Axis II comorbidities are less common in people with borderline personality disorder who are in remission


Q Does remission of severe borderline personality disorder affect the prevalence of axis II comorbidities?

METHODS

Design: Prospective cohort study.

Setting: McLean Hospital, Massachusetts, USA; enrolment 1992–1995.

Population: 290 adult inpatients (18–35 years) with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD) (DSM-III-R and Revised Diagnostic Interview for Borderlines (DIB-R)). Exclusions: non-English speaking; IQ<70; current or prior schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar I disorder, or an organic condition causing psychiatric symptoms.

Assessment: Three semi-structured interviews were administered to assess participants for borderline personality and other Axis II disorders at baseline and at 2 year follow up intervals (DIB-R; Diagnostic Interview for DSM-III-R Personality Disorders). Random effects regression models were used to analyse prevalence of comorbid Axis II disorders. Remission was defined as no longer meeting criteria for borderline personality disorder. Time-to-event modelling methods were used to calculate hazard ratios and 95% confidence intervals.

Outcomes: Presence of Axis II disorders (DSM-III-R), time to remission.

Follow up period: 6 years.

MAIN RESULTS

At 6 years, 202 people had experienced remission from severe BPD. The prevalence of dependent, avoidant, self-defeating, narcissistic, and histrionic personality disorders was significantly higher among people whose BPD had never remitted, compared with those who had experienced remission (see table, no significant difference in other axis II disorders). The overall prevalence of axis II comorbidities declined over time. However, avoidant personality disorder increased in the never-remitted group. People without avoidant, dependent, or self-defeating personality disorders had a significantly earlier remission from BPD than people with these comorbidities (self-defeating: HR 4.1, 95% CI 1.8 to 9.3; avoidant: HR 2.0, 95% CI 1.3 to 2.9; dependent: HR 3.5, 95% CI 2.2 to 5.7).

CONCLUSIONS

In people with severe BPD the prevalence of axis II comorbidities decreases with time, particularly in people in remission. The presence of self-defeating, avoidant and dependent personality disorders increases time to remission in people with BPD, suggesting that these axis II disorders may hinder recovery.

Notes

Axis II disorders were assessed using DSM-III-R criteria, which is likely to differ from DSM-IV classification of axis II disorders. As participants were recruited as very disturbed inpatients, the findings of this study may not apply to less severely disturbed people with BPD. The study did not clearly establish the temporal relationship between comorbidity and remission, therefore a causality cannot be imputed.

Table  Axis II disorders that differed significantly between remitted and non-remitted borderline personality disorder (BPD) at baseline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis II disorder</th>
<th>Baseline n=88</th>
<th>6 years n=64</th>
<th>Remitted BPD Baseline n=202</th>
<th>6 years n=200</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent</td>
<td>56% 45%</td>
<td>42% 8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Avoidant</td>
<td>50% 59%</td>
<td>36% 16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-defeating</td>
<td>34% 27%</td>
<td>22% 1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narcissistic</td>
<td>19% 2%</td>
<td>7% 2%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Histrionic</td>
<td>16% 6%</td>
<td>8% 2%</td>
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