

# Psychological Medicine

MONOGRAPH SUPPLEMENT 4

---

Psychiatric and social aspects  
of premenstrual complaint  
Anthony W. Clare

---

Cambridge University Press

# Psychiatric and social aspects of premenstrual complaint

The subject of the premenstrual syndrome is a highly controversial one at the present time. There is considerable discussion and disagreement concerning its precise definition, prevalence, impact and treatment. Particularly contentious are claims concerning its relationship with psychiatric ill-health.

This monograph provides a detailed and thorough review of the available literature concerning the syndrome and contains the first thorough study of the prevalence and nature of premenstrual complaints and their psychological and social concomitants, in women attending their family doctors. It confirms that the tendency to report premenstrual changes in physical and psychological health and in behavioural function is virtually ubiquitous but suggests that a much smaller, albeit significant, proportion of these women experience serious discomfort. The study also confirms that there is a highly significant and positive relationship between premenstrual complaint and psychiatric morbidity. Attempts to explain this association by hypothesizing that the severity of the premenstrual symptomatology causes the psychiatric ill-health are explored and largely discounted. Instead, it is suggested that psychologically stressed women are either more sensitive to the underlying changes which normally occur premenstrually or that psychiatric ill-health exacerbates such changes or is itself exacerbated in the premenstrual phase. A significant and positive relationship between premenstrual complaint and marital problems is discussed and methods of differentiating between women with premenstrual symptoms who are otherwise healthy and psychiatrically ill women with premenstrual exacerbation are suggested. The overall findings of the monograph are evaluated in the context of a multifactorial model of causation.

This monograph illustrates the advantages to be gained from studying conditions such as the premenstrual syndrome outside of specialized hospital treatment clinics and in primary care and the community. The findings raise major questions concerning current and widespread theories of causation and treatment.

# Psychological Medicine

Anthony W. Clare

Psychiatric and social aspects of premenstrual  
complaint

MONOGRAPH SUPPLEMENT 4

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE  
LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE  
MELBOURNE SYDNEY

PUBLISHED BY  
THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
32 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022, U.S.A.

© Cambridge University Press 1983

*Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge*

## CONTENTS

Introduction	<i>page</i> 3
Review of the literature	5
Definition and prevalence of premenstrual symptomatology	5
Premenstrual physical, psychological and behavioural changes	6
Psychiatric ill-health and premenstrual symptoms	10
Methodological problems	15
Summary	16
Method	17
The general practice sample	17
The St Thomas's Hospital sample	18
Instruments	18
Results	20
Questionnaire phase – general practice sample	20
Questionnaire phase – St Thomas's Hospital sample	28
Interview phase	30
Menstrual diaries	38
Discussion	41
Summary of conclusions	41
Discussion of findings	41
Implications for future research	49
List of tables	53
References	54

This study was carried out at the General Practice Research Unit, Institute of Psychiatry, under the direction of Professor Michael Shepherd. I would like to thank Professor Shepherd for his helpful criticism and constant encouragement throughout the course of the study. I am particularly indebted to Dr Victoria Cairns for her statistical advice and enthusiasm, to Richard Wiggins for assistance in the preliminary sampling stage, and to Mrs B. Bowen, Y. Davies, J. Winny, Dr M. Briscoe and Dr R. Corney for undertaking the social assessments. The study could not have been carried out without the cooperation of the Royal College of General Practitioners and, in particular, Dr Clifford Kay and the South London Faculty. The major debt, however, is to the patients and their general practitioners: Drs V. Angus, J. Baksh, Lt. Col. J. D. Bell, P. F. E. Brown, A. Corbett, S. Curson, Major J. Eustace, G. A. Griffin, M. A. Q. Jamil, D. C. D. Jones, G. Jupp, T. Lawson, J. McEwan, V. McKeigue, D. Moony, S. D. Moss, B. Palmer, J. Pietroni, R. Pietroni, G. Plaut, L. Ross, E. Rosser, S. Russell, J. Saunders, J. Scobie, S. Shah, E. J. Stacey.