RORSCHACH RESPONSE PATTERNS IN ADOLESCENT SCHIZOPHRENICS

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of Rorschach response patterns of 30 adolescent schizophrenics and an equal number of age and sex matched normal adolescents was undertaken. Two of the five Thiesen's patterns associated with schizophrenia, namely pattern C and D, occurred significantly more frequently in Rorschach responses of adolescent schizophrenics as compared to normal controls.

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KEY WORDS : Rorschach test; Schizophrenia

Introduction

The Rorschach 'form interpretation' test is the oldest and most widely used personality test available in clinical practice today, in adults as well as in children. Reports on Rorschach responses in children are rather sparse. The first to undertake a systematic investigation of children with the Rorschach test was Behn-Eschenburg who found that the test was eminently suitable for their psychological assessment [1]. Interpretation of children's records has been dealt with notably by Exner & Weiner [2] who recommended the use of Rorschach test for assessment of the personality of normal and schizophrenic children.

Thiesen [3] reported five patterns of Rorschach variables which he found to be associated with schizophrenic patients and extremely rare in normal subjects. While these patterns differentiated the two groups, it was stated that they must be regarded as tentative since the subjects on whom they were tested were the same from whom they were derived, and therefore needed to be confirmed on new groups. The present study was undertaken to assess the clinical utility of Thiesen's pattern of Rorschach responses in schizophrenic and normal adolescents.

Material and Methods

The patient group consisted of 30 adolescents attending the outpatient department of MH Meerut and 151 BH during the period 01 Jan 92 to Sept 94. All patients met the DSM III-R criteria for schizophrenia [4]. All patients showed active symptoms of their disease and were on treatment with antipsychotic drugs. None of the patients had received electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Duration of illness varied from 6 months to over 3 years. Patients who were not co-operative for the Rorschach test were excluded from the study. An equal number of age and sex matched normal adolescents without past or family history of psychiatric disorders formed the control group and also underwent the Rorschach test. The controls were also matched for their economics strata, education and whether they resided in an urban or rural area. Beck's method was followed in administering and scoring the test [5].

Thiesen's patterns were scored as :

Pattern A : The presence of 3 or more anatomy responses and 4 or more sex responses.

Pattern B : F+% of less than 69 and a Z score of less than 8.0

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Pattern C : No FC or M responses and an A% of less than 40.

Pattern D : F% less than 69, A% less than 40, and fewer than 5 popular responses.

Pattern E : One or more DW responses and no FC responses.

The patterns apply only to records where 10 or more responses have been given.

Statistical comparisons were made using the Chi square test and Fisher's "Exact test" [6].

Results

Mean age of the patients was 14.7 years (range 13-16 years) while mean age of the control group was 14.8 years (range 13-16 years).

The results of analysis of the Rorschach response patterns in the present study along with the results of Thiesen [3] and Taulbee and Sission [7] are presented in the Table. In the present study, only two of the five patterns associated with schizophrenia, namely pattern C and D, suggested by Thiesen were confirmed.

Discussion

Thiesen's pattern [3] were first developed by examining a combination of twenty major Rorschach variables in schizophrenic adults and normal controls. Three criteria were used to select these patterns. The first criterion was that the pattern should occur in more than ten percent of the patients records. The second criterion was that the pattern be present in less than two percent of the control group. The third criterion was that the incidence of

the pattern significantly differentiates the groups at the 0.01 level of significance. The presence of one or more patterns occurred in 48.3% of the schizophrenic patients and only 3.2% of the control subjects. The presence of one or more patterns in an individuals protocol was considered diagnostic of schizophrenia. The absence of any pattern, however, cannot be considered to indicate normality. Despite the initial promise of the system which correctly labelled nearly half of the schizophrenics cross-validating efforts gave mixed results.

One study [8] compared 42 hospitalised male schizophrenics with a normal control group. Only pattern D differentiated between patients and controls. The presence of one or more patterns identified only 16.7% of the schizophrenics. Another validation study [7], on the other hand, reported that patterns A, C, & D did differentiate between schizophrenics and normals. Although they confirmed the rarity of the patterns in normal subjects - only 4.5% of the normals showed one or more of the patterns - they had a very low yield of true positives, with only 27.4% of the schizophrenics demonstrating one or more of the Thiesen's patterns. Similarly, Khorana [9] in a study of 20 schizophrenic children and matched normal controls reported that 4 of Thiesen's patterns (A, B, C & D) were confirmed. However, in our study we found that only patterns C & D occurred significantly more frequently in schizophrenic adolescents. In the present study also, the false positive rate was low (6.7%) but the true positive rate was not very high (26.7%).

TABLE
Patterns of Rorschach variables associated with schizophrenia

Pattern	Thiesen, 1952		p	Taulbee & Sission, 1954		p	Present study		p
	Patients (n = 60)	Controls (n = 157)		Patients (n = 52)	Controls (n = 157)		Patients (n = 30)	Controls (n = 30)	
A	12	1	< 0.001	5	0	< 0.002	2	0	NS
B	11	2	< 0.001	3	2	NS	2	1	NS
C	6	0	< 0.001	5	2	< 0.02	6	1	< 0.05
D	9	1	< 0.001	5	3	< 0.04	7	1	< 0.02
E	7	1	< 0.001	0	0	—	0	0	—

The findings of our study together with the findings of the earlier studies leads us to the conclusion that Thiesen's patterns are a set of score combinations that occur relatively infrequently in the Rorschach records of both normal as well as schizophrenic subjects. They are certainly more likely to appear in the records of schizophrenic than in normal groups. However, because of their infrequency they have limited clinical diagnostic utility.

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