

Investigating the prevalence of anxiety and depression in people living with patellofemoral pain in the UK: the Dep-Pf Study

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Investigating the prevalence of anxiety and depression in people living with patellofemoral pain in the UK: The Dep-Pf Study

ABSTRACT

1

2 **Background and Aims**

3 Patellofemoral pain (PFP) is a common knee condition causing pain around or behind
4 the kneecap which is exacerbated by certain activities. Traditionally it has been viewed
5 as a self-limiting condition. Recent research proves this is not the case and the
6 evidence for poor long-term outcomes is growing. Whilst the evidence base for PFP
7 treatment and the understanding of its aetiology is improving, it remains a complex and
8 difficult to treat condition. In many physical conditions, it has been shown that anxiety
9 and depression negatively affect both their management and duration. It is unclear how
10 prevalent anxiety and depression are in PFP. This study aimed to identify the
11 prevalence of anxiety and depression in people living with PFP in the UK.

12 **Methods**

13 In order to investigate this, a cross-sectional online survey was undertaken. Four
14 hundred participants with self-reported symptoms of PFP were recruited through a
15 tailored social media campaign, using modified snowball sampling. Eligibility criteria
16 were i) aged between 18 and 44, ii) self-reported symptoms of PFP (using accepted
17 criteria) iii) resident in the UK. Exclusion criteria were previous history of patella
18 dislocation or previous surgery to affected knee. The survey recorded demographic
19 information, previous treatment for both PFP and anxiety and depression, the Hospital

20 Anxiety and Depression Scale and the Anterior Knee Pain Scale. Ethical approval was
21 gained from a University of Plymouth Ethics Committee.

22 **Results**

23 Half (49.5%; n=198) of respondents were classified as experiencing anxiety and 20.8%
24 (n=83) as experiencing depression. The levels of anxiety and depression identified in
25 this study are higher than those found in the general population (5.9-7.8% and 3.3-7.8%
26 respectively). This mirrors results which have been reported in other studies into PFP in
27 different settings and with other musculoskeletal conditions, such as osteoarthritis and
28 contracted shoulder.

29 **Conclusions**

30 Anxiety and depression are more common in people living with PFP than in the general
31 population. These findings support the need for greater research into the effects of
32 psychological factors, such as anxiety and depression, in PFP. A key area of future
33 research will be to determine whether these psychological factors affect treatment
34 outcomes in people living with PFP.

35 **Implications**

This is the first study to investigate the prevalence of anxiety and depression in people
living with patellofemoral pain in the UK. This study shows that anxiety and depression
are very common in people living with patellofemoral pain. The need for further work
into the effects of psychological factors in patellofemoral pain is indicated.

36 **Keywords**

37 **Patellofemoral; Knee; Anxiety; Depression; Prevalence; Mental Health**

38

Introduction

39 Patellofemoral pain (PFP) is a common knee condition (1) generally affecting younger
40 and more active people (2). It is characterised by pain around or behind the patella
41 aggravated by weight bearing activity with the knee in a flexed position (3). It has
42 traditionally been viewed as a self-limiting condition, however more recent research has
43 shown that over 40% of those receiving treatment for PFP will still have symptoms after
44 a year (4) with one in four reporting ongoing pain after 20 years (5). The impact of living
45 with PFP is becoming clear, affecting activity levels (6), social participation (7,8) and
46 Health related Quality of Life (8). Historically, research has focussed on the anatomical
47 and biomechanical causes of PFP (9–11), however this is starting to change. Recently
48 best practice guidelines have been published (12,13) which provide guidance as to the
49 optimal management of PFP. Despite this PFP remains a complex and challenging
50 condition to treat (14,15) and many people still continue to experience symptoms even
51 with optimal management (4).

52 In other musculoskeletal conditions it has been shown that anxiety and depression are
53 more common in these populations than the general population, with figures ranging
54 from 16-30% in those living with musculoskeletal conditions (16–18) compared with 3.3-
55 7.8% in the general UK population (19). This has led to further work to investigate the
56 effects of psychological changes on the management and treatment of these conditions
57 (20–22). It has been shown that increased levels of anxiety and depression are
58 associated with greater persistence of the condition (22), increased acute pain (21),
59 slower recovery (20) and greater risk of re-occurrence (23). Despite this there has been
60 little work to investigate anxiety and depression in PFP (24).

61 A recent systematic review of psychological features in PFP (24) identified few studies
62 investigating the prevalence of anxiety and depression with more extensive literature on
63 the effects of kinesiophobia and catastrophizing behaviour. Those studies which do
64 exist reporting anxiety and depression were generally conducted with small sample
65 sizes and using a variety of disparate outcome measures (24). This limited the ability to
66 perform any meta-analyses to identify the true picture of anxiety and depression in PFP
67 with only a single study (25) reporting clear prevalence figures for anxiety and
68 depression. Domenech et al (25) investigated the prevalence of anxiety and depression
69 in Spanish tertiary care PFP patients. This study reported the prevalence of anxiety
70 (30%) and depression (16%) in 97 consecutive patients attending an orthopaedic clinic.
71 However, this is not representative of the majority of PFP patients in the UK who are
72 managed in a primary care setting. Attendance at an orthopaedic clinic would suggest
73 increased severity and chronicity of the condition and, as such, these results cannot be
74 considered representative of the general PFP population. To the best of our knowledge,
75 there had been no UK based studies investigating anxiety and depression in people
76 living with PFP.

77 The aim of this study was to identify the prevalence of anxiety and depression in people
78 living with PFP in the UK and whether there are any links between the severity of PFP
79 and anxiety and depression.

80

81

METHOD

82 **Study Design**

83 A cross-sectional online study design was used to gain a snap-shot of the prevalence of
84 anxiety and depression in people living with PFP in the UK population. An online
85 approach, using Bristol Online Surveys (now Online Surveys), was used to reach a
86 wide-ranging and diverse population which may not have been available from a more
87 traditional outpatient centred recruitment strategy. The study was opened on 01st March
88 2017 and closed on 09th May 2017 as the required sample size had been achieved.
89 Participants were provided with a detailed information sheet and could withdraw at any
90 time during or up until two weeks after completion of the survey. Ethical approval was
91 gained from University of Plymouth Faculty of Health & Human Sciences, Schools of
92 Medicine and Dentistry Research Ethics Committee (Reference 16/17-257)

93

94 **Participants**

95 A sample size of 330 was calculated, using Raosoft Sample Size calculator, based on
96 an estimated UK population of 675,000 people living with PFP in our age range [based
97 upon a minimum 3% prevalence (3,26), the UK population aged 15-44 (27)] and a
98 prevalence of anxiety and depression of 30% based on the figures found by Domenech
99 in PFP and reported in other conditions (16–18,25). The higher figure of 30% was
100 chosen based on the figures for anxiety (25) to reduce the risk of underpowering the
101 study. As there is no pre-existing sampling frame participants were recruited from a variety
102 of online sources (Facebook, Twitter, Forums, Special Interest groups, such as parkrun)
103 who identified as having PFP based on accepted criteria (3). Recruitment was capped
104 at 400 completed surveys. Whilst this allowed for the potential of over recruitment, this
105 enabled people who had begun completing the survey the opportunity to complete it

106 once the calculated sample size was completed and to allow for any withdrawals
107 following the closing of recruitment. Eligibility criteria were i) adults aged between 18
108 and 44, ii) self-reported symptoms of PFP of pain when loading the knee in a flexed
109 position, such as running, jumping, squatting, hopping (3) iii) resident in the UK.
110 Exclusion criteria were previous history of patella dislocation or previous surgery to
111 affected knee (3).

112 **Outcome measures**

113 A questionnaire was developed to address our research question. The data collected is
114 summarised in Table 1.

115

116 **Statistical analysis**

117 Data was analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics (version 23.0). The sociodemographic
118 characteristics of the respondents are reported as percentages and numbers.
119 Prevalence of anxiety and depression were calculated as percentages of total sample.
120 Independent samples t-tests were used to compare continuous variables such as age
121 and HADS and AKPS scores. Chi-squared tests was used to compare categorical
122 variables such as gender, previous history of anxiety and depression and duration of
123 symptoms (categorical as grouped) with current HADS and AKPS scores. Correlation
124 between severity of PFP symptoms (NRS and AKPS) and severity of anxiety and
125 depression was assessed using Pearsons correlation co-efficient. Tests for normality
126 were not run as the sample size was in excess of that required for Central Limit

127 Theorem assumptions of normality (28). Levels of statistical significance were set at
128 $p < 0.05$.

129 **RESULTS**

130 The survey was accessed 2,386 times, with 1,894 not progressing beyond the consent
131 page and 162 people being excluded as they did not meet the inclusion criteria. The
132 demographics of the participants are summarised in table 2, as those excluded did not
133 complete the demographic information this is not available. Scores for the HADS-A,
134 HADS-D, AKPS and NRS are presented in table 3.

135

136 **Prevalence of anxiety and depression**

137 Almost half (49.5%; $n = 198$) of respondents scored ≥ 8 on the HADS-A (29) indicating
138 the presence of anxiety. One in five respondents (20.8%; $n = 83$) scored ≥ 8 (29) on the
139 HADS-D indicating depressive symptoms. When combined this showed that 53% ($n =$
140 215) of respondents were living with anxiety and/or depression.

141 **Age**

142 Respondents with a HADS-A score suggesting anxiety were shown to be younger than
143 those who were not (mean age = 33.55 v 35.3) following an independent samples t-test
144 ($p = 0.015$). In those with scores suggesting depressive symptoms no significant
145 difference was identified (mean age = 34.55 v 34.4; $p = 0.86$) (Table 4).

146

147 **Gender**

148 A chi-squared test for independence (with Yates' Continuity Correction) indicated a
149 significant association between gender and anxiety ($p = 0.001$). Adjusted residual
150 scores (4.6) indicated a greater than expected number of females with anxiety. No
151 significant association was seen between depressive symptoms and gender ($p = 0.628$).

152 **History of anxiety and depression**

153 A significant association between a previous diagnosis of anxiety and/or depression and
154 a current score indicating anxiety or depressive symptoms was found using chi-
155 squared. This was found to be stronger for anxiety ($\phi = -0.33$; $p = 0.001$) than
156 depression ($\phi = -0.22$; $p = 0.001$).

157 **Association with knee symptoms**

158 A significant association between AKPS score and both anxiety and depressive
159 symptoms was identified using an independent samples t-test (Table 4). Pearson
160 product-moment correlations showed a small negative correlation between lower scores
161 on the AKPS and higher levels of anxiety ($r = -0.15$; $p < 0.001$), and a small to medium
162 negative correlation between lower AKPS and higher levels of depressive symptoms (r
163 $= -0.26$; $p < 0.001$).

164 No significant association was identified between the NRS scores and either anxiety
165 and depressive symptoms.

166 **Duration of Symptoms**

167 A chi-squared test identified no significant association between the duration of PFP and
168 the presence of anxiety ($p = 0.73$) or depressive symptoms ($p = 0.39$).

169

170

DISCUSSION

171 Until recently the role of psychological factors in PFP has received little attention. The
172 recent publication of a systematic review (24), has emphasised the paucity of evidence
173 in this area. The current study has suggested that over half of people living with PFP
174 are experiencing anxiety and/or depressive symptoms. There seems to be a small
175 correlation between increased severity of PFP symptoms (AKPS) and increased levels
176 of anxiety and depressive symptoms. This is more marked with depressive symptoms.
177 To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to investigate the prevalence of
178 anxiety and depression in people living with PFP in the UK population.

179

Anxiety and depression prevalence in PFP

181 The levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms shown in this study are much higher
182 than those found in the general population (anxiety: 49.5% v 5.9-7.8%; depressive
183 symptoms 20.8 v 3.3-7.8% (19)). Whilst some caution must be exercised with these
184 figures due to the potential for the HADS to overestimate anxiety and depression (30),
185 and the broad inclusion criteria of the study, this suggests a significant proportion of the
186 study population are experiencing anxiety and depression in addition to the known
187 physical effects of PFP.

188 Despite these concerns, the results echo those reported in other studies. Domenech et
189 al (25) identified similar rates of anxiety (30%) and depression (16%) in people with

190 PFP (n=97) in a tertiary setting. They also reported similar mean scores for HADS-A
191 (7.9) and HADS-D (5.3). Direct comparisons with this study should be made with
192 caution as it is not clear as to the threshold used to identify anxiety and depression.
193 Axford et al. (18) suggested a rate of depression in excess of 40% in osteoarthritis,
194 however this has recently been superseded by the systematic review by Stubbs et al.
195 (16), which suggested figures of around 20% may be more accurate for both anxiety
196 and depression in osteoarthritis. Similar figures have also been reported in contracted
197 shoulder (17) and low back pain (31). This suggests that the findings in this study are
198 realistic, despite concerns regarding the accuracy of the HADS as a measurement tool.
199 The growing evidence from these studies suggest that higher levels of anxiety and
200 depression are found across a number of MSK conditions.

201 The figures for anxiety in this study suggest a high prevalence in people living with PFP.
202 However, this must be viewed in the context of the study population. The study
203 population was predominately female (67.6%) and relatively young (mean age 34.4).
204 Previous studies have shown that anxiety is more common in younger women than in
205 the general population (32). It must be considered whether the results found reflect the
206 demographics of the study. Whilst there was a significant difference in the prevalence of
207 anxiety between men and women, this alone does not explain the prevalence of anxiety
208 in this study.

209 *Relationship between symptom severity and anxiety and depression*

210 The results of this study identified a correlation between greater severity of PFP
211 symptoms (as measured on the AKPS) and higher scores recorded on the two elements

212 of the HADS. The magnitude of correlation was small for anxiety ($r = -0.15$; $p < 0.001$)
213 and small to medium for depressive symptoms ($r = -0.26$; $p < 0.001$). However the large
214 numbers involved in this study suggest that this statistical significance may be due to
215 the sample size (33). When we consider the strength of the relationship between the
216 two sets of variables (-0.15 and -0.26), and the co-efficient of determination (2.25% and
217 6.76% respectively), the low levels of these figures suggest that there is only a weak
218 influence of the level of PFP symptoms on the level of anxiety and depressive
219 symptoms (33). When the figures are examined the mean difference in AKPS between
220 those with and without anxiety and depressive symptoms (Table 4), whilst statistically
221 significant, fall well below the minimal clinically important difference for the AKPS (34).

222 Domenech et al. (25) reported correlations of -0.61 and 0.57 for depression and anxiety
223 (measured with the HADS) with the Lysholm score. Piva et al (35) reported a correlation
224 of -0.45 between the KOS-ADLS and Beck Anxiety Index. This reinforces the concerns
225 raised by Maclachlan et al. (24) regarding the heterogeneity of outcome measures used
226 in PFP research. It could be argued that had the current study taken a different
227 approach to data analysis, such as a binary approach to anxiety and depression, then a
228 stronger relationship may have been found between these factors, as suggested by
229 previous studies.

230 Irrespective of the magnitude of the relationships identified by Piva et al. (36),
231 Domenech et al. (25) and the current study, all agree that there is a relationship
232 between severity of PFP symptoms and anxiety and depression. A previous meta-
233 analysis investigating chronic pain has suggested that increased levels of depression
234 are associated with the duration of symptoms, severity of symptoms and number of

235 joints affected (37). Interestingly this current study has suggested that neither the
236 duration of symptoms nor level of pain (measured by NRS) affect the levels of anxiety
237 and depression in PFP. This may reflect the nature of the population targeted in this
238 study. Previous studies have concentrated on people attending a variety of secondary
239 and tertiary healthcare settings, whereas this study has recruited people whether they
240 were receiving formal treatment or not. PFP is not considered to be a degenerative
241 condition, with many people having symptoms over a long time period (4,5). This may
242 suggest that some of the respondents included in this study with long term symptoms
243 have been managing their condition well, with pain at a low level.

244 **Future Research**

245 Further research would be beneficial to identify the effects, if any, of anxiety and
246 depression on treatment outcomes in PFP. Should this show that anxiety and
247 depression does have a negative impact on treatment outcomes then further studies
248 investigating the treatment of anxiety and depression in PFP would be warranted.

249 Whilst this study has shown that there are high levels of anxiety and depression evident
250 in people living with PFP we are unable to draw any inferences as to why this is. Further
251 qualitative work could identify any common themes about what contributes to the
252 development of anxiety and depression. This could then be progressed to investigate
253 whether there is a causative relationship between PFP and anxiety and depression and
254 in which direction it exists.

255 **Strengths and Limitations**

256 This study benefits from the fact we were able to over-recruit (target 330, actual 400)
257 ensuring that we were able to adequately power all the calculations for the statistical
258 analysis. Underpowered studies are more prone to both type I and type II errors (38)
259 with the risk of both false positive results and 'true' results not reaching statistical
260 significance. This is a weakness seen in many studies across all fields (39). The
261 number of respondents in this study was larger than any previous study looking at
262 mental health in PFP (24,25).

263 The study also benefitted from using robust outcome measures (AKPS, HADS and
264 NRS) to determine our primary outcomes (PFP severity and anxiety and depression)
265 with good reliability and validity. These measures have been identified as the most
266 commonly used outcome tools in PFP (24), meaning that the results of this study can be
267 easily incorporated into any future meta-analyses.

268 There were a number of clear limitations identified within this study. Foremost among
269 these was the lack of clinical diagnosis for PFP amongst the respondents. Clinical
270 assessment by an experienced clinician is considered the gold standard for diagnosis of
271 PFP (3,12). This was not a practical option for this study due to its online nature.
272 Instead, the criteria developed by Crossley et al. (2016) were used to classify someone
273 as living with PFP. This raises the likelihood that other knee conditions were included in
274 this study. The use of established inclusion and exclusion criteria should have mitigated
275 this risk.

276 The online nature of the study also contributed to another significant weakness within
277 the study design. Anxiety and depression are complex, multifactorial conditions unlikely
278 to be directly attributable to a single cause (40,41). Recent studies have also shown that

279 PFP is highly associated with multi-site musculoskeletal pain (42). As we were unable to
280 collect extensive medical history for each participant we are unable to account for the
281 effects of other musculoskeletal or chronic health conditions in this study. This limits our
282 ability to truly say that PFP is associated with higher levels of anxiety and depression.
283 This is shown by the high number of respondents identifying as having a history of
284 anxiety or depression.

285 Another limitation identified in this study is the risk of self-selection bias. Since our
286 respondents were able to choose whether to participate in the study, it is not possible to
287 say that this was a representative sample of the population as a whole (43). It is well
288 established that ethnic minorities are generally under-represented in research
289 participation (44) and that educated white females are disproportionately represented in
290 research studies (45). This is shown in this study with an over-representation of those
291 identifying as white (94.8%; n= 379) compared with that expected from the latest Office
292 for National Statistics figures (86%) (46). Whilst this is a common finding across many
293 fields of research, it raises the question about what information may be being missed in
294 these groups. This is an area which would benefit from greater attention in future
295 research in order to ensure a wider, and more representative, study population.

296 **CONCLUSION**

297 Anxiety and depression in people living with PFP is more common than in the general
298 UK population. In this study almost half of people meeting the inclusion criteria for PFP
299 had a score on the HADS-A indicating anxiety and one in five were identified as
300 experiencing depressive symptoms on the HADS-D. To the best of our knowledge this

301 is the first study to investigate the prevalence of anxiety and depression of people living
302 with PFP in the general population rather than those who are engaged in healthcare
303 services. This study cannot draw any causal links between anxiety and depression and
304 PFP, but it does highlight the strong association between the two conditions. The results
305 of this study add further strength to the need for additional work into the effects of
306 mental well-being in PFP. This is an area which has previously received little attention.

307

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311 ***Conflict of Interest declaration:*** None declared

312 **Informed Consent:** Informed consent has been obtained from all individuals included in
313 this study.

314 **Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was gained from University of Plymouth Faculty of
315 Health & Human Sciences, Schools of Medicine and Dentistry Research Ethics
316 Committee (Reference 16/17-257)

317

<i>Demographics</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Gender • Educational level, • Employment status • Ethnicity.
<i>History</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duration of knee pain symptoms. • Any previous treatment for this. • Previous diagnosis of either anxiety and/or depression • Any current treatment for anxiety and/or depression
<i>Anxiety and Depression</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) (47) • This scale gives scores for both anxiety (HADS-A) and depression (HADS-D) with a maximum score of 21 on each scale. • A cut-off point of ≥ 8 was chosen for each scale (29) . • Shown to have the greatest sensitivity for case detection (48). • The HADS has been shown to be valid and reliable for use in primary care, community and musculoskeletal populations (29,30,49,50).
<i>Knee symptoms</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two measures used to assess severity of PFP symptoms. • A numerical rating scale (NRS) for pain over the previous 24 hours was used to assess current pain. • Shown to be valid and reliable in both general musculoskeletal conditions (51) and PFP (34). • Anterior Knee Pain Scale (AKPS) (52) was used to assess level of function. • Shown to be both valid and reliable in PFP patients (53) and requires little guidance in completion (54).

			n
Age, mean (SD)	34.4	(7.18)	400
Gender - female, n (%)	268	(67.3)	397
Ethnicity, n (%)			
White	379	(94.8)	
Asian or Asian British	9	(2.3)	
Black or Black British	3	(0.8)	398
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups	5	(1.3)	
Other ethnic background	2	(0.5)	
Education, n (%)			
GCSE / O Level	26	(6.5)	
AS Level	5	(1.3)	
A Level	36	(9.0)	
NVQ or other vocational	39	(9.8)	398
First Degree (including foundation degree)	177	(44.3)	
University Higher Degree (Msc or PhD)	111	(27.8)	
None of the above	4	(1.0)	
Employment Status, n (%)			
Employed / Self employed	352	(88.0)	
Unemployed	7	(1.8)	
Looking after home/ family	13	(3.3)	399
Student / Full time education	25	(6.3)	
Unable to work	2	(0.5)	
Pain Duration, n (%)			
<3 Months	55	(13.8)	
3-6 months	54	(13.5)	
6-12 months	42	(10.5)	
12-18 months	40	(10)	400
18-24 months	27	(6.8)	
2-5 years	84	(21.0)	
>5 years	98	(24.5)	
Affected Knee, n (%)			
Right	111	(27.8)	
Left	126	(31.5)	400
Both	163	(40.8)	
Previous treatment for PFP - Yes, n (%)	187	(46.8)	400
Previous Diagnosis of anxiety or depression - Yes, n (%)	136	(34.8)	400
Receiving Treatment for anxiety or depression - Yes, n (%)	45	(11.3)	400

321 *Table 3: Mean values of key outcome measure for study participants. (SD = Standard deviation)*

Outcome Measure	Mean	SD
Numerical Rating Scale - Pain 0-10,	3.45	(2.2)
Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale – Anxiety 0-21,	7.75	(4.2)
Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale - Depression 0-21,)	4.65	(3.5)
Anterior Knee Pain Scale 0-100,	76.7	(10.4)

322

323

324 Table 4: Associations between anxiety and depression and key outcome measures. (NRS = Numerical Rating Scale;
 325 AKPS = Anterior Knee Pain Scale)

Variable	Depression			Anxiety		
	<8	≥8		<8	≥8	
	(n=317)	(n = 83)	<i>p</i>	(n= 202)	(n = 198)	<i>p</i>
Age	34.40 (7.15)	34.55 (7.35)	0.86	35.30 (7.13)	33.55 (7.14)	0.015
NRS	3.45 (2.18)	3.45 (2.35)	0.994	3.32 (2.23)	3.58 (2.19)	0.25
AKPS	77.61 (10.23)	73.24 (10.15)	0.001	78.37 (9.96)	75 (10.49)	0.001

326

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