

Original

**PROFILE OF PSYCHIATRIC ADMISSIONS FOLLOWING  
POLICE REFERRAL IN BAHRAIN**

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This is a retrospective study of patients admitted via the police to the Psychiatric Hospital in Bahrain during 1989. A high percentage of police admissions were unemployed, single males in their twenties or thirties. They mostly suffered from schizophrenia or substance abuse problems and were arrested because of their abnormal behavior or being violent. Comparison of these results with corresponding studies in the developed and developing world showed consistency in the demographic data, and causes for the police involvement. The diagnostic categories differed only in their order of frequency from that in the developed countries.

Police admissions to psychiatric hospitals have been a focus of attention for many investigators, especially by those who advocate a social control hypothesis in relation to psychiatry, where the hospital is viewed as an agent of the authority helping to exert control over those individuals labelled by the society as "psychiatrically abnormal"<sup>1</sup>. Some studies have examined the possibility that high rates of police admissions may partly be affected by conscious or unconscious racist attitudes<sup>2</sup>. Other investigations concluded that patients reaching treatment facilities via the police are amongst the most acutely disturbed admission who comes from decaying parts of large cities and who are lonely, isolated and coming from minority communities<sup>3</sup>.

This study aims at identifying the characteristics of police admissions in Bahrain, with respect to:

1. Events leading to admissions of the patients by the police,
2. The socio-demographic characteristics of these patients,
3. Psychiatric diagnosis in frequency of occurrence.
4. The nature of police related admissions as compared to other parts of the world.

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BACKGROUND

Bahrain is a group of islands in the Arabian Gulf with a population of 508,000 (323,300 Bahrainis and 184,700 other nationalities<sup>4</sup> and a surface area of 70,000 Km<sup>2</sup>.

The Psychiatric Hospital was established in the capital Manama in 1948, with a catchments area covering the whole country. There is an out-patient, an in-

patient, a community, a day care, a long stay, a psycho geriatric and occupational therapy departments. It is also a teaching hospital for the Arabian Gulf University Medical School.

A mental health act is still under study by the Ministry of Health, Bahrain. Patients are admitted to the Psychiatric Hospital mainly on voluntary basis or on request of their relatives. Fewer cases are admitted on the request of court or police for assessment and report.

#### METHODS

Data related to all police admissions during 1989 (65 patients) were studied. The information was obtained from the case notes of the patients and the police referral forms. In evaluating the data a pre-designed format was used to highlight information relating to the sociodemo-graphic characteristics, past psychiatric history, diagnosis on admission (using ICD-9) and the causes for police intervention.

#### RESULTS

A total of 65 patients admitted following referral by the police represented 5.5% of the total admissions to the Psychiatric Hospital during 1989. The table shows the demographic data, the past psychiatric history, the diagnosis and the causes for police intervention.

The age distribution shows that 75% of the patients were between the ages of 21-40 years old. The male to female ratio was 8.3:1. Marital status showed 67% (62% males and 5% females) unmarried. The unemployed were 65% (62% males and 3% females). Nationality distribution showed 77% of the patients were Bahrainis. The diagnostic categories were as follows; 38% schizophrenia, 26% alcohol and / or drug problem, 11% affective disorders, 8% personality disorders, and 8% other conditions with 5% of the cases had more than one diagnosis. The police intervened in 66% of cases because of abnormal behavior consisting of wandering, bizarre conduct and verbal aggression, while 41% of cases had more than one cause for the police arrest.

Table: Demographic and clinical profile of psychiatric admissions through police referral (% in parenthesis)

Demographic/Clinical/Legal Profile	Males	Females	Total
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Age Group:			
0 - 20	3 (5)	0 (0)	3 (3)
21 - 40	43 (66)	6 (9)	49 (75)
41 - 60	11 (17)	1 (2)	12 (19)
> 60	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
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Marital Status:			
Single	40 (62)	3 (5)	43 (67)
Married	17 (26)	4 (6)	21 (32)
Divorced/Separated	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (2)
Widowed	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
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Nationality:			
Bahrainis	48 (74)	2 (3)	50 (77)
Non-Bahrainis	10 (15)	5 (8)	15 (23)
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Employment:			
Employed	18 (28)	5 (8)	23 (30)

Unemployed	40 (62)	2 (3)	42 (65)
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Past Psychiatric History:			
Present	29 (45)	1 (2)	30 (46)
Absent	29 (45)	6 (9)	35 (54)
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Diagnosis (ICD-9):			
Schizophrenia	19 (29)	6 (9)	25 (38)
Alcohol & Drug Abuse	17 (26)	0 (0)	17 (26)
Affective Disorders	6 (9)	1 (2)	7 (11)
Personality Disorders	5 (8)	0 (0)	5 (8)
Others	5 (8)	0 (0)	5 (8)
More than one diagnosis	3 (5)	0 (0)	3 (5)
No Psychopathology	3 (5)	0 (0)	3 (5)
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Cause of Police Intervention:			
Abnormal behavior	40 (62)	3 (5)	43 (66)
Violence	14 (22)	4 (6)	18 (28)
Alcohol & Drug Problem	29 (45)	0 (0)	29 (45)
Para suicide	5 (8)	2 (3)	7 (11)
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## DISCUSSION

The number of patients admitted following police referral during the study period represented 5.5% of the total admissions during that year. In a similar study carried out in Germany the police referral represented only two percent<sup>5</sup>. This difference may be related to the existence of alternate routes of admission and the greater awareness of mental illness in Western cultures. Furthermore, the ability to relate behavioral problems to mental disorders is a concept which varies in different societies<sup>6</sup>.

The majority of the studied population (75%) aged between 21-40 years old which is similar to the corresponding studies from Woodbridge Hospital in Singapore<sup>7</sup> and in Birmingham<sup>8</sup>, and is also comparable with demographic data of psychiatric in-patient profile in Bahrain<sup>9</sup>. The young age groups of the sample are a reflection of the population structure in Bahrain where 95% of the populations are below 50 years old<sup>9</sup>. Also, the third and fourth decades of individual's life are known to be commonly associated with the onset of most of the psychiatric disorders.

The male to female ratio in the study was 8.3:1 while it is only 1.8:1 in the general population. The marked under-representation of females in the study can be explained by the protective attitude of the Bahraini society towards females. Thus they are less likely to go out of the house and less likely to come to the attention of police. Alcohol and / or drug abuse is rarely seen among Bahraini females<sup>9</sup>.

The male to female ratio of the non-Bahrainis in the study was 2:1, while the ratio in the general population is 2.5:1. This is different from their Bahraini counterparts since a good number of the expatriate females in the study work as housemaids and their sponsors usually inform the police when they become mentally disturbed for fear of bearing consequences of their disturbed behavior.

The preponderance of unmarried men in the study (62%) is consistent with the profile of psychiatric in-patient in Bahrain<sup>9</sup>. It is also in agreement with results of similar study in Singapore<sup>7</sup>. Males remain single for longer periods than females as they have to work and earn their living necessary to afford the high costs of marriage in the Gulf area which is the male responsibility.

Twenty nine percent of the males in this study were schizophrenics. It is known that schizophrenia is common among males remaining in the single status<sup>10</sup>, who are more likely to come to the attention of the police when they become disturbed. According to the social drift theory, schizophrenics tend to drift down the social scale. These patients lose their jobs and become unable to cope with the demands of marriage and thus remain single. The percentage of married females was higher than single females (57% and 43% respectively). Females marry earlier in life and by the time they reach the age of peak incidence of psychiatric disorders they are already married. Seventy five percent of the married females in the study were expatriates and lived away from their spouses and children which might have added to the stress of living in an alien culture.

The high representation of unemployed males (62%) is consistent with corresponding findings from Birmingham and Singapore<sup>7,8</sup>. It is expected that the relapsing and chronic nature of psychiatric disorders and the subsequent frequent hospital admission results in these patients losing their jobs. The smaller percentage of expatriates in the unemployed group (6%) is understandable since the greater majority leave the country as they cannot support themselves without a job. The unemployment among females is low (3%), because 5 out of total 7 females in the study were expatriates who came to the island for work and were housemaids.

The ratio of Bahrainis to non-Bahrainis among males in the study is 14.5:1; while non-Bahrainis are soon repatriated when they fall mentally ill, the Bahrainis remain living in Bahrain and their number gradually accumulates over the years.

Studying the case note diagnosis in their order of occurrence, it was found that schizophrenia and related disorders was the most frequent diagnosis (38%). This result is consistent with the profile of psychiatric inpatient in Bahrain in that schizophrenia was the most frequent diagnosis for admission to the Psychiatric Hospital<sup>19</sup>. In a corresponding study from Germany, the most frequent reasons for police admission was alcohol-related psychiatric disorders in men and endogenous psychoses in women<sup>5</sup>. Psychotic patients tend to exhibit bizarre behavior which eventually brings them to police attention.

The second frequent diagnosis in this study was alcohol and drug abuse (26%). The Psychiatric Hospital is the only centre for drug detoxification and rehabilitation in Bahrain. It is a law in Bahrain that all alcohol and/or drug abusers are referred for treatment to this hospital. Such cases are referred to Psychiatric Hospital by their families or by the police for either breaking law and order or behaving disorderly. It is worth mentioning that all alcohol and drug abuse patients were males. Alcohol and drug dependence among females is a rarity in the protective and conservative Islamic society of Bahrain. This is consistent with results of a similar study in Saudi Arabia<sup>11</sup>, where alcohol and drug abuse was found to be a disorder exclusively present among males. In a corresponding study from Germany, alcohol and drug abuse was the most frequent diagnosis among white men<sup>5</sup>.

The third frequent diagnosis was affective disorders (11%). Five out of the total 8 patients were manic. This high rate can be attributed to the fact that manic patients can be irritable and easily provoked and it is their abnormal behavior and / or aggression which brings them to the attention of the police.

The fourth frequent diagnosis was personality disorder (8%). In contrast to our findings, a similar study from the United Kingdom showed personality disorder to be the most frequent diagnosis for white men together with alcohol and drug problems<sup>8</sup>. Patients with anti-social personality disorder usually have problems in complying with the law and this eventually makes them more vulnerable to arrest by the police.

As for the events which led to the police intervention it was found that 66% of cases exhibited abnormal behavior (61% males and 5% females). As mentioned earlier, females in this society live and work under a protective environment hence it is mainly men who are easily picked up by police if they become disturbed and get referred to psychiatric agencies more frequently than females<sup>9</sup>. Abnormal behavior was the most frequent cause for police arrest in the study (66%). In a similar study from the United Kingdom, abnormal behavior was also the most frequent cause for police arrest<sup>3</sup>.

Twenty eight percent of cases were arrested because of physical violence including two patients with attempted homicide. The male to female ratio of violence was 10:1. Males tend to direct their anger outwardly while females direct it inwardly<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, males spend more time outside their homes hence they are easily detected by police if they become violent. Thirty percent of the males in this study were involved in drug and alcohol problems which also make them more liable to arrest.

#### CONCLUSION

The police in Bahrain play an important role in referring mentally disturbed patients to the psychiatric hospital. Such cases are usually Bahraini single and unemployed males, in their third or fourth decades. They mostly suffer from schizophrenia or alcohol and drug problems, manifested as abnormal or violence behavior. These referrals demonstrates that the police in Bahrain play a meaningful role as a "social - agency" in the detection of psychiatrically ill people. The efficiency of this role can further be improved by training the police to develop skills necessary for handling such population.

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