

## S20-05

### THE CRITICAL PERIOD

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**Aim:** Evidence from long-term follow-up studies of schizophrenia and from the 'new epidemiology' of psychoses has forced us to rewrite the textbooks and challenge accepted wisdom. In this paper I aim to review the concept of my 'Critical Period' in the long-term trajectory of schizophrenia.

**Method:** I will review long-term follow-up studies of first episode psychosis.

**Results:** Studies suggest that:

- a. the course of the psychoses is very variable;
- b. much of this variability is laid down during the 'prodromal' and first 3 - 5 years following the first episode;
- c. the 'disability' plateaus quickly, much of it occurring before the positive symptoms develop (the 'symptom-disability gap') but
- d. the psychosocial and ecological risk factors that have now been uncovered, suggest a more protean, malleable process in the development of psychosis, as witnessed, for example by the considerable number of 'at risk' individuals with low-level, but disabling psychotic symptoms, who escape psychosis (the misnomer of the 'false positive').

**Conclusion:** This picture presents a fresh take on my concept of the 'critical period' with implications for public health and prevention.