

Poster presentation

Language impairment in premorbid cases of schizophrenia: a path to early detection of the disease

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from International Society on Brain and Behaviour: 2nd International Congress on Brain and Behaviour
Thessaloniki, Greece. 17–20 November 2005

Published: 28 February 2006

Annals of General Psychiatry 2006, **5**(Suppl 1):S268 doi:10.1186/1744-859X-5-S1-S268

Background

Prodromal or psychotic-like symptoms can be conceptualised as being a sign of vulnerability to psychosis. Recent findings indicate that certain impairments in language precede the first episode of schizophrenia and are already evident in persons who are considered to be at risk, or seem to run the prodrom phase of the disease. According to the neurodevelopmental hypothesis, these impairments are mostly observed in childhood and adolescence of individuals, who later manifest the disease, something which supports the notion that delay in the processes underlying the development of language may preexist. There is also evidence that in a crucial developmental stage of schizophrenia, there is a failure of lateralization of the components of language. Also, in some cases, language impairments appear to have a heritable base.

Material and method

In this paper, I review the knowledge with regard to the way that premorbid cases of schizophrenia can be detectable by language impairment.

Results

Premorbid language impairment may exist for months or years before the manifestation of the disease. Some of the most common premorbid impairments are the disorganised and incoherent speech, the disturbances in the expressive and receptive speech and the poor verbal production-specific impairments of language production and comprehension as well as low IQ and poor academic performance in the areas of speech and reading have been associated with juvenile and childhood-onset schizophrenia. Also, some cases of early childhood, such as elective mutism may also be precursors of a later development of the disease. It has been observed by most researches that

such impairments are not related to the gender. The developmental abnormalities in premorbid language functions precipitate an earlier age of onset in schizophrenia. However, recent findings [1] suggest that this may be more relevant to those with an adolescent onset. There is evidence also, supporting that several premorbid intentional perturbances in speech could predict the particularity of the clinical course and that the premorbid language production is relevant to the type of the thought disorder that the individual will develop.

Neuropsychological tasks can shed light to language impairments before the onset of the disease. The linguistic analysis of premorbid speech can also be a useful tool for a differential diagnosis. However, the prediction of the disease based only on language impairments appears to be difficult, since most of these disorders disturbances are not pathognomical. Especially after the age of 20 this is more difficult, since the premorbid speech symptoms are much less evident.

Discussion

This is a public health issue, because drug treatment is much more effective in case it is started early and early detection of the disease can preserve the patient from a variety of misfortunes.

References

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