restlessness (pacing the floor, fidgeting, etc.).

FROM ABSTRACT

Objective
This study investigates the relationship between posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (avoidance, reexperiencing, and hyperarousal) and the presence, severity, and duration of neck complaints after motor vehicle accidents.

Methods
Individuals who had been involved in traffic accidents and had initiated compensation claim procedures with an insurance company were sent questionnaires containing complaint-related questions and the Self-Rating Scale for PTSD.

Complaints were monitored using additional questionnaires that were administered 6 months and 12 months after the accident.

Results
PTSD was related to the presence and severity of concurrent post-whiplash syndrome.

More specifically, the intensity of hyperarousal symptoms that were related to PTSD at one month were found to have predictive validity for the persistence and severity of post-whiplash syndrome at 6 and 12 months follow-up.

Conclusion
Results are consistent with the idea that PTSD hyperarousal symptoms have a detrimental influence on the recovery and severity of whiplash complaints following car accidents.

THESE AUTHORS ALSO NOTE:

"Whiplash is one of the most prevalent posttraumatic diagnoses following traffic accidents."
In the absence of identifiable structural injuries, whiplash victims may suffer from long-lasting complaints that are characterized by persistent neck pain, often accompanied by cognitive complaints.

“As many as 40% of [whiplash] victims suffer from long-lasting symptoms, sometimes with severely disabling effects.”

“High initial pain intensity, female gender, and increasing age are predictive of delayed [whiplash] recovery.”

“The presence of posttraumatic stress symptoms is another factor that may play an important role in the persistence of whiplash symptoms following a motor vehicle accident.”

“Post-whiplash syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are both relatively common conditions following traffic accidents.”

As many as 23% of traffic accident victims developed PTSD.

“PTSD shares several symptoms with acute whiplash syndrome, including insomnia, irritability, and cognitive problems.”

“There is evidence to indicate that the acute posttraumatic stress response (i.e., re-experiencing and avoidance symptoms) is related to the intensity of whiplash symptoms.”

PTSD symptoms may also influence the course of whiplash symptoms.

More specifically, the present study addresses the following questions:

1) Are PTSD symptoms more frequent among individuals who have post-whiplash syndrome? [This study concludes YES]

2) Are PTSD symptoms related to the severity of whiplash complaints? [This study concludes YES]

3) Is the presence of PTSD symptoms predictive of delayed recovery from post-whiplash syndrome? [This study concludes YES]

In this study, participants were assessed at 1 month, 6 months, and 12 months after their accidents.
DISCUSSION

The major results of the present study can be summarized as follows:

1) “PTSD and the number of its symptoms are more prevalent among car accident victims who have post-whiplash syndrome than they are among victims who do not have post-whiplash syndrome.”

2) “The presence of PTSD symptoms was associated with relatively more severe concurrent post-whiplash syndrome complaints.”

3) “Specifically, the initial number of hyperarousal symptoms was found to have predictive validity for the persistence and severity of post-whiplash syndrome at 6 and 12 months follow-up.”

“In accordance with earlier research, PTSD and its symptoms were found to be more prevalent among victims who had post-whiplash syndrome in the first 6 months following their accidents.”

“Since earlier research has shown that the development of PTSD is not substantially related to either the severity of the accident or the severity of the sustained injury, differences in the frequency of PTSD are not readily explained by any apparently terrifying aspect of the accident.”

“The current results seem to correspond with earlier research that suggests that victims with post-whiplash syndrome generally considered the accident more frightening than did other car accident victims.”

“Because perceived threat is of paramount importance in developing PTSD, it could be speculated that the presence of whiplash complaints is threatening and induces anxiety complaints.”

“Our results clearly show that the hyperarousal symptoms have the most marked relationship with post-whiplash syndrome.”

The “presence of PTSD may have an undesirable influence on the course of whiplash complaints.”

The results of this study are consistent with the idea that at least some post-whiplash syndrome complaints are actually symptoms of PTSD. “The pattern further highlights the importance of considering PTSD, particularly the hyperarousal features, when diagnosing and treating individuals with apparent post-whiplash syndrome complaints.”
“Our results confirm earlier research, which showed that recovery from post-whiplash syndrome after 6 and 12 months is related to the severity of initial symptoms.” [Very Important]

“The present results replicated previous findings that indicated that women are overrepresented among accident victims with post-whiplash syndrome.”

“To conclude, a considerable number of individuals with post-whiplash syndrome were also found to suffer from posttraumatic stress symptoms.”

“Specifically, the number of hyperarousal symptoms at 21 days after the accident was found to be related to the persistence and severity of post-whiplash syndrome symptoms at both 6 and 12 months follow-up.”

“It is therefore worthwhile to consider symptoms of PTSD and anxiety in general when evaluating and treating patients with post-whiplash syndrome after motor vehicle accidents.”

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND:

Hyperarousal = anxiety, sleep problems, irritability, inability to concentrate, unusually intense startle response, hypervigilance (watchfulness), and physical restlessness (pacing the floor, fidgeting, etc.).

1) Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is related to the presence and severity of symptoms in the post-whiplash syndrome.

2) PTSD hyperarousal symptoms have a detrimental influence on the recovery and severity of whiplash complaints following car accidents.

3) Whiplash victims may suffer from long-lasting complaints that are characterized by persistent neck pain, often accompanied by cognitive complaints, yet show no identifiable structural injury.

4) “As many as 40% of [whiplash] victims suffer from long-lasting symptoms, sometimes with severely disabling effects.”

5) “High initial pain intensity, female gender, and increasing age are predictive of delayed [whiplash] recovery.”

6) “Post-whiplash syndrome and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are both relatively common conditions following traffic accidents.” As many as 23% of traffic accident victims developed PTSD.
“Acute posttraumatic stress response (i.e., reexperiencing and avoidance symptoms) is related to the intensity of whiplash symptoms.”

PTSD symptoms are more frequent among individuals who have chronic post-whiplash symptoms.

PTSD symptoms are related to the severity of whiplash complaints.

PTSD symptoms are predictive of delayed recovery from whiplash injury.

“The initial number of hyperarousal symptoms was found to have predictive validity for the persistence and severity of post-whiplash syndrome at 6 and 12 months follow-up.”

The development of PTSD is not substantially related to either the severity of the accident or the severity of the sustained injury.

“The current results seem to correspond with earlier research that suggests that victims with post-whiplash syndrome generally considered the accident more frightening than did other car accident victims.” [Our history should probably ask the patient to grade “how frightening” was the collision.]

“Specifically, the number of hyperarousal symptoms at 21 days after the accident was found to be related to the persistence and severity of post-whiplash syndrome symptoms at both 6 and 12 months follow-up.”

“Women are overrepresented among accident victims with post-whiplash syndrome.”

“To conclude, a considerable number of individuals with post-whiplash syndrome were also found to suffer from posttraumatic stress symptoms.”

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“It is worthwhile to consider symptoms of PTSD and anxiety in general when evaluating and treating patients with post-whiplash syndrome after motor vehicle accidents.”