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POSITIVE AND USEFUL AUDITORY VOCAL HALLUCINATIONS: PREVALENCE, CHARACTERISTICS, ATTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TREATMENT

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Objective: Patients who seek treatment often suffer from negative auditory vocal hallucinations ('voices'). However, some of these patients also report positive or useful voices, that they wish to preserve. When this wish is neglected by their therapist, this may lead to rejection of therapy or low compliance. This study describes prevalence, characteristics, course of and attributions to these voices in psychotic and non-psychotic patients.

Method: One hundred and thirty one patients of a Voices Clinic and 65 members of the Dutch Resonance Foundation were assessed with the Positive and Useful Voices Inquiry. Data were analyzed using Pearson's chi-square, one-way ANOVA, Student's T-test and Cronbach's alpha statistics.

Results: First voices are most often reported as negative. The lifetime prevalence of positive voices ranged from 50 to 75%, useful voices were reported by 40 to 60% of respondents, with higher prevalences among the members of the Resonance Foundation. Positive voices occur more among non-psychotic patients. No significant association was found between voice characteristics and diagnosis. Attributions of protective power to positive voices has the strongest association with positive experience. Useful voices that are advising are experienced as most useful. Over 30% of respondents want to keep their positive and/or useful hallucinations. This wish is significantly associated with perceived control over the voices.

Conclusions: The prevalence of positive and useful voices is considerable and therefore clinically relevant. A substantial part of patients want to preserve these voices.