



TRANSITION FROM PERCEPTION OF AUTONOMIC FUNCTIONING TO SOMATOFORM DISORDERS: THE ROLE OF ALEXITHYMIA AND HEALTH ANXIETY

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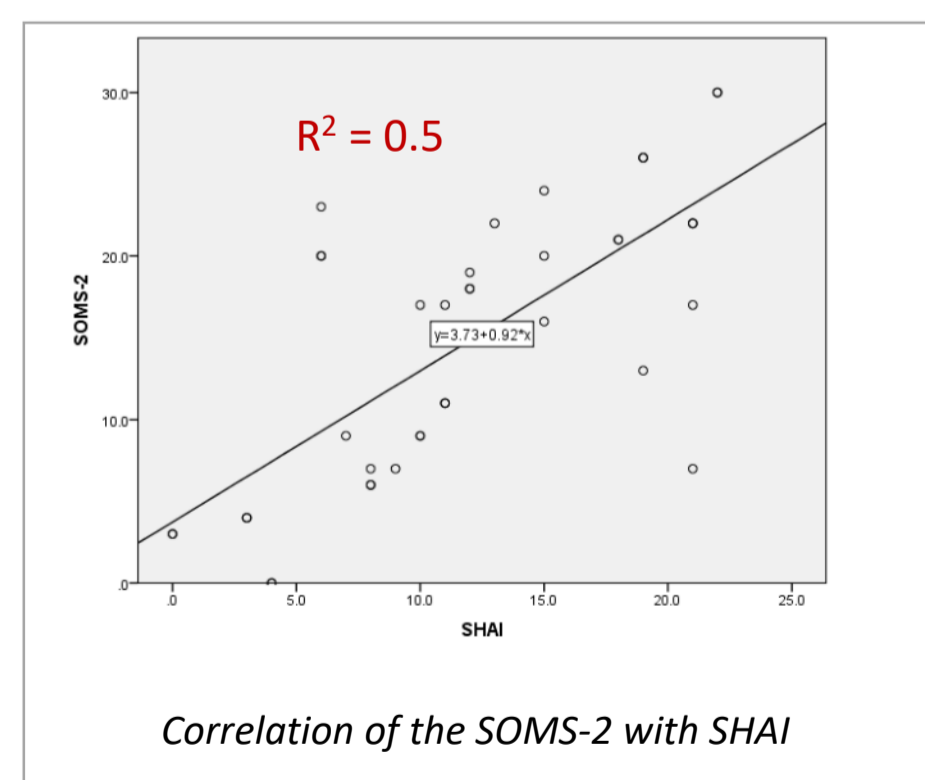
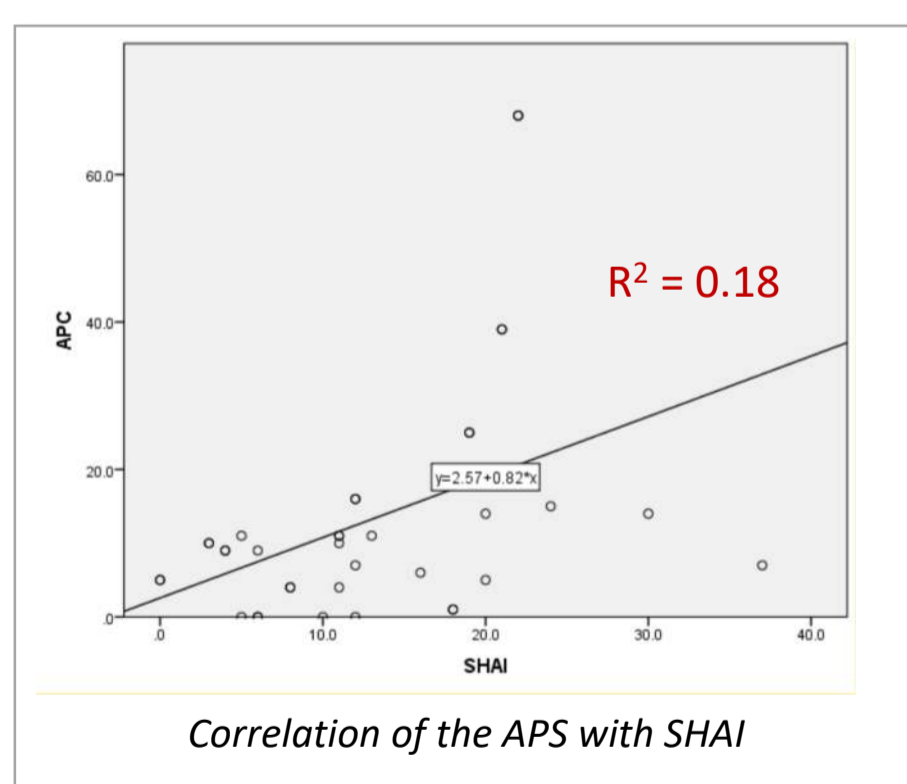
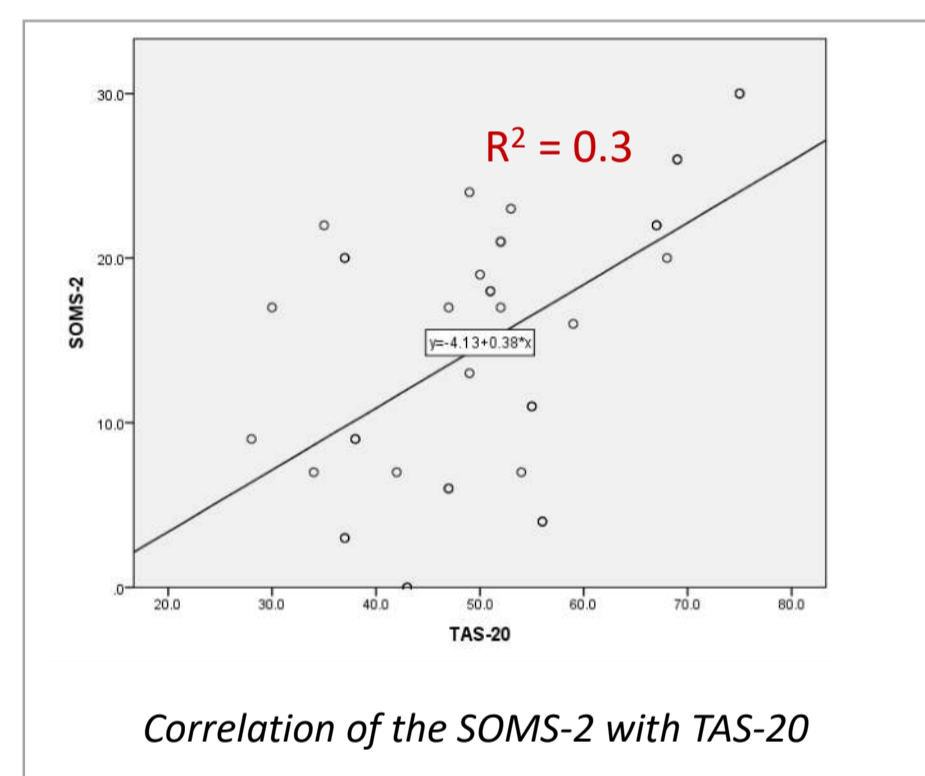
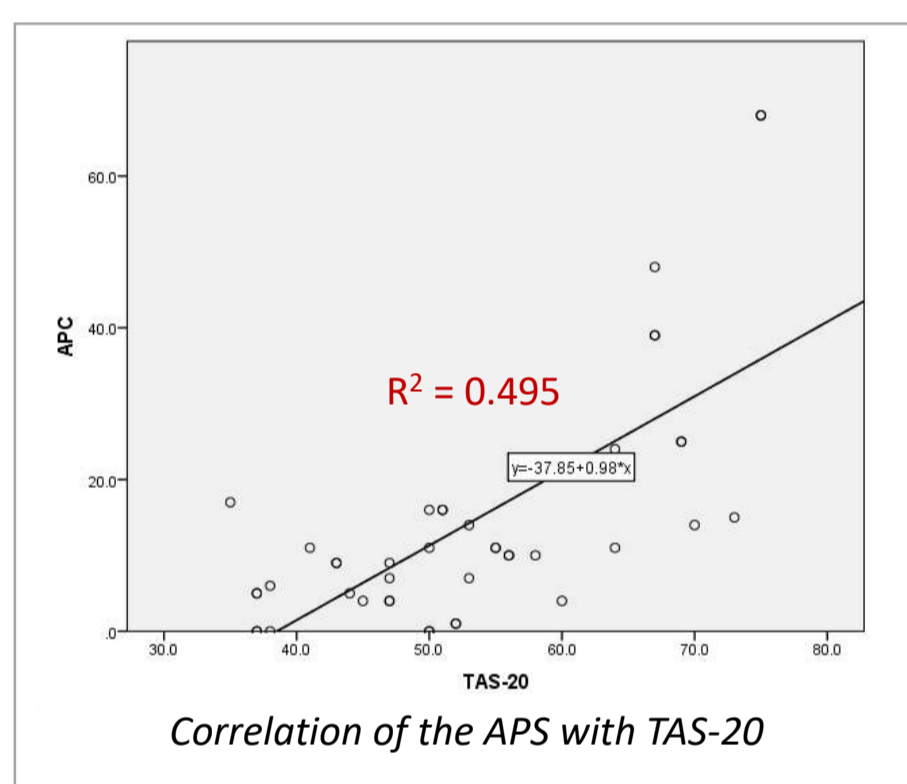
Introduction

Introduction: Perception of autonomic functioning, such as feeling of fast/loud heartbeat, sweatiness, bowel motility, is a part of normal interoceptive experience. However, the same features represent the complaints forming somatoform disorders. It is of practical importance to study the differences between these two phenomena.

Objectives: To evaluate the factors contributing to increased autonomic perception and to formation of somatoform disorders.

Methods

58 volunteers aged 38±12 (7 male) were examined with the use of Screening for Somatoform Disorders 2 (SOMS-2), Autonomic Perception Scale (APS, a checklist for features of autonomic functioning perceived during the last week), Short Health Anxiety Inventory (SHAI), Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20), and Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA). A linear regression was used to evaluate the role of alexithymia, health-related anxiety and interoceptive awareness both in autonomic perception (APS) and in somatoform disorders (SOMS-2).



Results

Linear regression allowed prediction of the APS value on the base of model including TAS-20, SHAI and MAIA ($R=0.75$, $p<0.001$), and the major predictor was alexithymia (standardized coefficient 0.7, $p<0.001$ for TAS-20, standardized coefficient 0.07, $p=0.5$ for SHAI). Model with the same components allowed prediction of the SOMS-2 value ($R=0.73$, $p<0.001$), but, in contrary with the APC value, the major contributor was the health-related anxiety (standardized coefficient 0.6, $p<0.001$ for SHAI, standardized coefficient 0.2, $p=0.3$ for TAS-20).

Conclusions

Individuals with higher alexithymia are prone to increased perception of autonomic signs, which may be explained by inability to recognize the emotional content of arousal. However, alexithymia per se does not lead to formation of somatoform disorders — the major pathogenetic factor is represented by health anxiety.