

Oral presentation

How relative is cultural relativity in psychiatry?

Driss Moussaoui*

Address: Ibn Rushd University Psychiatric Centre, and Director, WHO Collaborating Centre, Casablanca, Morocco

* Corresponding author

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Cultural relativity of psychiatric symptoms and syndromes in psychiatry started with the long trip of Emil Kraepelin to Indonesia and Singapore in 1904. An important literature described more than a hundred "folk syndromes" until the 40's.

The interesting thing is that a number of syndromes described as being specific of a region are often found in other regions of the world under different labels. One of them is the "Latah" which has been described in Malaysia before finding the same syndrome in many other parts of the world, including Morocco.

Other cultural descriptions (somatic expression of depression in sub-Saharan Africa, smiling depression in Thailand) have been found in other cultures. We have even described in Moroccan illiterate young patients from rural areas a delusion similar to the one of the president Schreber described by S.Freud.

In psychiatry, cultural relativity has to be relativised.