

Research seeks to improve Schizophrenia treatment

July 29 2011, By Elaine Bible

Everyday tasks such as going to work or connecting with friends require us to have a certain level of motivation to carry out those actions, but people suffering from schizophrenia often lack this drive. Associate Professor of Psychology David Gard is leading an innovative study that could yield new treatment options for people with this mental health condition.

"In addition to hearing voices and believing things that are not true, people with schizophrenia often suffer from problems with [motivation](#) which make it hard for them to engage in normal activities and to function in the community," Gard said.

Gard's research over the last decade suggests that the root cause of the problem could lie in the way people with schizophrenia experience emotions. With a recent grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, he is testing this theory by studying 60 people with schizophrenia and a similar sized group of healthy individuals.

"Emotions are important for guiding our actions," Gard said. "People with schizophrenia appear to struggle with intrinsic motivation -- the drive that makes us do something simply because we want to or because we love to do it."

This latest study builds on Gard's prior work that suggests people with schizophrenia experience emotions in the moment, but struggle to hold onto their emotions. This could explain why people with the disease have

difficulty feeling a sense of "wanting" or looking forward to future events or feelings. To test this theory, participants will take part in lab-based exercises that measure their [emotional responses](#) to a series of photographs.

The study will also use cell phones to help track motivation and emotion in participants' lives. Participants will be given cell phones. Researchers will call them several times a day, for one week, to ask about their goals for the day, their feelings and whether they reached their goals. GPS technology in the phones allows researchers to track participants' daily movements.

"This study is a first step toward developing a psycho-social treatment that would help people with [schizophrenia](#) to function better in the community," Gard said. "If we can find out how a patient's motivation is impaired, the problem can be addressed through psychotherapy or computer-based training exercises."

Provided by San Francisco State University

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