

Psychosis — explained

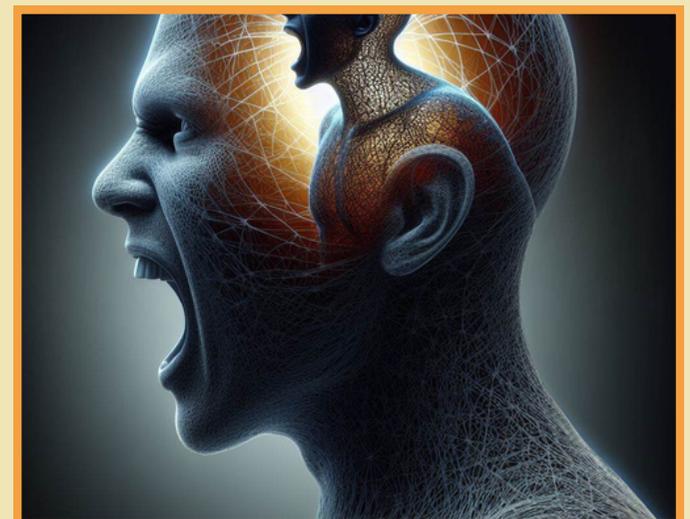


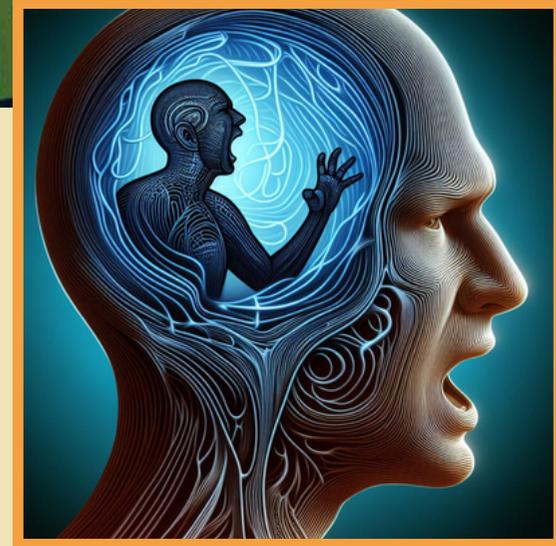
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As a psychiatrist practicing in South Africa, I encounter the profound impact of psychosis is on individuals and their loved ones. It's essential to provide clarity and understanding about this complex phenomenon, encompassing primary and secondary forms, as well as the diverse array of experiences it entails.

Psychosis can manifest as a primary feature of psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, delusional disorder, bipolar disorder and others. Additionally, it can arise as a secondary symptom due to medical conditions or substance use.

Individuals experiencing psychosis often encounter the so-called positive symptoms, which include extraordinary perceptions and beliefs that diverge from reality, as well as disorganised behaviour. Hallucinations involve sensory experiences in the absence of external stimuli, such as hearing voices or seeing things that aren't there. Delusions, on the other hand, are fixed false beliefs that persist despite evidence to the contrary. Examples of delusions include persecutory delusions, where individuals believe they are being persecuted or conspired against, or grandiose delusions, where they hold exaggerated beliefs about their own abilities or significance. Some delusions may be connected to each other in a systematic way in patients who are psychotic. Negative symptoms include poor motivation, a lack of interest in interacting with others by talking or socialising, a lack of emotional range of expression and a lack of interest in previously enjoyable activities.





The neurotransmitter dopamine plays a significant role in the development of psychotic symptoms. Elevated dopamine levels in certain brain regions are associated with hallucinations and delusions, providing insight into the neurobiological underpinnings of psychosis.

The relationship between cannabis use and psychosis is complex. While cannabis can induce acute psychotic symptoms in some individuals, particularly those predisposed to psychiatric disorders, the exact mechanisms are still being elucidated. Long-term cannabis use may also contribute to the development of psychosis, highlighting the importance of substance education and intervention.

Treatment of psychosis primarily involves medication, such as antipsychotic drugs, which help alleviate symptoms by modulating dopamine levels. However, these medications may carry side effects that require careful monitoring and management by healthcare professionals.

In addition to pharmacotherapy, support for individuals with psychosis is essential for restoring functioning and promoting recovery, as function is often quite adversely affected in multiple areas of life. This may involve the involvement of allied health services, including occupational therapists and social workers, to address practical and social needs and facilitate integration into the community.

In conclusion, psychosis is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a range of experiences and underlying causes. By understanding the complexities of psychosis and providing comprehensive support and treatment, we can work towards improving outcomes and quality of life for individuals affected by this condition.