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STUDY OF THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THEORY OF MIND, SYMPTOMS AND PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF A NON-PSYCHIATRIC POPULATION

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Aims: A deficit in the theory of mind has been identified, although without univocal results, in various pathologies, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and some personality disorders. Aim of the study was to evaluate, in a non-psychiatric population, the correlation of personological characteristics and symptoms with theory of mind and emotion recognition tasks.

Methods: The following protocol was administered to 130 voluntary students from Novara (Italy) School of Medicine: EPQ-R test for personality analysis; an intention-inferencing task for theory of mind (adapted from Happé's version); the emotion recognition test (adapted from Blair's version); and SCL-90 for symptoms evaluation. Spearman correlation coefficient (SC) was calculated; $p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

Results: No statistically significant correlations were found between the EPQ-R (psychoticism, extroversion and neuroticism) and theory of mind test scores. Better performances in the theory of mind test corresponded to lower scores in SCL-90 subscales: obsessive-compulsive disorder (SC:-0.248; $p=0.004$); depression (SC:-0.280; $p=0.001$); anxiety (SC:-0.276; $p=0.001$); hostility (SC:-0.178; $p=0.042$); phobic anxiety (SC:-0.197; $p=0.025$); paranoid ideation (SC:-0.191; $p=0.03$); and psychoticism (SC:-0.189; $p=0.032$). A lower capacity in the recognition of the happiness emotion corresponded to higher scores in the hostility (CS:-0.194; $p=0.027$) and phobic anxiety (CS:-0.211; $p=0.016$) SCL-90 subscales, while higher scores in the EPQ-R subscale psychoticism and somatisation SCL-90 subscales were respectively related to lower skills in the recognition of fear (CS:-0.226; $p=0.01$) and envy (CS:-0.193; $p=0.028$) emotions.

Conclusions: Theory of mind skills seem independent from personological traits, but are inversely correlated to various symptomatological subscale scores. The recognition of specific emotions correlates selectively with various personological traits and symptomatological subscales.