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SUBJECTIVE COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT IN SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENTS: CLINICAL AND NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES

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Introduction and objectives: Cognitive deficits, in particular that of memory and executive functions, have been linked to functional disability. The treatment with antipsychotic drugs leads to subjective changes in cognitive functioning as well as subjective experience of schizophrenic patients, which both contribute to compliance and treatment outcome. Aim of this study was to evaluate the role of clinical, neurocognitive and pharmacological variables on the subjective perception of cognitive functioning in schizophrenic patients.

Methods: The sample was composed of 78 schizophrenic inpatients (M/F=38/35, mean age 41 + 11.6 years) recruited in the Rehabilitative Centres of two Departments of Mental Health in Italy and treated with typical (n= 15) or atypical antipsychotics (n= 63). Patients were diagnosed according to the DSM-IV TR criteria and evaluated with the Frankfurter Beschwerde Fragebogen (FBF) Scale, the SAPS and SANS (Scales for the Assessment of Positive and of Negative Symptoms). Neuropsychological functioning was assessed by means of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS- R).

Results: The results showed that the severity of symptoms was correlated positively with a greater impairment on self perception of mental functioning. Neuropsychological functioning also correlated with self perception of cognitive deficits, with an abnormal subjective experience associated with more neuropsychological disturbances. Atypical antipsychotics were associated with a better insight of cognitive dysfunction.

Conclusions: The results of the study underline the importance to investigate the subjective experience of schizophrenic patients treated with antipsychotic drugs in order to improve treatment adherence and efficacy in schizophrenia.