Original Article

Clinical Presentation of First Contact Psychosis: A Cultural Background

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Introdcution: Culture is not a synonym for unexplained variance. The concept of culture refers to a people's way of life, their traditional beliefs and practices or the world of meaning in which people live. The symbols, rituals, values, emotional styles and all of their understanding about what is and what ought to be. Defined in this way, culture is indeed pervasive. It influences how people everywhere think, feel and behave, and it may well have an impact on the clinical presentations, course and outcome of mental illnesses.

Aim of the Study: To investigate the psycho demographics, clinical characteristics as well as presentations of two ethnic groups (Arabs and Asians) and study the influence of culture, constitutional and other clinical variance of such presentations.

Patients and Methods: Thirty patients of each group were studied by systemic randomization at psychological Medicine Hospital of Kuwait as inpatients. All patients experienced their first psychotic episode. Semi-structured interview and diagnosis according to DSM-IV. PNNSS, YMRS, HDRS AND CGIs were applied for all collecting data and statistical analysis.

Results: Patients of both Arab and Asians were comparable for age, gender and source of referral, but clear difference was present for other demographics and clinical characteristics. The main diagnoses for Asians were brief psychotic episodes and affective psychoses, while Arab patients labeled as schizophrenic disorders mainly. Arabs scored higher significantly than Asians on Total PANSS positive syndrome subscale and CGIS while Asians scored higher on YMRS scale. Clinical diagnoses were consistent with scores on different scales. Culture has the main influential effect on clinical presentation while constitutional and biasing artifacts of limited role.

Conclusion: Culture has determining effect on patient's characteristics, illness behavior as well as clinical presentations, course and outcome of mental illnesses. Researches must be directed for difficulties of case defections, tools and defining cultural variance. Psychiatric services and Health planning in multi–ethnic communities should be consistent with needs of its local communities.

Keywords: Culture, Arabs, Asians continental Ancestry Group, sick role, clinical presenation.

Abbreviations:
PANSS: Positive and negative syndrome scale.
YMRS: Young Mania Rating Scale.
HDRS: Hamilton scale for depression.
CGI – S: Clinical global impression seventy scale.

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INTRODUCTION

"Nature, in the production of diseases, is uniform and consistent; so much so, that for the same disease in different persons the symptoms are for the most part the same; and the self-same phenomena that you could observe in the sickness of a Socrates you would observe in the sickness of a simpleton. Just so the universal characters of a plant are extending to every individual of the species; and whoever should accurately describe the colour, the taste, the smell, the figure, etc. of the single violet would find that his description held good; there or thereabout, for all the violets of that particular species upon the face of the earth."

This statement, had written at the end of 17th century by *(Sydenham, 1682)*.

It is a generally accepted belief in transcultural psychiatry that psychiatric illnesses as they are conceptualized by Western psychiatry are prevalent all over the world in roughly the same percentages *(Kleinman, 1980)*. Some investigators, such as *Ebigbo (1982)*, *Harris (1981)* and *Prince (1983)* opposed this majority standpoint of the universality of psychopathology; they proceed from the assumption that particular psychiatric illnesses exist which are culturally determined.

It is unclear whether the difference in complaints cited is a reflection of a real difference in how sickness is experienced (and argument supporting the cultural determined of psychiatric disorders), or whether it is a culturally determined expression of help seeking behavior. In both cases, however, these differences