

# Researchers explore social cognitive deficits in progressive multiple sclerosis

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Dr. Genova is assistant director of the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research at Kessler Foundation. Credit: Kessler Foundation/Jody Banks

A recent study by Kessler Foundation researchers provided new findings

about the nature of social cognitive deficits in the population with progressive multiple sclerosis (MS). The article, "Cognitive but Not Affective Theory of Mind Deficits in Progressive MS", was published on June 10, 2019 by the *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society*. The authors are Katie Lancaster, Ph.D., Eric M. Stone, and Helen Genova, Ph.D., of Kessler Foundation.

The researchers conducted tests of [social cognition](#) in two groups: 15 individuals with progressive MS and 15 healthy controls. They used Virtual Assessment of Mentalising Ability (VAMA) to measure Theory of Mind (ToM) in both groups. This was the first application of VAMA for research in the subtype of progressive MS. Results showed poorer performance on VAMA in the MS group and identified a specific [deficit](#) in the cognitive ToM subtest, which measures how well individuals can reason about the thoughts and intentions of others. In contrast, they found no differences between the groups on the affective ToM subtest, which measures how well individuals can reason about the emotions of others.

Deficits in social cognition that impair quality of life are associated with all types of MS, but appear to be more pronounced in progressive MS. Developing effective interventions depends upon expanding our knowledge of social cognitive deficits in progressive MS. Much of the research, however, has been conducted in relapsing remitting MS.

"This study is an important first step toward a better understanding of cognitive dysfunction in individuals with progressive MS," said Dr. Genova, the Foundation's assistant director of the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research. "By examining both the cognitive and affective components of Theory of Mind, we found evidence for differential effects of progressive MS, similar to the effects reported for relapsing remitting MS," she affirmed, "including the apparent sparing of affective ability. Our findings indicate that VAMA

will be an important tool for developing interventions that help individuals maintain the skills needed to function in everyday life."

**More information:** Katie Lancaster et al, Cognitive but Not Affective Theory of Mind Deficits in Progressive MS, *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1017/S1355617719000584](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355617719000584)

Provided by Kessler Foundation

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