

Childhood adversities and Psychosis

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Summary and concluding remarks

The present thesis focuses on the relationship between childhood adversity and psychosis. The studies here proposed suggest that childhood adversities might lead to psychosis via and/or interact with recent events and/or HPA-axis dysregulation and/or cognitive functioning. Findings are also consistent with the hypothesis that different types of childhood might impact differently on psychosis.

Chapter one provides a general introduction about the relationship between early events and psychosis.

Chapter two provides support to the socio-developmental perspective showing that the impact of early adversities on the risk of onset or persistence of psychosis might be amplified by subsequent exposure to recent events.

In chapters three, four and five the role of the HPA axis dysregulation and neurocognitive functioning were evaluated on the basis neurodevelopmental perspective. Chapter three suggested that HPA-axis dysregulation could be involved in the relationship between early adversity and psychosis given that higher morning cortisol secretion was found in patients with early events than in those without or in controls. However, whether variations on evening cortisol levels are related to the exposure to early events or to the severity of psychotic disease is still unclear. Chapters four and five showed that childhood adversities might lead to psychosis by impairments on neurocognitive domains. In chapter five, the role of social cognition was also evaluated and evidences suggested that the relationship between childhood adversity and psychosis might be mediated by impairments in mentalization abilities.

Findings presented in chapters three, five and six also suggested that childhood adversity might have a “pathoplastic effect” once the disorder is developed since more severe symptoms were found in patients with early events than in those who had not been exposed to them. In addition, results proposed in chapters three and five emphasises the importance of taking into account the different subtypes of childhood adversities as they may have different impact on psychosis. If compared with subjects without early events, while the exposure to childhood sexual abuse, mother’s neglect/loss was associated with a risk almost doubled to be psychotic patients than controls, childhood physical abuse and father’s neglect/loss seem not to influence such a risk; negative symptoms were found positively correlated with childhood neglect but not with childhood abuse. Furthermore, findings presented in chapters three and five underlined that childhood adversities might impact differently on the developmental trajectories to psychotic symptoms. HPA-axis dysregulation seems to be mostly involved in the association between childhood adversities and positive symptoms while

cognitive impairments might be a pathway linking early events to negative symptoms, disorganization, excitement, and emotional distress.

Finally, chapter seven provides a general discussion.