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The Attention Network Test as a potential endophenotype for schizophrenia

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Currently, schizophrenia research gains a new focus on identification of endophenotypes which presumably are closer related to the neurobiological basis of the disease than the heterogenous phenotypes as defined by clinical diagnostic criteria. Identifying and further investigating these endophenotypes in the field of neurocognition is promising since schizophrenia is also conceptualised as a mainly neurocognitive disorder with especially attentional functions being impaired. The authors investigate the Attention Network Test (ANT) as a potential neurocognitive endophenotype of schizophrenia. When introducing this neuropsychological task, Posner and co-workers proposed that the neuroanatomical substrates of attention form a specific system of cortical and subcortical areas. This attentional system can be further broken down into three networks carrying out alerting, orienting of attention, and executive control. 150 schizophrenic patients and 150 healthy controls matched for gender, age, and education will be tested with the ANT and other established neuropsychological tests like the Continuous Performance Test (CPT) and the Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (WCST) in a longitudinal design. By subsequent genotyping the association of deficits of attentional network functions with genetic polymorphisms according to the neurodevelopmental model of schizophrenia spectrum disorders will be examined to possibly identify neurocognitive endophenotypes of schizophrenia. Here, we present preliminary results of behavioural data of schizophrenic patients and healthy controls.