

AQA Psychology A-Level

Option 2: Schizophrenia

Example Essay

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Outline and evaluate issues with the diagnosis of schizophrenia. (16 MARKS)

The diagnosis of schizophrenia involves identifying symptoms using classification systems such as the DSM. However, the accuracy of diagnosis may be affected by several issues, including culture bias, gender bias, co-morbidity and symptom overlap.

One issue is culture bias. Diagnostic criteria were largely developed in Western countries and may not be appropriate for individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Luhrmann et al. (2015) interviewed people diagnosed with schizophrenia in Ghana, India and the USA and found cultural differences in the experience of auditory hallucinations. While American participants often described the voices as hostile and distressing, participants from Ghana and India were more likely to view them positively. This suggests that symptoms may be interpreted differently across cultures, meaning clinicians could reach inaccurate diagnoses when using Western diagnostic criteria. **AO1**

Another issue is gender bias. Traditionally, diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia were based on predominantly male samples, which may lead clinicians to overlook differences in female presentations of the disorder. As a result, women may sometimes be underdiagnosed or misdiagnosed because their symptoms are expressed differently from those typically associated with schizophrenia. **AO1**

A further issue is co-morbidity, which occurs when a person experiences schizophrenia alongside another disorder. Many individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia also suffer from conditions such as depression or substance misuse. This makes diagnosis difficult because clinicians may struggle to determine which disorder is responsible for particular symptoms. **AO1**

Closely linked to co-morbidity is symptom overlap. Schizophrenia shares several symptoms with other mental disorders. For example, delusions can occur in bipolar disorder, while avolition and anhedonia are also common symptoms of depression. As a result, clinicians may find it difficult to distinguish schizophrenia from other disorders. **AO1**

Research supports the existence of culture bias in diagnosis. Luhrmann et al. (2015) found that individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia in Ghana and India often reported hearing voices that were more positive and less distressing than those reported by participants in the USA. This suggests that cultural factors influence how symptoms are experienced and interpreted, meaning Western diagnostic criteria may not always be culturally valid. **AO3**



Evidence for gender bias comes from Loring and Powell (1988), who found that psychiatrists were more likely to diagnose schizophrenia when the patient in a case study was described as male rather than female. This suggests that clinician expectations and gender stereotypes may influence diagnostic decisions. **AO3**

Research also supports concerns regarding co-morbidity and symptom overlap. Buckley et al. (2009) estimated that 50% of schizophrenia patients have co-morbid depression, 47% have substance abuse disorders, and 29% have PTSD. This suggests that symptoms of schizophrenia are often difficult to separate from those of other disorders, making accurate diagnosis challenging. Consequently, co-morbidity and symptom overlap may lead to individuals receiving incorrect diagnoses or multiple diagnoses, reducing the accuracy of schizophrenia diagnosis. **AO3**

A significant issue with schizophrenia diagnosis is that inaccurate diagnoses can have serious consequences for the individual. Because schizophrenia shares symptoms with disorders such as depression and bipolar disorder, and because cultural and gender biases may affect clinical judgement, some individuals may be diagnosed incorrectly. An incorrect diagnosis may result in a patient receiving inappropriate treatment, such as antipsychotic medication when another treatment would be more effective. As antipsychotic drugs can produce unpleasant side effects, misdiagnosis may negatively affect a person's quality of life. Furthermore, being labelled as schizophrenic can lead to stigma and discrimination, which may worsen psychological wellbeing. Therefore, issues such as symptom overlap, co-morbidity, culture bias and gender bias are important because they can reduce the accuracy of diagnosis and lead to harmful consequences for patients. **AO3**

Teacher's Comment:

Excellent essay demonstrating a thorough understanding of the issues surrounding the diagnosis of schizophrenia. The four key issues (culture bias, gender bias, co-morbidity and symptom overlap) are clearly explained and well organised, creating a logical line of argument throughout. There is a strong balance between AO1 and AO3, with relevant research evidence effectively used to support each evaluative point. The discussion moves beyond simple description by considering the implications of inaccurate diagnosis for patients, including the impact on treatment and wellbeing.

Level 4 (13-16 marks)

