The impact of alcohol use in Schizophrenia

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Comorbidity in psychiatry is common and may require a different approach beyond the simple sum of each disorder treatment. Regarding Substance Use Disorder, alcohol is widely distributed by several psychiatric conditions. During the last two decades, numerous studies have reported an increase in alcohol consumption among schizophrenic patients. Comorbidity ranges from 35 to 80%.

Methods:

Non-systematic review of the literature using PubMed database. Research of articles with the keywords: "schizophrenia", "alcohol", "comorbidity", published in last ten years and selected by its scientific relevance.

Results:

Impact

- Unemployment
- Exacerbation of psychiatric symptoms
- Greater use of emergency services
- Increased number of psychiatric hospitalization
- Earlier rehospitalizations compared with ones with schizophrenia with no alcohol consumption
- Higher levels of cognitive impairment compared to ones without schizophrenia
- Higher levels of suicide attempts
- Structural brain changes not attributable to schizophrenia per se
- Higher numbers of suicide attempts

- Male patients with schizophrenia with higher levels of comorbid alcohol disorder
- High rates of alcoholism heritage (higher than in general population)
- Neuroticism features during childhood related in favor of less comorbidity in adulthood in schizophrenic patients

What patients say?

Used as a way of socialization

Used as self-medication for depression, anxiety and psychotic symptoms

Is this population vulnerable?

Some studies suggest that **impulsivity** and the **seeking for sensations** present among patients with schizophrenia may increase the risk for alcohol use and dependence. On the other hand, this group of patients presents an **increased stimulatory response to alcohol**, leading to an **increased risk of dependence**. Also, alcohol appears to cause structural brain changes that are not attributable to schizophrenia per se. Patients with schizophrenia are a **population at risk** for alcohol consumption.

Conclusion:

- The treatment of both disorders is crucial to prevent this comorbidity consequences’.
- Combined treatment with targeting both alcohol consumption and psychiatric disorder gives better results than addressing each disorder separately.
- Although the impact of alcohol on this population is well known, there are still few studies evaluating the various psychological interventions that could improve the treatment and prognosis of this comorbidity.

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