

Why immigrants visited at Psychiatry Emergency Services are not diagnosed as a Borderline Personality Disorder? Differences according to region of origin

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Objectives

The association between immigration and borderline personality disorder (BPD) has not been extensively investigated. Some studies have suggested that immigration could be a risk factor for mental health disorders such as psychosis and that immigrants have higher rates of psychiatric emergency service (PES) utilization than natives (1,2). However, in some of these studies immigrant samples have been analyzed as a single group, therefore not taking into account major cultural differences that depend on their region of origin. The aim of this study is to examine the association between immigration and BPD diagnosis in the psychiatric emergency unit and determine differences according to area of origin.

Method

A total of 11578 consecutive visits at a tertiary hospital PES over a 4-year period were reviewed. Data collected included socio-demographic, clinical, social and therapeutic information and the Severity of Psychiatric Illness (SPI) score. The sample was divided in six groups: North Africa, Subsaharian area, Southamerica, Asia, Western-origin (Europe, North America and Australia) and natives.

Results

Table 1: Comparisons of demographic, clinical characteristics, total SPI Scale and BPD diagnosis between Immigrant and Native groups

Variables	Natives N= 9.983	Immigrants N= 1.345 (11.6%)
Age, mean (SD) §	41.38 (15.6)	33.13 (11.1)***
Gender (% Male) χ	46.4	53.5%***
Previous psychiatry history, (%) χ	81.5	61.8%***
Previous psychiatry Service contact, (%) χ	75.4	49.9***
High language problems, (%) χ	0.2	11.1***
Drug use, (%) χ	30	30.9%
SPI Total, mean (SD) §	9.14 (5.1)	9.68 (5.5)**
Hospitalisation, (%) χ	15.8%	20.1%***
BPD Diagnosis; n (%) χ	948 (9.5%)	76 (5.7%)***

Table 2: Comparisons of demographic, clinical characteristics, SPI Scale and BPD diagnosis between Native group and each groups of immigrants

Variables	Natives N= 9.983	North Africa N=395	Subsaharan N=51	Southamerican N=475	Asiatic N= 105	Western-origin N=319
Age, mean (SD) §	41.38 (15.6)	31.33 (10.3)***	29.75 (8)***	35.06 (12.1)***	34.77 (11.2)***	32.45(10.5)***
Gender (% Male) χ	46.4	71.6***	68.6**	34.9***	66.7***	52.0*
Previous psychiatry history, (%) χ	81.5	61.7***	52.9***	59.2***	54.3***	69.6***
Previous psychiatry Service contact, (%) χ	75.4	53.1***	51.0***	46.1***	41***	54.5***
High language problems, (%) χ	0.2	10.9***	26.0***	0.2	35.2***	17.2***
Drug use, (%) χ	30	43***	30	21.1**	25.3	32.8
SPI (Suicide risk item ≥ 2), (%) χ	7.0	4.8	0*	3.8**	8.6	5.0
SPI (Danger to others item ≥ 1), (%) χ	28.0	38.0***	52.0***	23.3*	34.3	24.5
SPI (Severity of symptoms ≥ 2), (%) χ	56.2	48.0**	62.0	50.5*	53.3	49.2*
SPI (Self-care ability item ≥ 1), (%) χ	57.9	51.3**	68.0	41.3***	50.5	49.1**
SPI (Premorbid dysfunction ≥2), (%) χ	33.4	29.8	24.0	18.5***	25.7	21.1***
SPI Total, mean (SD) §	9.14 (5.1)	10.88 (6)***	11.82 (4.9)***	8.4 (4.7)**	9.15 (6)	9.92 (5.5)**
Hospitalisation, (%) χ	15.8%	21.9***	49.0***	14.5	29.5***	18.2
BPD Diagnosis; n (%) χ	948 (9.5%)	25 (6.3%)*	1 (2%)***	27 (5.7)**	3 (2.9)***	20 (6.3%)*

§ T-Test χ Chi-Square * p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Conclusions

- Our current findings do not support the concept of migration as a risk factor for BPD and indicate that the emergency clinician diagnosed BPD in immigrant patients less frequently than in natives.
- We found important differences between different subgroups of immigrants.
- There are several possible hypotheses to explain this difference:
 - Although data on prevalence of BPD in some areas of Asia and Africa is lacking, it is possible that the prevalence of this disorder is less frequent in these areas.
 - BPD diagnosis could be related with models transmitted in western cultural societies in which control over emotion is emphasised in contrast with Eastern tradition wherein acceptance is more relevant.
 - Differences might be attributed to clinician misdiagnosis due to language difficulties and/or misperception of culturally appropriate emotion expression.
 - Immigrants may have a more "resilient" personality.

References

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