

Relation of physically aggressive behaviour to depression among demented patients

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Dementia causes the brain to lose its normal ability to control angry impulses. Anger becomes aggression when threatening another person or attacking objects. It may occur when he misinterprets actions of others or feels ignored or mistreated. The prevalence of aggression in dementia varies with the severity of the condition. 23.7% of community dwellers and nursing home residents with dementia were agitated or aggressive. The aim of this study was to determine the frequency of physically aggressive behaviour in patients with dementia and its relationship to depression. Fifty patients with DSM-IV-defined dementia recruited over a period of six months from the Geriatric Department Outpatient Clinic and the Memory Outpatient Clinic of the Institute of Psychiatry at Ain Shams University Hospital in Cairo underwent comprehensive neuropsychiatric evaluation and were rated on the Cornell scale for depression in dementia, the mini-mental state examination scale, the activities of daily living scale and the general medical health rating scale. The results showed that physically aggressive behaviour was exhibited by 27 patients in the two weeks before evaluation. Aggressive behaviour was highly statistically significantly associated with depression. It was also found to be associated with hallucinations, sleep disturbances and severity of cognitive impairment. There was no statistical significant association between physically aggressive behaviour and the presence of delusions, male gender and impairment in activities of daily living. It was concluded that patients with dementia exhibit physically aggressive behaviour, and this aggression is strongly linked with the presence of depressive symptoms.

It is possible that the identification and treatment of depression in dementia may be a mean of preventing and managing physically aggressive behaviour.