

Trichotillomania

Shehan Williams¹ and MUPK Peris²

Trichotillomania is characterised by recurrent failure to resist impulses to pull out one's hair resulting in hair loss. The hair pulling is usually preceded by mounting tension and is followed by a sense of relief or gratification [1]. The diagnosis is not made if there is an underlying dermatological condition, or if the hair pulling is in response to a delusion or hallucination.

The term was coined by the French dermatologist Francois Hallopeau in 1889 [2] from the Greek words *thrix*, hair; *tillein*, to pull; and *mania*, madness or frenzy. Hair plucking can involve sites on the scalp, eyebrows, eyelashes, axillary and facial hair, or pubic hair. It is an impulse control disorder related to obsessive compulsive disorder.

The patient was a 12-year old schoolboy. He pulled out his hair while studying, watching television and when alone, over a period of one year (Figures 1 and 2). He continued this despite repeated reprimanding. It was accompanied by trichophagia (eating of hair), which can lead to the formation of trichobezoars in the stomach or intestinal tract [2].



Figure 1. Back view of the head of the right-handed boy with trichotillomania.



Figure 2. Side view of the head with trichotillomania.

The mean age of onset of most trichotillomania is the early teens. The early onset form tends to remit more readily, but the late onset form, occurring after age 13, often becomes chronic. Behaviour therapy as in obsessive compulsive disorder is particularly effective [3]. Serotonergic agents such as fluoxetine can also be used in the treatment.

References

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¹Lecturer and ²Senior Lecturer, University Psychiatry Unit, Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Ragama, Sri Lanka. Correspondence: SW, Tel: +941958219/+941958039, e-mail: shehanwil@msn.com (Competing interests: none declared). Received 14 July and accepted 19 July 2003.