LETTERS TO EDITOR

FORMATION OF NEW STATE AS A LIFE EVENT

Sir,

The hypothesis that stress can cause mental disorders is an old concept and most work has focussed on the putative effects of life events (Kessler, 2000). However inherent in this conceptualization is the hypothesis that stress or life events have a personal meaning to the affected person. This can be readily seen in the various items of life events inventories (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Singh et al., 1984). In the following case the significant event did not seem to have a directly personal relationship.

The news that Lok Sabha had cleared the bill for the statehood of Jharkhand made headlines in this part of the country. A week after this report, a 22-year-old single tribal female was brought to the OPD with a three day history of an increase in verbal productivity, an increase in the physical activity, a decrement in sleep, excessive meeting and talking to strangers. A Mental status examination revealed an expansive affect with distractibility, racing thoughts and wanting to work for the upliftment of Jharkhand and wanting to become the Chief Minister of the new state convinced that she possessed the abilities and means to become the Chief Minister. She was apprehensive that there were enemies who were plotting against her becoming the Chief Minister.

There was past history suggestive of mild depression one year back that had lasted for two months and remitted spontaneously. There was no family history of any mental illness. A diagnosis of bipolar affective disorder current
episode mania with psychotic features was made and the patient responded on a combination of Lithium and Haloperidol.

The above case is unique in the respect that the life event i.e. formation of the new state was not in any way directly related to her.

The role of this stressor can be better understood in the context of group psychology. A valid generalization that can be made about the nature of accessory function of groups is that all groups serve to meet the identity and belongingness needs of most of their members (Krech & Crutchfield, 1948). However, the belongingness needs may vary in intensity among different individuals in the group. This can be seen in the study of suicide by Durkheim who concluded that the suicide rate varied inversely with integration of social groups of which the individual formed a part and altruistic suicide resulted from excessive integration in society (Roy, 2000).

Thus it can be postulated that individuals who are highly integrated or have high belongingness needs will be more easily susceptible to favorable or unfavorable events affecting the group.

The formation of the new state has been generally perceived to be something of an achievement and very beneficial to the tribal inhabitants of the area. This being a favorable event for the group precipitated a manic relapse in our case.

The above case assumes importance for two reasons. First of all it seems that in the currently highly competitive era, group boundaries are becoming narrower by devising different boundaries concentrating on ethnic, religious, professional, vocational, social and castes providing different identities and apparently increasing the belongingness needs. Recruitment patterns wherein members of the same group are preferred over equally competent non-group members and even in referral practices wherein patients prefer doctors of the same group are well known in this part of the country. The significance of this phenomenon can be readily gauged from the increasing practice that when a student joins an educational institution, enquiries are made about this ‘phylum’ and he is immediately inducted in the group accordingly.

Secondly, the current life event inventories and schedules do not take into consideration this aspect of psychosocial development and concentrate only on individualized events.

This is a phenomenon which needs attention of social and behavioral scientists. This case highlights the importance of making suitable changes in the life event inventories to study the identity and belongingness aspect which may assume more importance with the passage of time.

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