

SCHIZOPHRENIA FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE

Aria Sharma

Maxfort School Rohini, New Delhi

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have started to study the role of gender differences in Schizophrenia. Several studies show that the incidence of schizophrenia is two to three times higher among males than among females. It is also observed that the age of onset of schizophrenia in men is earlier than in women. It is believed that most men experience negative symptoms and on the other hand, women experience positive symptoms. Some researchers suggest that schizophrenia is more severe in men than in women and thus, the condition of women in terms of social functioning, maintaining relationships and their daily life is proven to be better than men in some studies. Even though the causes of schizophrenia are not known, a lot of factors can cause or trigger this terrifying mental disorder. Women are also observed to have fewer days of hospitalisation and a better response to medications and therapy than men. According to a research, In India, most cases of schizophrenia are observed to be in Goa and the least cases are in Bihar. India is globally ranked at 13th position in the number of publications on schizophrenia with a 2.04 % global share. To conclude, gender differences have been found in a number of studies and further study in this area can help provide useful information with a view to improving our care of these patients.

INTRODUCTION

Schizophrenia is one of the most alarming disorders existing in the contemporary world. Many misunderstandings are present related to schizophrenia, which leads to confusion, isolation and discrimination that can be experienced by people with schizophrenia, their family and other people surrounding them. There is a misconception present in the world that schizophrenia means a person with a “split personality”. But that is not true at all. Split personality and schizophrenia are two different things. Schizophrenia is much more common than split personality. Schizophrenia is a mental illness where a person confuses reality with his own

imagination abnormally. A person affected by schizophrenia cannot differentiate between reality and his imagination. They tend to believe their imagination and interpret their false beliefs as reality. It is a chronic disease which means it can last for a long time and requires medication for a long period of time. A person's thinking, emotions, feelings about a particular person and behaviour towards others is affected by

Schizophrenia. Schizophrenia not only impacts one's mental health but also his/ her functioning, Personal life, professional life and physical health. The causes of schizophrenia are not known yet. But some causes of schizophrenia believed are-

- Genetic factors: If a parent is affected by schizophrenia, A child can also be affected by it. However, the percentage of a child developing schizophrenia if one of the parents are affected by it is 10%.
- Issues in personal life: However no theory proves this, but a lot of patients affected by schizophrenia were going through family conflicts or conflicts with their loved ones.
- Consumption of drugs/Alcohol: Harmful alcohol or high consumption of drugs and alcohol
- Stress: Stressful life and incidents can be a reason a person develops schizophrenia.

The intelligence of people with schizophrenia is the same as a normal healthy human being of their age group. However, during some situations, a person can be confused with a particular situation and might believe his own false beliefs and not the reality. A large amount of the population also believes that people with Schizophrenia are harmful and dangerous. This is not true, however, a person seldom can be aggressive and violent.

To maintain relationships with others is very difficult for a person affected by this terrifying mental illness, as it can be confusing to others and they might interpret their situation incorrectly due to the lack of knowledge.

Even though a large population is affected by schizophrenia as it is a common mental disorder, unfortunately, there is no particular treatment for this disorder. Medicines, therapy, rehabilitation are some of the most common methods of treatment for someone affected by Schizophrenia. People affected by schizophrenia should be aware of their condition thoroughly. Their family members, friends, caretakers and people surrounded by them in their daily life should gain more and more knowledge about this mental health disorder. Otherwise, this disease can be very

harmful for a person affected by it and can cause more stress and anxiety to him if he is not surrounded by his close ones.

In India, where about 1.38 billion (2020) people reside, the prevalence of schizophrenia is about 3/1000 individuals. Schizophrenia affects both males and females. However, it is noticed that schizophrenia is more common in males than in females. According to a research, Schizophrenia was two to three times higher among males than women in India. Schizophrenia can affect a person at any age. However, it is observed that schizophrenia is more common in males who are in their 20s and females who are in their late 20s or early 30s. Many studies show that schizophrenia affects men at an earlier age than women. A man can be 2-6 years younger than a woman when he gets affected by schizophrenia. Hence, females have a much later onset of schizophrenia when compared to males. It is very rare for a child below age 15 or an adult above age 40 to get affected by schizophrenia. Fewer than 20% of teenagers are affected by schizophrenia. However, men can get affected by this mental health disorder in their teenage years. Children start showing symptoms of schizophrenia in their teenage years. Even though no one can confirm if these symptoms will lead to this terrifying mental health disorder, There are some common symptoms that teenagers show which most likely results in them getting affected by schizophrenia. Some of the symptoms are- Confused thinking, delusions, severe anxiety, lack of personal hygiene, social isolation. Before teenagers start showing the classic signs of schizophrenia, they often experience "The Prodromal period". These include symptoms that are often considered "Warning signs". These symptoms can be general as well. Some of these include- Disturbed sleeping patterns, Lower grades, seeming depressed all the time. There is no particular treatment for schizophrenia. These symptoms are not affected by gender but It is observed that men go through more negative symptoms than females. Studies show that women, in general, have better social functioning than men affected by schizophrenia. It was observed that women with schizophrenia presented higher resilience than men to cope with stressful situations. Women are also observed to have fewer days of hospitalisation and a better response to medications and therapy than men.

According to a research by SDI, in India, most DALYs of schizophrenia were observed in Goa which were around 210 and the least number of DALYs were observed in Bihar approx 133 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017. Furthermore, Arunachal Pradesh, a medium SDI state recorded a DALY rate of 177. In the northern part of India, 160 DALY rate was observed in Jammu and Kashmir and 182 was observed in Himachal Pradesh.

Moving towards the northern-eastern part of India, 185 DALY rate was observed in Sikkim, Mizoram, Manipur observed a DALY rate of 162 and around 152 in Assam. In the southern part

of India, the rate in Karnataka and Telangana were 175. In the western part of India, Gujarat observed a DALY rate of 171 and in Rajasthan, it was approx 148. Other States like Maharashtra observed a DALY rate of 178, Punjab-179 and in the national capital, Delhi it was 185. According to NCBI. From 2011 to 2015, the prevalence of schizophrenia increased from **0.63% to 0.94%**. DALY rate observed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in India (in 2004) was about 268.903. India is globally ranked at 13th position in the number of publications on schizophrenia with a 2.04 % global share(citation). India stands at 47th position globally according to the DALY rate. Indonesia is ranked the highest with a DALY rate of 321.870 and Australia is ranked the lowest with a DALY rate of 164.255. The impact of schizophrenia was highest in Oceania, East Asia and lowest in the nations of Japan, Australia, The United States and Europe. During the pandemic, In India, it was observed that in some people schizophrenia worsened due to the changes that occurred in their daily life. Most people started to live an unhealthy lifestyle with changes in sleep patterns, dietary patterns, less amount of physical activity and social isolation. Studies showed that People with schizophrenia have a nearly 2.7 times higher mortality rate with COVID-19. However, the evidence on whether COVID-19 could trigger mental illness is still weak and is not confirmed.

This paper will focus on analysing schizophrenia in Males and females, with the help of 15-20 research papers.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SCHIZOPHRENIA

There is a debate about the presence of gender differences in schizophrenia as according to some scientists and doctors, Your gender does not affect the onset or seriousness of the disease. Earlier, it was accepted that schizophrenia affects both men and women the same way. However, recent studies show that there are gender differences present in schizophrenia.

Some ways in which schizophrenia is different in males and females are:

AGE OF ONSET

Recent studies show that men get affected by schizophrenia earlier than women. Schizophrenia affects males approximately 5 years before a woman gets affected by it. Men usually develop the illness at age 18–25, and the age of onset of schizophrenia in women is 25–35. Males start to show symptoms in their teenage years. On the other hand, women show symptoms in their early 20s. Women are also observed to have two peaks in the age of onset of this illness. The first is after menarche (first menstrual period) and the other one is when they are over 40.

However, the major prevalence in women is when they are over 40 years in age. This can be due to the reduction of estrogens after menopause (Marks the end of a menstrual cycle in women) according to the estrogenic hypothesis of schizophrenia.

However, some also believe that there is no such difference in the age of onset of schizophrenia in women and men and family background and bad relations with your family might increase the risk of schizophrenia.

However, these are some beliefs of some people and are not proven scientifically. Even though a lot of studies show that there are gender differences present in schizophrenia, some of them disagree with this statement as well.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONING

It is observed that the social functioning of women affected by Schizophrenia is better than that of men. It is also found that men scored higher in disability when compared to women. Women with schizophrenia are found to be calmer and more resilient than men. It is easier for them to function in their life and handle stressful situations. A study shows that men demanded education, food, money during their treatment while women wanted to gain more knowledge about the illness and the method of treatment.

Hence, to conclude women function better socially than men and have lesser needs as well. Thus, Gender differences in the social functioning of people are present.

It is also observed that most women respond positively to the treatment methods. Men usually have negative symptoms of Schizophrenia. However, some studies show different results.

CAUSES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

The exact causes of schizophrenia are unknown. Researchers suggest that possible causes of schizophrenia can be due to a combination of reasons. It can be due to Physical, Psychological, Hormonal and Environmental changes.

Some factors that may contribute to a person developing schizophrenia are:-

GENETICS

One of the factors can be genes. There might be a possibility that someone from the family of the person with schizophrenia might also have the same disorder. However, it is believed that a single gene is not responsible for this. There might be a combination of genes that can cause

schizophrenia. However, the presence of these genes does not indicate the presence of schizophrenia. In some cases, a person might not develop schizophrenia even if he/she has these genes.

DEVELOPMENT OF BRAIN

People with Schizophrenia might have differences in the structure of their brain. However, this can also occur in people without any mental disorders.

NEUROTRANSMITTERS

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that are responsible for the transfer of signals between brain cells. A lower level of these chemicals can play a role in the development of schizophrenia or any other mental disorder. A change in the level of dopamine and serotonin might cause schizophrenia.

BIRTH COMPLICATIONS

Studies show that complications during birth or pregnancy may be responsible for the Development of schizophrenia. Lack of oxygen, low birth weight can be some of the complications that can affect the brain.

TRIGGERS

Triggers such as stress, Drug abuse or alcohol abuse might contribute to the development of schizophrenia.

SYMPTOMS OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

Studies clearly show that sex differences in the symptoms of schizophrenia are present. Adult Men with schizophrenia appear to have more negative symptoms than women. Women with schizophrenia go through some depressive symptoms. Interestingly, the severity of symptoms also depends on the age of onset in females. It is observed that women with late-onset schizophrenia may have less severe negative symptoms and might respond positively to the treatment method.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OBSERVED IN BOTH MALES AND FEMALES

It has been observed that women and men show different symptoms of schizophrenia at different ages. However, there are also many kinds of symptoms that are shown by both women and men of all ages. They are categorised into two- Positive symptoms and Negative symptoms.

Some common symptoms observed in both males and females are-

-Positive symptoms (Symptoms that will start occurring)

The word Positive does not indicate the severity of the symptoms. It means the presence of symptoms rather than the absence. Some of these are:-

-DELUSIONS:

Delusions occur in most people with schizophrenia. Delusions are false beliefs that might appear true to some people. Delusions can be about someone hurting you or harassing you and many more.

Types of delusions are:-

- **Persecutory delusions:** A person believes that someone is stalking them and is trying to trick them or frame them.
- **Somatic delusions:** A person believes that they are going through a terrible physical health problem.
- **Grandiose delusions:** A person might think that they are a famous figure like a celebrity or a politician and might behave like one.
- **Religious delusions:** Someone might think that they are connected to god or they are possessed by some demon.

-HALLUCINATIONS:

Hallucinations mean hearing, smelling or seeing things that don't exist in real life. Most patients with schizophrenia hallucinate regularly. Types of Hallucinations are:-

- **Auditory:** A person can hear voices in their head. There can be more than a single noise. This can be confusing and irritating for them and thus, they can be angry or demanding.
- **Olfactory and gustatory:** A person can think that they were not given the right food and can even refuse to eat anything.

- **Visual:** Someone might see people or patterns. They can also see people close to them pr their lovedones who are no longer with them.
- **Movement disorders:** Some people with schizophrenia can be observed to be restless or some might sit at the same spot without moving at all.

Some other symptoms observed in both males and females are- Abnormal childish behaviour, lack of response, abnormal thinking and trouble concentrating. Symptoms may vary from person to person.

-Negative Symptoms (Things that might stop happening)

The word Negative does not indicate the severity of the symptoms. It means the absence of some things like logical thinking, right social functioning which have stopped happening in schizophrenia patients.

Some of these are-:

- **No interest in anything:** A person will stop taking interest in things that he might have found fun before.
- **Less or no facial expressions at all:** Someone might stop showing any facial expressions or excitement in their voice. Their voices can also sound flat.
- **Changes in personal life:** A person might stop taking care of their hygiene and diet.

Other than positive and negative symptoms, schizophrenia can also affect a **Person's thinking**. He/She can find it hard to remember things and also can have trouble making decisions.

SYMPTOMS IN WOMEN:

Symptoms of schizophrenia in females might be less severe. These may include depression or anxiety and illogical thinking. This leads patients to a stressful situation and can also lead to suicide. Women with schizophrenia may be more physically active than men. They also experience delusions frequently. Sexual delusions are one of the common and most experienced kinds of delusion that women with schizophrenia experience.

SYMPTOMS IN MEN:

Symptoms of schizophrenia in males can be more severe than in females. They have more negative symptoms. Some common symptoms in males are Religious delusions, Audible thoughts and confused thinking.

To conclude, studies found that in adults, sex differences describe the presence of negative symptoms in males and positive symptoms in females. Both females and males have cognitive symptoms which include confused thinking.

DIAGNOSIS

Some mental illnesses have plenty of similar symptoms. Symptoms can be due to other factors like medication, substance abuse and more. Thus, it is really important to eliminate other disorders and identify the right one.

In men, it can be difficult to distinguish the beginning of schizophrenia from substance-induced psychosis. In women, because affect is preserved, schizophrenia is not easily distinguishable from affective psychosis (cit). There are multiple ways in which diagnosis of schizophrenia can be done. A urine test or/and a blood test can be done to clear if substance abuse or alcohol is causing these symptoms. If clear, tests that scan your brain are done. MRI or Magnetic Resonance Imaging and CT scan or Computed Tomography are done for ruling out diseases such as tumours.

Determining a diagnosis of schizophrenia includes various kinds of tests. They are:-

- **Physical test:** Urine, Blood tests that rule out the other problems that might be causing the symptoms.
- **Screenings:** Tests are done to see if there is any other disorder that is causing these symptoms. Examples are- MRI, CT scan and others.
- **Cognitive tests/Personality tests:** A mental health professional may examine the patient by observing their thoughts, delusions, mood swings.
- **Diagnostic criteria:** A doctor or mental health professional may use the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

The earlier the diagnosis is done, the better it is for the patient and their family. However, if the patient is left untreated, symptoms of schizophrenia can intensify and even cause trouble in the social functioning of the person and their personal life.

PHASES OF SCHIZOPHRENIA

According to studies, there are three stages or phases of schizophrenia in adults. Each phase has its unique symptoms. Gender does not play an important role in the phases of schizophrenia.

The three phases are:-

- **Prodromal phases**: The first stage of schizophrenia is known as the prodromal phase. This stage might be unnoticeable as it occurs before the actual symptoms start to show.
- **Active**: The noticeable phase called active or acute schizophrenia is where the patient with schizophrenia starts showing symptoms like- Hallucinations and Delusions.
- **Residual**: This is the final phase where the patient might experience less severe symptoms of active schizophrenia.

SYMPTOMS EXPERIENCED IN EACH PHASE:

-PRODROMAL PHASE: Symptoms experienced in this phase are common. They can be due to stress, depression or can indicate any other mental disorders as well. Some symptoms of this phase are-

- Isolation
- Confused thinking
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Sleep problems

According to a research, 73% of the people with schizophrenia experienced these symptoms before reaching the Active phase.

-ACTIVE PHASE: The symptoms in the active phase can be obvious. Some of them are:-

- Hallucinations
- Confused thoughts
- Delusions

- Talking to oneself

-RESIDUAL PHASE: Symptoms in this phase may resemble the ones experienced in the prodromal phase. However, some symptoms of the Active phase are also included here. Some of these are:-

- Emotionless face
- Isolation
- Illogical thinking
- Flat voice

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (**DSM-5**) does not consider this phase and symptoms anymore. However some Mental health professionals use this for discussing with patients and their family.

TREATMENT

There is no known cure for schizophrenia. However, treatment can help in eliminating symptoms and can improve the daily life of people with schizophrenia. Treatments of schizophrenia can include:

MEDICINE

Lower levels of chemicals and neurotransmitters in the brain can lead to the development of schizophrenia. Thus, Antipsychotic medicines can help in reducing the symptoms. They can also be taken in order to avoid worsening symptoms. However, these affect females in different ways. Due to antipsychotic adverse effects, some women may believe that they are pregnant when they are not, whereas women who want to be mothers may find it difficult to conceive. Some pregnant women may deny their pregnancy, others may seek abortions. Women can experience more adverse effects of medications than men.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

There can be many types of psychotherapy such as:-

- Cognitive behavioural therapy: This can be done to improve the thoughts of the patient and to workthrough disruptive thoughts.

- Family therapy: Family or close friends of people with schizophrenia are involved in this kind of therapy. It is usually done for the reduction of stress.

COORDINATED SPECIALITY CARE (CSC)

This involves a combination of medication, psychotherapy, counselling and providing education and employment support to people with schizophrenia.

People with schizophrenia have a better condition if they are supported by family, friends and close ones. Women are observed to have fewer days of hospitalisation and a better response to medications and therapy than men.

CONCLUSION

Gender differences in Schizophrenia are still not proven and thus it is a controversial issue that is still debatable. However, according to many studies, Gender differences in Schizophrenia are present. They suggest that the response to treatment and social functioning is better in women when compared to men. Women also have a late onset of Schizophrenia. These differences in men and women can be due to differences in genes, hormones and environment. Hence to conclude, gender differences in terms of age of onset, response to treatment, effects during treatment and social functioning are somewhere present. However, we can not neglect the studies that show no gender differences in women and men with schizophrenia.

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