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Acculturation and Migration: Language- Proficiency Among Immigrant Psychiatric Patients in Italy

A. Ventriglio¹, M. Pascucci², E. Cuzzo¹, E. Stella¹, G. Vitrani¹, A. Bellomo¹

¹Department of Clinical and Experimental Medicine, Section of Psychiatry - University of Foggia, Foggia, Italy ; ²Department of Neurosciences, Institute of Psychiatry and Psychology - Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Rome, Italy

AIM: This study tested the associations between Language-proficiency (LP) and clinical, therapeutic characteristics among hospitalized immigrants to study how LP may influence the presentation and the outcome of mental disorders.

BACKGROUND: According to our previous evidences, lack of cultural adaptation may risk or worsen mental illness among immigrants, and interfere with assessment and treatment. Also, LP seems essential for access to foreign environments. In this study further considerations were made regarding LP on a larger sample of immigrant patients and longer period of observation.

METHOD: We reviewed clinical records of immigrant psychiatric patients hospitalized at the University of Foggia in 2004–2012 (N=153), and compared characteristics of patients with adequate versus inadequate language proficiency (LP).

RESULTS: Subjects were 80 men and 73 women, aged 35.2±10.3 years, 50.3% emigrated from other European countries. Many were diagnosed with a DSM-IV adjustment disorder (31.3%) or depressive disorder (28.1%), and 69.9% were in first-lifetime episodes. Average comprehension and spoken language-proficiency (LP) was considered adequate in 62.7% and inadequate in 37.3%. Adequate-LP was more prevalent among women (p<0.0001), in first-lifetime episode cases (p=0.0005), among patients had entered Italy legally (p=0.0009), and emigrated from another European country (p=0.01).

CONCLUSION: Findings support an expected importance of LP among immigrant psychiatric inpatients, and encourage language-assessment and training as part of comprehensive support of such patients, especially men.

REFERENCES:

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