Stalking May Be Linked to Right Brain Dysfunction

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SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Some parasitic stalking behaviors may be associated with right-hemisphere brain dysfunction, Montgomery Brover, M.D., said at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Family Practice.

The brain’s right hemisphere deals with visual spatial functions, and right-hemisphere dysfunction "is something that exerts its effect early because it’s either a developmental or an early acquired syndrome," said Dr. Brower of Harvard Medical School, Boston.

In the event of a "dysfunction" has a "developmental impact which manifests itself as a developmental learning disorder," he noted.

The most common sign of right hemispheric dysfunction is a gap between verbal and performance IQs. A "split of 15 points is considered significant," said he.

Patients with right-hemispheric related learning disorder, for example, often have poor recall when asked to construct a diagram from memory. However, since the communicative function is not impaired, these patients can often do quite well in school because their verbal and remote memory skills are quite good. "In fact, they’re often hyperdeveloped in that area," Dr. Brower added.

Another manifestation of right-hemispheric brain dysfunction is social skills deficits. "This tends to manifest with a flat affect and diminished prosody," he said.

These patients don’t understand the nonverbal components of interpersonal communication. They will often comment in a flat manner. They may also fail to make eye contact during conversation, which may contribute to some cases of paroxysmal speech and possibly related sex offending behavior," he concluded.

Also, specific cognitive deficits and social skills seen in right-hemispheric dysfunction may contribute to stalking and erotic fixations.

At least one study has found increased prevalence and underidentification of adult psychiatric patients with this syndrome. Other studies have found that these patients frequently collect multiple diagnoses, none of which seem to fit comfortably," he said.

The social skills deficits may lead to transgressions in personal relationships and continuing pursuit of people who are not interested in them, as was the case with one 20-year-old male who was in a juvenile facility.

He didn’t have a history of mental illness, but he showed the clinical syndrome affect, prosody, and impairments of social judgment.

Dr. Brower said this patient also showed dysmorphic facial features consistent with fetal alcohol exposure, and he had mild impairments on visual-spatial tasks in addition to a 17-point difference in verbal and performance IQ.

This patient “didn’t understand why he couldn’t go and resume normal relationships with the family members of the inmates,” he explained.

In the area of stalking behavior, one case involved a male patient who had a history of making homicidal threats to female partners who had tried to break up with him, he had been the subject of a restraining order for telephone stalking of one female victim.

During serial hospitalizations, the patient engaged in recurrent, socially maladaptive and impulsive behavior. "It may contribute in some cases to parasitic sex offending behavior," he concluded. "Also, specific cognitive deficits and social skills seen in right-hemispheric dysfunction may contribute to stalking and erotic fixations.

Dr. Brower said that since stalking behavior and other parasitic behavior are associated with right-hemispheric dysfunction, "...the psychological development of parasitic behavior may simply be a manifestation of right-hemispheric dysfunction, and is not a separate entity in and of itself."