Assessing dissociative pathology in psychogenic movement disorders: Clinical utility of the Dissociative Experiences Scale-II

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BACKGROUND

- There is accumulating research linking psychogenic movement disorders (PMD) with dissociative psychopathology defined as the disruption of normal integration of psychological functioning.1
- Although the Dissociative Experiences Scale-II (DES-II) is among the most commonly employed instruments, this measure may be insensitive to PMD dissociative experiences due to its emphasis on absorption symptoms (i.e., such engagement in an activity that one becomes unaware of surroundings).2
- The objective of the present study was to examine the clinical utility of the DES-II and its three factor model has shown that symptoms of dissociation decrease with age. Hence, validation of the DES-II with neurological sample of undergraduate college students and research has shown that symptoms of dissociation decrease with age. Hence, validation of the DES-II with neurological and non-neurological disorders will provide a better understanding of the prevalence of dissociative symptomatology in PMD.

RESULTS

- No significant demographic differences were found between the PMD and NES groups. The average anxiety scores for both groups were in the moderate range, however, NES participants reported significantly greater depression (moderate range) as compared to those with PMD (mild range).
- DES-II total group means were within normal limits, and the total scale scores of only three NES (13.6%) and one PMD participant (5.9%) were above the recommended cut-off of thirty.
- NES participants reported experiencing significantly more amnestic types of dissociative experiences than the PMD group.
- Table 1. Demographic variables and outcome measures by group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Measure</th>
<th>NES Group (n=22)</th>
<th>PMD Group (n=17)</th>
<th>t/F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38.6 (10.8)</td>
<td>38.0 (13.4)</td>
<td>-0.19</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>15.0 (4.8)</td>
<td>13.0 (4.9)</td>
<td>-0.97</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of Sx Onset</td>
<td>27.8 (5.3)</td>
<td>26.8 (6.3)</td>
<td>-0.25</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Group means and standard error of the means for significantly different DES-II items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>NES</th>
<th>PMD</th>
<th>t/F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Means (SD) are provided for each variable.

PMD participants scored significantly higher than NES participants on item 19-Able to ignore pain [t(37)=-2.24, p=0.031].

CONCLUSIONS

- Although the greater endorsement of amnesia by NES participants may be due to attentional deficits or a tendency to underestimate memory functioning, the current findings are consistent with previous research suggesting that type of dissociation involved in psychogenic illness (compartmentalization/amnesia) is not adequately assessed by the DES-II, which consists primarily of items concerning detachment and absorption.2 Thus, it is likely that a number of participants with clinically severe dissociative tendencies were not identified in the current study with the standard cut-off for DES-II total score.

- This tool was originally validated on a convenience sample of undergraduate college students and research has shown that symptoms of dissociation decrease with age. Hence, validation of the DES-II with neurological and non-neurological disorders will provide a better understanding of the prevalence of dissociative symptomatology in PMD.

REFERENCES


METHODS

- Seventeen female patients who underwent comprehensive neurological evaluation and were subsequently diagnosed with PMD were compared with 22 female patients with V-EEG confirmed NES.
- In addition to DES-II, both groups completed the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II).

Note. Means (SD) are provided for each variable.