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ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Indirect task instructions better reveal theory-of-mind impairment, independent of executive dysfunction, in schizophrenia

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Abstract

Theory of mind (TOM) impairments associate significantly with executive deficits in schizophrenia, consistent with the proposal that executive abilities can limit TOM task performance, and confounding identification of those patients who would benefit most from targeted mentalising interventions. 50 schizophrenia patients and 30 healthy controls completed an executive battery and four TOM tasks that were alike with regards generating overt measures of causal false-belief reasoning, but differed with regards using indirect (vs. more direct) instructions. Only the TOM tasks that used indirect instructions to elicit spontaneous false-belief inferences revealed impairment, independent of executive dysfunction, in the schizophrenia patients.

Keywords: theory of mind; executive function; schizophrenia

1. Introduction

Evidence that impaired ‘theory of mind’ (TOM: the capacity to infer causal mental states to predict and explain others’ behaviour) predicts social dysfunction in schizophrenia (Fett et al., 2011) has informed the development of targeted mentalising interventions. Yet, impairments in other cognitive domains, in particular, executive function, also associate significantly with TOM impairment in schizophrenia, with both TOM and executive functioning sometimes contributing independently to predicting social dysfunction, depending upon which task are used (e.g., Brüne, 2005). Examining which TOM tasks better reveal impairment, independent of executive

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