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Deficit of Action Awareness in Psychosis: a Practical Cognitive Experimental Paradigm for Assessing Passivity and Hallucinatory Psychotic Symptoms

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Background

The current study tries to understand the psychopathology of passivity and hallucinatory symptoms, which are symptoms sometimes signified by their conscious experience of attaching internally generated content to external source. This study focuses on the postulated deficit of patients with these symptoms, and suggests that the specific deficit in action awareness is psychopathologically important and wishes to develop a simple task for clinical assessment.

Method

19 healthy control, 19 psychotic patients control and 19 psychotic patients with the relevant symptoms were recruited in the study. Their clinical, social, cognitive, side-effect and motor condition were assessed, and the main experiment task was conducted. In the task, the participants were asked to replicate their own actions in conditions: (1) being passively moved; (2) moving voluntarily and (3) being instructed. The inaccuracy of the replication was recorded, and 1 supplementary experiment was conducted for confounders.

Result

After control the confounding factors, such as the cognitive deficit, result from the main and supplementary experiments suggested that patients with passivity experience and hallucinatory symptoms as a group were having deficit in the awareness of their own actions, such that they showed no improvement when acting voluntary compared to when being passively moved; while this improvement were found in other groups. Moreover, this failure in showing improvement was due to their problems in obtaining information about their own actions.

Conclusion

The simple paradigm developed demonstrated that patients with the relevant psychotic symptoms were closely related to a specific deficit in their awareness of actions.