

INDEXED JOURNAL**International Journal Of Medical Case Reports****"AUTOMATISM"AN INTERESTING CASE REPORT.**

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ABSTRACT

In psychiatric medicine term 'automatism' denotes a set of behavior that occurs outside the conscious control of the person and it usually signifies a serious and sometimes life threatening situation for the person affected with automatism and also those around the patient. Automatic states are serious enough and require immediate and prompt intervention¹. Here we present a rather rare case of 58 years old male who presently is asymptomatic. But he had a past history becoming stiff like 'zombie' and suddenly feeling energetic. In addition to this other behavioral disturbances like anger outburst and confusion and difficulty in remembering the events was also present. The patient killed his younger brother during automatism. He was admitted in our hospital (department of psychiatry hospital in Taif kingdom of Saudi Arabia). During investigations his EEG showed right fronto-temporal sharp waves indicating multifocal epileptiform activity, MRI was unremarkable. Patient was started on Sodium Valproate to which he is responding well.

KEYWORDS: Automatism, tonic clonic seizures, temporal lobe epilepsy, the sleep walkers defense.

Introduction:

Automatism is defined as "having performed in a state of mental unconsciousness or dissociation without awareness" is applied to actions or conduct occurring "without a will and purpose or reasoned intention²."

A crime may have been committed during an episode of ictal or post ictal confusion. In legal terms an automatism occurs if an act was committed but was neither intended nor the result of recklessness².

In UK legal automatism care categories as 'non-insane' if they arise through extrinsic causes eg. An acute head injuries or 'insane' if they arises through intrinsic causes eg. Epilepsy³.

Defendant lacked intention altogether for an offence. The paradigm example is acts committed while sleep walking⁴.

Patient should have past history of unequivocal epileptic seizures. It last few seconds to several minutes⁴.

The performance of actions without conscious thought or intention.

Automatism actions and involuntary processes that are not under conscious control.

Treatment of epileptic automatism is antiepileptics⁵.

Case Report:

A 58 years male, driver by profession, was brought by police to Taif mental health hospital prison ward, kingdom of Saudi Arabia, with the history of crime that he killed his younger brother.

When we met him in prison ward, he was symptom free but a detailed history revealed interesting aspects of his personality since 2 years.

He was residing with his younger brother. He had episodes of a strange feeling that there is something in his body . He said his body become stiff just like 'zombie' i.e there is no movements , no feelings and understanding, during episodes becomes unaware of what is going around him, but sometime he is feeling that he is pure soul from heaven. This symptoms last for 3-4 hrs for 2-3 days. Then suddenly he used to become energetic and powerful , he used to clinch the teeth and unable to control by 10-15 peoples, if they try to catch him. This episode used to usually last for 10-15 minutes then he used to become normal without any efforts. He sometimes remained confused for short periods. Relatives also gave history of him talking during sleep. Also there was history of sleep walking.

For these complaints he was taken to a faith healer who treated him with some hot water bath mixed with crushed leaves of unknown plants. He was also advised to take bath with same water for next 3 days. After taking treatment from faith healer he started feeling better for some days.

But this apparent improvement in the condition of the patient didn't last for long and again he started getting episodes of becoming stiff like `zombie` followed suddenly by feeling energetic and then confused for short period. He was also unable to remember the events properly.

One day he has a same episode he went to kitchen took a knife and tried to hit himself with knife and said that he is powerful and his body is like iron, when his younger brother saw him and tried to stop him, and a struggle ensued between patient and his brother during which his brother accidentally got killed. During whole episode patient was confused and not aware of what he has done.

When he was normal he came to know that he was in police custody and his crime was that of killing his own brother. He claimed complete unawareness of the whole episode.

Because accused claimed that he was totally unaware of his crime a psychiatric

evaluation was ordered by relevant authorities and hence he was admitted in our hospital.

After a through and complete evaluation followed by investigations he was diagnosed to be suffering from Automatism.

He was started on antiepileptic tab sodium valporate 400mg per day. He responded well to sodium Valproate subsequent to which he has no episodes of automatism.

Discussion:

Automatism is set of brief unconscious behavior typically lasting for several seconds to minutes or sometime longer. A time during which subject is unaware of his actions.

This type of automatic behavior often occurs in certain type of epilepsy such as complex partial seizure in those temporal lobe epilepsy.

In this complex automatism the subject enters in to the behavior of sleep walking also. Following the episode the subjects regain consciousness and has feeling

disorientation and has no memory of the incident.

Epileptic automatism should be treated with antiepileptics. Sodium Valproate is one of the drugs routinely used for Epileptic Automatism.

Conclusion:

Psychiatric illnesses are one of the most important cause put forth by defendants in the court of law. Automatism is one of such conditions. It needs proper evaluation and needs treatment. Epileptic Automatism is one of the conditions in which person committing the crime is totally unaware of his actions. This condition can be treated by antiepileptic like Sodium Valproate.

Conflict Of Interest: None

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