

Surrey Uni Study: long Covid patients proving their illness is real challenges

28 March 2025



People living with Long Covid often feel dismissed, disbelieved and unsupported by their healthcare providers, according to a new study from the University of Surrey.

The study, which was published in the *Journal of Health Psychology*, looked at how patients with Long Covid experience their illness. The study found that many patients feel they have to prove their illness is physical to be taken seriously and, as a result, often reject psychological support, fearing it implies their symptoms are “all in the mind”.

Professor Jane Ogden, co-author of the study from the University of Surrey, said:

“We found that the problem isn’t people with Long Covid refusing help - it’s about the deep need for people to be believed. When a patient feels dismissed, offering psychological support instead of medical care can be misconstrued as insulting.”

According to the Office for National Statistics, there are 1.9 million people who live with Long Covid in the UK. Long Covid symptoms include fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle aches and shortness of breath, which persist for many weeks, sometimes months, after the initial Covid-19 infection.

Surrey’s study involved in-depth interviews with 14 people in the UK between the ages of 27 to 63 who had experienced Long Covid symptoms for more than four weeks. The group included 12 women and 2 men.

Saara Petker, clinical psychologist, co-author of the study and former PhD student at the University of Surrey, said:

“We found that our participants are living a life of constant uncertainty, struggling to find treatment. People told us that they didn’t feel listened to, some said they’d lost trust in doctors, their social circles and even their own bodies because of the whole experience.

“Medical advice is crucial - but psychological support must be offered with care. If it’s seen as replacing medical help, it can feel dismissive.”

Image: License details Creator: Jose Luis Navarro. Copyright: CC BY-SA 4.0