

Persecutory delusion

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Persecutory delusions are a set of delusional conditions in which the affected person believes they are being persecuted. Specifically, they have been defined as containing two central elements:^[1]

1. The individual thinks that harm is occurring, or is going to occur.
2. The individual thinks that the perceived persecutor has the intention to cause harm.

According to the DSM-IV-TR, persecutory delusions are the most common form of delusions in paranoid schizophrenia, where the person believes "he or she is being tormented, followed, tricked, spied on, or ridiculed."^[2] They are also often seen in schizoaffective disorder and, as recognized by DSM-IV-TR, constitute the cardinal feature of the persecutory subtype of delusional disorder, by far the most common. Delusions of persecution may also appear in manic and mixed episodes of bipolar illness and in severe depressive episodes with psychotic features, particularly when associated with bipolar illness.

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Legal aspects

When the focus is to remedy some injustice by legal action, they are sometimes called "querulous paranoia".^[3]

In cases where reporters of stalking behavior have been judged to be making false reports, a majority of them were judged to be delusional.^{[4][5]}

If the delusion results in imprisonment or involuntary commitment, the person may feel justified in this belief.

Treatment

Medications for schizophrenia are often used, especially when positive symptoms are present. Both first-generation antipsychotics and second-generation antipsychotics may be useful.^[6] Cognitive behavioral therapy has also been used.

See also

- Grandiose delusions
- Paranoia
- In Object relations theory see: splitting (psychology), paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, and paranoid anxiety
- Querulant
- Social stigma (see 3.2 - current research on people diagnosed with psychiatric illness)

References

1. Freeman, D. & Garety, P.A. (2004) Paranoia: The Psychology of Persecutory Delusions. Hove: Psychology Press. Page

13. ISBN 1-84169-522-X
2. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association. 2000. p. 299. ISBN 0-89042-025-4.
3. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association. 2000. p. 325. ISBN 0-89042-025-4.
4. "After eight uncertain cases were excluded, the false reporting rate was judged to be 11.5%, with the majority of false victims suffering delusions (70%)." Sheridan, L. P.; Blaauw, E. (2004). "Characteristics of False Stalking Reports". *Criminal Justice and Behavior* **31**: 55. doi:10.1177/0093854803259235.
5. Brown, S. A. (2008). "The Reality of Persecutory Beliefs: Base Rate Information for Clinicians". *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry* **10** (3): 163–178. doi:10.1891/1559-4343.10.3.163. "Collapsing across two studies that examined 40 British and 18 Australian false reporters (as determined by evidence overwhelmingly against their claims), these individuals fell into the following categories: delusional (64%), factitious/attention seeking (15%), hypersensitivity due to previous stalking (12%), were the stalker themselves (7%), and malingering individuals (2%) (Purcell, Pathe, & Mullen, 2002; Sheridan & Blaauw, 2004)."
6. Garety, Philippa A.; Freeman, Daniel B.; Bentall, Richard P. (2008). *Persecutory delusions: assessment, theory, and treatment*. Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Oxford University Press. p. 313. ISBN 0-19-920631-7.

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