

Othello Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

Othello syndrome is a psychological disorder where either the husband or the wife is preoccupied with the thought that the partner is being unfaithful without having any real proof and manifests with a delusional jealousy. This case study is that of a 45-year-old man who has this problem and presented to the hospital. A complete detailed history of the patient is important. The line of management is antipsychotic drugs and psychological and social therapies.

Keywords: Case, Delusion of jealousy, Male, Psychological disorder, 45 year.

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INTRODUCTION

A 45-year-old man presented with a two-week history of delusional beliefs that his wife was having an affair. His presentation was consistent with the diagnosis of an Othello syndrome, which is characterized by intense delusional beliefs of infidelity by the patient's spouse or sexual partner.

The Othello syndrome was named by the English psychiatrist John Todd (1914–1987) in a paper he published with K. Dewhurst, entitled "The Othello syndrome: a study in the psychopathology of sexual jealousy."

DEFINITION

It is a psychological disorder in which a person is preoccupied with the thought that their spouse/sexual partner is being unfaithful without having any real proof along with a socially unacceptable/abnormal behavior related to these thoughts. The most common cited forms of psychopathology in morbid jealousy are delusions and obsessions.

Other Names

- Delusional jealousy/conjugal paranoia.
- Erotic jealousy syndrome.
- Morbid jealousy.
- Othello psychosis/sexual jealousy.

Psychiatric History

- Presenting difficulties: Neurotic/psychotic jealousy.
- Past psychiatric history: Deliberate self-harm and attempted suicide.
- Family history: Mental illnesses, including pathological jealousy.
- Relationship history: Incorporating both the current and the previous relationships.
- Medical history: Organic causes may be responsible for the morbid jealousy.

Causes

- **Psychological**
 - King Ham and Gordon—Delusion of infidelity without any other psychopathology.
 - Cobb 1979—Delusion of betrayal. It has been suggested that morbid jealousy may potentially arise in response to reduced sexual function.¹

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• Personality

- People who are very insecure/even fearful are more likely to become anxious/question their partner's commitment to them.

• Environmental

- Morbid jealousy suspects that he/she is being drugged/given some kind of substance that might decrease their sexual patency.²

Symptoms^{3–5}

- Accusing the partner of looking/giving attention to other people.
- Questioning of the partner's behavior.
- Interrogation of phone calls, including wrong number/accidental phone calls.
- Not allowing any social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter.
- Always asking where the partner is and whom he/she is with.
- Isolating partners from their family and friends.
- Controlling the partner's social circle.
- Claiming that the partner is having an affair when he/she withdraws.
- Threatening to harm others/themselves.

Associated Drugs and Alcohol Uses

- In two studies, morbid jealousy was present in 27–34%, respectively of men recruited from Alcohol Treatment Services.
- Amphetamine and cocaine increase the possibility of a delusion of infidelity that can continue after intoxication.⁶

Assessment

- To begin, a careful history should be taken of both partners if possible, separately and together.
- Mental state examination to be recorded for the jealous partner.

Management

- **Medical**
 - Treatment of the primary psychiatric condition.
 - Antipsychotic medication.
 - Antidepressant medication.
- **Psychological**
 - Psycho-education for the affected person and the partner.
 - Behavioral therapy.
 - Cognitive therapy.
 - Individual psychotherapy.
 - Family therapy.
 - Couple therapy.
- **Social**
 - Geographical separation of partners.
 - Social work involvement for child protection issues.
 - Alcohol and substance misuse.

CONCLUSION

Othello syndrome is a psychological disorder of delusional jealousy which can be resolved with proper treatment. This case study typically demonstrated Othello syndrome and was resolved with antipsychotics, proper counselling and social therapies.

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