

# Schizophrenic patients' frozen faces harm social interactions

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Non-verbal communication, in the form of facial expressions, may be impaired in people with schizophrenia. Researchers writing in BioMed Central's open access journal *Behavioral and Brain Functions* have shown that deficits in non-verbal expressivity in schizophrenia are linked to poor social skills and an unawareness of the thoughts and intentions of others.

Martin Brüne from the University of Bochum, Germany, led a team of researchers who used interviews and psychological tests to gauge whether reduced nonverbal expressivity could be linked to patients' social-cognitive impairments and poor social competence. He said "We were able to show that patients with schizophrenia were reduced in their non-verbal expressivity during an interview that explored psychopathological symptoms and subjective factors of distress. Moreover, we found that patients with the lowest level of nonverbal expressivity performed more poorly on a test that tapped into the comprehension of others' minds than patients whose nonverbal expressivity during interviews was within the range of healthy controls."

The ability to "mentalise", to accurately imagine the thoughts, feelings or intentions that another person is experiencing, is known to be impaired in schizophrenic patients. Brüne and his colleagues have previously shown that this impairment is associated with poor social skills. He said, "By showing that a link exists between non-verbal expressivity and the inability to mentalise, we hope to better specify the factors that actually guide and motivate patients' interpersonal nonverbal behaviour".

Brüne speculates that poor mentalising abilities contribute to patients' reduced use of the nonverbal behaviours that invite and sustain social interaction in conversation, and that reduced signals of this type then contribute, in part, the difficult and unappealing nature of conversation with schizophrenic patients.

Paper: Linking non-verbal expressivity with social competence and "mentalising" in patients with schizophrenia spectrum disorders, Martin Brüne, Mona Abdel-Hamid, Claudia Sonntag, Caroline Lehmkämer and Robyn Langdon, *Behavioral and Brain Functions* (in press), [www.behavioralandbrainfunctions.com/](http://www.behavioralandbrainfunctions.com/)

Source: BioMed Central

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