

MENTAL DISORDERS IN LEPROSY: HIGH PREVALENCE AND LOW PSYCHIATRIC CARE

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Introduction: Leprosy is an infectious disease with high physical disability and is strongly associated with chronic pain, since there may be significant impairment of the peripheral nervous system. Additionally, the stigma associated with the label of leprosy persists and imposes a high social commitment of the disease.

Objective/aims: Describe the frequency of psychiatric comorbidities in leprosy patients and check if they had been previously diagnosed and were in psychiatric care.

Method: The study was conducted with a sample of 120 leprosy patients treated at two hospitals for leprosy: Hospital Dom Rodrigo de Menezes and University Hospital of Federal University of Bahia, in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Survey participants were older than 18 years of age, had confirmed the diagnosis of leprosy and were in antimicrobial treatment. Patients were evaluated face to face with a socio-demographic questionnaire and the Mini-International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI-Plus) in Portuguese. The period of data collection was limited from October 2009 to June 2012.

Results: The assessment using the MINI-Plus showed that 34 (28.33%) patients did not have any psychiatric diagnosis and 86 (71.66%) had at least one. Of these 86 patients, 25(20.83%), met the criteria for one diagnosis, 26 (21.66%) had two diagnoses and the rest, 35 (29.16%), had three or more psychiatric diagnoses. All patients with moderate or high risk for suicide had one or more psychiatric comorbidities.

Conclusion: Leprosy patients have a high prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities. Beyond that, most of them had no previous psychiatric diagnosis and the absolute majority were not in treatment.