

PSYCHOSOMATIC ILLNESS AND MEDICALLY UNEXPLAINED SYMPTOMS

Is it all in the Mind?

*"Most of the time we think we're sick,
it's all in the mind"*

- Thomas Wolfe

This qualitative research study investigated the lived experience of seven female adults in the age range of 52 to 62 years old, using semi-structured interviews and the research method of Heuristic Inquiry, as developed by Clark Moustakas¹. The selected participants all endured Medically Unexplained Psychosomatic Symptoms (MUPS) which included: irritable bowel syndrome, loss of voice, urinary frequency, tinnitus, physical nervous tics, hypertension and fibromyalgia.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF MUPS?

The term *Psychosomatic* is used to define any physical symptom that cannot be explained by a disease and is suspected to have a psychological cause,² the processes of which begin in the subconscious mind.⁸ Medically unexplained symptoms refer to symptoms that are thought to be stress-related and cannot be accounted for by a physical disease.²

THE LINK BETWEEN MIND AND BODY

The mind body relationship reflects the unity of the body and the mind, evolving through Psycho Neuro Immunology (PNI)³, which is the study of the interaction between psychological processes and emotions, including the nervous and immune systems. Psychosomatic medicine is a medical field exploring the relationship between mental, social, behavioural, body processes and health conditions. The mind contains the root cause of physical distress.

TRANSPERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Empowering transpersonal approaches were at the heart of this research. They are rooted in humanistic psychology, which includes the works of Abraham Maslow,⁴ Carl Jung,⁵ and Stanislov Grof.⁶ This psychological lens increased the awareness of the mind-body-immunity link into the awareness of research participants and helped to identify what was being expressed or ignored. It was fundamental in discovering if awareness alone can promote growth and transformation, creating an improvement, or change in MUPS. Transpersonal developmental stages reach beyond the ego, are transformative in nature and pay particular attention to states of consciousness, encompassing wider aspects of the human experience, life and the psyche. The essence of transpersonal psychology lies within spiritual values and considers ideas and unexplained impulses and intuitions that don't necessarily fit into the rational picture of the human experience.⁷



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100% mentioned
a deeper
understanding of
MUPS

100% mentioned a
healing
and a change in
MUPS

100% mentioned
a change in
awareness of
MUPS

CAN GROWTH & TRANSFORMATION CHANGE MUPS?

Growth and transformation was the second most illuminated theme, with 100% of participants reporting that it featured strongly in their lived experiences. The combination of Heuristic Inquiry¹ and transpersonal psychological approaches⁷ provided a strong framework to facilitate growth and transformation for participants.

"It's given me a new awareness of myself and other people too".

"Self-development, self-awareness, getting in touch with my higher self, understanding that it actually makes me not feel alone".

"I am working on helping myself as in looking at myself, asking these questions, what is going on for you, being reflective, being transpersonal".

**GROWTH & TRANSFORMATION ARE
BENEFICIAL NOT ONLY TO MUPS BUT HOW IT IS
PERCEIVED BY THE SUFFERER AND
HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS.**

A Heuristic Inquiry into the mind body lived experience of adults who have endured Medically Unexplained Psychosomatic Symptoms (MUPS) from a transpersonal perspective.
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100% mentioned
unpredictable
emotions.

100% mentioned
fear, anxiety &
judgement.

100% mentioned
unidentified
emotions.

CAN EMOTIONAL STATES OF MIND CREATE OR HEAL DISEASE?

The intention of the study was to explore and unpack important psychological, somatic, and emotional contributing factors that may be embedded at the root level of illness and disease. The results revealed that *emotions* was the most illuminated theme with 100% of the research participants who took part reporting that the emotional mind featured strongly in their lived experience of MUPS.

"I still think that the physical things that I experienced were from my emotions, I was unable to control my emotions"

"Everything that was going on did trigger the IBS because it was such a stressful situation"

"I have definitely accepted that my mental state does directly affect my IBS but also my wellbeing in general for sure"

"It was to do with the anxiety and everything I was going through at the time that it was my mind basically connecting with my body and with my ear, so it was a mind body reaction to everything that was going on for me at that time".

**THE RESULTS OF THIS RESEARCH HAVE BEEN
VALUABLE IN IDENTIFYING THAT EMOTIONS HAVE
A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON HEALTH.**

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The study revealed nine different themes associated with the participants lived experience of MUPS. The strongest theme was *emotions*. In addition to this, the study revealed the following associated emotions in order of appearance: stress, grief and loss, security, support & safety, sadness, depression and disappointment, impactful relationships, gratitude, happiness & joy, guilt, shame and regrets, rejection and abandonment.

The theme of *growth & transformation* closely followed (see previous page) and revealed in order of appearance: healing and change in MUPS, a deeper understanding and a change in awareness.

The linking of emotional states of mind to psychological experiences contributed strongly to the lived experiences of MUPS.

Receptivity to transpersonal approaches provided a holistic and more empowering dimension to the study, giving participants an opportunity to express subjective experiences of *near death* and *pre-cognition* dreams for the first time and to explore interconnection, which contributed to their overall healing process. It revealed to the participants a deeper understanding and awareness of the inter-relationship between mind and body, which facilitated a whole person healing approach.

FUTURE HOLISTIC HEALTHCARE

Consideration into changing existing healthcare frameworks facilitates an opportunity for MUPS sufferers to participate in further research. Participation in itself, could provide healing for those taking part.

A more holistic approach that interfaces the existing psychological and physiological frameworks could provide a new approach to healthcare that shifts the focus away from functionality into a transformational empowering approach, which treats the individual from a *wholeness* perspective.

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