

Abstract

Background

Culture-bound syndrome is a term used to describe the uniqueness of some syndromes in specific cultures. *Dhat* (semen-loss anxiety) has been considered to be an exotic 'neurosis of the Orient'.

Aims

To ascertain the presence of similar symptoms and syndromes in different cultures and historical settings.

Method

Electronic and manual literature searches were used to gather information on the existence and description of semen-loss anxiety in different cultures and settings.

Results

Most of the empirical studies on *dhat* syndrome have emerged from Asia, whereas its concepts have been described historically in other cultures, including Britain, the USA and Australia. The different sources indicate the universality of symptoms and global prevalence of this condition, despite its image as a 'neurosis of the Orient'.

Conclusions

It appears that *dhat* (semen-loss anxiety) is not as culture-bound as previously thought. We propose that the concept of culture-bound syndromes should be modified in line with DSM-IV recommendations.