Clues to an expectable attack to public figures by mentally disordered people

Maria J. Peixoto¹, Mota Oliveira¹, Catarina Novais¹, Filipe Pinto¹, and Sertório Timôteo¹


Abstract

Introduction: Public figures are constantly besieged with unwanted attention from mentally disordered people. The studies of attacks on public figures emphasize the role of mental illness and the relationship between delusional fixations and subsequent attacks.

Objectives: To review literature on predictive factors for the threat-approach-attack escalation.

Methods: Papers about the association between mental illness and public figures attacks were searched through PubMed database, using the following terms: mentally disordered; approach behavior; public figures; pre-requisite to attack.

Results: In a review of mental disorder role in attacks on European politicians the authors found that a high proportion of the attackers were psychotic at the time of the event. In other review, 70% of those who approached were men with a mean age of 39 years, and the presence of mental illness ranged from 59.6% to near 84%, with grandiosity and delusional ideas being more frequent than persecutory beliefs. Those who approached celebrities were more likely to evidence an excessive sense of self-importance or uniqueness and had written a letter more than once (or used other forms of communication). Those who engaged in abnormal communications, employed multiple means of communications and were considered to be driven by motivations that concern a personal entitlement to the public figure, were more likely to approach physically the person of interest. On the other hand, angry and hostile themes on letters to public figures occurred more frequently in those who did not pursue an encounter.

Discussion and Conclusions: Approaches are a pre-requisite to attack, therefore, the prediction of approaches can assist in the prediction of attacks. Approach behavior appears to be associated with more intrusive forms of attempted communication with multiple means of interaction and a desire for face-to-face contact. The recognition of pre-attack signals like inappropriate communications and visits, statements to third parties of their intention to harm a public figure and physical approaches might predict who among the mentally disordered could commit an attack to a public figure. The high prevalence of mental illness indicates the relevance of psychiatric intervention.

Supplementary material: Complete presentation available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org

¹Centro Hospitalar de São João, Porto, Portugal
Correspondence: peixoto.mj@gmail.com

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