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DEVELOPMENTAL RISK FACTORS IN PATIENTS WITH SCHIZOPHRENIA AND SEVERE NEUROCOGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION

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Introduction: Recent data suggest that schizophrenia is a complex disorder with intricate patterns of neurocognitive impairment supported by specific neurobiological systems, present in schizophrenia patients, regardless of individual or clinical variables. The neurodevelopmental model of schizophrenia states that early insults (pre-, perinatal), late environmental, early and late genetic factors interact in various developmental stages, leading to various individual expressions of the disorder.

Aim: To assess specific developmental risk factors in connection with the level of neurocognitive dysfunction in schizophrenia.

Material and methods: Issues concerning family history, parenting style, attachment and early life stress were investigated in correlation with general intellectual functioning, working memory and executive functions in a set of young schizophrenia patients and a control group.

Results: The authors found that certain prenatal insults, complications of delivery and early development, along with the quality of attachment and parenting style, were strongly correlated with the patterns of cognitive dysfunction in schizophrenia patients.

Conclusions: Cognitive impairment might be a trait-like feature, stable throughout the lifetime, occurring years before the onset of the illness. Extending the concept of development to the entire life span could entail that factors with limited timeframe of action may play a role in the epigenetic regulation of certain genes and proteins expressed in specific areas of the brain, in specific developmental stages, which in turn may lead to overt and definitive changes much later in life.