

Abstract

The relationship of negative affect, daily life stress and bowel symptoms were studied in participants diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome – diarrhea subtype (IBS-D) and healthy controls, using experience sampling method (ESM) that required participants to complete questionnaires 8 times a day for a period of 14 days. Compared to healthy controls, participants in the IBS-D group reported no significant difference in average level and daily fluctuations of negative affect and daily life stress across 14 days of ESM assessment.

Momentary, reciprocal temporal relationships between negative affect, daily life stress and bowel symptoms were found in both IBS-D and healthy control groups, where negative affect and stress predicted abdominal symptoms at a later time, and vice versa. IBS-D participants demonstrated a stronger and more reinforcing relationship between symptoms and mood or stress. This suggested a possible role of negative appraisal of bowel symptoms in maintaining IBS symptomatology in patients. If further evidence supports this speculation, cognitive therapy targeted specifically to the negative appraisal to bowel symptoms may further improve the treatment outcome in IBS-D.