Delusional disorder-jealous type: sleeping with the enemy

Adriana Carapucinha and Safira Hanemann


Abstract

Introduction: Jealousy, the emotional state linked with the desire to preserve one's possession, is a common human response. It may present as the content of a psychopathological phenomenon such as delusions - delusional or morbid jealousy. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably with "Othello's syndrome", referring to a delusion characterized by the false absolute certainty of the infidelity of a partner. Delusional jealousy may be associated with several psychiatric and neurological disorders including Delusional Disorders (DD). DD are characterized by the presence of one or more nonbizarre delusions (jealousy, persecutory, somatic, erotomaniac or grandiose) and the relative absence of associated psychopathology. It is classically described that individuals suffering from delusional jealousy frequently harbor varying forms of hostility, posing medicolegal consequences.

Objectives: Concerning a clinical vignette of a patient with DD – jealous type, the purpose of this work is to make a critical review of literature on this disorder.

Methods: A search through electronic databases has been made for original research and review articles using the search terms 'Othello syndrome, morbid jealousy, pathological jealousy, delusional disorders, paranoia'. All literature in English or Spanish dated from twenty years ago onward was examined and 15 articles were selected.

Results: Among 398 patients with a jealousy disorder, only 4% met diagnostic criteria for DD-jealous type. Age at onset is usually middle or late adulthood and the jealous type corresponds to approximately 10% of DD. Depression is more frequent among the jealous and persecutory types. Speech comprehension, executive functioning, attention and verbal memory are functions which appear to be altered in DD. Erotomaniac, jealous, and persecutory types might be associated with higher risk for violence.

Discussion: DD is not rare, but DSM criteria might not be inclusive enough to diagnose the jealous type of DD. Despite having some disabilities, "pure" DD seem to have preserved basic social cognitive abilities. Regarding therapeutics aspects, literature is confusing, but the last decade's results suggest optimism about the potential for treatment effectiveness.

Conclusions: It is concluded that further exploration is required and greater epidemiologic, diagnostic and therapeutic attention needs to be given to Delusional Disorders.