

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Psychopathological parameters and dexamethasone suppression test in psoriasis

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

The literature dealing either with the psychological impact of psoriasis on the patients or the vulnerability of psoriatics to stressful life events is extensive whereas, so far, only few studies have actually tried to investigate the role of neuroendocrine parameters within the aforementioned setting.

Objective

To investigate the correlation between psychopathological parameters and the neuroendocrine functional test of Dexamethasone Suppression Test (DST) in psoriatic patients.

Methods

24 mostly outpatient psoriatics and the same number of matched controls underwent psychiatric evaluation for detection of psychopathological traits. All participants underwent the DST.

Results

Psoriatic patients showed significantly higher levels of depressive and anxiety mood, with the latter being mostly related to recent stressful life events. In the DST, psoriatics exhibited higher mean cortisol serum levels although both groups presented suppressed cortisol levels under 5 µg/dl. Hormonal parameters did not correlate with psychopathological features, the extent of cutaneous psoriatic lesions and the duration of the disease.

Conclusions

Psoriasis is related to significant psychosocial morbidity although no clear correlation with the DST has been replicated.

Key Words: *Psoriasis, Stress, Psychopathology, Dexamethasone Suppression Test, Cortisol, Life Changes*

INTRODUCTION

Psoriasis serves as perhaps the most illustrative example, compared to any other psychocutaneous disorder, of the subtle interactions between genetic predisposition, environmental influences and psychosocial factors that take place before the disease manifests itself. On the other hand, because the 60% of the patients suffering from psoriasis start having the first symptoms prior to the age of 30 years, the nature of the skin disease becomes a crucial factor in these persons' psycho-

logical development.¹ Numerous studies have attempted to identify a specific personality profile of a representative psoriatic patient but it remains unclear whether different psychological features precede and precipitate psoriatic flare-ups, or they are a consequence of having a chronic, symptomatic, disfiguring illness.²⁻⁶

Furthermore, many studies have focused on the relationship between stressful life events and the exacerbation of psoriatic disease.⁷⁻¹⁴ According to one of them, psoriatic patients whose the cutaneous condition is closely connected to their exposure to stressful life events, were reported to be up to 80%.⁹ On the contrary, the research output dealing with the psychopathology of psoriasis especially within the neuroendocrine framework, is minimal. In particular, the research into the literature about studies involving the application of the Dexamethasone Suppression Test (DST) in psoriatic patients, demonstrated only 2 studies.^{15,16} In no study has there been an attempt to track down and investigate a possible interaction between psychopathological parameters and DST in psoriatic patients. This has been our main motive for carrying out the present study.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

PATIENTS

The study involved (the participation) of 24 patients that visited the A' Clinic of Dermatological and Venereological Diseases of Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki on a primarily outpatient basis. They suffered from psoriasis which had been diagnosed either on a clinical basis (the diagnosis had been made by two clinicians) or by histopathological findings. The patient sample consisted of 24 subjects, 11 men(46%) and 13 women(54%), with mean age 51.29 ± 3.59 years.

From the above mentioned patients 3 were admitted in the hospital (2 males and one female). The mean duration of the disease was 6.29 1.90 years and according to the reports of the patients, the mean duration of the current psoriatic episode was estimated in 6.28 1.61 months (n=18, 6 gave insufficient reports).

In the study, 24 healthy volunteers participated as control group. Eleven (46%) were males and 13 (54%) were females with mean age, 43.42 2.35 years. The groups under study were matched according to sex and age.

The protocol of the study has been approved by the ethical committee of both the Aristotelian University and the Hospital of Dermatological and Venereological Diseases of Thessaloniki. All the participants gave their written consent after having been told the exact procedure.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for both healthy volunteers and psoriatics were 1) age between 18-60 years 2) participation in at least 10-year federal educational system, 3) absence of severe concomitant diseases (cardiopulmonary, renal failure, cancer, cerebrovascular episode etc), 4) absence

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