



Case Report

Lizard tail as unconventional addiction: Case Report

Shobhit Kumar Prasad^{1*}, Piyush Verma², Priti Singh³, Rajiv Gupta⁴

^{1,&2} Junior Resident, ³Professor, ⁴Senior Professor & Head of Department, Department of Psychiatry, Institute of Mental Health, Pt B.D. Sharma Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (PGIMS) Rohtak, India.

ABSTRACT

The scientific literature regarding use of reptiles for purpose getting high are sparse, and mainly from developing countries. During conditions like non-availability of drugs or other substances of abuse, there can be propensity for using alternative forms of substances like reptiles or insects, which is determined by a milieu of factors, like personality profiles, socio-cultural milieus, availability and accessibility of substance and co-morbid psychopathology. We present a case of alcohol and cannabinoid dependence syndrome with dissocial traits admitted in a state drug-deaddictioncenter, PGIMS Rohtak describing the use of tail of Indian lizard to get high when there was non-availability of cannabis and alcohol in jail.

KEYWORDS: lizard, addiction, substance abuse, dissocial traits

INTRODUCTION

Abuse of psychoactive substances by man has been evident in history right from the time of his existence. Man has constantly been experimenting with newer, better, stronger sources for altering his consciousness. It is important to consider that as the origin of these practices are unknown; their actual antiquity is on an open-ended time scale. Some of the most commonly used mind-altering substances today are of plant origin. However there have been a variety of animal sources of psychoactive substances which are less known but equally potent and dangerous. Some of these practices of use of psychoactive fauna are gaining their popularity to an alarming scale without the realization of law.[1]

Psychoactive fauna is used to denote the group of animals whose body parts or excretions contain one or more substances which, in a sufficiently high dose, have the potential to alter the user's state of consciousness, for example, snake venom, scorpion sting, wasps, toad skin, lizard tail etc. Although there have been few odd and baffling reports by many authors showing usage of these psychoactive fauna, but the exact cause or compound responsible for producing the psychoactive effect is not clear in any of these studies. The role of psychoactive effect has also been implicated to be placebo

effect, and could also be influenced by social and cultural influences.[2]

There are few strange incidences reported in papers for use dried lizard tails (common house lizard or gecko) to gain a feeling of high, but there is not much elaborative detail reported anywhere.[3]

We present a case of alcohol and cannabinoid dependent with dissocial traits, admitted in drug-deaddictioncenter of a tertiary care center, describing the use of tail of Indian lizard to get high.

CASE REPORT

Mr S aged 32 years, driver by occupation, attended out-patient services of drug deaddictioncenter of a tertiary care setup in northern part of India, with history of alcohol and cannabinoid dependence for 17 years with opioid (afeem, tablet spasmoproxyvon and smack) dependence with previous history of intravenous drug usage of Pentazocine in the last 3 years (currently abstinent from opioids for 1 year). He came with symptoms of alcohol withdrawal and was admitted for detoxification and relapse management. Patient

was in contemplation stage of motivation at the time of admission. He was detoxified using benzodiazepines (Lorazepam) using fixed tapering dose regimen, and dose was tapered according to severity of withdrawal symptoms measured using CIWA-Ar scores.

Along with Relapse prevention therapy was initiated with focus on craving management. Motivational enhancement therapy was initiated too during the process of admission. He underwent personality assessment where he was found to have dissocial traits, for which temperament character inventory was done, suggestive of elevated scores on novelty seeking, reward dependence and persistence temperament and low score on self-directedness character.

On detailed enquiry, he reported that when he was 21 years old, went to prison for 5 months for the charge of robbery, and was dismissed under bail. Before imprisonment, he was using alcohol in dependant pattern and was under abrupt withdrawal from these agents at the time he was jailed. He started having withdrawal symptoms of alcohol during imprisonment, with complaints of decreased sleep, restlessness and intense anxiety, tremors and body aches. No medication was provided to him to counter the withdrawal phase and he used to have intense craving for alcohol.

He had persuaded some of the fellow prison inmates to get him beedi or cigarette to smoke and would smoke 3-4 beedis in a day at the times he was not being kept under eye. In the prison, he was told by some inmates that he can get cannabis (ganja/charas) through persuading one of the guards by supplying him money from outside sources, after which he was able to procure cannabis inside prison, and would occasionally smoke ganja/sulfabeedi on some of the days. During that time, he was introduced to practice of adding dried powder of lizard tail in the beedi/sulfa to enhance its effect. It was shown to him by a fellow inmate, after which he thought of experimenting with the lizard tail.

He reported hitting the lizards so that they would leave their tail behind, which he would dry under the sun and burn the dried tail to charred residue. He would subsequently fill his beedi with this charred residue and smoke it. He reported feeling “intense high” and sense of floating and relaxation which was more pleasurable than cannabis and used to last for 4-5 hours.

After coming out from jail, he used to do lizard abuse on infrequent basis, only when he wanted to have “something different” from regular abused substances. He was arrested again after few months in charge of being involved in multiple gang wars and acts of violence, but was dismissed in view of no evidence. Later on, he again resorted to alcohol usage in dependant pattern within 1 year, and later resorted to opioid usage in dependence pattern. He had been

to Deaddictioncenter multiple times in the past, but used to frequently relapse in view of high peer-pressure by company of drugs seeking friends. He used intravenous heroin for duration of a year in view of seeking thrill and peer pressure, which he left after a year after for which he quoted to be devastated by seeing death of two of his close friends who died after taking laced heroin. He would often get involved in high risk taking behaviour with multiple sexual encounters in brothels and hiring prostitutes. Patient solely resorted to alcohol and cannabis usage till the time he got admitted and was assessed during the recent visit. He was smoking dried lizard tail on occasional basis till then, for quoting it as “thrill seeking” activity.

Patient was discharged after there was no reporting of withdrawal symptoms and was in preparation stage of motivation. Patient was initiated on Tablet disulfiram and advised to follow up regularly in deaddictioncenter for regular psychological sessions.

DISCUSSION

This case opens the possibility of unusual addiction by psychoactive fauna, possessing euphoriant properties. The scientific literature regarding use of reptiles for purpose getting high are sparse, and mainly from developing countries.[4] The Indian wall lizard, *Hemidactylus flaviviridis*, is found ubiquitously in Indian households. These lizards can lose their tail when alarmed, though it regenerates to its original shape.[5] In India probably it is the lizard tail which believed to contain a substance which some people use to get high or to enhance the high produced from other substances like cannabis.[6]

It remains to be seen that perceived psychoactive effects of lizard tail is either due to placebo effect or just another myth. There is high probability that addition of lizard or its part to substance of abuse is an exotic activity.[7]

During conditions like non-availability of drugs or other substances of abuse, there can be propensity for using alternative forms of substances like reptiles or insects, which is determined by a milieu of factors, like personality profiles, socio-cultural milieus, availability and accessibility of substance and co-morbid psychopathology.[8] In this case too, the patient with dissocial personality traits too resorted to lizard abuse when there was non-availability of cannabis and alcohol in jail. More research is required to know the root cause of addiction for psychoactive fauna and long-term effects of such addiction.

CONCLUSION

This case report of unconventional addiction to lizard tail smoking is not just to invoke surprise or interest in the readers. Rather this calls for the urgent need to understand the exact magnitude of this problem, undertake more research to unfold biopsychosocial aspects of such addiction to psychoactive fauna. This would help in developing mechanisms to curtail the problem in its infancy stage, and the need to improvise and upgrade the law governing psychotropic substances.

REFERENCES

1. Saah T. The evolutionary origins and significance of drug addiction. Vol. 2, Harm Reduction Journal. BioMed Central; 2005; 2:8.
2. Blom JD. Psychoactive Fauna. In: Blom JD, editors. A Dictionary of Hallucinations. New York: Springer New York; 2010. pp. 381–440.
3. Varghese ST, Balhara YP, Mondal A. Unconventional substances of abuse: scorpions and lizards. J Postgrad Med. 2006;52(4):325–6.
4. Garg M, Sidhu BS, Raj R. Addiction to lizard: A rare case report. Indian J Psychiatry. 2014;56(2):206.
5. Frembgen JW. The Folklore of Geckos: Ethnographic Data from South and West Asia. Asian Folkl Stud. 1996;55(1):135.
6. Sarkhel S, Praharaj SK, Sinha VK. Does lizard tail lacing heighten Cannabis addiction? Am J Addict. 2011;20(2):181.
7. Bhad R, Ambekar A, Dayal P. The lizard: An unconventional psychoactive substance? J Subst Use. 2016;21(2):113–4.
8. Chahal S, Singh P, Gupta R. Lizard as psychoactive fauna: an unconventional addiction. Int J Med Sci Public Heal. 2016;5(4):1517–8.

*Corresponding author: Dr Shobhit Kumar Prasad
E-Mail:drshobhitkprasad@gmail.com