Emerging Psychosis in Youth: What you need to know

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Outline

• What is psychosis and why is this important?
• What are the causes psychosis?
• Cannabis and youth
• What to pay attention to and how to support?
• What is early psychosis intervention?
• John’s story
What Is Psychosis and why is this important?
What Is Psychosis & Who Does It Affect?

• Video:
  ◦ [https://vimeo.com/74929581](https://vimeo.com/74929581)

• Taken from ‘becauseyourmindmatters.ca’
What Is Psychosis?

• A medical condition that involves
  ◦ Chemical changes in the brain messaging system
  ◦ Involves a distortion of reality
  ◦ Sudden or gradual onset
  ◦ Psychosis is a symptom, not a diagnosis
Who Does It Affect?

• Affects 3/100 people
  ◦ As common as type 2 diabetes
  ◦ Most common in young adults – 16-30 year olds
  ◦ Equally as common in males and females
    ◦ First episode for females in usually later than for males
Why is this important?

• **The sooner, the better!** The longer the duration of untreated psychosis, the higher the risk of:
  ◦ Derailing of life goals and functioning:
    ▪ Relationships
    ▪ School
    ▪ Work
  ◦ Hospitalization
  ◦ Suicide
  ◦ Substance abuse
  ◦ Disability

• Psychosis is treatable, and it is possible to recover
What Are the Causes of: Psychosis?
Biological Sources of Vulnerability

• Genetically based
  ◦ >60% of clients have no family history

• Biochemical abnormalities
  ◦ Dopamine appears to be significant

• Abnormal brain structure
  ◦ E.g., larger lateral ventricles, abnormalities in pattern of blood flow and electrical activity

• Environmental influences
  ◦ Viruses, prenatal or antenatal difficulties, immigration, trauma and urban living

• Street drug use
  ◦ Marijuana in particular has been associated with increased risk of schizophrenia
The Stress Vulnerability ‘Bucket’

https://vimeo.com/74930285

- Increased drug use
- Emotional Stress – peer pressure, relationship issues, conflicting cultural values and beliefs
- Environmental Stress – new situation financial problems, school demands, sharing accommodations
- Physical stress – eg, late nights, poor diet, lack of routine, illness, drug use
- Genetic Factors

Brabben & Turkington 2002
Street Drug Vulnerability

- Drugs such as amphetamine (speed) that increases dopamine levels can induce psychotic episodes.
- Marijuana in particular has been associated with increased risk of psychosis and schizophrenia.
Cannabis – We’re #1

• Canada highest rate of teen cannabis use in the developed world
  ◦ Canadian teens 2x more likely to use than adults
  ◦ Up to 10% of grade 12 students smoke pot every day
  ◦ 28% Canadian children aged 11-15 admit to using in past year
    ▪ 23% in US legalized states, 17% in Netherlands
• The most potent cannabis the world has ever known
  ◦ Up to 30x higher THC content than that smoked at Woodstock
  ◦ Shatter has up to 80% THC content
• Cannabis is the #1 drug that youth are seeking treatment for
• We’re only beginning to understand the effects of this
Cannabis – Impacts

• Heavy cannabis use in youth found to cause a number of cognitive impairments
  ◦ Attention/concentration, working memory, thinking speed, and memory

• Structural changes in brains of 18-25 year olds who smoked pot at least once /week
  ◦ Significant changes in the brain (thinning of cortex) among users 16 or younger vs non-users
Cannabis – So what?

- Loss of intelligence (lower IQ)
  - Evidence suggests it be permanent
- The brain needs to “work harder”
- Teens who smoke pot daily are 60% less likely to finish high school or university

- The earlier and heavier the use, the greater the negative impact
Cannabis and psychosis

- Cannabis use in adolescence significantly increases the likelihood of developing psychosis later in life
  - Doubles the risk
- Genetic studies have shown some people are more vulnerable than others
  - E.g. history of mental illness in family
- Cognitive difficulties are often worse for individuals with psychosis
Cannabis and psychosis

• Increased risk of relapse with use – even if they are in treatment

• Components:
  ◦ Risk of psychosis, euphoria and addiction linked to THC
  ◦ Cannabidiol
    ▪ Non-psychoactive, has shown promise for protective factors for substance induced psychosis, an anti-inflammatory, and an experimental treatment for cancer
Cannabis and other areas

- Mental health:
  - Increased risk for depression, anxiety, suicide and depression:

- Physical Health:
  - Lungs: Marijuana contains twice as much tar as cigarette smoke associated with increased risk of lung cancer, bronchitis and emphysema
  - Sex: Association of marijuana use with increased rates of sexual risk behavior and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

- Driving:
  - Marijuana impairs judgment, motor coordination and reaction time; impairs driving ability
How can you support students?
Campus Impact

- Discomfort around people - avoiding class (especially with group work)
- Difficulty concentrating in class
- Difficulty with reading comprehension
- Falls behind – effects on self esteem
- Low mood and lack of facial expression – turn people off
- Avoids events in dorm and on campus
- Decreased hygiene
- Lack of interest in many activities
- Spending more time in room alone
- Difficulty with sleep – affects concentration
- May initially present with expressed depression or anxiety
- If not living on campus – increased isolation, difficulty connecting with campus services
Psychosis Assessment Tips

- Psychosis rarely presents in “neat parcels”, and students rarely volunteer the information (Shiers, 2013)
- *Observation...observation...observation*
- Avoid overly textbook or medical language
- Open-ended, non-leading questions
- General description of experience
- Use language adolescents understand:
  - “uncomfortable”
  - “worries about safety”
  - “confused”/ “figure things out”
- General to specific
- Understand cultural context within which information is presented
Example Questions

• Have you felt that something odd might be going on that you cannot explain?
• Have you been feeling that people are talking about you, watching you or giving you a hard time for no reason?
• Have you been feeling, seeing or hearing things that don’t make sense to you?
• Have you felt especially important in some way, or that you have powers that let you do things which others cannot?
Supporting Students with Psychosis
Return to School

• Dispel myths and stigma – can be hard to return to school
• Remember psychosis is a brain disorder.
• Medications are a foundation of treatment; consider the side-effects of medications.
• Allow for difficulties in concentration and thinking.
• Provide academic accommodations as required.
• Support reintegration; campus life, back to classes, residence.
• Connect with the student’s EPI service providers (with consent)
• Maintain a positive, encouraging stance with students.
Accommodations - Examples

• Classroom
• Exams
• Assignments
• Financial assistance
• Scheduling/Timetable
• Academic
• Withdrawal from class accommodations
• Accessibility workshops
• Residential accommodations
• Provision of support services
• Assessment for provision of adaptive technology
What Should I Do?

• Take family, friends, residence don, and faculty concerns seriously
• If student (and/or family etc) is help-seeking:
  ◦ Check out local EPI service provider
  ◦ Connect with general practitioner
  ◦ Check out websites:
    ▪ [http://help4psychosis.ca/](http://help4psychosis.ca/)
    ▪ Kids Help-phone
    ▪ good2talk
    ▪ Local Distress Centres/Crisis-lines
• If student is not help-seeking:
  ◦ Keep the door open
  ◦ Check-in periodically with student
  ◦ Determine student’s present needs
  ◦ Provide resources to families
• If a threat to self or others:
  ◦ Follow emergency protocol as per your institutional policy
What is Early Psychosis Intervention? (EPI)
What can EPI offer?

• Early Psychosis Intervention programs founded on hope and recovery
  • Experts in early intervention in psychosis care that integrates holistic recovery oriented approaches
• Research suggests that EPI may improve outcomes, especially if duration of untreated illness is limited
  ◦ Decrease or eliminate hospital admissions.
  ◦ Help youth reclaim their lives.
  ◦ Maintain healthy lifestyle with chronic illness.
  ◦ Support families and caregivers.
  ◦ Eliminate need for long-term mental health services/psychiatry.
  ◦ Keep youth in their communities.
John’s Story
Remember:

• More than 1 in 4 families is touched by psychosis.
• Don’t dismiss change as adjustment to post-secondary school or substance misuse.
• Pay attention to family, friends, dons, & faculty etc. concerns.
• Psychosis is treatable!
• Early intervention is important and closely tied to recovery.
• Culturally competent care is important.
• Your responsibility does not end with referral.
  ◦ Your ongoing support and reintegration into school and campus living is essential part of recovery.