

「Schizophrenia May be Tied to Higher Risk of COVID-19 Death」

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According to a new study published in JAMA Psychiatry, schizophrenia may be one of the highest risk factors for dying from COVID-19, second only to age. [1]

In the new study, researchers looked at health records from 260 outpatient clinics and four hospitals across New York City. Of 26,540 patients tested, 7,348 adults tested positive for COVID-19. They divided the patients with a reported psychiatric disorder into one of three categories — schizophrenia spectrum, mood disorder or anxiety disorder and no psychiatric disorder. The researchers did not find an association between anxiety or mood disorders and death from COVID-19. But they found that people with schizophrenia were about 2.7 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than people without that mental disorder — the second-highest risk factor after age. This association was significant even after adjusting for medical risk factors including smoking status, hypertension, heart failure, myocardial infarction, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and cancer. [1]

Previous studies had already found that people with pre-existing mental illnesses, particularly depression and schizophrenia had a higher risk of becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. [2] Now the mortality may also be closely related to mental disorders.

The authors of the current study mentioned that there might be something about either the illness of schizophrenia or possibly medications that causes them to be at high risk of mortality. For example, perhaps the illness or medications are disrupting the immune system. Previous research has found that people with schizophrenia can have altered immune responses and variations in the genes that regulate the body's immune response to infections. [1]

Some other psychiatrists speculate that schizophrenia is associated with the activation of the immune system and pro-inflammatory signaling molecules known as cytokines. A common cause of COVID-19 death is an overreaction of those cytokines, also known as a cytokine storm. Such a mechanism could also play a role in schizophrenia and be a common pathway of schizophrenia and fatal course in COVID-19. Still, the study was limited by the low number of schizophrenia patients (n=75), and also by the lack of data on patients' psychosis medications. [3]

An association between severe infection and psychosis has been reported for decades, suggesting that the higher risk of death in patients with schizophrenia may not be unique to COVID-19. Unfortunately, the

associations between COVID-19 and psychiatric disorders are possibly “bidirectional”. [4] A paper published in November last year clearly indicated that survivors of COVID-19 appear to be at increased risk of psychiatric sequelae. In this study, researchers used large-scale real-world data and assessed 62354 patients whether a diagnosis of COVID-19 was associated with increased rates of subsequent psychiatric diagnoses. Their findings show that COVID-19 survivors have significantly higher rates of psychiatric diagnoses and psychiatric history is a potential risk factor for being diagnosed with COVID-19, independent of known physical risk factors. [4]

As of the Jan 26th, the official global confirmed cases of the coronavirus have surpassed 100 million and death toll have surpassed 2 million. It's a figure that seemed almost unimaginable 12 months ago, when the first case had just been confirmed in Japan. In addition to actively treating COVID-19 patients, how to track their mental health and continuously treat sequelae will also be one of the most important challenges in the future.

Reference:

1. Katlyn Nemani et al. 27 Jan 2021. "Association of Psychiatric Disorders With Mortality Among Patients With COVID-19" *JAMA Psychiatry*.
2. QuanQiu Wang et al. 7 Oct 2020. "Increased risk of COVID 19 infection and mortality in people with mental disorders: analysis from electronic health records in the United States" *World Psychiatry*.
3. Yasemin Saplakoglu. 27 Jan 2021. "Schizophrenia is 2nd highest risk factor for dying of COVID-19, after age" *Live Science News*
4. Maxime Taquet et al. 9 Nov 2020. "Bidirectional associations between COVID-19 and psychiatric disorder: retrospective cohort studies of 62 354 COVID-19 cases in the USA" *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

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