

# Psychiatric Illness, Personality Traits and the Irritable Bowel Syndrome

K M Fock,\**FAMS, M Med (Int Med), FRCP (Edin & Lond)*, C N Chew,\*\**FAMS, MBBS, M Med (Int Med)*, L K Tay,\*\**FAMS, MBBS, M Med (Psych)*,  
L H Peh,\*\**FAMS, MBBS, M Med (Psych)*, S Chan,†*FAMS, MBBS, M Med (Psych)*, E P H Pang,‡*BA (Hons) (Melb), MSc (Clin Psych) (Lond)*

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Irritable bowel syndrome is a common functional gastrointestinal disorder. Although its aetiology is still unknown, visceral hypersensitivity, disorders of motility and psychosocial factors have been proposed as possible factors that affect the "gut-brain" function. The objective of this study was to determine if psychiatric disorders exist in patients with irritable bowel syndrome. **Patients and Methods:** During a 10-month period, 43 outpatients, after exclusion of organic bowel pathology and meeting Manning's criteria for the diagnosis of irritable bowel syndrome, were assessed using the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. In addition, a psychiatric interview was conducted by two psychiatrists. Twenty patients with organic bowel disorders, who were age matched, were selected as patient control. **Results:** Psychiatric diagnoses (62.5%) were present in significantly more female patients with irritable bowel syndrome than female patients with organic bowel disorders (16.7%,  $P < 0.05$ ). On Eysenck Personality testing, female patients with irritable bowel syndrome scored significantly higher on neuroticism (15.25 versus 8.58) and lower on need for social desirability (14.04 versus 17.0) than the organic disease group. Male patients with irritable bowel syndrome were comparable with male patients with organic bowel disorders in terms of presence of minor psychiatric morbidity, psychiatric diagnoses and Eysenck Personality scores. **Conclusion:** There is a difference between male and female patients with irritable bowel syndrome in terms of psychopathology.

*Ann Acad Med Singapore 2001; 30:611-4*

**Key words:** Extraversion, Irritable bowel syndrome, Lie, Neuroticism, Psychosocial, Psychoticism

---

\* Head

Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Medicine  
Changi General Hospital, Singapore

\*\* Consultant Gastroenterologist

Mount Alvernia Medical Centre, Singapore

\*\*\* Consultant Psychiatrist

Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre, Singapore

† Consultant Psychiatrist

Gleneagles Medical Centre

‡ Head

Psychological Services Unit

Ministry of Community Development and Sports, Singapore

Address for Reprints: Associate Professor K M Fock, Division of Gastroenterology, Department of Medicine, Changi General Hospital, 2 Simei Street 3, Singapore 529889.