

## "NEEDS" IN PATIENTS OF NEURODERMATITIS CIRCUMSCRIPTA

(Lichen Simplex Chronicus)

BHUSHAN KUMAR \* GURMOHAN SINGH † O. N. SRIVASTAVA ‡ A. N. JAISWAL ||

### Summary

Psychological needs of 20 adult male patients with neurodermatitis circumscripta (lichen simplex chronicus) and 50 matched controls were studied using ten TAT cards. Need affiliation (100%), need achievement (95%), need superiority (55%) and need dominance (40%) were the predominant needs. In contrast to the findings in other studies where aggressive needs were high in patients with atopic dermatitis our study showed that it was a prominent need in only one patient with neuro-dermatitis circumscripta.

Psychosomatic approach in relation to dermatology was elaborated by Stokes and Beerman in 1940<sup>1</sup>. To recognise, that psychological factors play an important role in the course and genesis of these diseases is not enough. The task is to discover the special factors which are involved.

The present study is aimed at evaluating psychological "needs" of patients with neurodermatitis circumscripta using *Thematic apperception test*. (TAT)

### Material and methods

#### *Subjects of study*

Twenty adult male patients with neurodermatitis circumscripta (lichen simplex chronicus) were selected from the out-

patients of Sir Sunder Lal Hospital attached to the Institute of Medical Sciences, B.H.U., Varanasi. The diagnosis was made on the basis of morphological features which included circumscribed lichenified or papular and scaly or moist pruritic lesions present on the easily accessible parts of the body. No diagnostic importance was attached to the presence of atopy<sup>2</sup> which was however present in 8 patients. All patients were educated upto high school. Their ages ranged from 19 to 45 years (mean age - 27.25 years). The duration of their symptoms ranged from one month to four years.

The psychological basis of the disorder was explained to each of the patients. They were then interviewed by one of us, (the clinical psychologist) and given 10 cards of TAT, 5 each on two days. No time limit was fixed for the test; patients being at leisure to make notes whenever convenient.

The TAT has been devised to bring out primarily the content of one's personality: the drives, needs, sentiments, conflicts, complexes and fantasies. In

\* Presently Lecturer in Dermatology, Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh.

† Head of Dermatology Department

‡ Head of Psychiatry Department

|| Clinical Psychologist, Institute of Medical Sciences.

Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

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this test thirty cards each with rather ambiguous pictures and one blank card are available for use. Each patient was asked to make up a story on the basis of each picture. The series of pictures selected was the third revision by Henry A. Murray of the original by Morgan and Murray<sup>3</sup>. Ten cards numbered 1, 3 BM, 4, 5, 7 BM, 12 M, 13 MF, 14, 15 and 16 (Blank card) were selected. This set of 10 cards was selected as the subjects were only adult males. The psychological principle involved is based on the assumption that in the interpretation the subject will consciously or unconsciously express his needs, values, attitudes and feelings about persons, situations and the world around him; as well as to the pressures he is experiencing from sources outside himself.

Each card represented a scene. Each patient was asked to answer the following questions in his own language

1. What led to the scene; how it came about?
2. What was happening, what are the feelings of the characters in the picture?
3. What will be the outcome?

Interpretation of the TAT stories was made by a trained clinical psychologist, keeping in view the needs of the patient. The details of the stories were analysed against the facts known about the personality of the subject and not against a standard. On the basis of the interpretation, dimensions of manifest needs were explored and rated on a 5 point scale.

Fifty matched controls were also included in the study.

#### Observations

An analysis of rating showed that affiliation and achievement were two dominant needs (n) expressed by all

the patients included in the study (Table I). Of these two needs, n affiliation had a higher rating (100%) than n achievement (95%). Two other needs namely n superiority (55%) and n dominance (40%) came next. It is significant that almost all the patients expressed substantial yearning towards these four needs. Pertaining to all other needs, n aggression was active in one of the cases in which n achievement was comparatively very low. In most of the cases need other than enumerated were scattered. The results of the normal individuals were included for better understanding.

#### Discussion

Need is a construct which stands for a force in the brain region, which organises perception, apperception, intellection, conation and action in such a way as to transform in a certain direction in an existing unsatisfying situation. A need may express itself subjectively as an impulse, a wish or an intention or objectively as a trend of overt behaviour. Needs may be fused so that one action satisfies two or more at once or one need may function merely as an instrumental force, subsidiary to the satisfaction of another dominating need. There are manifest and latent needs.

Twelve of the 28 needs which have been analysed in this study are :-

- |                  |                    |
|------------------|--------------------|
| 1. n achievement | 2. n acquisition   |
| 3. n affiliation | 4. n aggression    |
| 5. n cognizance  | 6. n counteraction |
| 7. n dominance   | 8. n exhibition    |
| 9. n passivity   | 10. n rejection    |
| 11. n retention  | 12. n superiority  |

Analysis of the profiles allowed successive discrimination of measured needs between the study and the control group. Mean values obtained for n affiliation and n achievement are very high for the study group. On the contrary the results of the other needs

TABLE I  
Shows the "needs" score and scatter of patients with neurodermatitis circumscripta.

NEEDS *												
Pt. No.	Ach.	Acq.	Aff.	Agg.	Cogz.	Count.	Domi.	Exhb.	Pass.	Rej.	Ret.	Sup.
1	9	7	15	7	3	2	10	-	2	4	6	8
2	14	1	16	4	2	2	2	3	4	2	1	7
3	10	1	13	5	2	1	7	6	-	-	-	3
4	19	2	22	7	1	5	1	-	2	-	1	16
5	19	2	23	7	3	-	6	-	1	-	1	13
6	5	-	19	21	2	2	11	2	2	3	-	9
7	18	7	20	5	-	6	1	-	6	2	5	9
8	19	3	27	1	-	-	7	2	3	-	2	10
9	19	3	29	-	4	4	2	-	6	4	3	4
10	8	3	21	-	1	1	8	3	3	-	-	4
11	21	4	20	6	3	13	14	4	-	-	-	9
12	21	1	28	6	2	-	7	8	-	3	-	11
13	19	-	26	7	3	4	11	-	-	10	-	9
14	20	4	26	4	3	5	4	-	3	-	5	6
15	21	-	28	3	5	5	5	-	5	7	-	7
16	26	-	22	2	-	9	10	5	-	3	3	6
17	22	5	29	-	-	10	12	-	3	-	3	9
18	28	4	33	7	-	11	14	2	-	-	2	14
19	27	7	30	8	-	6	11	-	-	-	19	6
20	27	-	32	7	-	9	6	3	2	4	8	13
Total	362	61	479	71	34	94	149	38	42	42	59	173
M <sub>s</sub>	18.6	3	23.9	3.5	1.7	4.7	7.4	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.9	8.6
M <sub>c</sub>	12.7	6.5	13.6	5.4	2.3	9.5	8.5	4.5	3.1	1.5	6.5	10.5

M<sub>s</sub> — Average of study group. Normal N — 50. M<sub>c</sub> — Average of control group.

\* Kindly see the full names of needs in the Material and Methods.

- |       |                 |      |               |
|-------|-----------------|------|---------------|
| Ach   | — achievement   | Domi | — dominance   |
| Acq   | — acquisition   | Exhb | — exhibition  |
| Aff   | — affiliation   | Pass | — passivity   |
| Agg   | — aggression    | Rej  | — rejection   |
| Cogz  | — cognizance    | Rev  | — retention   |
| Count | — counteraction | Sup  | — superiority |

indicate a tendency of higher shift among the control group than the study group. n dominance is expressed in strength in both the groups. It is just possible that n deprivation may have incurred diffusion in the estimation and decision making as related to their manifest needs. The high scores of n affiliation supports the hypothesis of Singh<sup>4</sup>; affiliation signifying increased dependency on and caressing by mother. Aspirations and interpersonal relationship may have led to emotional reactions, conflict and cumulative frustrations. This is evident from significantly high n affiliation and n achievement. In other words it can be said that neuro-dermatitis circumscripta in

these patients was the result of their frequent frustrations in (a) interpersonal situations and (b) achievement of their major goals.

The psychic functions underlying the act of itching are said to be emotions (or emotionality<sup>5</sup>), aggression<sup>6,7</sup>, hostility<sup>8</sup>, depression and decompensation<sup>9</sup> and personality problems characterised by anxiety, neurotic traits, passivity, unhealthy attitudes<sup>6,10</sup>, dependency<sup>4</sup> etc. In psycho analytic terms these symptoms are said to reveal repression of various libidinal conflicts, sado-masochistic involvement, and handling of mother figure masochistically due to guilt symbolising anger<sup>12</sup>.

Need aggression (need to express aggressive impulses) has been observed by many workers in patients with atopic dermatitis. Stokes and Beerman<sup>1</sup> have described the personality of such a patient as one who has an inclination to feelings of inferiority, aggressiveness, sensitivity, lability on mental and somatic reactions, intense motor needs, tension, restlessness, higher than average intelligence and accentuated dependence.

Suppressed hostility<sup>13,14</sup>, suppressed bitterness<sup>15</sup> and attitudes and reactions connected with anger and hostility<sup>8</sup> have been reported in patients with neurodermatitis circumscripta. Musaph<sup>6</sup> found in the infantile personality structure fear of patient's own hostile feelings. Kuypers<sup>7</sup> found difficulty in the expression of feelings especially aggressive. In our study of 20 patients only one patient had shown the presence of need aggression.

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