

Facial and verbal affect recognition in schizophrenia: specific deficits in facial affect recognition

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Disturbances in the processing of emotional material are a hallmark of schizophrenia. These problems in emotional processing may contribute to social and occupational dysfunction. In the present study, we tested the hypothesis whether schizophrenia patients show emotional processing deficits, if this deficit is emotion-specific and if this deficit is limited to facial affect recognition or whether biases are also present in verbal material. 37 patients with schizophrenia were compared with 39 healthy matched control subjects on facial and verbal emotional processing tasks. There were no differences in age, sex, years of education and a verbal measure of intelligence. Although patients with schizophrenia did not differ from healthy control participants on non-emotional face recognition, patients with schizophrenia made more errors in recognizing fear on a degraded facial affect recognition task, $F=28.45$, $p<0.000$. In contrast, schizophrenic patients were better in recognizing anger in degraded faces compared to controls, $F=4.43$, $p=0.04$. No differences between patients and control participants were observed in the processing of emotional verbal material. We conclude that patients with schizophrenia demonstrate a specific threat-related bias in explicit facial affect processing only and not in the incidental, verbal processing of affective material.

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