Associations between daily living skills, cognition, and real-world functioning across stages of schizophrenia; a study with the Schizophrenia Cognition Rating Scale Japanese version

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1. Introduction

Cognitive function is impaired in most patients with schizophrenia; multiple cognitive domains are affected, for example, verbal learning memory, attention, working memory, executive functions, motor speed. (Heinrichs and Zakzannis, 1998; Saykin et al., 1991). The magnitude of cognitive impairment is suggested to predict daily-living abilities and real world functioning to a greater extent than do positive symptoms (Green et al., 2000). Therefore, it is desirable to use valid and feasible measures of cognition and daily living skills to facilitate the development of novel therapies and improve the quality of clinical practice.

Performance-based measures are traditionally used to assess cognitive impairments in schizophrenia (Chapman and Chapman, 1973). For example, the Brief Assessment of Cognition in Schizophrenia (BACS) (Keefe et al., 2004) and the MATRICS Consensus Cognitive Battery (MCCB) (Marder and Fenton, 2004; Nuechterlein et al., 2004) represent such measures. On the other hand, it is suggested that clinicians may not be able to sufficiently evaluate changes of daily living capacity by performance-based measures alone (Buchanan et al., 2005). This argument may be related to several reasons, including poor observance by agitated subjects of procedures for completing cognitive tasks, practice effect, and so on. Interview-based assessments, on the other hand, may be deprived of these disadvantages associated with performance-based measures.

The Schizophrenia Cognition Rating Scale (SCoRS) was one of the assessment tools recommended by the MATRICS initiative to evaluate functional capacity of patients. Several studies report the validity and...
reliability of SCoRS in other countries (Chia et al., 2010; Green et al., 2011; Harvey et al., 2011; Kaneda et al., 2011; Keefe et al., 2015; Keefe et al., 2006; Vita et al., 2013). The SCoRS was developed to measure cognitive
functions through questions about cognitions related to daily life
events (Keefe et al., 2006). It consists of 20 items, for example, “Remem-
bering names of people you know or meet?”, “Handling changes in your
daily routine?”, “Concentrating well enough to read a newspaper or a
book?”. Each item is rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 with higher
scores reflecting a greater degree of impairment. Every item is given an-
chor points based on the degree of their daily problems.

In spite of previous studies reporting its utility as a functional capac-
ity measure, discussed above, there is little information on whether the
SCoRS would provide a valid assessment tool also in subjects with first
or recent onset schizophrenia, or prodromal state of the illness. In
view of the need for early intervention into cognitive deficits of schizo-
phrenia, we considered it is important to determine whether the SCoRS
would elicit sufficient validity in patients with various stages of the
illness.

Therefore, the purposes of this paper were; (1) to examine the struc-
ture of the SCoRS, (2) to determine its relationships with cognitive func-
tion, as measured by neuropsychological assessment, and social func-
tion (interview-based), and (3) to determine if such associations depend on
the stage of schizophrenia.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Subjects

We collected the data from 3 hospitals (275 from Toyama University
Hospital, 17 from Tokyo University Hospital and 2 from Kamiichi Gener-
al Hospital) from 2007 to 2016. Participants were in- or outpatients who
had psychotic symptoms. Diagnoses were made according to ICD-10 by
well experienced psychiatrists. Most of them (N = 173) met the criteria
of schizophrenia (F20). First episode schizophrenia (FES, n = 38, male/
female = 20/18; mean [SD] age = 26.4 [8.2] years) was defined if dura-
tion of illness was <1 year. The rest of patients with duration of illness
≥ 1 year was categorized as chronic schizophrenia (CS, n = 135, male/fem-
ale = 77/58; mean [SD] age = 31.1 [8.5] years).

Diagnosis of at risk mental state (ARMS) was based on the Compre-
hensive Assessment of at risk mental state (CAARMS) by a method as
we conducted in past studies (Higuchi et al., 2014; Higuchi et al.,
2013) (n = 102, male/female = 64/38; mean [SD] age = 19.4 [3.9]
years). Others (OTHERS, n = 19, male/female = 11/8; mean [SD]
age = 26.1 [10.3] years) consisted of; schizotypal disorder (F21, n = 3),
delusional disorder (F22, n = 2), acute and transient psychotic disor-
der (F23, n = 4), neurosis (F4, n = 9), and pervasive developmental dis-
orders (F8, n = 1). None had a lifetime history of serious head trauma,
neuropsychological illness, serious medical or surgical illness, substance
abuse and intellectual impairment (IQ < 70). IQ was estimated by using the
Japanese Adult Reading Test (JART) (Matsuoka et al., 2006).

This study was performed in accordance with the Declaration of Hel-
sinki and was approved by the ethical committee on each institute.
Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects. If they were<br>20 years old, informed consent was also obtained from their family.

2.2. Clinical and neuropsychological assessments

The SCoRS was performed according to the procedure by Keefe et al.,
2006. It consists of 20 questionnaires, and each item is rated on a scale
ranging from 1 to 4 with higher scores reflecting a greater degree of im-
pairment. Two sources of information were used: an interview with a
patient (SCoRS for patient) and an interview with caregiver(s) (SCoRS
for caregiver). Caregivers included family members (mother 74.4%, fa-
ther 10.5%, parents 3.1%, partner 6.2%, grandparents 2.3% and sibling
2.3%) or medical staff (0.8%). Raters (interviewers) generated a “Global
Rating Score” reflecting overall impairment by incorporating all
information, including ratings obtained from the patient and caregiver.
The Global Rating Score was scored from 1 to 10, with higher ratings in-
dicating severe impairment.

Neuropsychological performance, measured by the Japanese version
of the BACS (Kaneda et al., 2007), was evaluated by experienced psychi-
atrists or psychologists. It uses the following assessments in the respec-
tive targeted domains: list learning (verbal memory), digit sequencing
task (working memory), token motor task (motor function), category
fluency and letter fluency (verbal fluency), symbol coding (attention and
processing speed), and the Tower of London test (executive func-
tion) (Keefe et al., 2004). Composite scores were calculated based on
the average z-score of each item (Kaneda et al., 2013).

Severity of psychotic symptoms was determined by the Positive and
Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS) (Kay et al., 1992). It is a rating scale used to subjectively
assess the social and occupational functioning due to medical condi-
tions. This scale was first presented by Goldman et al. (1992) in the paper ‘Re-
vising Axis V for DSM-IV: A review of measures of social functioning’
and later included in the DSM-IV, section ‘Criteria Sets and Axes Provid-
ed for Further Study’. The scale is based on a continuum of functioning,
ranging from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating better functioning
(Samara et al., 2014). Because the start of ratings with the SOFAS was
delayed, there are less data from this scale compared with those from
the rest of clinical measures.

Raters (psychiatrist, psychologist) were not informed of subjects’
profiles and diagnosis.

2.3. Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for
Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 (SPSS Japan Inc., Tokyo, Japan). Group
differences for demographic variables, SCoRS, SOFAS and BACS were ex-
amined using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). Difference be-
tween male and female were calculated by Fisher’s exact test.
Correlational analysis was performed by Pearson’s rank correlation
test. We also conducted factor analysis to examine the factor structure
of obtained data. Cronbach’s alpha was used to indicate reliability. Signi-
ficance was considered when the p-value was <0.05.

3. Results

3.1. Characteristics of patients

Demographic data of patients are shown on Table 1. Sex ratio did not
differ significantly among groups. ARMS patients were younger than
other groups. ARMS and OTHERS groups received less dose antipsycho-
drugs compared to schizophrenia patients. Schizophrenia patients re-
ceived larger dose antipsychotics than did ARMS and OTHERS groups.
JART scores for FES group were slightly lower than those for other
groups. Severity of psychotic symptoms, as measured by the Positive
and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS), did not significantly differ be-
tween 4 groups.

3.2. Factor analysis

According to Keefe et al. (2015), we performed factor analysis to in-
vestigate the construction of the SCoRS Japanese version. Exploratory
factor analysis of our dataset (N = 294) indicated that a single factor
was the best structure, consistent with Keefe et al. (2015) using the
original English version. Cronbach’s alpha in this study was 0.917.

3.3. SCoRS

SCoRS Global Rating scores (range 1–10) are shown on Table 2. They
greatly varied according to diagnosis. Scores of chronic schizophrenia
patients were higher than those of other diagnosis groups, suggesting worse daily functioning. Ratings for ARMS and OTHERS groups were not so high unlike those for patients with schizophrenia.

3.4. Relationship between SCoRS and SOFAS scores

We could obtain SOFAS data from 39 ARMS, 15 FES, 60 CS and 4 OTHERS patients. There was no significant difference in SOFAS scores between four groups. The relationships between ratings on the SOFAS and SCoRS are shown on Fig. 1. ARMS and CS groups, as well as entire patients, showed significant correlations between the two measures.

3.5. Relationship between SCoRS and BACS

Composite z-scores of the BACS are shown on Table 2. They remarkably varied according to diagnosis. Thus, patients with FES showed the worst z-score (−1.41), while performances by ARMS and OTHERS groups were less affected.

We also examined the correlations of SCoRS Global Rating scores with BACS composite z-scores. As shown in Fig. 2, they were significantly correlated across diagnoses.

4. Discussion

The SCoRS was developed to measure current cognitive status and changes related to daily activity skills in patients with schizophrenia. The large number of subjects (n = 294), recruited from three institutions, indicates reliability of this study. Specifically, we included subjects with ARMS for evaluation, in addition to patients with established schizophrenia. Results from exploratory factor analysis suggest that a single factor was the best structure the SCoRS Japanese version, consistent with the case for the English version (Keefe et al., 2015). Cronbach’s alpha in this study is equivalent to that for the English version (Keefe et al., 2015).

We found validity of the SCoRS as a measure of cognition linked to daily activity skills. To our knowledge, this study is the first to investigate the relationship between cognition close to real-world activities and social function in subjects with ARMS, FES, and CS, both separately and collectively.

It is important to determine appropriate tools for evaluating functional outcome for each of the clinical stages of psychosis. The positive correlation between scores on the SOFAS and SCoRS in ARMS subjects indicates the validity of the latter scale in evaluating functional status in people vulnerable to developing psychiatric conditions. The lack of such relationship in patients with FES or OTHERS may be due to the small sample numbers for which SOFAS data were available. Another reason for the absence of significant correlation in OTHERS group may be the heterogeneity of subjects. In fact, this group consisted of several psychotic conditions, e.g. delusional disorder, acute and transient psychotic disorders, and so on. Further study is warranted to see the validity of SCoRS in individual schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.

The implication that SCoRS effectively evaluates functional outcome is consistent with previous studies (Chia et al., 2010; Keefe et al., 2006; Vita et al., 2013) using the Global Assessment Functioning (GAF) (Lehman, 1983), WHO-quality of life scale (The WHOQOL group, 1998), Health and the Nation Outcome Scale (HoNOS) (Wing et al., 1998), Independent Living Skills Inventory (ILSI) (Menditto et al., 1999), and University of California Performance-based Skills Assessment (UPSA) (Patterson et al., 2001) as a comparative measure. Results of the current study add to the concept that the SCoRS provides a valid measure of functional outcome in schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, including high-risk states.

We observed a strong correlation between SCoRS Global Rating Score (interview-based measure) and BACS composite score (performance-based measure) for the entire patients, as well as patients with schizophrenia (both FES and CS) and subjects with ARMS. These results suggest the SCoRS is able to predict cognitive performance in schizophrenia-spectrum patients across stages. Previous studies report performance on the BACS (Chia et al., 2010; Kaneda et al., 2011; Keefe et al., 2006) or Measurement and Treatment Research to Improve Cognition in Schizophrenia Consensus Cognitive Battery (MCCB) (Keefe et al., 2015) was significantly correlated with ratings with the SCoRS. Specifically, Vita et al. (2013) found correlations between the interview’s Global Rating Score on the SCoRS vs. processing speed, working memory and executive function (Vita et al., 2013). Overall, the results obtained in this study add to the concept that the SCoRS provides a valid measure of functional outcome in schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, including high-risk states.

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Some issues related to the results of the SCoRS and BACS are worth mentioning. First, as shown in Table 2, FES patients performed worse on the BACS than did ARMS subjects. On the other hand, the difference in

Table 2

Comparisons of SCoRS, BACS and SOFAS data.

|                      | All subjects | ARMS       | First episode schizophrenia | Chronic schizophrenia | Other psychiatric illnesses | ANOVA |
|----------------------|--------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------|
| SCoRS Global Rating Score | 4.00(1.92)   | 3.66(1.90) | 3.81(1.8)                   | 4.38(1.93)             | 3.45(1.58)                  | F(3, 293) = 4.82, p = 0.003** |
| SOFAS                | 52.6(13.1)   | 53.3(8.6)  | 44.4(11.7)                  | 54.9(14.4)             | 42.5(16.8)                  | F(3, 117) = 2.05, p = 0.11   |
| BACS composite score (z-score) | -0.90(0.99) | -0.48(0.94) | -1.41(0.79)                 | -1.10(0.97)            | -0.80(0.81)                 | F(3, 293) = 13.36, p = 0.001**|

ARMS; at-risk mental state, SCoRS; Schizophrenia Cognition Rating Scale, SOFAS; Social and Occupational Functioning Assessment Scale, BACS; Brief Assessment of Cognition in Schizophrenia.

Average (SD), *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.
the ratings on the SCoRS between the two groups was not significant. It might reflect the way that the two groups express concerns about their cognitive problems, although ratings on the SCInventory rely mainly on objective assessment by raters. Second, there were slight differences in BACS and SCInventory scores between FES and CS in an opposite way, both of which did not reach significant level. The reason why the discrepancy occurred is not clear, but may be related to the natures of cognitive functions measured by BACS and SCInventory. It is possible that CS patients generally received pharmacological and psychosocial treatments for a long time, which may be particularly advantageous to performance on the BACS.

The limitations of this study include the relatively small number of patients for whom SOFAS data were available. Also, more definite conclusions could have been obtained with a larger number of FES and OTHERS subjects.

In conclusion, the results of this study indicate strong correlations between SCInventory ratings vs. SOFAS and BACS scores. These observations suggest the ability of the SCInventory to measure cognition associated with daily living skills in various stages of schizophrenia and related disorders.

Role of funding source

Study sponsors played no role in study design; data collection, analysis, or interpretation; manuscript preparation or decision to submit the paper for publication.

Contributors

Drs. Higuchi and Sumiyoshi conceptualized and designed the study. Drs. Sumiyoshi, organized the collaborative team of institutions. Dr. Higuchi conducted the analysis, interpreted the data and prepare the initial draft. Dr. Sumiyoshi revised the draft critically for important intellectual contents. Drs. Suzuki, Kasai, Seo, Suga and Takahashi assisted with data collection. Drs. Seo, Nishiyama and Komori executed psychological tests. All authors contributed to and have approved the final manuscript.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (No. 16K10205, 26461739, 26461761, P16H06395, 16H06399 and 16K21720) from the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science, and Intramural Research Grant (27-1) for Neurological and Psychiatric Disorders of NCNP. This study was also supported in part by the Brain Mapping by Integrated Neurotechnologies for Disease Studies (Brain/MINDS) from Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development, AMED (16dm0207004h0003). We would to thank Akihito Okabe (Kamiichi General Hospital) for recruitment of patients. Special thanks to Yumiko Nishikawa, Daiki Sasabayashi and Mihoko Nakamura (Department of Neuropsychiatry, University of Toyama) for their assistant

Fig. 1. Scatterplots and least squares regression lines depicting the relationship between SCInventory Global Rating Score (interviewer) and SOFAS score. ARMS; at-risk mental state, FES; first episode schizophrenia, CS; chronic schizophrenia, OTHERS; other psychiatric disorders with psychosis.
Fig. 2. Scatterplots and least squares regression lines depicting the relationship between SCoRS Global Rating Score (interviewer) and BACS composite z-score. ARMS; at-risk mental state, FES; first episode schizophrenia, CS; chronic schizophrenia, OTHERS; other psychiatric disorders with psychosis.

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