Using psychological theory to understand the need for relatedness amongst people living with severe asthma

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Presentation language : English

Background
Severe asthma affects 3-10% of the asthma population and is associated with a significant burden affecting social and working life. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) construct of ‘relatedness’ concerns the need for belonging both with individuals and community. However, this has not been closely examined from the patient’s perspective.

Methods
In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants aged 18+ years and diagnosed with severe asthma. Interviews were video and/or audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed inductively and deductively, informed by the SDT construct of relatedness.

Results
Thirty-eight face-to-face interviews, lasting 1.5 - 4 hours, were conducted around Australia. Participants’ sense of relatedness was challenged by the impact of their illness. Two themes emerged: 1) the desire to be understood: feeling isolated and 2) the desire to be accepted: ‘I’m supposed to be like everybody else’.
Participants valued feeling cared for, understood, connected to others and having a sense of belonging. Their overall psychological well-being was dependent upon their sense of connection to others.

Conclusion
Using SDT and qualitative methods has enabled a more nuanced and rich understanding of living with a debilitating and unpredictable illness. Findings such as these can inform future self-management interventions for those living with severe asthma.