

## Short Article

# “A Spirit Encroachment”: Hysterical Possession, Case Study from Kerala

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## Abstract

The Present case of a 45-year-old female with a 10th-grade education who presented with a history of episodes where she would display extraordinary strength while becoming aggressive towards her family members and displaying bizarre behavior. The period was short. She was diagnosed with hysterical based on possession. She would always claim amnesia for the event. She claimed a hidden treasure that was in her dream in her backyard and seemed to be also possessed with spirit as she said. The family tried black magic to cure it. But the black magician tries to physically assault her. Later she starts showing physical symptoms of hysterical possession. She always tries to avoid her family husband and children. The suggestions of a close family member brought the patient for consultation in the hypnotherapy and counseling clinic. The present case illustrates how sexual harassment can lead to possession. Visualization hypnotherapy and counseling were the treatments given to the client. Finally, the client completely cured.

**Keywords:** *Hysterical possession, Hypnotherapy, Counseling, spirit*

## Introduction

The word “hysteria” is frequently used to define highly charged, seemingly uncontrollably emotional behavior. During the Victorian era, the term hysteria was a common medical diagnosis, especially for women. Hysteria was viewed as a psychological disorder as far back as 1900 BCE. The word hysteria comes from the Greek “hystera”, which means “uterus”. This is when ancient Egyptians first described the condition, adding that it was caused by “spontaneous uterus movement.” This was also sometimes referred to as having a wandering uterus. In the early 1600s, the focus switched, such as when anatomist Thomas Willis concluded that hysteria did not originate in the uterus, but in the brain. This understanding opened the possibility that hysteria could affect men as well. In the 1800s, for instance, French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot utilized hypnosis to treat women suffering from hysteria. It was Freud’s work with colleague Josef Breuer on the case of Anna O, a young woman experiencing symptoms of hysteria. that helped lead to the development of psychoanalytic therapy. Carl Jung, a colleague of Freud’s, treated a young woman named Sabina Spielrein who was also thought to suffer from hysteria. The term “hysterical neurosis” was first mentioned in the second edition of the DSM (DSM-II), published in 1968, but has since been abandoned in favor of a diagnosis of somatic symptom disorder, dissociative disorder, or conversion disorder [1-8].

## Sensory Disturbances

These disturbances include paresthesia, hypersensitivity, and complete or partial loss of sensation. In severe cases, hysteria may also cause damage to other sensory organs and cause blindness, hearing loss, and loss of taste or smell.

## Motor Symptoms

Motor symptoms include complete paralysis, tremors, or convulsions. When the disease progresses, it may even cause loss of speech, vomiting, hiccuping, etc. However, when undergoing a neurological examination of the affected site, these individuals present intact neuromuscular apparatus with normal electrical activity, response, and stimulation.

## Psychic Symptoms

These symptoms are generally called dissociative reactions, where a person presents with attacks of amnesia and sleepwalking and can also present with multiple personalities. For example, a person with a dissociative reaction sometimes forgets his name or house address or has a split personality. Females with hysterical behaviors can behave emotionally charged, and out of control [9].

## Discussion

### Case Presentation

The case on the current study was took place in March 2016. The client was a 45-year-old woman and had a 10th-grade education. She had a husband and two daughters in the family. The beginning was that she showed some special unusual symptoms like strange behavior, extreme unrest, change of voice, seizures and acquiring tremendous strength shown to the children and the husband, especially to the husband. In Kerala, associated with the Hindu belief system, a spirit (called “Yakshi -A female spirit”) enters the body in myths and old texts. That belief is still being followed to some extent in Kerala, the

majority of the parts. The client grew up amidst such beliefs. Once one night she dreamed that a treasure was hidden in her backyard. Even then and before that, she was experiencing symptoms like unusual psychomotor agitation. Her husband brought the information to a black magician. He summoned everyone at night two 2 am and cast a spell. Finally, the black magician was relieved to let the woman sit in the room and asked the other relatives to go out. Then he closed the door and tried to rape her. She screamed. Everyone ran to her. After that incident, she has unusual psychomotor agitation when she sees her husband. She assumes that the spirit has entered her body. Sometimes swearing at someone who resembles her husband also causes symptoms.

### Patient History in Their Words

As soon as the client came, unusual behavior was visible to therapist. They asked to stop the red light coming from the computer monitor on the table.

"That red light should be turned off," she strictly said

When asked if she believed she was infected, she gave the therapist strange wordings with expression.

"I will kill you and drink your blood"

When asked to her, she did not remember anything that happened at that time of possession, she spoke in such a way that she had the knowledge that others had told to her.

The information given by the client confirmed what the bystanders. They also believed that there was treasure in the back yard and she is possessed by the spirit.

### Medical History

Her whole family members believed in superstitious things. After the appearance of the black magician they again visited many other several faith healers and swamis with no improvement in her condition. They had no idea that she was mentally ill and this mental illness should need to be treated. They visit the therapist for consultation only after when one of their educated close family members suggests. The client was not at all interested in that particular decision. She never visits a doctor or psychologist or takes any other medication for this illness.

### Treatment History

Visualization hypnotherapy and Counseling were the treatments given to the client.

### Visualization Hypnotherapy

Visualization is just about the most powerful form of suggestion imaginable. The more senses that are stimulated, the more realistic the image to the brain, and the easier it is to establish that all-important process of selective thought within the hypnotic state. Just about any sort of hypnotic suggestion we might wish to give somebody can be enhanced by the use of the "four-sense" method of creative visualization. It means we include sounds, feelings, and even smells — in addition to any visual imagery [10].

### Counseling

Counseling is a talking therapy that involves a trained therapist listening to you and helping you find ways to deal with emotional issues. Sometimes the term "counseling" is used to refer to talking therapies in general, but counseling is also a type of therapy in its own right [11].

### Clinical Findings General Examination

She was not properly tied his hair. She had an average mode of dressing. Other than that on examination, all general parameters were normal.

### Differential Diagnosis

1. Possession syndrome (most likely diagnosis for discussion).
2. Schizo-Hysteria (not in the diagnostic classification system).
3. Schizophrenia (not meeting the criteria).
4. Organic brain syndrome (ruled out).

### Diagnostic Findings

- Cannot control themselves: She didn't know what she was doing. She was unable to control herself. She used to be violent towards family members especially, her husband and children.
- New personality: New personality, introduced to her- the victim becomes a different person and acts and speaks as one who is controlled by another personality
- Different voice: A slight change and tone in her voice identifies
- Supernatural knowledge: She repeatedly says that a treasure in the backyard
- New abilities: She, those possessed by can demonstrate superhuman strength, the family reported

Her family was a lower class one. Finances have overwhelmed them to spend their days constantly. Being a family that strongly followed the superstitious belief, she believed that they would get a way out of that one day. That may be the reason she believes there is treasure in their backyard, her family must have believed it too. It is also a reason to introduce the black magician. There is a common belief in Kerala that only a person with supernatural powers can take the treasure.

What made this client the most difficult was the insecure feeling that came to her. The fact that the black magician tried to physically harm the client after letting her husband, children and relatives out and closing the door while they were outside, caused a great impact on them. The reason for their anger towards her husband is that, it was her husband who brought the man there. She hated everyone who had left her alone in front of the man and guarded her. It was that hatred that later came out as possession symptoms.

### Therapeutic Intervention

Hypnotherapy and counseling methods were used for the client.

## Hypnotherapy

In getting the true basic information about the client, the therapist talked to the client, the bystanders that arer her husband, children, and the two elder brothers of the client. The therapist did not have to use any form of hypnotic techniques for information gathering, because it was clearly understood that the information given by them was accurate and the necessary information was already available. But here hypnotherapy was used as a treatment modality later. The visualization technique was used. Being a hysteric patient, the suggestibility of the client was high. So that it was also possible to bring the client into deep hypnosis very quickly. Through suggestions, she went to "Aluva Manappuram" (the place where the Aluva Manappuram temple is located, Ernakulam), which is a very important sacred place according to the Hindu faith and "Periyar" (the largest river in Kerala) flows nearby it. Curative suggestions are that when you immerse yourself in the river, the spirit goes away with the very strong flow of the river and the spirit is unable to swim back to her. The client was following the suggestion exactly. The situation was explained in detail. So it was easy for her to follow it. After the procedure, let her sleep and when awakened visible difference started to be seen. It was with just one trial. She was that much cooperative. As a follow-up, she was subjected to hypnotherapy forthree consecutive days to make counseling in her subconscious mind. Both of those times they were subjected to light hypnosis and after that time she seems to be almost completely free.

## Counseling

The suggestions given in light hypnosis convinced her even when she was awake. She understood what her problem was and said that she would never have that problem again. Therapist gave satisfactory answers to her questions. Client gave counseling three times more every each week.

## Conclusion

Possession syndrome is important diagnostic category that should be considered especially in cross culture contexts. Because most of the times it's deeply connected with culture. If it is in India or especially in Kerala is has another dimension too. The religion Psychotic illnesses can manifest in various forms. We can't predict it anyway. It depends on so many psycho -socio- cultural factors. Cultural consultation is important in treatment.

## Foot note

**Informed consent:** Yes.

**Competing interests:** None.

**Patient consent:** Obtained.

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