

S21-03

STRESS IN PEOPLE AT HIGH RISK FOR PSYCHOSIS

F. Day^{1,2}, L. Valmaggia^{1,2}, C. Pariante¹, A. Papadopoulos³, I. Papadopoulos³, P. McGuire^{1,2}

¹Psychosis Studies, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London, ²OASIS, ³Bethlem Hospital, South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

Background: Stress is a key feature of many aetiological models of psychosis and there is considerable empirical evidence implicating stress in the development of psychosis. This paper investigates the role of psychosocial stress in the onset of psychosis by examining the relationship between current and lifetime exposure to traumatic experiences and psychosocial stressors, HPA axis function, and psychopathology in people at high risk of developing psychosis.

Methods: Sixty 'high risk' (HR) participants were compared with 50 healthy control (HC) participants on measures of exposure to psychosocial stressors. Subgroups of HR and HC participants which provided saliva samples were compared regarding measures of HPA axis function.

Results: HR participants were exposed to greater levels of psychosocial stress than HC participants. Specifically, HR participants were more likely to have been separated from their parents ($p=.003$), report severe parental antipathy ($p=.011$), and have been bullied while growing up ($p=.024$). HR participants experienced greater levels of perceived stress than HC participants ($p=.001$) and were more likely to have had a negative life event in the previous 6 months ($p<.001$). Positive correlations were found between current stress and number of life events and attenuated psychotic symptoms ($r=.585$, $p<.001$, and $r=.384$, $p<.001$, respectively) in the HR participants.

Discussion: This study shows that people at high risk of developing psychosis experience greater levels of psychosocial stress than matched healthy control participants throughout the lifetime, from early childhood to the present day, and that current stress is strongly associated with psychotic symptomatology.