

Case C : Mary

Mary is a 30 years old woman. She suffers from an intense anxiety of not being able to find a bathroom and to have an involuntary urine leakage. This anxiety is extremely incapacitating in her daily life. In the past, she has had panic attacks. She is fearful whenever she leaves home. For example, walking to the supermarket in the street next to her house provokes an important anxiety. Marie also suffers from stress in regard to managing daily activities, particularly at work.

She is seeking help because the intensity of her difficulties seem to increase over time since several months. Her workload has increased and she feels stressed. She fears losing her job because of the consequences of her psychological problems. She would like to find a way not to be anxious all the time and wishes to discover tools to handle the panic attacks and the anxiety related to her work. Any biological explanation of the problem has been excluded by a physician. Mary doesn't take any medication.

Mary is in couple. She describes her companion as compassionate and caring. She has a daughter and is pregnant. She has friends that are supportive. However, she doesn't share her difficulties with them. She has been working for three years in the care of homeless people.

Her difficulties started with a clearly identifiable trigger event that took place four years ago. By that time, she felt already stressed by her workload. During a long ride by car as a passenger on a drivewith her companion, she needed to urinate. However, she abstained from asking her companion to stop because she didn't want to bother him. At a given time, she started anticipating: "What if I accidentally urinate on myself?". Those thoughts triggered a panic attack. Her need to urinate increased. She finally asked her boyfriend to stop on a motorway rest area. After going to the bathroom, she felt unable to go back in the car. She went to the bathroom and urinated several times. Finally, she asked her boyfriend to drive her at the nearest train station and returned to her home by train. This allowed her to have a constant access to a bathroom.

Behavioral chain (adapted from Davidson & Clark, 2014)

What are the target behaviors?

- A) Anxiety to have a urinary leakage
- B) Anxiety in regard to managing daily activities

What are the consequences of the behavior?

Mary fears losing her job. She self-depreciates herself. She has been off work for 6 months. She stopped the activities she used to like. She feels guilty of not feeling good. She feels tired.

What is the potential precipitating factor of the problem behavior?

- A) In the presence of other people. In the car (especially for long rides), in the bus, in the plane, in the crowd, at the cinema, at the hairdresser.
- B) In the morning, when she organizes her day. In the evening when she goes to bed. Especially when the workload is important.

What are the perpetuating factors (thoughts, emotions, behaviors, feelings)?

- A) Avoidance of the situations and subtle security behaviors (doesn't talk, doesn't move, bring a basin in her car).

B) Thoughts: "I'm incompetent".

What are the internal or external factors that increase vulnerability to engage in the problem behavior?

Not identified

Does the patient have an idea on how different choices could have been made and would have changed the situation?

No