

in this disorder. A gap in the literature concerning early stages of the disorder is identified.

Conclusions: The observed emotional features of BPD have important negative consequences for daily life functioning. Studies of social cognition in BPD can help to better identify the key factors underpinning these emotional disturbances in BPD. More research is needed, however, in the early stages of the disorder, prior to the effects of chronic stress and recurrent mental state pathology associated with adult forms of BPD, to better evaluate the primacy and core nature of social cognition impairments in BPD.

06-03

What is the evidence that social cognition deficits in schizophrenia represent a vulnerability marker?

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Background: Patients with schizophrenia are observed to have marked deficits across several social cognition domains including theory of mind (TOM), social perception and emotion processing. These deficits are observed at illness onset (TOM, Polowsky et al. 2002) and across illness phase (TOM, Janssen et al. 2003), and differ in presentation from those observed in other diagnostic groups (eg depression, Garety & Freeman 1999; affective disorder, Loughland et al. 2002), suggesting they may represent a trait marker for the disorder. The aim of this paper was to review current findings with regard to social cognition deficits in schizophrenia and to examine the evidence that these deficits may represent a vulnerability marker.

Method: A narrative review of the research literature was undertaken and supplemented with the current research findings of the author that investigate emotion-processing deficits in people with schizophrenia, first-degree relatives, affective disorder and healthy non-psychiatric controls.

Results: Findings from TOM, social context and emotion processing provide evidence that healthy first-degree relatives and other at-risk groups show similar, but less severe, social cognition deficits to those observed in schizophrenia (Cornblatt & Keilp 1994; Frenkel et al. 1995; Toomey et al. 1999; Loughland et al. 2004).

Conclusions: The results support the notion of a social cognition vulnerability marker for schizophrenia disorder. Differential patterns of performance on social cognition tasks may help detect those potentially

at risk of developing schizophrenia and provide a potential method for developing endophenotypes for examining diagnostic, genetic and therapeutic issues in schizophrenia.

06-04

Social cognition in nonforensic psychopathy: further evidence for a dissociation between intact 'theory of mind' and impaired emotion processing

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Background: Psychopathy is a developmental disorder characterized by antisocial behaviour identified in forensic settings using the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised (PCL-R; Hare 1991). Forensic psychopaths, like autistic individuals, show social cognition abnormalities linked to amygdala dysfunction (eg impaired recognition of negative affect). These developmental disorders differ, however, with respect to theory of mind (ToM); while psychopaths are adept at imputing others' causal mental states (intentions/beliefs), ToM deficits characterize autism. In line with recent research that has used nonforensic groups to further examine the dissociation of sociocognitive skills in psychopathy, this study investigated conscious and preconscious processing of facial affect, ToM and empathy in a university sample assessed for psychopathic traits using the Self Report Psychopathy Scale III (SRP-III; Paulhus et al. in press), an instrument styled on the PCL-R.

Method: About 416 university students completed the SRP-III. Sixty individuals with high (>75 percentile), medium (40–60 percentile) and low (<25 percentile) psychopathic tendencies (20 per group) were then called back for experimental testing. Tasks assessed facial affect recognition, affective priming (using subliminally presented facial expressions) and ToM. The Emotional Empathy Questionnaire (Mehrabian & Epstein 1972) was also administered.

Results: While groups did not differ in their ToM abilities, psychopathic tendencies were associated with poor recognition of negative affect (eg disgust), an absence of affective priming and reduced empathy.

Conclusions: Nonforensic and forensic psychopaths appear alike; these individuals know how others