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CLINICAL LYCANTHROPY: HUMAN BEHAVE LIKE A NON - HUMAN ANIMAL

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ABSTRACT

Clinical lycanthropy is a rare delusional misidentification syndrome where individuals hold the fixed belief that they are transforming, or have transformed, into an animal, most commonly a wolf. Historically described since antiquity, early explanations ranged from demonic possession in medieval Europe to melancholia canina in 16th-century medical texts. Modern literature recognizes it as a secondary symptom of underlying psychiatric or neurological conditions rather than a distinct diagnosis. Analysis of 38 case reports from 1970–2020 shows psychotic depression 31.6% and schizophrenia 21.1% as the most frequent associated disorders. Bipolar-related conditions including mania and mixed episodes account for 15.8%, while organic disorders 5.3% and alcohol intoxication 2.6% are uncommon. This review traces the historical evolution of clinical lycanthropy and highlights its strong link to mood and psychotic disorders. Findings support its classification as a culture-influenced delusional symptom within the broader spectrum of psychiatric illness, emphasizing the need for treatment of the primary disorder.

Keywords :-outpatients, clinics, community care, West Riding, social workers, mental hospitals.

INTRODUCTION

Clinical Lycanthropy is a unique type of psychiatric syndrome within which the patient will have the delusional belief of turning into a wolf. Zoanthropy is a psychiatric syndrome within which the patient has the delusional belief of turning into an animal. Zoanthropy is observed on all continents and animals can be lions, tigers, hyenas, sharks, or crocodiles. Wolf transformations have been mentioned since Ancient Times in myths, in popular culture but also in the physician's observation this clinical lycanthropy name is associated with the mythical condition of lycanthropy, a supernatural affliction in humans are said to physically shapeshift into wolves.

Lycanthropy is an infrequent form of delusion or scare belief that one has renovated into a non-human animal or exhibition behaviour or feelings indicative of such a belief. It is a rare and abnormality of delusional misidentification syndrome [DMS] unambiguously revers inter metamorphosis where patient have faith in that they are experiencing transformation or have transformed into an animal creature. DMS is seen in association with several neuropsychiatric condition, including primary psychotic and affective conditions, drug intoxication and withdrawal, cerebrovascular disease, traumatic brain injury, dementia, delirium, and seizures.

The 50-year period between 1890 and 1940 saw local and national changes in the legal and practical administration of mental health and learning disability provision. Following the 1890 Lunacy Act, the twentieth century brought more revisions to both Poor Law and mental health legislation, and the advent of new treatments and services. Included in this were the 1913 and 1927 Mental Deficiency Acts, which aimed to separate the learning disabled from the mentally ill, and the 1930 Mental Treatment Act (MTA), which held the promise of reduced overcrowding in mental hospitals, facilitating earlier and easier access to mental. The 50-year period between 1890 and 1940 saw local and national changes in the legal and practical administration of mental health and learning disability provision. Following the 1890 Lunacy Act, the twentieth century brought more revisions to both Poor Law and mental health legislation, and the advent of new treatments and services. Included in this were the 1913 and 1927 Mental Deficiency Acts, which aimed to separate the learning disabled from the mentally ill, and the 1930 .

It is a dual neuroscientific and cultural approach that can help to better understand the clinical presentation of patients with psychiatric disorders and can help to find an approach to research. Socio-cultural factors have a great impact on these mystical experiences. It is the lack of proof, the research has not progressed.



Fig 1- Dual Neuroscientific Faces

A visual representation of a delusional misidentification syndrome in which an individual experiences a transformation of identity into an animal, typically a wolf, reflecting disturbed self-perception and altered body image.”

- * The human–wolf split symbolizes the patient’s belief of metamorphosis into an animal.
- * It reflects distortion of body schema and loss of stable identity boundaries.
- * Often associated with psychotic disorders, such as Schizophrenia
- * Severe depression with psychotic features
- * Bipolar disorder
- * Zoanthropic delusion (belief of being an animal)
- * Dissociation between human identity and perceived animal form
- * Projection of primal aggression and instinctual drives

This all reflected wider, longer-term aspirations to move those who were seen to be chronically ill and incurable away from those whose symptoms and prognosis suggested that they were indeed curable and worthy of medical intervention, and of the funds needed to provide them. As part of that process, the MTA created new 'voluntary' or 'temporary' gateways into mental hospitals for patients, which allowed individuals and/or their families to circumvent the existing but protracted processes of certification (TNA, FD 1/1398, 1930). For the first time, non-fee-paying patients were theoretically able to admit and discharge themselves from mental hospitals (Pearce, 2006) and Unsworth (1993: 486) described the 1930 act as a 'harbinger of the post-carceral era,' and step towards 'therapeutic liberalism' (Unsworth, 1987: 132). Contemporaneously, the Local Government Act of 1929 transferred many duties of the old Board of Guardians to the local councils, officially ending the terminology of pauperism. For medical professionals these reforms were long overdue (Anonymous, 1932; Morris-Jones, 1930) and it was hoped that they, along with a re-branding of asylums as mental hospitals, and pauper lunatics as rate-aided patients, would encourage individuals to seek assistance at a more curable stage of their illness (Busfield, 2004, 2006).

frustrating process and Hugh Freeman (2005: 121), confessed that his 'examination of government records from the 1930s about these new outpatients clinics [had] not revealed very much as to what went on in them'. Cherry's (2003: 183) analysis of Norfolk and Norwich's outpatients department reveals little insight into what actually happened within the clinic or how successful their treatments were. Likewise, whilst providing a detailed overview of the origins of the 1930 legislation and the move towards voluntarism, Unsworth's work does not identify how the legislation affected the realities of patients lived experience.

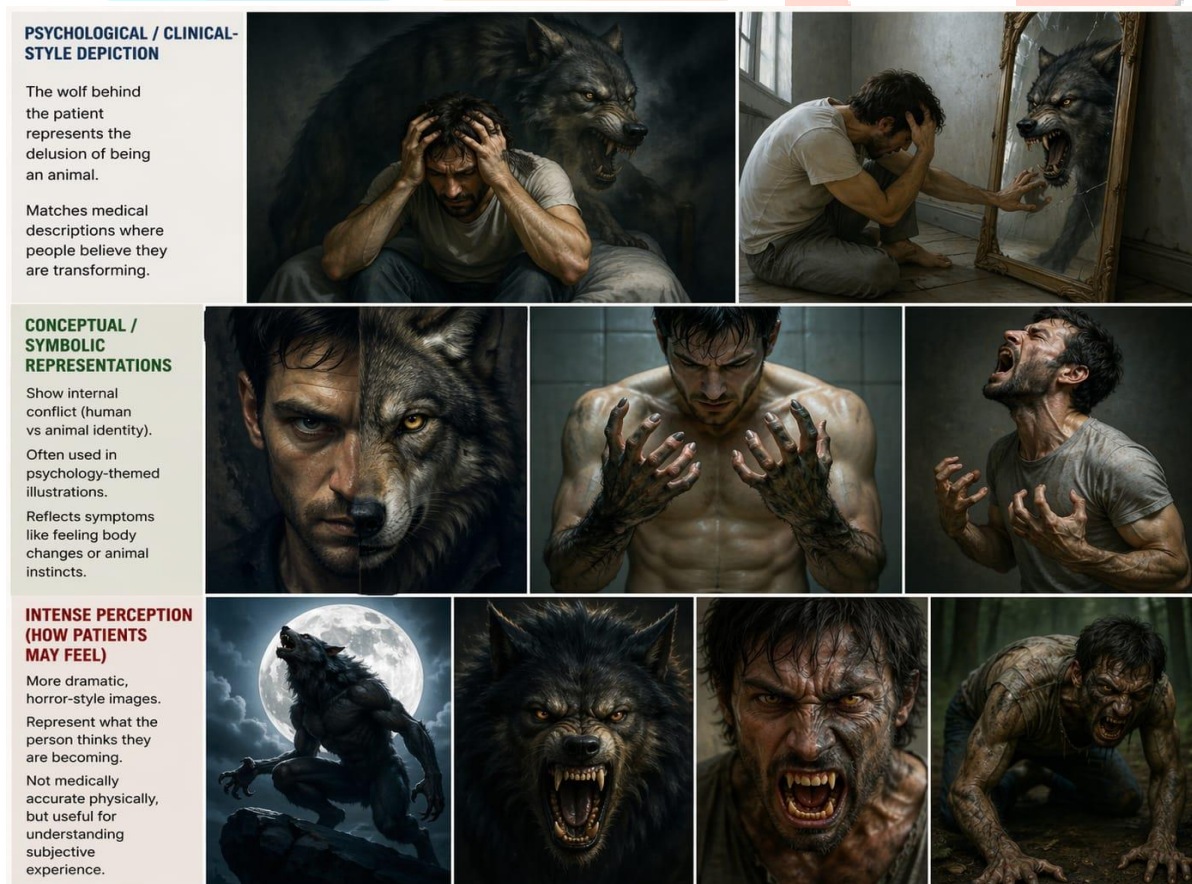


Fig 2- Frustrating Process of Human

Clinical (psychopathological) depiction:

The upper panels illustrate the core feature of clinical lycanthropy: a somatic delusion of transformation into an animal. The presence of a wolf perceived behind the individual, or reflected in a mirror, signifies a distortion of self-perception and body schema, consistent with psychotic-spectrum disorders. The subject's posture and facial expressions convey marked psychological distress, anxiety, and loss of ego boundaries.

Clinical lycanthropy is also known as lycomania. The adjective 'clinical' is used to distinguish the condition from actual lycanthropy, or the ability to metamorphose physically into a wolf (i.e. a lycanthrope or werewolf) and back again into a human shape, as depicted in classical mythology and demonology (Blom, 2010: 101). The term partial lycanthropy is used when delusional beliefs about excessive hair growth are accompanied by a wolf-like appearance, but not by delusional concerns about wolf or werewolf transformations (Silva et al., 2000; Verdoux and Bourgeois, 1993). In ancient Greece the related term kynanthropy was used to denote a person's transformation into a dog (Nejad and Toofani, 2005). Likewise, the term boanthropy is used to denote the bovine variant of this classical condition, ailuranthropy or galeanthropy to denote the feline variant, and zoanthropy to denote the general class of transformations into an animal form. Lycanthropy has been known and described since ancient times, and has remained an evocative theme up to the present day, judging by the many and varied references to it in the popular media.

Clinical lycanthropy, however, has received relatively little attention. Although many psychiatric textbooks mention this monothematic delusion in passing, original case descriptions have always been rare. Since the 1970s a modest rise in the number of published cases can be discerned, but although the condition is still considered extremely rare, and certainly poorly understood, it may well be even rarer than the literature suggests. The present paper provides an overview of published cases of clinical lycanthropy and zoanthropy. It aims to assess the clinical characteristics of these conditions, and to re-examine their pathophysiological underpinnings as well as implications for nosology, classification and treatment.

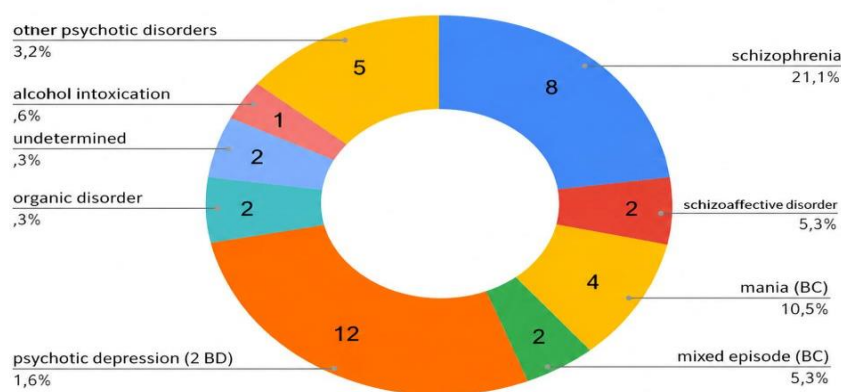


Fig 3- Classification and Treatment of Nosology.

- **Total Cases Analyzed:-**

- 38 cases total from 1970–2020. You get this by adding: $12+8+5+4+2+2+2+2+1 = 38$

Psychotic depression	12	31.6%
Schizophrenia	8	21.1%
Other psychotic disorders	5	13.%
Mania(BD)	4	10.5%
Schizoaffective disorders	2	5.3%
Mixed episode (BD)	2	5.3%
Organic disorder	2	5.3%
Undetermined	2	5.3%
Alcohol intoxication	1	2.6%

- **Mood Disorder Dominance**

- Bipolar-related diagnoses combined: Mania 4 + Mixed episode 2 + Psychotic depression 2 BD = 8 cases = 21.1%

- All depression + bipolar spectrum: Psychotic depression 12 + Mania 4 + Mixed 2 = 18 cases = 47.4% Mood disorders are the biggest contributor overall

- **Psychosis Spectrum Primary psychotic disorders:**

Schizophrenia 8 + Schizoaffective 2 + Other psychotic 5 = 15 cases = 39.5% So ~87% of all cases are tied to either mood disorders or schizophrenia-spectrum.

- **Non-Psychiatric Causes Are Rare Organic disorder:**

- 2 cases, 5.3% — includes epilepsy, brain lesions
- Alcohol intoxication: Only 1 case, 2.6%

HISTORY

The history says the king of Armenia, Tiritates III, believed that he also had lycanthropy and was cured by Gregory the Illuminator. In several parts of the Bible, it is written that Nebuchadnezzar's behavior in the book of Daniel 4 is a manifestation of clinical lycanthropy. One of the earliest examples of clinical lycanthropy, neurologist Andrew J. Lerner, has written that the fate of Odysseus's crew was due to the magic of the circle. Ibn Sina cured the buyid prince Majd al-Dawla according to Persian tradition. In the 7th century, Alexandrian physician Paulus attributed lycanthropy to melancholia, or an "excess of black bile." A Lutheran physician by the name of Johann Weyer reported in 1563 that wolves had sunken, dim, and dry eyes, as well as bodily symptoms such as paleness, a tongue, and extreme thirst. He also said that wolves had an imbalance in their melancholic humor. Even King James VI and I, in his 1597 work *Daemonologie*, attribute melancholy—which leads some individuals to mistakenly assume they are wolves and mimic these animals' actions—rather than the Devil's delusions of wolf behavior.

Ancient Period

- Greek Mythology ~8th century BCE: King Lycaon of Arcadia was turned into a wolf by Zeus as punishment. Term "lycanthropy" comes from *lykos* = wolf + *anthropos* = human.
- Roman Writings: Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Virgil's *Eclogues* mention men turning into wolves. Pliny the Elder 1st century CE described it as a disease in *Natural History*.

Medieval Period 5th–15th century

- Strong link to witchcraft and demonic possession. European folklore saw werewolves as people cursed or pacted with the devil.

- 1486: *Malleus Maleficarum* by Heinrich Kramer described lycanthropy as an illusion created by demons, not physical transformation.

Renaissance to Early Modern 16th–18th century

- 1515–1588: Johann Weyer, physician, challenged the demonic view. In *De Praestigiis Daemonum* 1563 he called lycanthropy *melancholia canina* or *insania lupina* — a mental illness from black bile.

- 1591: Case of Peter Stumpp in Germany, tried as a "werewolf." Physicians at the time debated if it was possession or madness. Physicians debated whether it was madness or possession.

19th Century

- 1563: Johann Weyer in *De Praestigiis Daemonum* rejected demonic explanations. Called it *melancholia canina* or *insania lupina*, a psychiatric disorder, not sorcery.

- 1591: Peter Stumpp “Werewolf of Bedburg” trial in Germany. He confessed under torture to being a werewolf. Physicians debated whether it was madness or possession.

- 1621: Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* lists lycanthropy under “species of melancholy” with symptoms: pale face, dry tongue, wandering graveyards at night.

- 1654: Daniel Sennert described cases of men barking and howling, attributing it to brain disease. 4c - Shift to medical/psychiatric explanation asylums grew - 1838: Jean-Étienne Esquirol french psychiatrist included lycanthropy under "monomanias" in early psychiatry texts. A single pathological preoccupation.

20th Century

- 1852: W. Boettcher published one of the first modern case reports of a patient believing he was a wolf during depressive phases.

1970–2020: Systematic reviews found 43 cases of clinical lycanthropy/kynanthropy reported in literature. Of those, 38 cases were between 1970–2020.

- 1975: Surawicz & Banta reviewed 12 published cases from 1850–1974 in *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal*. Most tied to psychosis and mood disorders.

- 1988: Keck et al. in *American Journal of Psychiatry* reported 4 cases tied to affective disorders.

1999–2005: Case reports from Iran, India, UK, Germany show cultural variation: wolf, dog, snake delusions. bb15d15512f8

21st Century - 2014:

Jan Dirk Blom’s systematic review “When doctors cry wolf” in *History of Psychiatry* analyzed 56 cases from 1850–201 - Only 13 met strict criteria for clinical lycanthropy proper.

- 47 cases were primary delusions, 9 secondary to hallucinations affecting body sense.

- Animals: wolf 47%, dog 21%, others 32%.

- 2021: Frontiers systematic review identified 43 cases total: 20 lycanthropy, 4 partial, 19 kynanthropy, reported 1852–2020. d1558709bb15.

Folklore and mythological origins

The concept of human transforming into wolves dates back to prehistoric times and proto-indo-european warrior cults (17)

Greek Legend of Lycaon : king lycaon was cursed by zeus and turned into a wolf after attempting to trick the god into eating human flesh (5,22).The term "lycanthropy" (Greek: lykos "wolf" and anthropos "human") originates here [24, 30].

European Folk Beliefs:

In the Middle Ages, werewolves were often seen as victims of curses, sorcery, or divine punishment [4, 6]. Figures like Peter Stumpp, the "Werewolf of Bedburg," were historically tried and executed for "werewolfery" and cannibalism.

CASE REPORT

CAS E NO	GENDE R/ AGE	COUNT RY	DISEASEE TYPE	DIGNOSIS	TREATME NT	REFERENCE
1	M/12	france	lycanthropy	Schizophrenifor m disorder	Antipsychotic low dose resperidone	Guessoum et al 2020[5]
2	M/41	portugal	lycanthropy	schizoaffective	Antipsychotic [haloperidol]	Marques, 2019[12]
3	M/52	portugal	lycanthropy	Affective disorder[obstruc tive sleep apnea]	Antipsychotic hypnotic	Groh 2020[13]
4	M/39	germany	lycanthropy	schizohernia	Antipsychotic risperidone	Sayar 2014[14]
5	M/21	turkey	lycanthropy	Psychotic disorder not otherwise specified	Antipsychotic aripiprazole	Shrestha 2014[15]
6	M/20	USA	lycanthropy	Chronic psychotic disorder	Antipsychotic ziprasidone	Blom 2010[16]
7	M/26	morocco	lycanthropy	schizophrenia	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
8	M/21	iraq	kynanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
9	F/26	iraq	kynanthropy	Schizoaffective disorder	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
10	F/27	iraq	kynanthropy	Bipolar disorder	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
11	F/30	iraq	kynanthropy	schiziphrenia	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
12	M/72	iraq	kynanthropy	Psychotic disorder	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
13	F/36	iraq	kynanthropy	Un determine/epilep	Antipsychotic	Younis/moselhy

				sy	valproic acid	y 2009[17]
14	F/42	iraq	lycanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Younis/moselhy 2009[17]
15	M/20	iran	lycanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic valproic acid	Moghaddas/naseri 2004 [18]
16	M/32	iran	kynanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic risperidone	Nejad/toofani 2005[19]
17	F/37	germany	Dog like delusioanl behavior	mania	Antipsychotic haloperidol	Garlipp 2001[20]
18	M/46	USA	Partial lycanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic haloperidol	Silva 2000 [21]
19	M/25	UK	Partial lycanthropy	Alchol abuse	Antipsychotic haloperidol	Mosalhy 1999[22]
20	F/53	UK	Partial lycanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic antiepileptic	Mosalhy 1999[22]
21	M/21	Bangalore ,india	kynanthropy	mania	Antipsychotic lithium carbonate	Rao 1999 [23]
22	M/17	Bangalore , india	kynanthropy	Psychotic depression	Antipsychotic fluoxetine	Rao 1999 [23]
23	M/45	france	Partial lycanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic antidepressant	Verdoux /bourgeois 1993 [24]
24	M/33	germany	kynanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic	Koehler 1990 [25]
25	M/24	spain	lycanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic antidepressant	Rojo moreno 1990 [26]
26	M/28	france	lycanthropy	Alchoal intoxication	Antipsychotic antidepressant	Benezech 1989 [27]

27	F/43	UK	lycanthropy	hysteria	Antipsychotic chlorpromazine	Dening and west 1989 [28]
28	M/18	USA	lycanthropy	cenaesthesiopathy	Antipsychotic , lithium carbonate	Keck 1988 [29]
29	M/19	USA	lycanthropy	psychopathy	Antipsychotic	Keck 1988 [29]
30	M/17	USA	kynanthropy	lycanthropy	Antipsychotic	Keck 1988 [29]
31	M/29	USA	kynanthropy	Bipolar disorder	Antipsychotic	Knoll 1986 [30]
32	F/66	ireland	kynanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic	Knoll 1986 [30]
33	F/56	USA	kynanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic ,antidepressant	Coll 1985 [4]
34	F/49	USA	kynanthropy	schizophernia	Antipsychotic	Jackson 1978 [31]
35	M/20	USA	lycanthropy	Bipolar disorder	Antipsychotic	Rosenstock and vincet 1977 [32]
36	M/37	USA	lycanthropy	mania	Antipsychotic ,trifluoperazine	Surawicz and banta 1975 [33]
37	M/66	USA	lycanthropy	Hallucinogenic drugs	Antipsychotic thioridazine hcl	Lange 1970 [34]
38	F/72	germany	kynanthropy	Chronic brain syndrome	Antipsychotic thioridazine hcl	Fodor 1945 [35]
39	F/18	USA	lycanthropy	Psychotic disorder	Antipsychotic thioridazine	Schneider 1920

					hcl	[36]
40	M/27	france	kynanthropy	psychopathy	Morphine	Deny and camus 1905 [37]
41	M/36	spanish	Kynanthropy/multi pale zoanthropy	lycanthropy	Morphine	Rua figueroa 1859 [38]
42	M/42	france	lycanthropy	lycanthropy	Morphine	Morel 1852 [39]

Case 1: The Wolf-Woman of Kentucky (1975)

The 49-year-old woman mentioned at the beginning was hospitalized after wandering in the woods for days, acting like a wolf. She exhibited:

- Quadrupedal walking
- Howling
- Aggression toward staff
- Belief that she had fur and fangs

She had a history of psychotic depression and drug use (LSD and other hallucinogens). Treatment with antipsychotic medication (chlorpromazine) gradually reduced the delusion over several weeks. She eventually regained her sense of human identity.

Case 2: The Man Who Became a Dog (1989)

A 24-year-old man with no prior psychiatric history began believing he was transforming into a dog. He barked. He refused to eat with utensils, insisting on eating from a bowl on the floor. He tried to sleep in a kennel. He described feeling his body changing-his face stretching, his sense of smell becoming more acute, his thoughts becoming “simpler and more instinctual.”

Brain scans showed no structural abnormalities. He was diagnosed with acute psychotic episode. Antipsychotic treatment resolved the delusion within weeks.

Case 3: The Bird Delusion (1977)

A 37-year-old woman believed she was turning into a bird. She climbed to high places and attempted to “fly” by jumping off furniture and ledges, resulting in multiple injuries.

Case 4: The Frog Transformation (1987)

A 26-year-old man in Iran believed he was becoming a frog.

He crouched in a squatting position for hours. He caught and ate insects. He attempted to jump long distances. He said he could feel his skin becoming moist and cold, and his tongue elongating. Treatment with antipsychotics resolved the delusion.

Case 5: The Snake Patient (2006)

A 32-year-old man was hospitalized after he began crawling on the ground, hissing, and refusing to stand upright. He believed he was transforming into a snake. He said his spine was fusing, his legs were merging, and scales were forming on his skin.

The Neuroscience: Why Does This Happen?

Clinical lycanthropy is not a distinct disease—it's a symptom that can arise from several underlying conditions:

- 1. Psychotic Disorders (Schizophrenia):** The most common cause. Lycanthropy can emerge during acute psychotic episodes, often involving hallucinations and delusions.
- 2. Bipolar Disorder with Psychotic Features:** Lycanthropy can occur during severe manic or depressive episodes with psychosis.
- 3. Severe Depression with Psychotic Features:** Some cases involve depressive delusions where patients believe they're being punished by being turned into an animal.
- 4. Drug-Induced Psychosis:** LSD, PCP, methamphetamine, and other hallucinogens have been linked to temporary lycanthropic delusions.
- 5. Brain Lesions or Neurological Damage:** Rare cases involve tumors, strokes, or traumatic brain injury affecting regions involved in body perception and identity.
- 6. Epilepsy (Temporal Lobe Epilepsy)**

Seizure activity in the temporal lobes can produce complex hallucinations, including feelings of transformation.

CONCLUSION - CLINICAL LYCANTHROPY

Clinical lycanthropy is a rare psychiatric phenomenon in which an individual holds a fixed false belief (delusion) that they are transforming into, or have transformed into, an animal—most commonly a wolf or dog. It is not a distinct disorder but rather a symptom associated with underlying psychiatric conditions, particularly psychotic disorders such as Schizophrenia, severe mood disorders like Bipolar Disorder with psychotic features, or neurological illnesses. From a clinical perspective, the condition highlights the complex interplay between perception, belief, and identity, where disturbances in brain function lead to profound alterations in self-awareness. Neurobiological findings suggest involvement of brain regions responsible for body schema and self-representation, while psychological and cultural factors may shape the specific animal form of the delusion. Importantly, clinical lycanthropy is treatable, with management focusing on the underlying disorder using antipsychotic medications, mood stabilizers, and psychotherapy. Early recognition is crucial, as appropriate treatment can significantly reduce symptoms and improve functioning.

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