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#### Asian patients and the HAD scale

SIR: Salim Nayani (*Journal*, October 1989, **155**, 545–547) has been a victim of a common misunderstanding in using an instrument for a purpose other than for which it was devised or intended. Somehow, a number of researchers in transcultural psychiatry have the impression that mere translation of an instrument is sufficient to make it applicable for use in populations from different ethnic or linguistic backgrounds. This leads to unjustified interpretations of the data.

For use of an instrument like the HADS in an Asian sample, it is necessary to suitably modify and adapt the scale for the Asian subjects, not just translate or backtranslate it. The adapted version then needs to be validated and standardised before it can be put into use. The modification should take into consideration the content of items, number of items, or the necessity for some other items to be included. The items in the HADS are far from constituting a 'suitable interrogation' to elicit depression in Asian subjects. A number of items in the HADS are not reported by Asians, at least in the form in which they have been presented in the scale. Similarly, there are a number of items which are reported by depressed Asian patients which are obviously not included in the HADS but would be of more discriminatory value. Dr Nayani's findings in fact confirm that the HADS in its present form is not really applicable to Asian subjects. The poor correlation between somatic symptoms and HADS depression is quite expected, since the items may not be measuring depression. Studying correlation between somatic symptoms and another measure of depression standardised for Asian subjects would confirm this.

Researchers on transcultural aspects should refrain from reporting data based on plain translated instruments. My criticisms are not directed towards the HADS, but towards the inappropriate method by which its utility has been investigated on Asian subjects, amounting to its abuse.

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#### Jarman indices and 'new chronic' in-patients

SIR: McCreadie & McCannell (*Journal*, September 1989, **155**, 348–351) found a wide variation in the numbers of 'new chronic' in-patients between hospitals relative to catchment area size. This was in keeping with the findings of their previous survey (McCreadie *et al*, 1983) and has been attributed in part to staff attitudes. The adequacy of rehabilitation services in the hospitals concerned did not account for the variation in the in-patient numbers of chronic patients (McCreadie *et al*, 1985). The catchment areas have been described as urban, rural or mixed, but no detailed evaluation of their sociodemographic characteristics has been made.

There is a strong association between indices of social deprivation and both psychiatric morbidity and demand for psychiatric services (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 1988). The accumulation of 'new chronic' in-patients would also appear to vary in accordance with this factor (Inter-Register Technical Committee, 1984).

It may be the case that the division of catchment areas into urban, rural, or mixed is insufficient to show the influence of social deprivation. The Jarman data on indices of social deprivation in the health districts of England and Wales shows that prosperous urban areas such as Oxford and Worcester have low scores on these indices in comparison with relatively underprivileged semi-rural areas such as some districts of Lancashire (Jarman, 1984). Some indices of social deprivation may be high in agricultural areas, such as high rates of unemployment, unskilled workers, and the elderly.

A more detailed analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics of the catchment areas in the Scottish studies may reveal that social deprivation is a factor contributing towards the wide variation in numbers of 'new chronic' in-patients.

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### Post-traumatic stress disorder

SIR: Kennedy (*Journal*, July 1989, 155, 129) rightly points out the great differences between groups of people who have been studied in recent surveys of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Clearly, one might expect a group of people who have been trained to face what is expected to be a highly stressful situation, either military or civilian, to have a higher threshold for any psychological consequences. Nevertheless, even in these groups their experiences may be overwhelming, placing them at risk of PTSD.

A trend recently emerging, however, suggests that it is not so much the nature of the experience which determines PTSD, but the presence of pre-existing personality factors and psychological morbidity (Breslau & Davis, 1987; MacFarlane, 1989).

When an airliner recently crashed onto the M1, there were fortunately a high number of survivors. They had all experienced the same traumatic event with, presumably, the same degree of 'unpreparedness'. This department is currently investigating

these survivors, in the hope that we may clarify some of these issues. Preliminary data has shown that as many as 30% of the survivors may have sustained significant head injury, which introduces another dimension into the psychological picture. It also poses an interesting question, as to whether survivors who have amnesia for the event can develop PTSD or a variant of it, or a totally different set of symptoms.

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## A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

### A question in medical jurisprudence

A recent case of fatal poisoning is of interest as belonging to the obscure area of medical jurisprudence occupied by questions of criminal responsibility. A few days ago a poor woman, the mother of an illegitimate infant, and deserted by her husband and family because of her misconduct, attempted in her despair to take away both her own life and that of her obnoxious offspring. With this object she swallowed the bulk of a large dose of laudanum, purchased in pennyworths, and administered the remainder to the child. The latter died with the usual symptoms. The verdict of the jury in this case, that of "Wilful murder", appears to have been justified by the circumstances. There was clearly occasion, however, for the charitable excuse in her favour which accompanied the verdict. The plea of temporary mental derangement is one which here naturally suggests itself in extenuation of the crime. It is one, however, which must be carefully handled. If it is to aid effectually in securing just mercy for the offender, the proof of it must not rest on mere sentiment or

imagination. This woman probably understood fairly well the rational consequences of her act. She was not mad in the ordinary sense. Her condition was rather that of hopeless despondency, which we might describe as the borderland between reason and unreason. The close connexion between this state and actual lunacy should not be lost sight of in determining the question of criminal responsibility. While we are unwilling therefore to sanction any sentimental abuse of the term insanity, we can conscientiously support the jury in their evident opinion that the circumstances of this distressing case are sufficient to justify exemption from the extreme penalty required by law. Another lesson implied in the history of this occurrence might be profitably studied by our legislators - namely, the expediency of amending the still excessive laxity of the Poisons Act, which allows facilities altogether needless for the purchase of dangerous drugs.

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