

following encephalitis (Rosner, 1942). Even here it was rare. In Jelliffe's exhaustive summary of all reported cases of oculo-erythric crisis after epidemic encephalitis up to 1928 there was not a single case of such an association (Jelliffe, 1929). In schizophrenia this association has not been described before Chiu's report. This may be because of the paradoxical association between a resumed drug-induced disorder and one of the symptoms the drug is supposed to treat. In the case I report, the oculo-erythric crisis has been previously noted but described as hysterical, just as were the earliest cases of oculo-erythric crisis after the onset of epidemic encephalitis.

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Caution about sorcery

SIR: Keshavan *et al* (*Journal*, February 1989, **154**, 218–220) discuss the role of sorcery in the aetiology of psychopathology in rural India. I would like to discuss a case which acts as a caveat when looking for such explanations in the illnesses of recent immigrants to the United Kingdom.

Case report: A 28-year-old married Ghanian lady was admitted with a 3-month history of increasing estrangement from her husband and a week's history of mutism and not eating. Her husband reported that they had had an arranged marriage in Ghana four years previously, but that his wife had not joined him in England until two years later. He felt their marriage to be happy and without problems.

On examination she was dehydrated, but also approximately 28 weeks pregnant. She was initially mute, and was only persuaded to eat and drink with great difficulty. A diagnosis of depression was eventually made and a course of ECT was given, to which she made a good response.

The lack of information about our patient encouraged speculation as to the role of specific sociocultural factors in the aetiology of her illness. We felt that there

was particular significance in the fact that she would not discuss and then denied her pregnancy. We discovered that there are traditional Ghanian beliefs leading pregnant women to think of their forthcoming child as a danger to themselves both physically and spiritually. Risks are much greater if the husband is not the father of the child; it is said that "adultery spoils the pregnancy", and it is felt very unlikely that such pregnancies will be safely delivered (Field, 1960).

These ideas led us to consider illegitimacy and worries about the pregnancy to be of major aetiological significance. However, when discussed with the patient prior to the course of ECT they did not elicit any response. The successful resolution of her illness allowed the patient to tell us that such views were very old-fashioned and now rarely believed. The problems she faced were much better understood in the context of isolation, a difficult marriage, and feeling very homesick.

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Benign intracranial hypertension and repeated self-mutilation

SIR: It is surprising that a void exists in the literature concerning the subject of psychiatric morbidity and benign intracranial hypertension, other than mentions in passing of feelings of subjective tension and discussions of the mental impairment suffered in children with the disorder.

Case report: Miss A, a 23-year-old unemployed single mother living alone with her child, was first seen as an overdose referral, having been admitted to the General Hospital following ingestion of 20 temazepam tablets to "relieve" the tension in her head. A careful history revealed no ideational or biological aspects suggestive of depressive illness.

On reflection she felt that she had never been happy even as a child, and that although there had been no specific traumas in her early life she had been shown little affection by her parents. At the age of 15, apparently unrelated to any social difficulties at the time, she began to experience feelings of extreme tension which she found difficult to explain in detail, but described as being not exactly pain but more a feeling of pressure building up to such a pitch that she felt as if her head was going to explode. The only way in which she was able to relieve this tension was by self-mutilation, and over the three years between the ages of 15 and 18 she made repeated superficial slashes to her forearms and also clawed at her face on several occasions with superficial injury

resulting. All of these manoeuvres were efficient in relieving tension, but she was ashamed of her actions, talked about them little to family or friends, and always completed the acts when alone. At the age of 18 intractable headaches developed. An appointment with a neurologist was arranged, and benign intracranial hypertension was diagnosed on the basis of papilloedema, CT scan, and lumbar puncture, and was subsequently treated with serial lumbar punctures.

Following this procedure, both the headaches and feelings of tension disappeared. Despite a fairly turbulent life pattern over the subsequent few years no recurrence of the tension or headaches developed until the age of 22, when the subjective feelings of tension returned and the self-mutilating behaviour recommenced. Over the past few weeks she has suffered headaches of increasing severity, and she once more has papilloedema on clinical examination.

She is currently being investigated and treated for recurrence of benign intracranial hypertension by the neurologist.

Our case could well be described as being typical of someone engaged in repetitive self-mutilation, as is shown by a recent large study (Favazza & Conterio, 1989). The psychiatric literature on the subject of benign intracranial hypertension is sparse, but feelings of tension are described in most of the

comprehensive neurological texts (Vinken & Bruyn, 1982).

In this particular case it is tempting to propose a model wherein subjective feelings of tension precipitated by benign intracranial hypertension induced self-mutilating behaviour, a proposal which would receive support from the temporal relationship with the symptom complexes and which must lead to the speculation that perhaps benign intracranial hypertension may be an underlying, undiagnosed factor in a larger proportion of patients with repetitive self-mutilation than has so far been realised. It would seem essential to perform a fundoscopic examination when reviewing these patients.

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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Dr Brown-Séguard's hypodermic fluid

The extraordinary statements made by Professor Brown-Séguard as to the efficiency of hypodermic injections of fluid expressed from the testicles of young animals in senile debility have been to a certain extent confirmed by M. Variot, who made a communication to the Société de Biologie on June 29th. The patients chosen were debilitated men, aged 54, 56 and 68 years respectively, and they were not informed of the nature of the treatment adopted. In

all three cases the injections were followed by general nervous excitement, increased muscular power, and stimulation and regulation of digestion. M. Brown-Séguard said that M. Variot's observations disposed of the objection that the results he had observed in himself were due to "suggestion".

Reference

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Research by Henry Rollin, Emeritus Consultant Psychiatrist, Horton Hospital, Surrey