

Psychiatric phenomenology across countries: constitutional, cultural, or environmental?

Abstract:

Some literature on the significance of culture on psychiatric phenomenology and also literature on psychiatric phenomenology in immigrants, particularly in Great Britain, are reviewed. It is pointed out that paranoid and religious phenomenology is particularly common in some immigrant groups and that this can be understood to some extent as a reflection of cultural factors. In order to elucidate more the role of culture in psychiatric phenomenology in immigrants to Great Britain the socio-cultural backgrounds of the immigrants and in particular the Africans, the West Indians and the Asians are discussed in some details. The phenomenology of psychiatric illness as recorded in a hospital based population of diverse cultural backgrounds in a London hospital was studied to see if any variations across the various cultural groups could be understood in terms of cultural factors. It was found that paranoid and religious phenomenology was more associated with African and West Indian groups for cultural reasons rather than their socio-environmental and racial status in Britain. Paranoia was directed to fellow immigrants rather than to the host population. It is concluded that paranoia and religious phenomenology do not necessarily have the same clinical significance in various cultural groups. It is also pointed out that hallucinations, and in particular auditory hallucinations and First Rank Symptoms of schizophrenia, which have assumed diagnostic significance in some cultures, may not necessarily have the same significance in other cultures.