

Incidental Case Detection Of Folie à Deux Mediated Via COVID-19 Pandemic

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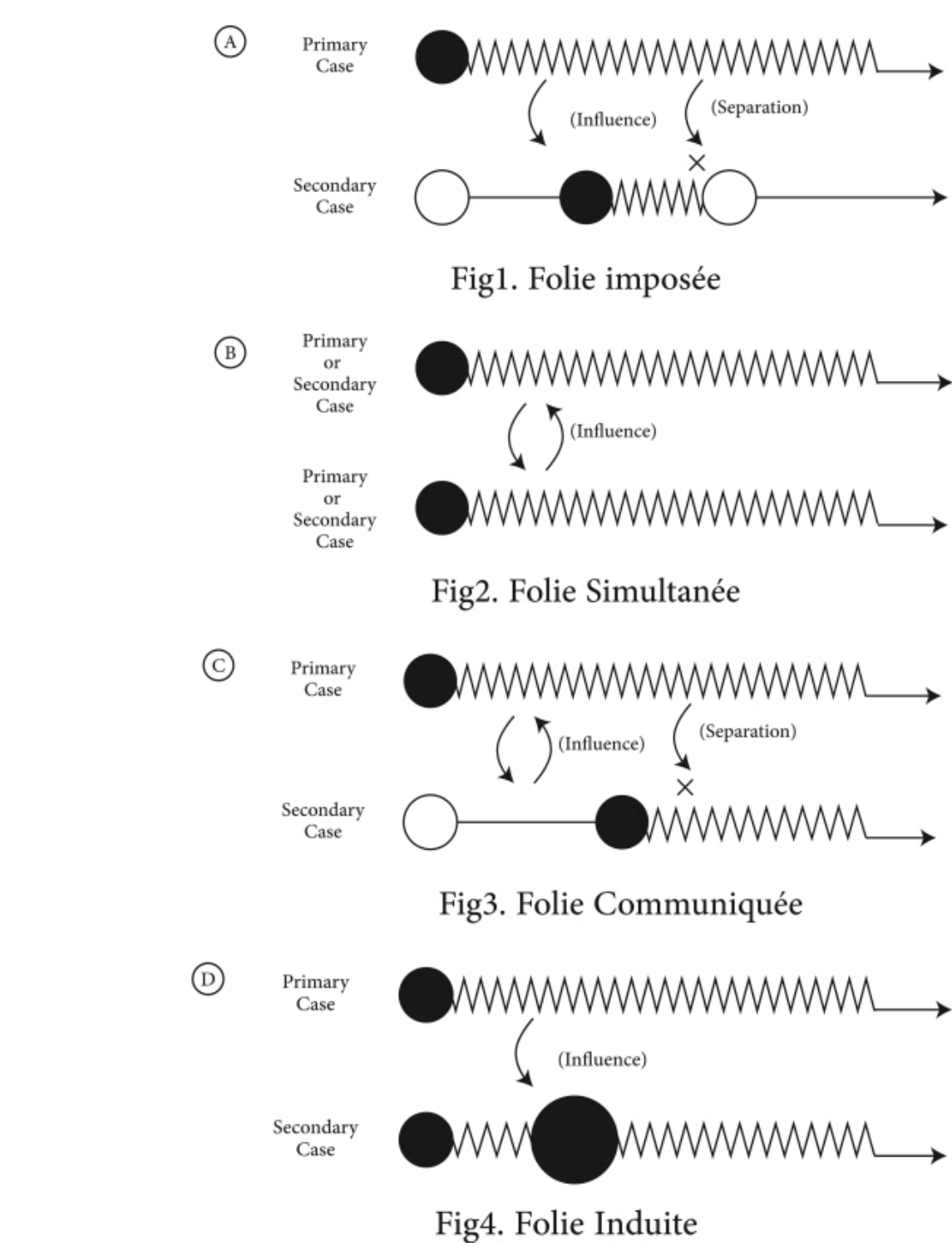
Introduction

- It is significant when collateral shares identical psychotic symptoms, namely delusions, with the patient being treated.
- Folie à deux (FAD) is a disorder of delusions held by two or more people in close social proximity.
- The term FAD was coined by Lasègue and Falret in 1877, and subtypes were characterized by Gralnick in 1942. (1)
- Its prevalence is difficult to determine, and cases are often missed. Some studies report that FAD is involved in 1.7-2.6% of psychiatric inpatient admissions (2)

Learning objectives

1. Describe the epidemiology of FAD.
2. Identify at least 3 risk factors for development of FAD.
3. Increase awareness of the presence of FAD.
4. Recognize the potential link between societally-induced social isolation via the COVID-19 pandemic and potential implications for the pathogenesis of FAD.

The four types of Shared Psychotic Disorder (Folie à deux) by Alexander Gralnick (1942)



DSM-IV 297.3 Shared Psychotic Disorder (Folie à deux)
 A. A delusion that arises in a person in the context of close relationships with other people, or some people, with pre-existing delusions
 B. Similar delusions relate to their contents with people who already have this delusion
 C. Disorders are not better calculated by other psychotic disorders (for example, schizophrenia) or mood disorders with psychotic features and not due to direct physiological effects of substances (for example, substance abuse and drugs) or general medical conditions
 ICD-10 F.24 Induced Delusional Disorder (Folie à deux)
 A. Two people share the same delusion or delusional system and support each other in this belief
 B. They have a very close relationship
 C. There is temporal or contextual evidence that delusion is induced in passive individuals through contact with active individuals

Figure 1 (left): A graphical representation of Gralnick's four subtypes of communicated psychosis or folie à deux.

Figure 2 (top): Diagnostic criteria for shared psychotic disorder (folie à deux) as delineated in the DSM-IV.

Case Presentation

- This case describes our patient, a 57-year-old female (Ms. A) with no previous psychiatric history and her 23-year-old daughter (Ms. B).
- During Ms. A's admission, it was determined that the patient and her daughter held various shared, persecutory, delusional beliefs with themes about motorcycle gangs, stalking via next-door neighbours, hacking of her bank accounts, and the belief that mental health professionals conspired with the patient's ex-spouse to treat one of her other children involuntarily.
- Ms. B endorsed similar delusions that led to significant functional impairment for both mother and daughter.
- Collateral history encompassing her pre-morbid functioning characterized her as being an "eccentric" and believing in numerous conspiracy theories, with family members wondering if the patient met the criteria for schizotypal personality disorder.
- Ms. A and her daughter's shared persecutory beliefs led to significant functional impairment, including extended travel out of the country solely to avoid the feared motorcycle gangs and delinquency with bill payments due to the belief that her bank accounts were hacked.
- During Ms. A's hospitalization, she was treated with antipsychotics and the therapeutic response was observed with Invega Sustenna
- On discharge, Ms. A and Ms. B were less fixated and distressed by their shared delusions and continued to follow up with outpatient psychiatry services.

Discussion

- This mother-daughter dyad has various risk factors for the development of FAD, including longstanding familial/social relationships and relative social isolation, especially in the context of COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and female sex. (3)
- Ms. A appeared to be the more active personality in transmitting the shared delusions, while Ms. B was the more passive personality, who was susceptible to introjecting delusional beliefs. Suggestible personality has been implicated as a risk factor in introjecting shared delusions.
- In terms of treatment choice, Ms. A met the diagnostic criteria for delusional disorder. She was thus treated with antipsychotic medication to improve her thought disorder and distress related to her persecutory delusions.

Implications of COVID Pandemic

- In 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a public health emergency, resulting in widespread lockdowns around the world.
- Social isolation due to lockdowns has led to an increase in mental health disorders, including shared delusions between family members.
- A systematic review of FAD published in 2020 described the phenomenon as rare, but it is possible that the prevalence of cases has increased after the pandemic due to increased social isolation.
- Case reports have emerged regarding FAD during the pandemic, which highlight the impact of social isolation on the development of shared delusions.

Conclusions

- Although FAD is a relatively rare, recognition of this condition is important for mental health clinicians, as it has significant implications regarding case formulation and treatment.

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