

## European Health Psychology Society abstract 2019

### Title:

The Psychological Impact of Venous Thromboembolism in young women:  
Health anxiety and PTSD

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**Background:** The study aimed to explore the psychological impact of VTE in young women, with specific focus on the misinterpretation of 'false-alarm' bodily sensations and how this can manifest as psychological problems, such as health anxiety and PTSD symptomology. The research provides insight into how individuals cope with the re-experiencing of bodily sensations similar to those at the initial VTE event, and identifies future patient requirements. Age and gender-specific factors were also explored.

**Methods:** Eleven female participants diagnosed with VTE were individually interviewed using an eight-item semi-structured interview schedule, designed specifically for the study. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** Five key themes were identified: (1) The initial onset of VTE, (2) Bodily sensations and their contribution to psychological problems, (3) VTE as a biographical disruption, (4) Learning to cope with VTE, and (5) Staying positive and looking to the future.

**Conclusions:** Findings showed both health anxiety and PTSD to be prevalent in this population. The re-experiencing of bodily sensations similar to those at the initial VTE event contributed to psychological problems and resulted in decreased psychological well-being and lower quality of life. The data revealed a disruption to typical developmental progression and highlighted the loss of a 'normal' life. Finally, it was observed that participants learned to develop ways of coping with VTE symptoms and related thoughts and emotions over time, and all participants exhibited some form of positive change as a direct result of experiencing VTE.

**Future directions:** Findings highlight a need for better aftercare advice, specifically on determining the meaning of bodily sensations, and how to cope with the re-experiencing of sensations reminiscent of those at the initial VTE event. Future research should aim to develop self-help interventions to help reduce anxiety surrounding bodily sensations in VTE patients and should focus on facilitating peer support groups for young VTE patients.