

Duration of early maternal separation and prediction of schizotypal symptoms from early adolescence to midlife

Deidre M. Anglin^{a,*}, Patricia R. Cohen^{a,b}, Henian Chen^a

^a Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University, College of Physicians and Surgeons, United States

^b Department of Epidemiology, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, United States

Received 14 January 2008; received in revised form 25 February 2008; accepted 26 February 2008

Available online 14 April 2008

Abstract

Early childhood experiences influence the capacity for healthy social and emotional development. The present study uses longitudinal data to determine whether early maternal separation predicted the subsequent development of schizotypal personality disorder (SPD) symptoms assessed repeatedly from early adolescence over the following 20 years. Within this community sample ($N=766$), multilevel linear regression analyses revealed the duration of separation from mother in the first 2 years of life predicted elevated SPD symptoms. This relationship was specific to children with mother-reported early angry emotional behavior. These results provide support for the role of early childhood psychosocial risk factors in the development of subsequent schizophrenia spectrum symptoms in emotionally vulnerable children.

© 2008 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Development; Schizotypal personality; Longitudinal; Early separation

1. Introduction

1.1. The importance of early childhood experiences

A growing number of studies have demonstrated the importance of early childhood experiences in the development of psychosis and schizophrenia in adulthood (Wicks et al., 2005). The majority of these studies focus on early developmental delays (e.g., Isohanni et al., 2001; Jones et al., 1994), childhood maltreatment (Read et al., 2001), adult-reported early attachment problems (see Berry et al., 2007 for reviews), and parental loss during childhood (Agid

et al., 1999; Erlenmeyer-Kimling et al., 1991). Some of this literature is limited by retrospective ascertainment of risk and risk periods that cover long spans of childhood (i.e., birth to 18 years). For example, Dozier (1990) found higher levels of attachment insecurity among individuals with schizophrenia, but the information about childhood attachment was obtained retrospectively and during adulthood.

Attachment theory emphasizes the crucial and formative role of early life experiences, especially during the first 2 years of life, for social and emotional development (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Lamb et al., 1999). Through repeated transactions with familiar attachment figures, infants form internal working models, which include affective and cognitive mental representations of expectations about the behavior of self and other (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1973, 1989). These models organize personality development and affect regulation, acting as

* Corresponding author. Columbia University, Department of Psychiatry, Division of Epidemiology, 100 Haven Avenue, Tower 3, Rm 31F, New York, NY 10032, United States.

E-mail address: dma2105@columbia.edu (D.M. Anglin).

heuristics in subsequent relationships (Levy, 2005). Thus, early experiences are particularly significant because they frame the child's subsequent transactions with the environment (Sroufe et al., 1999). Children with an early unstable foundation are left more vulnerable to normative stress and the development of pathology over time.

One potential disruption during early childhood is separation from the mother (Bowlby, 1973, 1988). Early separations may interfere with attachment formation between the child and mother and reduce the probability that a secure relationship will develop (NICHD, 1997) because the infant may lose confidence in the availability of mother. The threat of abandonment introduced by separation especially during the first 2 years of life generates a sense of loss and anger that can become dysfunctional (Bowlby, 1973, 1989). In rodent studies of separations between mother and infant, Hofer and colleagues (2006) found that the distress in infant rats brought on by separation was evidenced in slowed behavior, low heart rate, and alterations in sleep-wave patterns (Myers et al., 1992; Polan and Hofer, 1999). They concluded that maternal separation withdraws important regulatory influences such as nutrient supply and warmth that in combination results in these biological changes in infant rats.

1.2. *The importance of early childhood experiences in schizophrenia*

Early impaired interpersonal relations have been implicated in the etiology and onset of aspects of schizophrenia disturbances, particularly the break from reality (Wilson and Costanzo, 1996). Strong negative beliefs about the self and the social world may increase vulnerability to psychosis. Detecting these psychosocial developmental risks in individuals with latent schizophrenia liability such as schizotypy would provide additional evidence that these risks are specifically relevant for schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Schizotypal disturbances including odd or eccentric beliefs, magical thinking, unusual perceptual experiences, and suspiciousness, as well as disorganized behavior and interpersonal problems are subtle signs of schizophrenia phenomena without overt psychosis (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Child maltreatment and problems with parental bonding have been implicated in the etiology of schizotypal personality disorder (Raine, 2006). We have identified no studies that have empirically tested whether early separation predicts the development of schizotypal personality disorder symptoms.

1.3. *Early separation and schizophrenia*

Recent evidence suggests a role of early separation and loss in psychosis and schizophrenia risk. Morgan et al.

(2007) found parental separation of at least a year before the age of 16 was a risk factor for psychosis (OR=3.36 CI=2.41–4.70) in a first-contact incident study conducted in the UK. Likewise, Mallett et al. (2002) found that Black Caribbeans with schizophrenia living in the UK were more likely than schizophrenia cases of other racial and ethnic groups to have experienced long-term separation from parents during childhood (i.e., from birth to 18 years). No studies to the authors' knowledge have examined the effects of early separation on the development and persistence of schizotypal personality disorder symptoms. Furthermore, given Bowlby's emphasis on the first 2 years of life, it would be important to determine whether effects may be specific or of exceptional magnitude in this developmental period. In the present study, we examine the role of the duration of early separations from the mother on subsequent development of schizotypal personality disorder symptoms in the children followed prospectively in a community sample.

To further explore our findings regarding early separation, we also examine whether reasons for the separation such as child or maternal illness or characteristics of the mother or child predict schizotypal PD symptoms or account for any apparent association with early separation. We also examine whether the child-reported degree of attachment and closeness between the mother and child may mediate an association between early separation and schizotypal symptoms. Some studies (Kubicka et al., 2002) although not all (e.g., Herman et al., 2006) found that children born from unwanted pregnancies were at increased risk for subsequent emotional adjustment problems, and these children may be more likely to experience maternal separation. In addition, temperamentally difficult children may be more likely to experience maternal separation, as well as be more vulnerable to subsequent schizotypal symptoms. We examine these possibilities in the current study. Given the literature demonstrating strong familial aggregation among schizotypal PD and other schizophrenia spectrum disorders (Kendler et al., 1993), we also investigate the possible association of psychopathology in the mother with early separation and SPD problems in offspring. It is hypothesized that early separations from the mother will be directly positively related to schizotypal symptoms into adulthood.

2. **Methods**

2.1. *Participants*

Participants for the present study were an epidemiological cohort of children randomly sampled from families living in randomly sampled 100 block groups in two upstate New York counties in 1975 when they were mean

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6828922>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6828922>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)