

Dissociative (Conversion) Disorders: a Clinical Study in Sohag University Hospital

H. M. Azab, R. M. Mahmoud, M. A. Eissa and T. A. Sayed

ABSTRACT

Objectives: To assess the proportion of organic diseases in the differential diagnosis of dissociative disorders (DD); To recognize risk factors for DD; and To identify patterns of presentation among patients with DD in Upper Egypt. **Patients and Methods:** This study comprised 100 patients fulfilling the ICD-10 of DD. Details of history, mental state examination, results of laboratory, neurophysiological and radiological investigations and psychometric studies were registered. The whole 100 patients were divided into DD patients (n=83) or Organic diseases (OD) patients (n=17). **Results:** Mean age of DD patients was significantly lower than that of OD ($p=0.001$). Female DD patients were twice as many as male patients. About two thirds of DD patients were unemployed. DD patients were significantly more exposed to multiple stressors than OD patients ($p=0.045$). DD patients were significantly more exposed to severe stressors ($p=0.018$). DD patients significantly reported more exposure to child abuse and significantly less IQ than OD patients. Histrionic personality disorder was most prevalent among DD patients (39.8%). **Conclusions:** OD constitute hidden causes for about one-sixth of the DD patients. Risk factors for DD comprise young age, female sex, unemployment, child abuse, low IQ scores and patients with histrionic personality. The most common patterns of presentation among DD patients are dissociative stupor and dissociative motor disorder. **Recommendations:** To organize continuing medical education programs for general practitioners and emergency physicians regarding the proper diagnosis of DD and the risk factors underlying these disorders. More controlled, community-based studies to reach a better understanding of clinical and epidemiologic factors related to DD. To plan for a national program to identify the magnitude of child abuse and to prevent it.

Introduction

Glick et al. (2000) stated that serious medical and neurological problems may initially thought to be dissociative disorders (DD) or similar psychogenic conditions. He added that thousands of such cases probably have occurred and large numbers may still occur each year, sometimes resulting in patient's injury. DD are defined as a partial or complete loss of the normal integration between memories of the past, awareness of identity and immediate sensations, and control of bodily movements (WHO, 2001). Patients with primarily psychiatric complaints commonly present to emergency department and the challenges to emergency medicine physicians are to distinguish functional from organic diseases (OD) and to address any underlying medical co-morbidities (Williams and Shepherd, 2000). Diagnosis and treatment of the DD may be delayed for many years because of difficulties in detecting patients at high risk for such a disorder (Steinberg et al., 1991). Moene et al. (2000) have emphasized the

dangers of making a diagnosis of DD in the absence of positive evidence. Unfortunately, they added that unreliable psychiatric indications, like certain behavioral characteristics, are still used in the diagnostic process. Also they stressed that general neurological examination is still a valuable diagnostic instrument in addition to modern diagnostic techniques. Modern interest in the DD has been sparked in recent years by a renewed preoccupation with patients suffering from multiple personality disorders (Nemiah, 1991). Many individuals who report abusive and traumatic experiences also report a wide array of dissociative and other psychopathological symptoms (Martinez-Taboas and Bernal, 2000). Nemiah (1990) found that the manifestations of DD are varied and frequently difficult to distinguish sharply from one another. Aziz (1989) mentioned that according to different studies DD are still prevalent in the Egyptian population. We observed that DD are frequent among patients attending Sohag university hospital psychiatric clinic, emergency department