The Impact of Racism on Psychosis

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Higher risk of psychotic disorders amongst several migrant groups

Extends to subsequent generations, including some Black British and British Asian groups

Causes remain largely unknown

Public mental health inequality of our times
The extraordinary ratio of insanity among the foreign-born has attracted wide attention.

Frederick Howard Wines, Special Agent, 1880 Census
Admission rate per 100,000

- Schizophrenia
- Depression

Norwegian rate
Norwegian migrant rate

Ödegaard, 1932
Risk of schizophrenia, schizoaffective, and bipolar disorders by migrant status, region of origin, and age-at-migration: a national cohort study of 1.8 million people

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Adjusted for age, sex & time period

Dykxhoorn et al, 2018
1. Selective migration
2. Demographic differences
3. Higher rates in countries of origin
4. Misdiagnosis
5. Social stressors
1. Selective migration
2. Demographic differences
3. Higher rates in countries of origin
4. Misdiagnosis
5. Social stressors
• Does the social experience following migration affect psychosis risk?

• Minority position may increase likelihood of psychosocial disempowerment

• Psychosocial disempowerment involves loss or denial of agency over one’s life/environment

• May arise when more socially & culturally distanced from majority population

• **Hypothesis**: Elevated psychosis risk in Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic groups would be attributable to greater sociocultural distance

• Data from EU-GEI case-control study
• 1130 FEP cases & 1497 controls from 17 centres
• Brasil, UK, Netherlands, France, Spain, Italy
• Social distance: education, parental SES, social isolation
• Linguistic distance: measured via language trees & fluency
• Disempowerment: discrimination
• Logistic regression, multiple imputation
Adjusted for: age*sex, paternal age, childhood trauma, cannabis use, parental psychosis

Adjusted for: Model 1 + social distance (education, parental SES, social isolation)

Adjusted for: Model 2 + linguistic distance

Adjusted for: Model 3 + discrimination

Patterns independently observed in Black (n=168/132), Asian (n=33/33), North African (n=45/25) & Mixed (n=107/96) ethnic groups

Robert Frank / The Met Gilman Collection

Jongsma et al, Psychol Med, 2020

Case/control N = 496/413 634/1034
Patterns independently observed in Black (n=168/132), Asian (n=33/33), North African (n=45/25) & Mixed (n=107/96) ethnic groups. Similar confounding effect of language distance evident for first generation migrants. For later generations, effect occurs earlier, more strongly confounded by social distance measures.

**Fig. 1.** Odds of psychotic disorders, by ethnic group following incremental covariate adjustment. Model A: adjusted for covariates (age, sex, their interaction, paternal age, childhood trauma, cannabis use, parental history of psychosis). Model B: Model A+adjustment for indicators of social disadvantage (parental SES, level of education, relationship status and living arrangements). Model C: Model B+adjustment for linguistic distance. Model D: Model C+adjustment for discrimination.
Effect of direct discrimination on psychosis attenuated after adjustment for structural distance

Adjusted for: age*sex, paternal age, childhood trauma, cannabis use, parental psychosis, social distance, linguistic distance

Discrimination: 0-12 scale of self-reported experiences
Elevated Striatal Dopamine Function in Immigrants and Their Children: A Risk Mechanism for Psychosis

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Egerton et al, Schiz Bull, 2017
• Raised psychosis rates in several ethnic minority groups in UK for over 50 years, most notably in people with Black Caribbean, African or British identities

• Recent evidence provides first account of excess rates in 140 years

• Both direct & structural discrimination are associated with risk

• But models suggest structural discrimination – potentially via disempowerment – stronger predictor of excess

• Genuine interdisciplinary research required to establish causation

Kirkbride et al, J Pub Ment Health, 2010
“Through interdisciplinary effort, we can prevent this public mental health inequality within a generation”

Dykxhoorn & Kirkbride, “Psychoses sans Frontieres”, Epidemiology & Psychiatric Sciences, 2019
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References


