

# PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS IN AN IRANIAN RURAL POPULATION

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**Abstract** — A psychiatric survey has been carried out in a solitary small village located in the fringes of central desert of Iran. Out of 106 individuals of 15 years old and over, selected randomly, 57 (53.8%) were found to be suffering from psychiatric disturbances 21 (41.2%) of them were males and 36 (65.5%) were females. Depressive illnesses were found to be the most frequently encountered disorder. The probable reason of relatively high incidence of mental illnesses as compared with similar studies carried out in other parts of the country has been discussed, and the genetical factors, as well as, the life style has been found to be possible causes.

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**Key words:** Psychiatric disorders, depression, epidemiology, Iranian ruralists

## INTRODUCTION

The value of epidemiological studies and their constructive significance in the training and planning of mental health programs suitable for and applicable in a defined cultural regions has frequently been emphasized for this part of the world (1,2). Although Bashar (3) in his highly informative and illuminating paper, while reporting on the current situation of psychiatric care in the countries of eastern mediterranean region lists Iran and Lebanon as those with availability of local training, Giel states that there is little evidences of any consistent effort to plan the mental health services on the grounds of socio-cultural structure (4). To achieve this goal, the accomplishment of psychiatric field surveys in different socio-cultural settings, among other sources of information, are substantial to provide the necessary material to plan and to implement effective mental health services.

The present study is an attempt to elucidate the picture of psychiatric illnesses in a society, whose socio-cultural setting differs in many ways from other rural or urban societies commonly seen in Iran.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study has been carried out in Dareh-Zereshk, a small village located at fringes of the central desert of Iran (Kavireh Loot) 60 km distant from Yazd which is the nearest city to this village. The people of this village

seldome visit Yazd. There are aged persons who have never left the village in their life. Most of them are farmers, their income is the lowest in the country. Inter marriages are frequent among natives of this village. 106 person (55 males and 51 females) having 15 years of age and over were selected randomly. A semistructured psychiatric interview was carried out on each case and the clinical diagnosis were made according to the criteria proposed by 9th International Classification of Diseases (WHO).

## Findings

Out of 106 individuals interviewed, 57 (53.8%) were found to be suffering from one or other kind of psychiatric disorder, 21 (41.2%) of them were males and 36 (65.5%) were females, (Table 1). The most frequent disorder encountered was neurotic depression, consisting 38 or 66.7% (12 males and 26 female) of all cases. Other disorder according to frequency were as following: Major depression, 11 or 19.3% (3 males and 8 females) mental subnormality, 4 or 7% (all males) and epilepsies 1 or 3.5%. There were also one female case of anxiety state (1.7%) and one male case of senile dementia (1.75%) (Table 2). As the frequency of types of symptoms are concerned, the occurrence of somatic symptoms exceeds enormously that of psychological ones. Eithy percent of symptoms displayed by patients were somatic. Similarly they complained more often from physical conditions than from psychological disturbances (Table 3). More frequently encountered symptoms and complains were pain in arms, legs, joints and neck, poor appetite, dyspepsia, fatigue, headache, cold extremities and loss of body weight.

**Table 1.** Individuals interviewed

Interviewd Sample	M		F		T	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
ill	21	41.2	36	65.5	57	53.8
healthy	30	58.8	19	34.5	69	46.2
Total	51	100.0	55	100.0	106	100.0

$\chi^2 = 8.62$ ;  $P < 0.01$

**Table 2.** Diagnosed psychiatric disorders (n=57)

Diagnosis	M		F		T	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Endogenous						
depression	3	14.3	8	22.2	11	19.3
Neurotic						
depression	12	57.1	26	72.2	38	66.7
Anxiety						
state	-	-	1	2.8	1	1.75
Senile						
dementia	1	4.8	-	-	1	1.75
Epilepsy	1	4.8	1	2.8	2	3.5
Mental						
subnormality	4	19	-	-	4	7.0
Total	21	100	36	100	57	100

**Table 3.** Frequency of symptoms according to number of complaints and numbers of detected symptoms (n=57)

Somatic symptoms	Complaints	Symptoms
Gastrointestinal	14	191
Cardiovascular	12	68
Respiratory	13	74
Musculoskeletal	65	112
Skin	4	55
Sleep	5	43
General	19	229
Subtotal	147	772
Psychological symptoms		
Anxiety & worries	6	39
Irritability	9	42
Lack of interest	1	19
Depressed mood	-	51
Crying	7	7
Diversion of stream of thought	4	34
Subtotal	27	192
Total	174	649

## DISCUSSION

The prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders obtained in this study is the highest in comparison with the similar studies (1,5). The high prevalence rate of mental illnesses in Dareh-Zereshk may be attributed to the genetical factors (intermarriages) and to the particularities of their socio-economical condition namely,

low income, unsatisfactory general health condition, life style. The women of the village seem to be overloaded with a variety of duties like helping their husbands by working on the farm.

As regarding the psychiatric signs and symptoms and the mode of complaints, they were mainly represented in somatic form. This corresponds with the findings of Davidian who has shown that there is a tendency in Iranian patients to describe their psychological disturbances in terms of physical complaints and use metaphors or figurative language in their descriptions (5,7).

This phenomenon is well demonstrated in the present study, practically no patient complained spontaneously from depressed mood, although they confirmed its existence when questioned.

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