

The Role of Psychological Therapy in Improving the Mental Health of Women with Endometriosis: An Exploratory Study.

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Background

- Endometriosis is a chronic and debilitating condition defined as the growth of endometrial-like tissue (the womb lining) outside the womb.
- Although its exact cause is unknown, it is hormone mediated and is associated with menstruation. Endometriosis causes pelvic pain, painful and/or heavy periods, inflammation and other symptoms that affect a woman's quality of life.
- 1.5 million women in the UK have a diagnosis of Endometriosis and it takes on average 7.5 years to be officially diagnosed.
- Endometriosis significantly compromises social and sexual relationships.
- Endometriosis costs the UK economy £8.2 billion a year in treatment, loss of work and healthcare costs.
- There is currently no cure for Endometriosis; the main objectives of treatment presented within the NICE 2019 guidelines are pain control, improvement of the quality of life, prevention of disease recurrence, fertility preservation and reducing any anatomical damage.
- Research has found women who suffer from Endometriosis report high levels of anxiety, depression and other psychiatric disorders.
- Research has also demonstrated that high levels of anxiety and depression can amplify the severity of pain.
- NICE guidelines acknowledge the psychological impact of the disorder yet there are no recommendations regarding the provision of psychological services for patients.

Aims

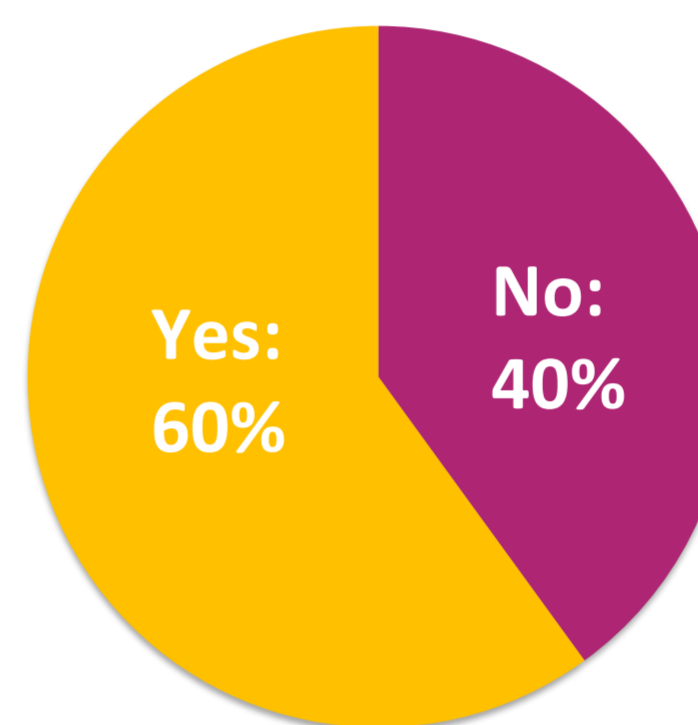
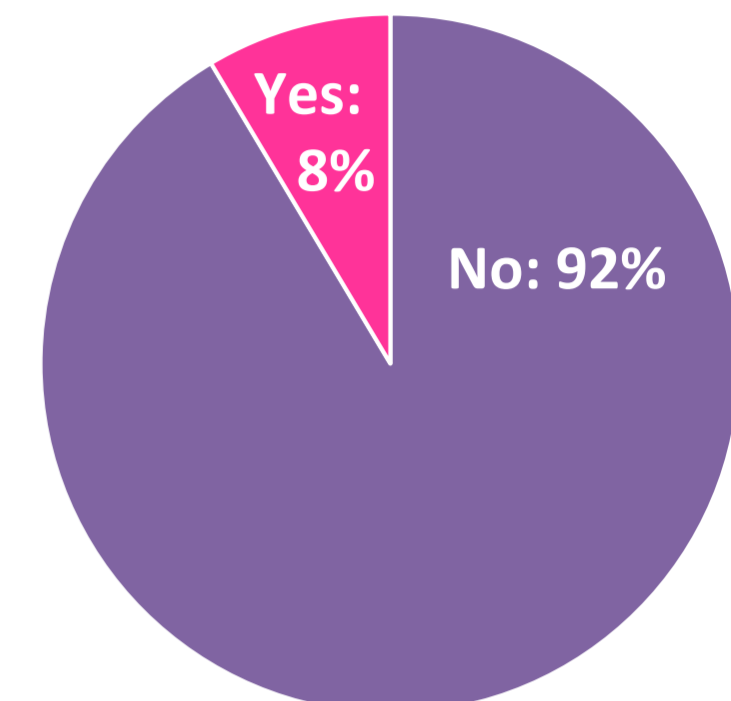
- To explore whether there is a need to offer patients with symptoms of Endometriosis (diagnosed or undiagnosed) psychological therapies as part of their treatment.
- To explore if there is a need to establish a direct referral pathway between the gynaecology team based at Queen Alexandra hospital and the long-term conditions service established within Talking Change (primary care psychology).

Methodology

- Participants were recruited using the Endometriosis South Coast Facebook group.
- Participants were invited to complete a survey of answer 9 questions about their care.
- All respondents had either a diagnosis of Endometriosis or were experiencing undiagnosed symptoms of endometriosis.
- 35 respondents in total participated aged 17-52.
- Participants were encouraged to seek support from their GP should they currently be experiencing suicidal ideation/urges to self-harm.

Results

- 92% reported they had never been offered psychology therapies during their investigation and treatment for Endometriosis.



- 60% of respondents reported that they had thoughts of ending their life or had taken action to end their life/self-harm from the onset of physical symptoms due to struggling with their symptoms and mental health.

- 64% of respondents reported they have struggled emotionally or psychologically due to their symptoms daily, 14% reported this weekly.

Reported impact on functioning and mental health

- Chronic fatigue
- Missing work
- Missing family events
- Spend days in bed
- Insecurities in marriage
- Less affectionate towards partner
- Unable to think positively about the future.
- Feelings of guilt.
- Irritable/angry
- Feeling nauseous
- Struggling to fit into normal clothes due to bloating
- Feeling isolated
- Pain medication prevents being able to drive/do housework/take care of children.
- Cancelling social plans.
- Avoiding previously enjoyed activities.
- Stress
- Painful sex
- Feelings of anxiety
- Feelings of low mood
- Avoiding going out due to fears of pain or a flare up of symptoms

Conclusion

- The vast majority of the sample had not been offered or signposted to psychological therapy as part of their treatment, despite evidence that this would help to improve symptoms of anxiety, depression and pain management.
- There is a significant impact not only in their mental health, social functioning but also interpersonal relationships
- 60% of our sample experienced suicidal ideation as a result of their endometriosis.
- Incorporating psychological therapies as part of the treatment plan for patients would be beneficial to support with developing skills and tools to manage mental health difficulties associated with their endometriosis.