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Demographic and clinical characteristics of individuals in a bipolar disorder case registry.

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BACKGROUND: The goal of this analysis was to characterize a cohort of 3000 persons who self-identified as having bipolar disorder by demographic, clinical, and treatment characteristics and to document the burden that this disorder imposed on their lives. METHOD: The Stanley Center Bipolar Disorder Registry used a variety of recruitment methods to reach people with bipolar disorder. The cohort included those currently in treatment and those active in support groups. Registrants completed an interviewer-administered questionnaire to obtain information on demographic characteristics, clinical history, and treatment history. RESULTS: The median age of the 2839 patients who were analyzed was 40.1 years, 64.5% were women, and over 90% were white. The median age at onset was 17.5 years, and the mean was 19.8 years. Despite the fact that over 60% completed at least some college and 30% completed college, 64% were currently unemployed. The patients' family histories point to a high prevalence of mental disorder in the families, especially mood disorders. Patients were concurrently taking multiple medications, and more than one third were taking at least 3 types of psychotropic medications. This pattern of pharmacotherapy was consistent with participants' overall mood ratings, which demonstrated how unusual it was for them to be symptom-free over a 6-month period. CONCLUSION: Our present findings point to the chronicity and severity of bipolar disorder as experienced in the community. We still need to develop better interventions, ensure access to care consistent with current consensus guidelines, and initiate care as early as possible in the course of the condition.

PMID: 11874212 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE] FIND IT @ HARVARD

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