

COGNITIVE REHABILITATION IN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING AND PROCESSING SPEED IN SCHIZOPHRENIA AND FIRST-EPISEDE PSYCHOSIS

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Objectives: Processing speed and executive functioning are among the more impaired cognitive domains in schizophrenia, do not improve despite antipsychotic medication, and are associated with poor long-term functioning and quality of life. Cognitive remediation therapy for psychosis (REHACOP) try to improve cognitive deficits by teaching information processing strategies through guided mental exercises. The objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of cognitive remediation therapy (REHACOP), compared to other treatments, on processing speed and executive functioning difficulties.

Material and methods: Fifty-seven patients with DSM-IV schizophrenia and 29 with first-episode psychosis were randomly allocated into one of two groups: Cognitive rehabilitation group (REHACOP) or occupational therapy group. The REHACOP group received 3 months structured group rehabilitation sessions (3 per week) focused on tasks requiring attention, language, memory, speed, executive functioning and activities of daily living. All subjects underwent a neuropsychological assessment pre- and post treatment, which included tests for processing speed (Trail-Making Test-A, Digit Symbol, and Stroop-Color) and executive functioning (Stroop Word-Color part and interference)

Results: Repeated measures of MANOVA showed that the interaction term groupXtime was significant for the executive functioning ($F = 9.88$, $p < 0.01$) and processing speed ($F = 5.92$, $p < 0.05$) measures, suggesting that the REHACOP experimental group improved significantly when compared to the control group's performance on both domains .

Conclusions: Results suggest that REHACOP is effective to improve executive dysfunction and processing speed deficits in first-episode psychosis and schizophrenia compared to occupational therapy.

Keywords: Speed of processing, schizophrenia, psychosis, cognitive remediation.