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Associations between intrusive thoughts, reality discrimination and hallucination-proneness in healthy young adults.

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Abstract

Introduction. People who experience intrusive thoughts are at increased risk of developing hallucinatory experiences, as are people who have weak reality discrimination skills. No study has yet examined whether these two factors interact to make a person especially prone to hallucinatory experiences. The present study examined this question in a non-clinical sample. **Methods.** Participants were 160 students, who completed a reality discrimination task, as well as self-report measures of cannabis use, negative affect, intrusive thoughts and auditory hallucination-proneness. The possibility of an interaction between reality discrimination performance and level of intrusive thoughts was assessed using multiple regression. **Results.** The number of reality discrimination errors and level of intrusive thoughts were independent predictors of hallucination-proneness. The reality discrimination errors × intrusive thoughts interaction term was significant, with participants who made many reality discrimination errors and reported high levels of intrusive thoughts being especially prone to hallucinatory experiences. **Conclusions.** Hallucinatory experiences are more likely to occur in people who report high levels of intrusive thoughts and have weak reality discrimination skills. If applicable to clinical samples, these findings suggest that improving patients' reality discrimination skills and reducing the number of intrusive thoughts they experience may reduce the frequency of hallucinatory experiences.

KEYWORDS: hallucination-proneness; intrusive thoughts; reality discrimination; signal detection

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