

Anxiety disorders

symptom dimensions, course and disability

Abstract

This thesis investigates if anxiety disorders must be considered as specific disorders or that they should be reclassified as one overall anxiety disorder group. This will be investigated by focusing on different aspects of anxiety disorders; course, symptom dimensions, cognitive profiles, disability and work functioning. This thesis focuses on social anxiety disorder (SAD), panic disorder with or without agoraphobia (PDA and PD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and multiple anxiety disorder (multiple AD, comorbidity with other anxiety disorders). All studies were based on the data of the Netherlands Study of Depression and Anxiety (NESDA). The results demonstrate that anxiety disorders must be considered as specific disorders. Various anxiety disorders have different courses and different disability levels which remain over a longer period of time, so diagnostic distinction is important for treatment focus. Furthermore, more attention should be paid to comorbidity in treatment since comorbidity is common among anxiety disorders. Overall, multiple AD and SAD are associated with a more chronic course and severe disability which remain over a longer period of time compared to PDA, PD and GAD. Symptom dimensions in anxiety disorders, like anxiety arousal and avoidance behaviour, give important information about the course and disability over time and are possibly more useful than the DSM-categories. The use of symptom dimensions could eventually give more insight in all the complex associations in psychopathology and determine how psychiatric problems develop over time.