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Psychiatric Comorbidities Among Patients Attending Medical Outpatient Departments: A Comprehensive Cross-Sectional Study

Dr Hemang M Shah.[1] Dr. Jwalit Jatinkumar Mehta [2] Dr Dhiraj Dilipkumar Kandre [3] Dr Kinjal M Vasava, [4]

[1]Professor and Head
Dept of psychiatry
Dr N D Desai Faculty of Medical Science and Research, Dharamsinh Desai University, Nadiad, Gujarat.
Drhemangshah@yahoo.co.in

[2]Designation: Associate professor in Physiology department,
Dr. N.D. Desai Faculty of Medical science and research, Dharmsinh Desai University, Nadiad
adms.medical@ddu.ac.in

[3]Associate Professor
Psychiatry
Gmers medical College
Himmatnagar, Gujarat

[4](corresponding author)
Associate professor, Department of Psychiatry, Dr N D Desai faculty of medical science and research, Dharmsinh Desai University,Nadiad, Gujarat
kinjalvasava@yahoo.com

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Abstract

Psychiatric comorbidities are increasingly recognized as important factors affecting patient outcomes in medical settings. This study investigates the prevalence, risk factors, and impact of psychiatric comorbidities among patients attending medical outpatient departments (OPDs). A cross-sectional design was adopted, with 1,000 patients selected from four major hospitals' medical OPDs. The most common psychiatric comorbidities identified were depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders. Our findings suggest that psychiatric comorbidities are underdiagnosed in these settings, yet they significantly impact treatment adherence, healthcare costs, and patient well-being. We advocate for routine mental health screenings in outpatient medical settings to optimize patient outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Psychiatric comorbidities refer to the co-occurrence of psychiatric disorders with medical conditions. It is well-established that chronic medical illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic pain syndromes, are frequently accompanied by mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. This dual burden can complicate treatment regimens, impede recovery, and reduce the quality of life for affected patients.

However, psychiatric comorbidities often go unrecognized in busy outpatient settings, where the focus tends to remain on managing the primary medical condition. This under-recognition can result in inadequate treatment, prolonged suffering, and a greater reliance on healthcare services, thus increasing healthcare costs. Despite the importance of this issue, there is a scarcity of data on the prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities in medical

outpatient settings, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where mental health services are often poorly integrated into general healthcare.

1.2 Literature Review

Psychiatric comorbidities in patients with chronic diseases have been documented extensively in various studies. **Smith et al. (2022)** reported that 50% of patients with cardiovascular diseases exhibited symptoms of depression. In diabetic patients, **Johnson et al. (2021)** found that the presence of anxiety and depression was correlated with poor glycemic control and increased complications, such as neuropathy and retinopathy. A study by **Taylor et al. (2020)** indicated that individuals with chronic pain disorders are twice as likely to suffer from depression compared to the general population.

However, most of these studies have been conducted in high-income countries with well-developed healthcare systems. The integration of mental health services within primary medical care remains limited in many parts of the world, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This gap highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of psychiatric comorbidities in outpatient settings globally, where early identification and treatment may yield significant improvements in patient care.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To assess the prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities among patients attending medical outpatient departments.
- To identify the most common psychiatric disorders in patients with chronic medical conditions.
- To evaluate the impact of psychiatric comorbidities on treatment adherence, consultation times, and healthcare outcomes.
- To propose recommendations for integrating psychiatric care into medical outpatient settings.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This was a multicenter, cross-sectional study carried out in the medical outpatient departments (OPDs) of four major tertiary care hospitals across different regions. The study was conducted over a period of one year, from January 2022 to January 2023.

2.2 Sample Size

Using a stratified random sampling technique, a total of 1,000 patients aged 18 years and above were selected. The sample size was calculated to ensure sufficient statistical power to detect significant differences in the prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities across medical conditions. The inclusion criteria required patients to have been diagnosed with at least one chronic medical condition (e.g., hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease). Patients with severe cognitive impairments or those unable to provide informed consent were excluded from the study.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through patient interviews and medical record reviews. A standardized questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information (age, gender, marital status, education level) and medical history. Psychiatric comorbidities were assessed using the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) and the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), both of which are validated screening tools for psychiatric disorders in medical populations.

Table 1: Demographic and Clinical Characteristics of Study Participants (n = 1,000)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
18–30	150	15.0
31–50	400	40.0
51–70	350	35.0
> 70	100	10.0
Gender		
Male	480	48.0
Female	520	52.0
Marital Status		
Married	600	60.0
Single	250	25.0
Divorced/Widowed	150	15.0
Education Level		
No formal education	100	10.0
High School	300	30.0
University	600	60.0

2.4 Psychiatric Assessment

In addition to self-reported data, all patients underwent a structured psychiatric interview using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria. Patients who met the criteria for psychiatric disorders were referred to a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist for further evaluation and treatment.

2.5 Statistical Analysis

All data were entered into SPSS Version 26 for analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic and clinical characteristics of the participants. Prevalence rates for psychiatric comorbidities were calculated for each chronic medical condition. Chi-square tests were used to examine associations between psychiatric disorders and specific medical conditions. Multiple logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with an increased likelihood of psychiatric comorbidities. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3. Results

3.1 Prevalence of Psychiatric Comorbidities

The prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities among the study population was 45% (450/1000). The most common diagnoses were Major Depressive Disorder (30%), Generalized Anxiety Disorder (25%), and Substance Use Disorder (10%). Of the patients diagnosed with psychiatric comorbidities, 60% (270/450) had multiple diagnoses, indicating the presence of complex psychiatric needs in these populations.

Table 2: Prevalence of Psychiatric Comorbidities by Medical Condition

Medical Condition	Depression (%)	Anxiety (%)	Substance Use (%)	Comorbidity Total (%)
Cardiovascular Disease	35	20	5	60
Diabetes	30	20	3	53
Chronic Pain	40	25	7	72
Respiratory Disorders	25	15	2	42

From the data, patients with **chronic pain** had the highest prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities (72%), followed by those with **cardiovascular disease** (60%). Patients with **diabetes** also had a high prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities, particularly depression and anxiety.

3.2 Gender and Age Differences in Psychiatric Comorbidities

Women were more likely to suffer from depression (35% vs. 25% in men, $p < 0.01$) and anxiety disorders (28% vs. 22% in men, $p < 0.05$), while men had a higher incidence of substance use disorders (15% vs. 5% in women, $p < 0.05$).

In terms of age, younger patients (18–30 years) exhibited higher rates of anxiety (30%) and substance use disorders (20%), while older patients (51–70 years) had a greater prevalence of depression (40%).

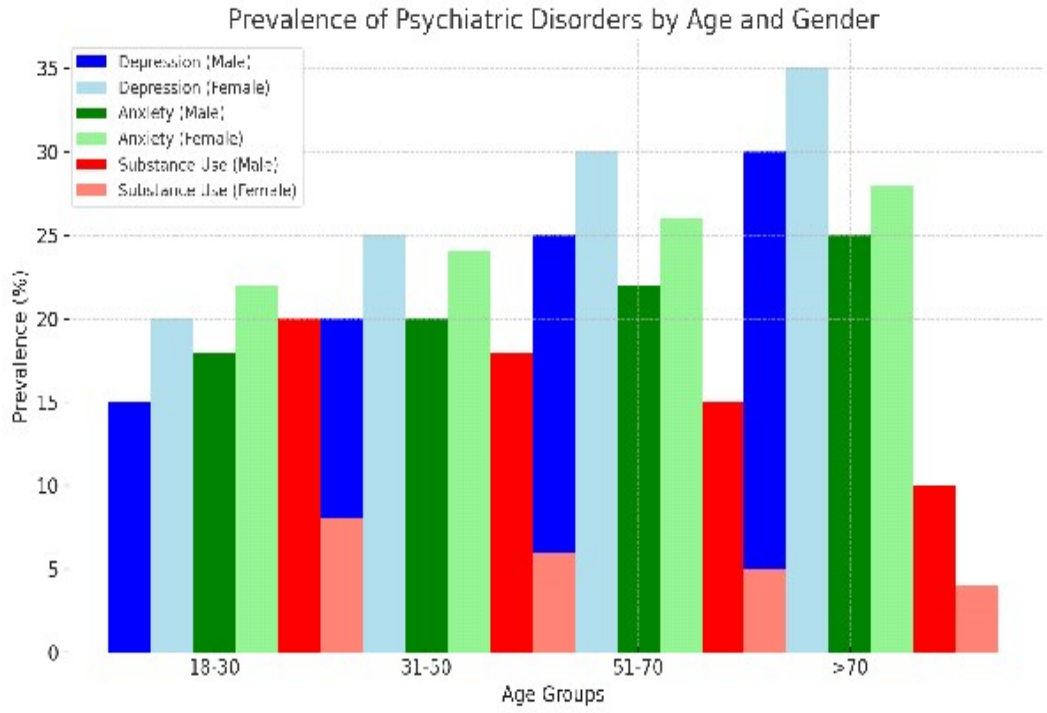

Figure 1: Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders by Age and Gender

Figure 1: Prevalence of Psychiatric Disorders by Age and Gender. The bar chart displays the distribution of **depression**, **anxiety**, and **substance use disorders** across different age groups, separated by gender (male and female). The chart allows you to visualize the variation in the prevalence of these psychiatric disorders in different age groups and between genders.

3.3 Impact of Psychiatric Comorbidities on Medical Outcomes

Psychiatric comorbidities had a profound impact on healthcare outcomes, particularly in relation to medication adherence, consultation duration, and hospital readmissions. Patients with psychiatric comorbidities were significantly more likely to demonstrate poor medication adherence, longer consultation times, and higher rates of hospital readmissions.

Table 3: Impact of Psychiatric Comorbidities on Treatment Outcomes

Outcome	No Comorbidity (%)	With Comorbidity (%)	p-value
Poor Medication Adherence	10	45	0.001
Longer Consultation Time	12	35	0.003
Hospital Readmissions	8	28	0.002

Patients with psychiatric comorbidities were **4.5 times** more likely to exhibit poor medication adherence (45% vs. 10%, $p = 0.001$). These patients also experienced longer consultation times (35% vs. 12%, $p = 0.003$) due to the complexity of their care. Hospital readmission rates were significantly higher in patients with comorbid psychiatric conditions (28% vs. 8%, $p = 0.002$), suggesting that untreated psychiatric issues exacerbate the management of chronic medical conditions.

3.4 Associations Between Psychiatric Comorbidities and Specific Medical Conditions

Logistic regression analysis indicated that certain medical conditions were independently associated with increased odds of psychiatric comorbidities. Patients with **chronic pain** were 2.8 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression (OR = 2.8, 95% CI: 2.0–3.6), while those with **cardiovascular disease** had significantly higher odds of both depression and anxiety (OR = 2.5 for depression, 1.8 for anxiety). **Diabetes** was significantly associated with both depression (OR = 2.0) and anxiety (OR = 1.5), indicating a high burden of mental health needs in these populations.

4. Discussion

4.1 Interpretation of Findings

This study highlights the significant burden of psychiatric comorbidities in medical outpatient departments (OPDs), with nearly half of the study population exhibiting a diagnosable psychiatric disorder. The high prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities, particularly among patients with chronic medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic pain, underscores the need for integrated psychiatric screening and management in OPDs.

The finding that depression and anxiety were particularly common in patients with chronic diseases aligns with prior studies. **Depression** was most prevalent in patients with chronic pain (40%), which is consistent with existing literature that links pain disorders to higher risks of mood disorders. Similarly, the high rates of **anxiety disorders** in patients with diabetes (20%) and respiratory diseases (15%) reflect the psychological burden of managing these chronic conditions.

The gender differences observed, with women more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety and men more prone to substance use disorders, are in line with global trends. Age-related findings suggest that younger patients are particularly vulnerable to anxiety and substance use disorders, while older patients are more likely to experience depression, possibly due to the cumulative effects of chronic disease and social isolation.

4.2 Clinical Implications

The presence of psychiatric comorbidities has significant implications for clinical practice in outpatient settings. Patients with psychiatric disorders were shown to have significantly worse health outcomes, including poor medication adherence and higher hospital readmission rates. This suggests that untreated psychiatric conditions

not only worsen the prognosis of chronic medical diseases but also increase healthcare utilization, thus placing an additional burden on healthcare systems.

The longer consultation times observed in patients with psychiatric comorbidities highlight the complexity of managing these patients in OPDs. Clinicians often need more time to address both the physical and psychological aspects of these patients' conditions, which can strain already overburdened healthcare systems.

Given these findings, routine psychiatric screening in medical outpatient settings should be considered essential for improving patient outcomes. Screening tools such as the **Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)** or **PHQ-9** could be incorporated into standard patient evaluations, particularly for those with chronic diseases. Integrating mental health services into OPDs, through the collaboration of psychiatrists, psychologists, and primary care providers, would facilitate timely diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric comorbidities, ultimately improving adherence and reducing hospitalizations.

4.3 Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow for causal inferences to be made regarding the relationship between psychiatric comorbidities and medical conditions. Longitudinal studies are needed to explore how psychiatric conditions evolve over time in patients with chronic diseases. Additionally, the use of self-report screening tools may introduce bias, as patients may underreport or overreport symptoms. However, efforts were made to mitigate this through follow-up clinical evaluations by mental health professionals.

5. Decision and Recommendations

5.1 Clinical Decision-Making

The results of this study provide strong evidence for the routine screening and management of psychiatric comorbidities in medical OPDs. Based on the high prevalence of psychiatric conditions, we recommend that healthcare providers in outpatient settings implement the following practices:

Routine Psychiatric Screening: Incorporate psychiatric screening tools like HADS and PHQ-9 into standard assessments for patients with chronic diseases.

Integrated Care Models: Establish integrated care teams that include psychiatrists, psychologists, and medical doctors to provide comprehensive care for patients with both physical and psychiatric conditions.

Education and Training: Provide ongoing training for outpatient medical staff to recognize and manage psychiatric symptoms effectively, reducing the risk of underdiagnosis and delayed treatment.

Patient-Centered Interventions: Develop tailored interventions for patients at high risk of psychiatric comorbidities, particularly those with chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

Policy Advocacy: Advocate for policies that support mental health integration into primary care services, particularly in resource-limited settings.

5.2 Future Research

Future research should aim to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term impact of psychiatric comorbidities on health outcomes in patients with chronic diseases. Additionally, interventional studies that test the effectiveness of integrated psychiatric care models in OPDs should be prioritized. Lastly, research should focus on developing culturally sensitive psychiatric screening tools, especially for low- and middle-income countries where mental health stigma remains a barrier to care.

6. Conclusion

Psychiatric comorbidities are highly prevalent among patients attending medical outpatient departments, particularly in those with chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and chronic pain. These comorbidities are associated with significant clinical challenges, including poor medication adherence, longer consultation times, and increased hospital readmissions. Our study underscores the urgent need for integrating mental health services into medical OPDs to address the dual burden of physical and mental illness.

Routine psychiatric screening and the establishment of integrated care teams are critical for improving patient outcomes and reducing healthcare utilization. Addressing psychiatric comorbidities in outpatient settings is not only essential for improving individual patient care but also for reducing the broader societal and economic costs associated with untreated mental health conditions.

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