

## DELUSORY PARASITOSIS

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## Summary

A retrospective analysis of 26 cases of delusory parasitosis is recorded.

Man may get acutely annoyed and worried by insects, spiders and other arthropods, though they may be actually harmless. A nervous disorder may develop, sometimes with sensory hallucinations. The arthropod complained of, may or may not exist in reality. The presenting complaints are skin irritation and itching. This sort of disturbance, continued for a prolonged period is termed entomophobia. When no actual arthropod is involved, the condition is known as delusory parasitosis<sup>1</sup>. Patients with such disorders are often encountered by the medical entomologists. Some patients go directly to them and others are referred to them by physicians, dermatologists and psychiatrists.

This communication deals with analysis of 26 cases of delusory parasitosis.

## Materials

The department of medical entomology, Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine examined 26 patients with delusory parasitosis during 1967-1976.

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In each case the relevant history was taken and the patient thoroughly examined to detect the presence of any insect. Different samples brought by the patients were also examined.

## Observations

Out of 1137 cases which attended the department of medical entomology, during the same period, 26 patients (2.2%) were diagnosed to have delusory parasitosis. Out of these, 18 were referred from the department of dermatology, School of Tropical Medicine and one from a psychiatrist. 7 cases came directly to the entomology department.

Distribution of cases according to age, sex and religion is shown in table 1.

TABLE 1  
Distribution of delusory parasitosis cases according to age, sex and religion

Age in years	No. of cases	Sex		Religion		
		Male	Female	H	M	Ch
11-20	2	1	1	2	—	—
21-30	2	—	2	2	—	—
31-40	4	1	3	4	—	—
41-50	6	4	2	5	—	1
51-60	5	3	2	4	1	—
61-70	5	3	2	5	—	—
71+	2	1	1	2	—	—
Total	26	13	13	24	1	1

The minimum age was 18 years and the patient was a female student. The maximum age recorded was 86 years.

Males and females were affected in equal numbers (13 each).

24 patients were hindus, one amuslim and one a christian. There were 8 cases below 4 years of age and 18 above showing that delusory parasitosis occurred more often in the higher age group.

Duration of complaint varied from 10 days to 10 years.

All patients complained of insects crawling all over the body. A young female was afraid of her blood stream being invaded by the crawling insects through the skin. Another patient complained that insects had been coming out regularly from his blood. Some gave the history of bites by the insects. One patient felt that the insects were flying and making noise around her body disturbing her peace and tranquility. Gnawing, jumping, sucking blood and entering into the ears, nasal cavities and anus were also reported by some patients.

50% of patients were symptomatic all through day and night and other 50% were bothered at nights only.

All patients complained of irritation, itching and burning sensation.

On examination, no insect, arachnid or other arthropod was detected on any of the patients. Almost every sufferer had brought certain specimens

either in paper packets or in small glass vials allegedly collected from their bodies. There were cotton fibres, sand particles, portions of skin, hair, crusts and debris. One person brought mutilated ants. One female patient brought dust mixed with mouth parts of cockroaches. Yet another female brought small specimen tubes containing enterobius vermicularis worms on two consecutive occasions, claiming that they were collected from around the ears.

In 21 cases the skin was found to be normal. In 5 cases (all female) skin showed numerous scratch marks. Two of these showed numerous excoriations as well all over the body. These were the result of attempts at picking up insects either with their nails or with forceps and scissors.

Treatments in the form of suggestion educative talk and psychotropic drugs were ineffective in all cases. Although many authorities recommend psychiatric help, for these patients, this does not prove beneficial often<sup>2</sup>.

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