

Psychological **MEDICINE**

MONOGRAPH SUPPLEMENT 24

**The premenstrual syndrome – a
reappraisal of the concept and the
evidence**

by John Bancroft

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The premenstrual syndrome – a reappraisal of the concept and the evidence

The Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) is a controversial concept. Does it have any clinical value? Is it politically damaging to women? Is this another example of the medicalization of women's health?

Whatever our views on these questions, it is beyond doubt that a large number of women are deeply troubled by changes that they attribute to their menstrual cycles. They often see 'PMS' as an explanation. But their search for a solution is likely to be disappointing. At the present time these cycle-related changes are not well understood and treatments offered are many and various, with little sound scientific basis.

In this review the concept of PMS is critically scrutinized and its value challenged. An alternative formulation is offered to account for the variety of menstrual cycle related problems that many women experience, based on three interacting factors. (a) the 'timing factor' (reflecting the impact of recurring ovarian hormonal cycle on the CNS); (b) the 'menstruation factor' (covering the processes leading up to and during menstrual bleeding, and their impact on the well being of the woman); (c) the 'vulnerability factor' (covering a variety of characteristics not in themselves functions of the menstrual cycle, but serving to influence how a woman reacts to the first two factors).

The recent literature is reappraised on the basis of this revised formulation. As a result many of the previous areas of confusion start to look clearer.

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