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## HIGH PREVALENCE OF HUMAN HERPESVIRUS 8 IN A TUNISIAN SAMPLE OF SCHIZOPHRENIC PATIENTS

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**Background:** The prevalence of Human Herpesvirus 8 (HHV8) has never been investigated in schizophrenic patients.

**Objective:** This study aimed to assess the prevalence of HHV8 serum antibodies in schizophrenic patients and in healthy controls.

**Methods:** During a 24 months period, we consecutively enrolled 108 patients meeting DSM-IV criteria of schizophrenia, in psychiatry department of Sousse Farhat Hached hospital (Tunisia). We also enrolled 108 controls among consenting blood donors. They were age and sex matched and free from any psychotic disorder as screened by MINI-Plus.

Psychopathology and severity were measured using PANSS, BPRS, SANS, SAPS and CGI. Sera samples were obtained from patients and controls and then analyzed for the presence of anti-HHV8 antibodies (anti-HHV8) using a sensitive indirect immunofluorescence assay to latent and lytic HHV8 antigens.

**Results:** A significantly higher prevalence of anti-HHV8 in schizophrenic patients than in healthy controls was found (28.7% vs. 14.8%,  $p=0.01$ ). Marital status, educational level, professional activity, poverty, promiscuity, number of children, sexual behavior or presence of risk factors of blood transmission were not associated with HHV8 prevalence ( $p>0.05$ ).

However, among schizophrenic patients, HHV8 prevalence was statically associated with positive symptoms (SAPS score) ( $p=0.01$ ) and the severity of illness (CGI score) ( $p=0.02$ ).

**Conclusion:** To our knowledge, this would be the first report of high HHV8 prevalence in schizophrenic patients, which support the role of this virus in the pathogenesis of schizophrenia. To go on further with this hypothesis, more investigations of HHV8 in schizophrenia are needed.