

Schizophrenia: Symptoms and Subtypes

Schizophrenia is the label given to a group of psychotic disorders in which a person's functioning deteriorates greatly. There are severe disturbances in thoughts, perceptions, mood, behavior, and social functioning.

Schizophrenia is known as a **psychotic disorder**. Psychotic disorders (or "psychoses") are a group of psychological disorders where a person "loses touch with reality." A psychotic person cannot tell the difference between what is real and what is imaginary. The world they see is very different from the one non-psychotic people see. The result is usually that the person can't meet even the most basic demands of life. Therefore, they are the most severe of all psychological disorders.

Diagnostic Criteria for Schizophrenia

A. *Characteristic symptoms*: **Two or more** of the following, each present for a significant portion of time during a 1-month period (or less if successfully treated):

1. *delusions*
2. *hallucinations*
3. *disorganized speech*
4. *extremely disorganized or catatonic behavior*
5. *"negative" symptoms*

(1) delusions (false beliefs)

- Can include a variety of themes, such as the following:
 - *Delusions of persecution*: these are the most common; the person believes her or she is being followed, tormented, tricked, spied on, or ridiculed
 - *Delusions of reference*: also common; the person believes certain gestures, comments, passages from books, newspapers, song lyrics, or other things are specifically directed at him or her
 - *Delusions of grandeur*: the person believes that he/she is an extremely famous, powerful, or important person; may result in the person thinking he/she is a famous historical person like Napoleon or Jesus
- Delusions can be both *bizarre* and *nonbizarre*. "Bizarreness" can be difficult to judge.
- A delusion is considered bizarre if it is clearly unlikely and not understandable, and doesn't stem from ordinary life experiences. An example of a bizarre delusion is a person's belief that **a stranger has removed his or her internal organs and has replaced them with someone else's organs without leaving any wounds or scars**. Other bizarre delusions would be a person's belief that **his or her thoughts have been taken away by an outside force** ("thought withdrawal"), that **alien thoughts have been put into his or her mind** ("thought insertion"), or that **his or her body is being acted on or manipulated by some outside force** ("delusions of control").
- An example of a nonbizarre delusion is a person's false belief that he or she is under surveillance by the police.

(2) hallucinations (false perceptions of the senses)

- auditory hallucinations are by far the most common, but hallucinations may appear in any of the other senses (vision, taste, smell, touch)
- auditory hallucinations are usually experienced as voices, either familiar or unfamiliar, that are perceived as different from the person's own thoughts
- hallucinations may be a normal part of religious experience in some cultures

(3) disorganized speech

- disorganized speech is seen as a sign of *disorganized thinking*, and can be shown in the following ways:
 - *Loose associations*: The person's may "slip off the track" from one topic to another and may answer questions in ways that are barely related or completely unrelated to the topic.

Example: In this experiment, participants are shown two colors that are very similar, and are asked to describe the difference between the two.

Normal speaker 1: Both are salmon colored. This one, however, is more pink.

Normal speaker 2: My God, this is hard. They are both about the same, except this one must be redder.

Normal speaker 3: They are both either the color of canned salmon or clay. This one here is the pinker one.

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- Schizophrenic 1: A fish swims. You call it a salmon. You cook it. You put it in a can. You open the can. You look at it in this color. Salmon fish.
- Schizophrenic 2: This is a stupid color of a ----- bowl of salmon. Mix it with mayonnaise. Then it gets tasty. Leave it alone and puke all over the ----- place. Puke fish.
- Schizophrenic 3: Make-up. Pancake make-up. You put your face on it and the think guys run after you. Wait a second! I don't put it on my face and guys don't run after me. Girls put it on them.

- Poverty of content: Sometimes schizophrenic language may use a lot of words, yet not "say" much.

Example: This is a schizophrenic man's letter to his mother. (It also has very loose associations.)

I am writing on paper. The pen which I am using is from a factory called "Perry & Co." The factory is in England. I assume this. Behind the name of Perry & Co. the city of London is inscribed. But not the city. The city of London is in England. I know this from my school days. Then, I always liked geography. My last teacher in that subject was Professor August A. he was a man with black eyes. There are also blue eyes and gray eyes and other sorts, too. I have heard it said that snakes have black eyes.

- Clanging: putting words together that have no relation to one another, other than the fact that they rhyme or sound alike.

Example: This is a conversation between a schizophrenic patient and a doctor. About half the man's daily speech was rhymed.

Dr: How are things going today, Ernest?

Patient: OK for a flump.

Dr: What is a flump?

Pt: A flump is a gump?

Dr: What do you mean by that?

Pt: Well, when you go to the next planet from the planet beyond the planet that landed on the danded and planded on the standed.

Dr: Wait a minute. I didn't follow any of that.

Pt: Well, when we was first bit on the slit on the rit and the man on the ran or the pan on the ban on the can on the man on the fan on the pan.

Dr: What's all that hitting your head for. And waving your arms?

Pt: That's to keep the boogers from eating the woogers.

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- Word salad: sometimes schizophrenic language completely breaks down and becomes impossible for the listener to follow any of the links between words and phrases

Example: This is the same man from the clanging example above.

It's all over for me now and there ain't no music, there ain't no nothing besides my mother and father who stand alone on the Island of Capri where there is no ice, there is no nothing but changers, changers, changers. That comes in like first and last names, so that thing does. Well, it's my suitcase sir. I've got to travel to keep my energy alive.

(4) extremely disorganized or catatonic behavior

- Disorganized behavior includes things like:
 - problems in goal directed behavior, which leads to difficulties performing activities of daily living (hygiene, making meals, dressing)
 - inappropriate sexual behavior
 - unpredictable and untriggered agitation (e.g., shouting or swearing)
- Catatonic behavior includes things like:
 - Catatonic posturing: holding a certain poses for hours or even days at a time
 - Catatonic rigidity: maintaining a rigid posture and resisting attempts to be moved
 - Waxy flexibility: patient's limbs can be moved into a variety of positions and maintained afterwards for long periods of time
 - Catatonic stupor: complete unawareness of things around you

(5) “negative” symptoms

- Negative means an absence of something. Examples of negative symptoms are:
 - Affective flattening: “affect” means mood; this means that any signs of emotion are gone or “flattened”
 - Alogia: this means an extreme lack of speech
 - Avolition: this is an inability to start and stick with goal directed activities; a schizophrenic might sit for long periods and show little or no interest in participating in work or social activities

Note: Only one from A is needed if delusions are bizarre or hallucinations involve a voice that keeps a running commentary on the person's behavior or thoughts, or two or more voices talking to each other.

- B. Social/occupational problems: For a large portion of the time since the disturbance began, one or more major areas of functioning such as work, interpersonal relations, or self-care are far below the level before the disorder started.
- C. Duration: Continuous signs of the disturbance go on for at least 6 months. This 6 months must include at least 1 month of Criterion A (see above).

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Subtypes of Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia can be classified into several subtypes. To be diagnosed with one of these subtypes, first the person must meet the above criteria for schizophrenia, then show the characteristics of one of the different subtypes below.

1. Paranoid Schizophrenia

- Criteria for schizophrenia are met.
- Person shows a preoccupation with *delusions* or frequent *auditory hallucinations*.

2. Catatonic Schizophrenia

- Criteria for schizophrenia are met.
- Person has prominent *catatonic symptoms* (see above).

3. Disorganized Schizophrenia

- Criteria for schizophrenia are met.
- *Disorganized speech and behavior, flat or inappropriate affect* stand out.

4. Undifferentiated Schizophrenia

- Criteria for schizophrenia are met.
- Symptoms for a particular subtype are not prominent.