

Abstract

While loneliness has long been regarded as a consequence of psychosis, increasing evidence has suggested that loneliness may play a role in the development of psychotic disorders and psychotic symptoms, with the social deafferentation hypothesis proposing that hallucinations and delusions are generated when meaningful social contacts from real life experiences are lacking. This study aimed to examine the association of objective and subjective loneliness with auditory verbal hallucinations (AVHs), and investigate if loneliness could trigger a higher intensity of AVHs in daily life in the clinical population. Negative affect was included in this study as a control variable due to its association with loneliness. The experience sampling method (ESM) was used to assess objective loneliness, subjective loneliness, hallucinatory experiences and negative affects over 6 consecutive days in people with schizophrenia spectrum disorders. Thirty-one participants completed the ESM measurements and twenty-six of them were included in data analysis. The multilevel linear regression modelling was performed to account for the multilevel structure of ESM data. Both cross-sectional and time-lagged analyses were conducted. It was found that AVHs were significantly associated with subjective loneliness but not objective loneliness at the same moment, yet their association became non-significant after controlling for negative affect. Moreover, loneliness did not predict subsequent AVHs and instead AVHs predicted subsequent loneliness. The possible role of negative affect in explaining the relationship between subjective loneliness and AVHs was discussed.

Keywords: Loneliness, Auditory verbal hallucinations, Experience sampling method

