

Depression in the elderly : Clinical and psychosocial study

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The work was done to study late onset depression to determine its characteristics, effect of psychosocial stressors, impact of depression on the global functioning, family history & cognitive impairment in elderly depressed patients.

The subjects of the study were patients with major depressive disorder and normal volunteers. The subjects of the study were grouped into: Group I: Early onset group: It included 30 depressed patients with age below 60 years.

Group II: Late onset group: It included 30 depressed patients with age at onset of first depressive episode above 60 years.

Group III: It included 30 normal controls.

All subjects of the study were subjected to the following Hamilton Depression Rating Scale, Life Events Questionnaire, \Global Assessment Functioning Scale and Bender Gestalt test.

The study demonstrated that, patients with late onset depression were more likely to suffer from a single episode of depression of longer duration and often precipitated by stressful life events.

Early onset depressives were more likely to suffer recurrent episodes of relatively more severe depression. Few differences in symptoms emerged between geriatric depressives and their younger counterparts.

These involved greater self blame, suicidal ideation, psychic anxiety in early onset depressive patients, and greater hypochondriasis somatic preoccupation, psychomotor retardation and late insomnia in the elderly. Agitation and paranoid symptoms long thought to be typical of elderly depressives did not emerge as hallmarks of elderly depressed patients in this study. Early onset depression tends to have more positive family history of mood disorders and unipolar depression than the late onset depression. Also, geriatric depression characterized by cognitive impairment and functional disability in comparison to the early onset depressives.

The findings of the study indicated that, neuroticism and stressful life events were more important underlying factors in evolution of depressive illness in elderly. It also denoted that the cognitive impairment that often occurs with depression may be so marked in elderly persons that he or she appearing disabled and the elderly are more likely to mask their depression than individuals at earlier stages in life.