Psychological traumatization and adverse life events in patients with organic and functional vestibular symptoms.

Abstract: A relationship has frequently been found between a history of traumatization and the existence of somatoform symptoms. The objective of this study was to examine whether this relationship is also observed for functional, i.e. medically not sufficiently explained, vestibular symptoms (FVS). We tested whether patients with FVS and organically explained vestibular symptoms (OVS) differ with regard to frequencies of previous traumatic experiences and posttraumatic stress symptoms. We also explored whether the impact of previous trauma was associated with characteristics of vestibular symptoms and handicap. Patients with a diagnosis of OVS (N=185) or FVS (N=158) completed questionnaires about potentially traumatizing experiences (e.g., Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Impact of Events Scale) and vertigo-related symptoms and handicap (Vertigo Symptom Scale, Vertigo Handicap Questionnaire). We found no differences between the two patient groups with regard to number or impact of traumatic life events. However, regression analyses across groups revealed that, regardless of their diagnosis, prior traumatic experiences and the presence of posttraumatic stress symptoms including avoidance and intrusion predicted to some extent higher overall balance symptoms and autonomic symptoms of
vertigo-related anxiety. Exposure to trauma and symptoms of posttraumatic stress can contribute to symptom severity and handicap experienced by patients with vestibular symptoms irrespective of their original cause, most likely serving as predisposing, modulating or perpetuating factors.

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