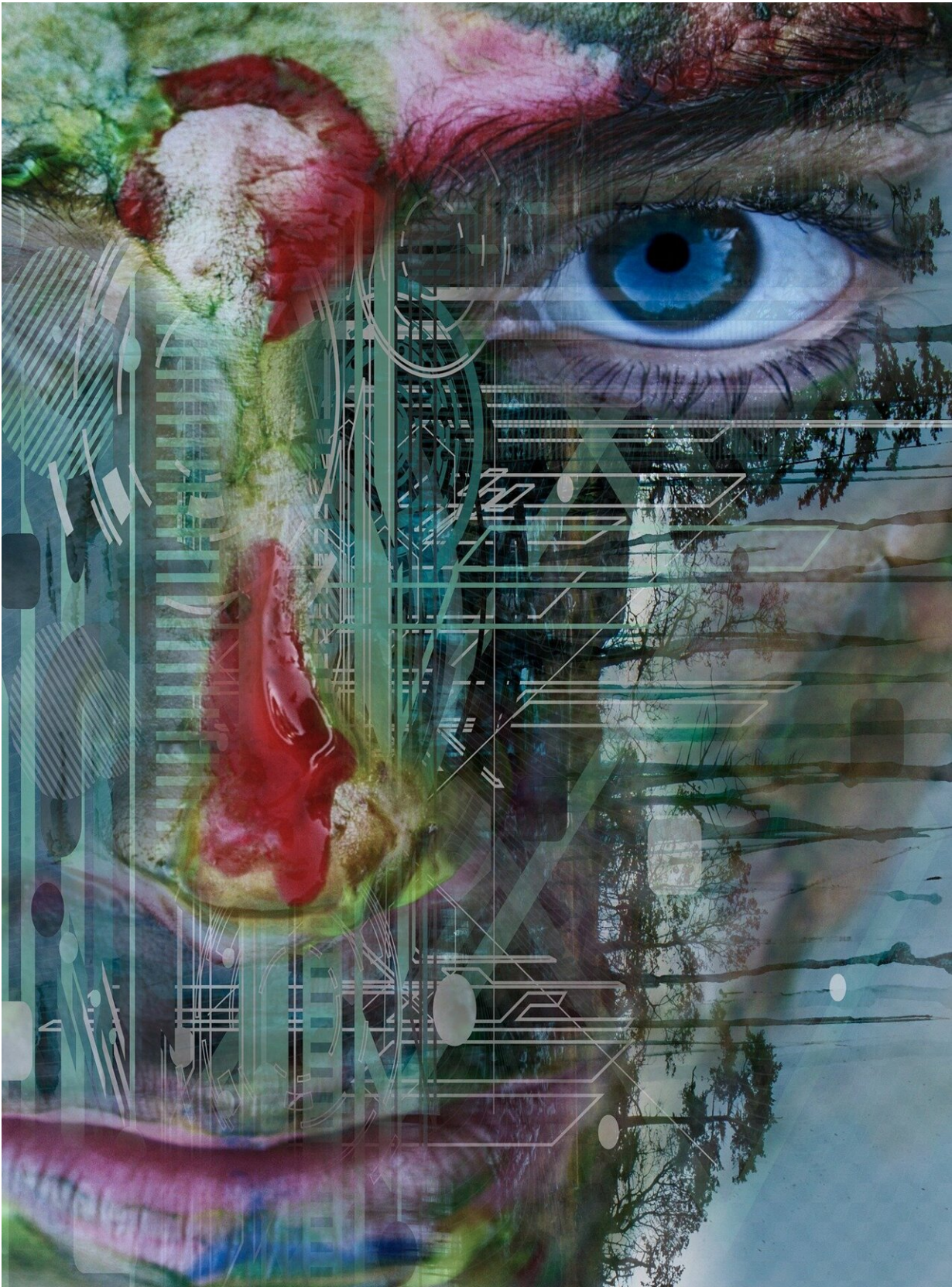


# **Patients with first-episode schizophrenia shown to exhibit impairments in envisioning future events**

June 8 2023, by Zhang Nannan

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Prospection refers to people's internal mental representations of future events and the pre-experience of these prospective events. It is very important for planning future actions and motivating hedonic behavior. Empirical evidence has suggested that people with schizophrenia may be impaired in their ability to predict, but most of the previous work has used samples with chronic schizophrenia, and whether prospective deficits can be found in first-episode schizophrenia has remained unclear.

Dr. Raymond Chan from the Institute of Psychology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and Dr. Simon Lui of the University of Hong Kong have conducted a study to examine prospection in patients with first-episode schizophrenia.

The researchers used a well-validated behavioral paradigm in which participants were presented with pictorial cues of varying valence to invite them to prospect future events, and were asked to self-report the phenomenal features of their prospected events and to provide a narrative. Participants' narratives of prospective events were then coded using a manual. The confounding effects of logical and working [memory functions](#) and estimated IQ on prospection ability in schizophrenia patients were also examined using covariate analysis.

Using a sample of 30 first-episode schizophrenia patients and 31 controls, they found that the two groups self-reported similar phenomenal features of the prospected events, in terms of pre-experience, temporal proximity, vividness and emotion.

In addition, the picture valence effect of the cues on the phenomenal

features of the prospected events was similar between the two groups. However, the coded narratives suggested that the prospectations of schizophrenia patients were less specific and less thought/emotion-rich than those of controls, and the prospection deficits in thought/emotion richness persisted after controlling for schizophrenia-associated logical memory and working memory deficits.

Taken together, this empirical work supports the presence of prospection deficits in first-episode schizophrenia patients. However, in contrast to their previous work in [chronic schizophrenia](#), first-episode schizophrenia patients did not perceive closer temporal distance than controls when prospecting negative events.

This work is one of the few pioneering studies on prospection deficits in first-episode schizophrenia, and paves the way for future application of cognitive strategies such as guided episodic thinking and imagery cognitive bias modification as early interventions to improve functioning in [schizophrenia](#) patients.

The results were published in *Schizophrenia*.

**More information:** Antoinette C. O. Fung et al, Prospection deficits in patients with first-episode schizophrenia: a cross-sectional comparative study, *Schizophrenia* (2023). [DOI: 10.1038/s41537-023-00365-w](#)

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