

**PSYCHOSOMATIC SYMPTOMS IN PATIENTS WITH LIMITED
SCLERODERMA**

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of the study. To study the features of psychosomatic pathology in patients with limited scleroderma.

Materials and methods. A questionnaire on the severity of psychopathological symptoms was used SCL-90-R to determine the assessment of patterns of psychological signs in 95 patients suffering from limited scleroderma. The control group consisted of 30 respondents without skin pathology.

Results. In patients with limited scleroderma, higher indicators were found for the general index of symptom severity (GSI), the index of present symptomatic distress (PTSD), the total number of affirmative responses of the questionnaire (PST). In the group of patients with limited scleroderma, higher levels of distress were determined on the scales of somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression, and anxiety.

Conclusion. Patients with limited scleroderma have a wider range of psychosomatic symptoms. The predominant characteristics of psychosomatic changes are somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression, and anxiety.

Keywords: Questionnaire on the severity of psychopathological symptoms SCL-90-R, level distress, somatization, depression, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

In the practice of a dermatovenerologist, the proportion of diseases with a chronic recurrent course with insufficiently studied etiopathogenesis is especially high. Despite the fact that the vast majority of dermatological diseases do not pose an immediate threat to life, the chronic, torpid and incurable nature of many dermatoses is a kind of stress stimulus. Skin diseases have a negative impact on the quality of life of patients, maladapt them socially, and lead to the formation of varying degrees of psychopathological symptoms. Patients with skin diseases are concerned about cosmetic defects, fear of disease progression and damage to internal organs, they worry about the possibility of inheritance of dermatosis or its contagiousness. All this leads to a deterioration in the patient's quality of life, his somatization. The most common affective disorders accompanying the course of skin diseases are anxiety, phobic (more often — sociophobic), depressive experiences. They are based on somatic manifestations that have an actual and constantly frustrating character (skin deformation, itching, burning, feeling contractions, peeling, changes in skin color and structure). Depression in dermatological disorders is also often associated with ideas of physical disability, inferiority, fear of lifelong deformity or deformity, concerns about the prognosis and outcome of the disease, associated with a sense of hopelessness, hopelessness, inferiority, pessimistic assessment of the future. The experiences and behavior of patients with a dermatological profile are characterized by increased shyness associated with fears

negative attitude of others, worries about the loss of attractiveness, avoidant or dependent behavior, the desire to hide the existing flaws of the skin. There is a lot of data on the deterioration of the quality of life of patients with chronic dermatoses, such as psoriasis, acne, allergodermatoses, vitiligo. A number of authors note that limited scleroderma, which is accompanied by inflammatory and atrophic changes in the skin and is characterized by a chronic course, it can also seriously affect the quality of life of patients, causing cosmetic and sometimes functional problems. At the same time, in the literature sources available to us, we did not find data on the features of psychosomatic disorders in patients with limited scleroderma, the level of its severity, and the prevailing symptoms. The aim of the study was to study the features of psychosomatic pathology in patients with limited scleroderma.

MATERIALS AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

For the survey of respondents, a validated questionnaire on the severity of psychopathological symptoms SCL-90-R (symptom checklist 90-revised) was used, designed to assess patterns of psychological signs in psychiatric patients and healthy individuals. The main group consisted of 95 patients (91 women and 4 men) suffering from limited scleroderma, the control group consisted of 30 people (28 women and 2 men) without skin diseases. The average age of patients in the main group was 55.89 ± 12.93 years, in the control group — 56.26 ± 8.88 years ($p=0.88$). In patients of both The groups had concomitant diseases such as hypertension, atherosclerotic cardiosclerosis, nodular goiter, autoimmune thyroiditis, cholelithiasis, type 2 diabetes mellitus. The scale of the SCL-90-R questionnaire contains 90 items, each of which is evaluated on a five-point scale (from 0 to 4), and allows you to assess the symptoms of both psychiatric patients and healthy individuals. Responses are calculated and interpreted according to 9 main scales of symptomatic disorders: somatization (SOM), obsessive-compulsive disorders (OS), interpersonal sensitivity (INT), depression (DEP), anxiety (ANX), hostility (HOS), phobic anxiety (PHOB), paranoid tendencies (PAR), psychoticism

(PSY). The severity of the symptom complex assessed by each of the scales was supplemented by the calculation of generalized indices of the second order: generalized index of symptom severity (GSI), index of present symptomatic distress (PTSD), total number of affirmative responses (PST). The criteria for inclusion in the study group were the presence of limited scleroderma in patients, the patient's voluntary consent to participate in the conducted research. The criteria for exclusion from the group were childhood age, pregnancy, the presence of concomitant pathology in the form of oncological diseases, systemic connective tissue diseases, the presence of signs of dementia and clearly psychotic conditions, the patient's refusal to participate in the study. The statistical analysis was carried out using the StatSoft "Statistica" application software package, 10.0 (USA). The assessment of the normality of the distribution of features was carried out using the Shapiro—Wilk criterion. Under normal The data were presented in the form of the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation of the arithmetic mean ($M \pm SD$).

THE RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

To identify the level of distress in patients with limited scleroderma, we selected the SCL-90-R questionnaire from the currently available methods for assessing psychopathology, since it allows us to determine not only the general level of symptoms, but also to identify

its nature. The general index of symptom severity (GSI) in patients suffering from limited scleroderma, which is an indicator of the current state and depth of the disorder and characterizes the intensity of the distress experienced, was at the level of 0.54 (0.41; 0.79). Its indicators in patients of the control group were 0.44 (0.14; 0.61) $p = 0.001$. The index of present symptomatic distress (PSDI), which is a measure of the intensity of psychopathological disorder, was higher in the group of patients with limited scleroderma compared with the control group and amounted, respectively 1.32 (1.17; 1.53) and 1.17. It is also noted that this index can be used as an indicator of the type of response to interaction, i.e. it can show whether the subject enhances or downplays his feelings when responding. The total number of affirmative responses (PST) in the patients of the study group was within 37 (27.50; 50.00), in the control group — 31 (13.75; 36.75), $p < 0.001$. This reflects the great breadth of symptoms in patients suffering from limited scleroderma. Thus, for all three generalized indices (the general index of symptom severity (GSI), the index of present symptomatic distress (PSDI), the total number of affirmative responses (PST)) in patients with scleroderma, higher indicators were determined, statistically significantly different from those of the control group. This may indicate that these patients are experiencing more severe distress with a wider range of symptoms. To clarify the nature of the manifestations of distress, we evaluated the severity of psychosomatic symptoms on separate scales provided by this technique. To assess the level of experience of psychopathological disorders (somatization, obsessive-compulsive disorders, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid tendencies, psychoticism) we used the following scale of interpretation of the results: the result of 0.1–0.4 was taken as a very low level of violations; the low level was 0.5–1.4; the result of 1.5–2.4 was estimated as an average level; 2.5–3.4 — an elevated level; 3.5–4.0 — a high level. The majority of respondents in both the main and control groups had indicators on all scales corresponding to very low and low levels of distress and were at the level of 0-1.4. At the same time the highest indicators were determined on the "somatization" scale in both the main and control groups and amounted to 1.17 (0.75; 1.54) and 0.5 (0.33; 1.00), respectively, $p < 0.001$. According to the somatization scale, the average level of symptom experience was determined in 26 patients (27.37%) with scleroderma and in 3 (10.00%) from the control group. From our point of view, higher indicators on the "somatization" scale in patients with limited scleroderma can be explained by the fact that they are worried about the possible involvement of internal organs in the pathological process, the possibility of their developing systemic sclerosis and serious complications. When working with these patients, it is noteworthy that many people study information about the disease that is available to a wide range. They try to detect signs of consistency in themselves, check with the doctor the likelihood of their developing systemic sclerosis. Such patients may be fixed on symptoms from the cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive and other systems. The components of the disorder may include headaches, general muscle discomfort. All these symptoms and the signs can indicate both the presence of psychosomatic disorders and be a manifestation of real somatic diseases. The indicator "obsessive-compulsive disorders"(thoughts, impulses and actions perceived as constant and irresistible forces, but alien) in the prevailing majority of respondents, both the main and control groups were at a very low and low level of experiencing symptoms. At the same time, the patients of the main group have an average value on this scale exceeded the value in the control group. The presence of obsessive-compulsive disorders in patients with a dermatological profile has been described by other authors. This, as a rule, was associated with subjective sensations, which are not uncommon in skin diseases and lead to the appearance of neurotic combs. It should be noted

that in patients with limited scleroderma, we did not notice obsessive-compulsive disorders accompanied by self-injury of the skin. According to the "depression" scale, the respondents of both groups had indicators of very low and low levels of distress. Only at 5 patients with limited scleroderma and 1 respondent in the control group had an average level of distress on this scale. At the same time, a statistically higher level of suffering was revealed in the patients of the study group compared with the control group, $p = 0.016$. According to literature data, depression is one of the most common syndromes of affective pathology and is observed in a third of patients at a skin and venereological dispensary. A number of authors note that trophic and pigmented skin changes occur due to the accumulation of free radicals and can, among other things, be a reflection of depression. Also, patients with limited scleroderma showed a higher level of anxiety compared to the control group, while the values of this indicator were at a very low and low level in all respondents. The signs of anxiety include nervousness, tension, tremors, panic attacks, and a feeling of horror. An increase in the level of anxiety and depression in patients with skin pathology, including with limited scleroderma, can be explained the formation of secondary experiences associated with the fact that skin diseases are noticeable to others, prone to relapses, which affects the emotional state of patients. Patients also worry about the possibility of disease progression, complications, and involvement of internal organs. In our opinion and according to a number of authors, the formation of secondary experiences contributes to the chronization of the disease. According to the scales "interpersonal sensitivity", "hostility", "phobic anxiety", "paranoid tendencies", "psychoticism", the level of distress in the overwhelming majority of respondents in both groups were at a very low or low level and did not differ statistically.

CONCLUSIONS

The highest indicator of the level of psychosomatic symptoms in patients suffering from limited scleroderma was determined on the "somatization" scale and statistically significantly differed from that in the control group. The level of distress on the scales of obsessive-compulsive disorders, depression, and anxiety in patients with limited scleroderma exceeded those in the control group. Patients suffering from limited scleroderma had higher scores on all three generalized indices (general index of symptom severity (GSI), index of present symptomatic distress (PTSD), the total number of affirmative responses (PST)), which may indicate more pronounced distress and a wider range of psychosomatic symptoms in this group of patients.

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