Entomophobia, illusory parasitosis, delusory parasitosis

Itchin’ to learn
11/9/15

To most, Bugs signify:

Filth, death, destruction, punishment
Are mysterious, alien, mindless
Can give painful sting, bite, may be poisonous
Indifferent to our space
Sheer numbers make us seem insignificant

Fig. 1. Estimated relative frequency distribution of attitudes toward insects and spiders in the general population.
People today
Have little experience with and little tolerance of arthropods

Not mentally or physically prepared for encounters

Misconceptions - “Vicarious learning” – horror stories of others and internet stories

Invisible itch cases
usually visible except scabies

Potential causes
Fleas, lice (head or pubic), bed bugs, chiggers, biting gnats are visible
Scabies mites require skin scrapings

EF 607  Head lice
EF 637 Parasitic mites of humans
ENT 58 Invisible itches
Sap feeders: Thrips, aphids, lace bugs
1) Entomophobia

Persistent irrational fear of and compelling desire to avoid insects, mites, spiders, or similar phobic objects
Arthropods cause significant distress despite recognition that the fear is excessive or unreasonable
No other mental disorder such as schizophrenia or obsessive compulsive disorder

Entomophobia

Displacement of diffuse anxiety to an external focus which can be avoided
Insects as the phobic object may be random, symbolic, or perfectly logical
Insects often represent filth and soiling

Entomophobia

Supportive psychotherapy, desensitization, insight
Prognosis for chronic phobia is good if the underlying conflict can be faced
Prognosis for deep, symbolic conflict is worse
Presence of compulsive symptoms such as cleaning makes it worse still
2) Illusory parasitosis

From environmental stimuli
Contagious nature
Dermatitis, itching and bites, in co-workers
Phobia of being affected, taking pest home
May be associations between the symptoms and personal office problems, overall loss of morale and efficiency

Illusions of parasitosis

Environmental factors- poor working environment, dull routine work, stress or pressure
Must rule out entomological cause

Nicholas rash remains a mystery

Mysterious sores bug state workers
Walkout is averted over health concern
Scratching

A common primate displacement activity in response to tension, anxiety, and stress

Symptoms of anxiety, stress, tension, depression, and tiredness can manifest themselves as itching and tingling

Symptoms - itching and rash

Bugs in offices – workers bitten
Files infested – treat with insecticide?
Site visit

Yards and yards of shelves, hundreds of folders of forms

Workers handling paperwork all day

Cause – paper splinters

A physical cause was found

Itchy kids

Day care kids with “bug bites”
Northern fowl mite

Live on birds
Left if host dies or leaves nest

Bites can cause itching and dermatitis
Mite can survive 2 to 3 weeks away from the host
A cause and solution

3) Delusory parasitosis
Ekbrom syndrome

A psychological condition
Person believes that insects, parasites, mites or “bugs” are present in or on their bodies and/or infest their environment
Itchy skin, sensation of being bitten, tingling skin, and other abnormal skin sensations As the condition progresses, sufferers may develop skin lesions as a result of scratching and other self-induced trauma

Delusions

Long time – biting, stinging, burning, crawling sensations
See many physicians, exterminators, public health workers, entomologists (6)
Consistently and fiercely rejects negative findings
“Baggie syndrome” - deliver or mail containers holding samples - dust, lint, skin scrapings, toilet paper, dried blood or scabs; hair or other pieces of human tissue
**Baggie syndrome**

Skin fragments, scabs, dried blood, hair, lint, fibers, plant matter, ...

**General profile**

Estimated 100,000 cases in US
Middle age or older
More likely to be female than male
May be well educated, professional
Can gives clear history, detailed description of life cycle and behavior (drawings)
Black or white “bugs” that change color
Crawl on skin, jump, tunnel in skin
Bite or sting
**General profile**

Eager to provide samples (baggie syndrome)
Has visited ave. of 6.3 health professionals
Unwilling to consider other causes
33% - spouse, child also develops symptoms
May be desperate ...
   “You’re my last hope!”

**Manifestations**

1) Skin infested with invisible bugs

   “I have bugs crawling under my skin.”

   Visible only to patient
   Sees many but cannot provide sample

2) Uses sharp objects to remove bugs from skin

   Skin injury from removal attempts or to allow bugs to escape
Excessive control efforts
Frequent use of shampoos for lice control
Excessive indoor bombs/sprays
Harsh shower soap / clothing soap (lye, etc)

4) Environment infested
Re-infestation from cloths, furniture, vehicles despite excessive cleaning efforts
Bugs can leave body, multiple in non-living object and return to human
Repeated problems in spite of intensive control efforts

5-7) Environment infested
Extreme house cleaning – harsh chemicals
Discarding/destroying belongings – replacement costs increase stress
Move – to hotel to escape but bugs follow
**Delusional parasitosis**

Prognosis is variable – depends other on diagnosed or undiagnosed disease complexes which contribute to the symptoms

Prognosis very poor in paranoid conditions - usually not suitable for psychotherapy/analysis

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**Potential causes**

Delusory parasitosis may result from physiological causes such as allergies, nutritional deficiencies, drug reactions, and other medical conditions

Prickling sensation of skin, abnormal skin redness, stinging or burning itch are listed side effects of most prescription and OTC drugs

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**Drug abuse**

Heavy stimulant use causes rise in body temperature, and increased blood flow to the skin

Combination of dehydration, sweating and loss of skin oil affects nerve endings on the skin – causes feelings of something irritating or "crawling" on or under the skin

Often extreme scratching
Samples

Accept reasonable samples – several times, should be in rubbing alcohol
Do not accept samples with body fluids, scabs, vacuum cleaner bags or large amounts of debris
Adhesive on scotch tape often dissolve bugs
Sticky boards are good – cover with saran wrap

Questions, etc.

How long have you noticed the problem?
Are any other people in your household affected?
Have you seen your physician or dermatologist?
We can look at samples for arthropods but cannot diagnose skin lesions

Suggestions

Never agree or disagree with clients about their claims - some sufferers will become very agitated and unpredictable when their beliefs are challenged
Never use the word “bites” when talking about the complainant’s skin lesions
“We are only trained in arthropod identification and cannot diagnose skin lesions.”
Suggestions

Avoid being alone with complainants when possible
Deny requests to examine bites or lesions
Morgellons (a.k.a. “fiber disease”)
An inability to change the client’s convictions or have them accept science-based facts is not a failure on the part of Extension personnel or volunteers

Do-it-yourself pest control

LOS ANGELES (AP) -- An explosion at a house being fumigated with 30 fogger-style "bug bombs" burned a woman, shattered the windows and lifted the roof three inches, authorities said.

The woman, whose identity was not immediately released, was treated at a hospital for first- and second-degree burns to her legs from the heat of the blast, fire spokesman Jim Wells said.

"The lady had activated about 30 foggers, and while activating the last one in the kitchen area, an ignition source, possibly a stove pilot light or a water heater, caused an explosion," Wells said.

No more than three or four foggers should have been used, he added.

There was no fire but the blast caused about $30,000 damage to the 800-square-foot home, Wells said.