General psychopathology is more important for executive functioning than diagnosis

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Abstract


Objective: Impaired executive functioning (EF) has often been reported in patients with major depression or schizophrenia. We hypothesize that the variance in EF is more affected by level of general psychopathology than by diagnosis.

Method: Forty-three patients with major depression and 47 with schizophrenia were included. EF was measured with Wisconsin Card Sorting Test, Stroop Colour Word Test, Paced Auditory Serial Addition Test, Digits Backwards and Controlled Oral Word Association Test. The level of general psychopathology was measured with Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale – Expanded and Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale, the General psychopathology subscale.

Results: The level of general psychopathology predicted more of the variance in EF than diagnosis. In multivariate analyses, the effect of general psychopathology on EF was more robust for adjustment for diagnosis than vice versa.

Conclusion: Future research on cognitive functioning in psychiatric patients should include level of general psychopathology to avoid overemphasising effects of diagnoses.