

SCIZOPHRENIA AND OTHER PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS

(A) Definition:

Schizophrenia (*Dementia Praecox*) is a mental disorder characterized by loss of contact with the environment, by noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life and by disintegration of personality expressed as disorder of feeling, thought (delusions), perceptions (hallucinations) and behaviour.

(B) Symptoms:

Delusions- Delusions are irrational false beliefs, common to schizophrenics. Prominent delusions are beliefs that one's thoughts, feelings or actions are being controlled by external agents (impulses). That one's private thoughts are being broadcast indiscriminately to others (thought broadcasting), that thoughts are being inserted into one's brain by some external agency (thought insertion) or that some external agency has robbed one of one's thoughts (thought withdrawal). Delusions of reference (This song being played on the radio is being played only for me by this person who wants to give me a special message), strange proportions (My belly is extremely elongated at a certain angle) or removal of organs (My neighbour removed my kidneys last week when I was sleeping) are common.

Hallucinations- A Hallucination is a sensory experience (auditory, visual, olfactory, tactile, gustatory) that occurs in the absence of any external perceptual stimulus. Auditory Hallucinations are most common among schizophrenics. These mostly have affective, conceptual or behavioural relevance for the patients who often become emotionally involved with their hallucinations, often incorporating them into their delusions. Sometimes they might even act on their hallucinations, doing what the voices tell them to do.

Disorganized Speech- Delusions reflect a disorder of thought content and disorganized speech is the external manifestation of the same. In this, the words and word combinations sound communicative, but what the speaker is trying to say (its meaning) doesn't make sense. Sometimes, the patient makes up completely new words (neologisms). Words Salads (a confused mix of random words and phrases in a speech) and Clang Associations (mode of speech characterized by association of words by sound and not meaning/ concept) are typical of a Schizophrenics speech.

Disorganized and Catatonic Behaviour- Goal directed activity, even daily routine functioning in areas of work, social relations, self-care is disrupted. Eg. Poor personal hygiene, disregard for personal health and safety. Disorganized behaviour like silliness, unusual dressing occurs. Impairment in the functioning of pre frontal of cerebral cortex is a possible reason for this. Catatonic behaviour of absence of movement and speech, freezing into a catatonic stupor for long periods of time is seen in some cases.