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SOCIAL COGNITION AND SCHIZOPHRENIA: NEW FRONTIERS IN INTERPRETING OTHER'S MIND IN SUBJECTS AFFECTED BY SCHIZOPHRENIA

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Aims: Research in social cognition has shown that subjects affected by schizophrenia are impaired in understanding other people mental state named "Theory of Mind" and in many other social cognition tasks. It is possible to apply qualitative analysis to examine their errors in different social cognition tasks. Typically they fail in perspective taking, in adherence to the context and in emotional contagion (the tendency to express and feel emotions that are similar to and influenced by those of others). The aim of our study was to examine the different answers of schizophrenic subjects in social cognition tasks and apply a model of path analysis on their errors in these tasks.

Method: We assessed multiple dimension of social cognition in 210 schizophrenic patients and 200 healthy controls, matched for age and gender, with emotion recognition task, false beliefs task and social knowledge task. To control for modulating effects of symptoms and cognitive deficits, clinical scales and a neuropsychological test battery were employed. All patients were recruited from the psychiatric service San Salvatore Hospital in L'Aquila (Italy).

Results: Schizophrenic patients showed significantly lower scores, errors in perspective taking ($p < 0.001$), in emotional contagion ($p = 0.001$) and adherence to the context ($p = 0.001$). Results in the domains of perspective taking and emotion contagion were not explained by symptoms, duration of illness or neurocognition deficits.

Conclusion: Our findings are in line with previous reports on theory of mind deficits in schizophrenia, as measured by a variety of paradigms, and may suggest deficits in all social cognition domains.