

Psychosocial aspects of lipoedema

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Introduction: Psychosocial aspects play an important role in the disease lipoedema. However, previous surveys gave the impression that the psychological suffering of women with lipoedema was mainly caused by lipoedema.

Aims of study: The present exploratory study on the role of the psyche in lipoedema and pain is the first so far to investigate the psychological stress in the period before the development of pain symptoms typical for lipoedema.

Methods 150 patients with medically confirmed diagnosis of lipoedema syndrome were questioned in semi-structured interviews about psychological stress and were examined for mental disorders according to ICD-10 criteria. The development of the symptoms typical for lipoedema was recorded in a second interview. Both interviews were blended together in collaboration with the patients, this means lipoedema-associated pain and psychological stress were related to time.

Results: Exactly 80 % of the patients diagnosed with lipoedema show a high level of psychological distress immediately before the onset of lipoedema-associated symptoms! In this study, mental distress was defined as the presence of a manifest mental disorder (ICD 10 F diagnosis) such as depression, eating disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder and/or serious psychological distress such as burnout syndrome or chronic stress.

Summary: These results contradict a widespread statement that all psychological problems of patients with the diagnosis lipoedema syndrome are caused by lipoedema, that lipoedema even causes the patient's mental disorder. Moreover, depression and posttraumatic stress disorders are significantly related to the maximum pain intensity estimated by patients in everyday life. This demonstrates that it is imperative to rethink lipoedema therapy and to integrate the psychosocial aspects in a comprehensive therapy concept as outlined by the International Consensus on Diagnostics and Treatment of Lipoedema.