

# Have people with posttraumatic stress disorder their recognition of positive emotion impaired?

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An investigation published in the current issue of *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* indicates a new feature of people who suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder: their recognition of positive emotions is impaired. Reading other people's emotions is an essential human skill that is impaired in several clinical populations. Only 1 previous study has assessed emotion recognition (ER) in individuals with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

This study aimed at extending findings to individuals with PTSD following various trauma types. While previous research used static images or computer-generated videos, in this study Authors used short video sequences showing actors' emotional expressions of different intensities, reflecting everyday life situations. Additionally, the relationship between [emotion recognition](#) and [childhood trauma](#), number of lifetime experienced [traumatic events](#), and dissociation was explored. Thirty-nine PTSD participants, 44 traumatized healthy controls (TC), and 35 non-traumatized healthy controls, 18–65 years of age were included in the study.

Results suggest that trauma history might be related to impaired [recognition](#) of positive expressions more strongly than PTSD diagnosis. Number of lifetime experienced traumatic events and childhood trauma may share some of the mechanisms (e.g., avoidance and social withdrawal) linking them to impaired recognition of positive

expressions, while other mechanisms (e.g., fewer positive interactions with primary caregivers or ambiguity of positive expressions, which for sexually abused individuals may have been followed by abuse) might be specific for childhood trauma.

These findings also show that childhood trauma can be linked to enhanced emotion recognition abilities. Similarly, maltreated children are faster at identifying negative emotions, which might be an advantage in an abusive environment and is in line with an established link between speed and accuracy of facial expression recognition and frequency with which expressions occur in social encounters.

**More information:** Sandra Passardi et al. Impaired Recognition of Positive Emotions in Individuals with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Cumulative Traumatic Exposure, and Dissociation, *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* (2018). [DOI: 10.1159/000486342](https://doi.org/10.1159/000486342)

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