

# Researchers investigate social cognition, mood and fatigue in 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

A recent study by Kessler Foundation researchers linked the deficits in social cognition in multiple sclerosis with symptoms in other domains.

The article, "Relationship between social cognition and fatigue, depressive symptoms, and anxiety in multiple sclerosis," was published on June 1, 2019 by the *Journal of Neuropsychology*.

The authors are Helen Genova, Ph.D., Katie Lancaster, Ph.D., Jean Lengenfelder, Ph.D., Christopher Bober, John DeLuca, Ph.D., and Nancy Chiaravalloti, Ph.D., of Kessler Foundation.

Researchers tested 28 individuals with multiple sclerosis for impairments of social cognition using tests of facial affect recognition and Theory of Mind, and looked for associations between deficits of social cognition with common conditions in this population by screening for fatigue, depression and anxiety. They also measured non-social [cognitive](#) ability, i.e., attention and processing speed, using the Symbol Digit Modality Test.

Preliminary findings showed consistent associations between poorer performance on measures of social cognition and increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, most notably psychosocial fatigue. Cognitive ability was not a factor in these associations.

The study raises issues of causality and reciprocal effects, according to Dr. Genova, the Foundation's assistant director of the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research. "The nature of the relationships among these variables remains unclear," said Dr. Genova. "We cannot say whether deficits of social cognition worsen mood condition and fatigue, or vice versa," she explained. "The relationships may be reciprocal in nature," she observed. "Poor social cognition may worsen fatigue, depression and anxiety, leading to greater social isolation. That, in turn, may worsen social cognitive function."

The researchers emphasized the preliminary nature of their findings and recommended further research into the relationships among these factors

in individuals with MS, as well in other populations with non-neurologic conditions, and healthy controls. "All of these conditions adversely affect quality of life," concluded Dr. Genova. "To alleviate their impact, we need to understand the interplay of [social cognition](#), mood, and [fatigue](#). Our study is an initial step toward understanding these dynamics in the population with MS.'

**More information:** Helen M. Genova et al, Relationship between social cognition and fatigue, depressive symptoms, and anxiety in multiple sclerosis, *Journal of Neuropsychology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jnp.12185](#)

Provided by Kessler Foundation

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