AGE AT ONSET AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT IN SCHIZOPHRENIA: AN ECOLOGICAL CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY WITH STABILIZED PATIENTS

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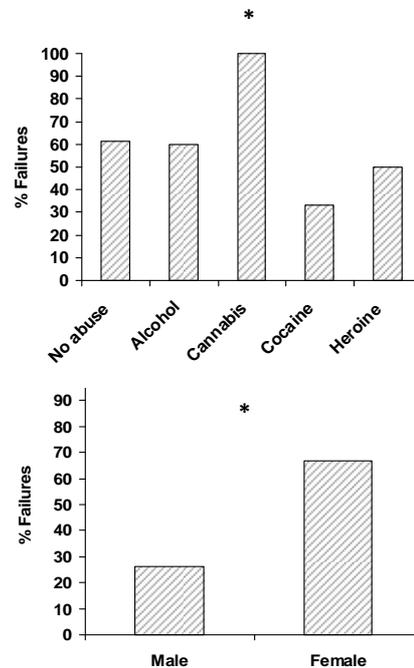
INTRODUCTION

Schizophrenic patients have global cognitive impairment which is influenced by different clinical variables [1]. A longer duration of untreated psychosis (DUP)/duration of illness (DUI) and substance abuse are more involved in cognitive deficits; longer DUI was found to correlate with impairment on psychomotor processing speed, verbal fluency and verbal learning [2]. Interestingly, there is a relationship between an early age at onset and pronounced deficits on Digit Symbol Coding and Tower of London [3].

Purpose of the present study is to detect if some clinical variables can be predictive of cognitive impairment in schizophrenics with particular attention on age at onset.

* Statistics:

$\chi^2= 9.35$, $p=0.04$, phi=0.52

* Statistics:

$\chi^2=4.80$, $p=0.05$, phi=0.40

METHODS

35 clinically stabilized schizophrenic patients (29 males and 6 females) were recruited.

They were assessed by:

-the Brief Assessment of Cognition in Schizophrenia (BACS);

- an executive/social cognition battery including the Multiple Errands Test for Use in Hospital Settings (MET-HV), the Hotel Task, the Iowa Gambling task, the Reading The Mind in the Eyes Test and the Faux Pas Test.

Binary logistic models were performed to find an eventual association between continuous clinical variables and cognitive test failures. The total sample was divided in groups according to dichotomous variables (gender, diagnostic sub-type and substance abuse) and the presence of cognitive deficits was compared between groups by χ^2 tests.

RESULTS

An earlier age at onset was found to be predictive of frontal cognitive impairment (Tower of London p=0.022, OR=0.709). In addition female gender was more probably associated with mistakes at MET-HV ($\chi2= 4.80$, p=0.05, phi=0.40) and Hotel Task ($\chi2= 5.25$, p=0.04, phi=0.4) than male one. Finally, cannabis abusers showed more frequently deficits on verbal fluency ($\chi2= 9.35$, p=0.04, phi=0.52) and executive functioning (Tower of London) ($\chi2= 11.67$, p=0.02, phi=0.58) than alcohol/cocaine abusers.

CONCLUSIONS

Female patients with an early age at onset and cannabis abuse seem to have the worst cognitive profile among schizophrenics. These data remark the importance of age at onset on the course of the disorder, and confirm that early onset population need a higher intensity of care in light of the more severe cognitive impairment.

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