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DIFFICULTIES IN EMOTIONAL PROCESSING IN SCHIZOPHRENIA PATIENTS AS A FUNCTION OF INSUFFICIENT SEPARATION

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Objectives: The study focuses on the emotion processing deficits, which are typical for schizophrenia patients. Since abnormalities in this field can be seen in terms of insufficient individuation and failure in the separation process, a context of a close interpersonal relationship was introduced into the testing procedure.

Method: 30 schizophrenia patients were compared to a normal control sample (n=31) on their performance on the lexical decision task (LDT). Two-factor of experimental design had a form of 2 (possible values of the independent variable was healthy /ill) x 2 (experimental conditions). Participants completed the LDT twice -1) in a standard testing situation, and 2) in the relational context condition (the procedure followed the activation of the subjects' experience with his/her mother). In an e-prime computerized experiment the list of 91 words (names of positive and negative emotions, divided into 9 categories) and 27 nonwords were randomly subliminally exposed. It was hypothesised that in a relational context condition the emotional processing irregularities would be more distinct.

Results: Analyses confirmed the aforementioned theoretical assumptions. A significant condition/group interactional effect was found for anger (F=4,56, p=0,04) and joy (F=5,05 ,p=0,03). The accessibility of the emotion categories mentioned above was higher in the relational condition for patients whereas in the control sample no differences were observed.

Conclusions: The results were interpreted to provide an explanation of separation difficulties in the clinical sample, since simultaneous presence of opposing emotions hinders the process of decision making, including a decision to leave the family of origin.