

B34

Monique Leinen B.S.

Advisor(s): Justin Dolin M.D.

Co-author(s):

I Prefer to Be Alone: Explaining social isolation among people with Schizophrenia

Social isolation is a global concern that is linked to worse health outcomes and increased mortality, especially in people with schizophrenia. Numerous studies have linked social impairment with neurocognitive deficits. Other studies have implicated social factors such as stigma that impact social functioning. We aim to provide a broader view that social isolation in people with schizophrenia is affected by both neurocognitive deficits and heightened social stigma. A non-systematic literature review was conducted utilizing PubMed and EBSCO with key terms “schizophrenia,” “social motivation,” “loneliness,” “stigma”. Inclusion criteria consist of studies published in the last 5 years that provide a meaningful theory. We excluded animal, pharmaceutical, and non-English studies. A total of 16 studies were selected. Eight studies focused on neurocognitive impairments that increased social isolation, highlighting deficits in the social reward process system. People with schizophrenia show a blunted neuronal response when anticipating social interaction but not when experiencing it. Eight studies focused on how stigma is associated with social isolation and decreased social functioning, reporting that self-stigma leads to impaired self-esteem, well-being, and autonomy, resulting in increased isolation. These studies suggest that at least a subsection of people with schizophrenia do desire increased social connection but that their efforts to obtain this are hampered by the stigmatization of people with mental illness in society. An approach that synthesizes neurocognitive and stigma theories may explain the social deficits of people with schizophrenia. While people with schizophrenia do have neuronal deficits in how they process social interactions, their experiences of stigma also influence how they interpret social interactions. A combined perspective can provide a more comprehensive approach to treatment that addresses both the biological and social factors.