

Themes of delusions and hallucinations in patients presenting to an Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre

Abstract

In contrast to patients with long standing schizophrenia, psychopathology of young patients presenting with a first-episode of a psychotic illness is a little researched area. This study aims to describe the themes of delusions and hallucination in patients presenting with a first episode of illness to the Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC), Melbourne, and to explore possible associations between different variables (such as socio-demographic factors, substance misuse and past trauma) and psychotic symptoms. A cross-sectional study was conducted, and a pro-forma questionnaire was used to collect the relevant data from the 143 EPPIC medical case notes. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS.

A majority of the patients had initially presented to the service with delusional beliefs (74.1%). of which delusions of persecution (53.7%), reference (24.5%) and grandiosity (13.3%) were most commonly seen. Among those with persecutory delusions, beliefs of being 'monitored' by persecutors, and beliefs of being poisoned, were among the most common themes. Of the patients who had delusions of reference, almost half believed that they were receiving messages from the television. 72.7% of patients also reported experiencing hallucinations at the time of initial presentation to the service. Auditory hallucinations were the most commonly reported, of

which second person auditory hallucinations (36.4%), and command hallucinations (22.4%) were the most frequent. The content of the second person auditory hallucinations was mostly derogatory or negative in nature, and of those experiencing command hallucinations, almost half reported hearing commands to hurt themselves.

The males in this study had a significantly higher rate of delusions, compared to the females; no significant gender difference was seen with regard to hallucinations. The presence of cannabis misuse in the previous three months, and a past history of sexual abuse was found to be significantly associated with the presence of delusions.

A majority of the patients (74.8%) were also found to have either substance misuse/dependency in the three months prior to presentation to the service- most commonly cannabis. Males had a significantly higher rate of cannabis misuse, compared to females in the sample.

Also of clinical significance is the finding that 32.3% of the sample were depressed/anxious in mood at time of initial presentation to the service.

Cannabis misuse, past sexual abuse and anxiety and negative schema in the context of age-related developmental issues, may have influenced the presence positive psychotic symptoms in this study.