

Differences and deficits in social processing present in alcoholism

Sharon Cox¹, Kevin Riggs² and Chris Chandler¹

¹London Metropolitan University, UK

²University of Hull, UK

Aims: Previous research suggests alcoholism is associated with specific social processing deficits, e.g. deficits in processing social information. This may be due to problems with visio-spatial skills. The relevance of visio-spatial perspective taking (VSPT) in understanding another's visual viewpoint requires further investigation.

Design: A mixed design study with 2 between subject measures (alcoholics and non-alcoholics) and 2 within subject variables with 2 levels (congruent and incongruent perspectives) and 3 levels of stimuli (neutral and fearful faces, and baseline stimuli).

Participants: Twenty non-alcoholics participants and 20 alcoholic participants were recruited from a Community Alcohol Service.

Measures: VSPT was measured by the reaction time to a dot-probe presented for 500ms alongside the stimuli (Zwikel and Muller, 2010, Cognition, 117: 101-105). To measure of alcohol abuse between the groups the FAST audit was completed.

Findings: This study indicates Differences and deficits in social processing present in alcoholism. For non-alcoholics the VSPT was more robust when the perspective of the stimuli was incongruent to their own, and when the stimuli were fearful. Suggesting that salient stimuli increase the likelihood of VSPT. However, alcoholics were slower in all conditions compared to the non-alcoholics, although within participant comparisons showed an expected slower reaction time within the incongruent conditions. The valence of the stimuli had no effect on the reaction time to the dot-probe for the alcoholics, which may demonstrate carry-over effects of the fearful stimuli onto the neutral stimuli. Alternatively it may be indicative of the high salience of faces per se for alcoholics.

Sharon.cox@londonmet.ac.uk