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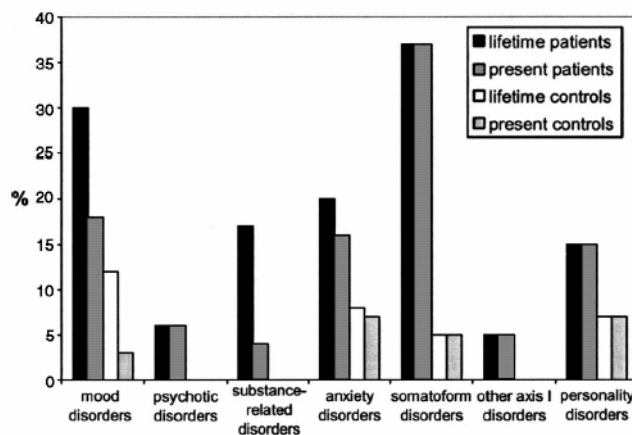
Psychiatric Morbidity and Toxic Burden in Patients With Environmental Illness: A Controlled Study

It would seem from this study that multiple chemical sensitivity diagnosis does not correlate with objective measurements of exposure. Perceived exposure may be the more important factor.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) has several pseudonyms including: idiopathic environmental intolerances and, environmental illness. Previous work has shown that psychiatric morbidity is unusually high both in MCS cases and in people who believe they are environmentally intolerant but could not be described as MCS cases.

This study sought to characterise 309 consecutive MCS self-referral cases and compare them with 59 people working in a semiconductor factory.

Levels of solvents in the blood of both patients and controls were comparable. Controls had significantly higher levels of metals. The following figure shows the distribution of neuropsychiatric conditions that were deduced from assessment tools.



Overall, the rate of psychiatric morbidity in the control group was in the range considered normal for the general population; the patient group had a very high psychiatric morbidity.

Comment

The study provides some evidence that environmental intolerance is not linked to objective measures of exposure. Patients were still reporting symptoms at the time of the survey; if exposure was actually relevant these patients had not achieved the necessary degree of control over it.

In our view it would be of interest to compare the effect of exposure awareness, perceived control over environmental exposure and beliefs about chemicals and their effects on health.

A longitudinal study would be possible, but the self selecting nature of the cases would need very careful analysis.