

IMPAIRMENT OF GAZE-INDUCED SPATIAL CODING IN PATIENTS WITH RECENT-ONSET SCHIZOPHRENIA

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Introduction: Patients with schizophrenia (SC) show deficits in the processing of social cues. Little is known whether this deficit in social cognition also influences non-social, “cold”, cognition. Interactions between these domains can be tested with a Simon task using social stimuli (gaze direction).

Aim: We investigated whether the Simon effect, the slowing of reaction times produced by stimulus incongruities in the spatial domain, differs in patients with schizophrenia and healthy controls as a function of the social nature of the cues.

Participants: Thirty-five recent-onset, male SC and 30 male HC participated in the study.

Methods: We used the gaze-direction Simon effect paradigm described by Zorzi et al.^[1], in which the Simon effect is generated by a schematic drawing of human eyes (social cues) or rectangles (non-social cues).

Results: Overall SC had longer reaction times. Furthermore, groups showed a Simon effect in both tasks. While in HC the Simon effect was stronger in the eye-like compared to the rectangle condition, for SC the Simon effect was less strong in the eye-like compared to the rectangle condition. Current psychopathology or treatment with antipsychotics did not influence results.

Discussion: Although the Simon effect is present in SC, the influence of social cues was much reduced in the patient group.

Conclusion: The present study supports earlier findings of altered processing of social cues in SC. Crucially; we demonstrated that this deficit in social cueing affects early attentional processes in schizophrenia.

1.Zorzi M, et al.. *PsychonBullRev* 2003;10:423-429.